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APPEARANCES OF SELF-HOOD: MERLEAU-PONTY, ENACTIVISM, AND
INSTITUTED SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

by

Michael Butler

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

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Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Philosophy

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For Jehangir, who taught me the urgency of thinking carefully, and for Wally, who taught me that thinking carefully takes time

Acknowledgments

One of the central insights I try to express in this dissertation is that reflective thought requires a community of people invested and engaged in a practice of making meaning together. I was able to articulate this insight only because of the community of people who've made reaching it possible for me. The list of people I need to thank in this small space is long, but it begins with my dissertation supervisor, Shaun Gallagher. Shaun has opened doors and shown me things I never would have imagined working on or thinking about. He's been a careful reader and commenter on my work, a model of what it looks like to do philosophy at an advanced level, and always there with a thoughtful push in a helpful direction when I've needed one. Shaun's influence on the dissertation should be obvious to those familiar with his work and probably shows up in all sorts of ways I've yet to notice. Second, I want to thank Mary Beth Mader and Somogy Varga for serving on my dissertation committee. They've both been helpful in their own ways throughout the writing of the dissertation. Additionally, in private discussions and seminars that they taught, I began to develop and articulate ideas that later found their way into the final document. I would also like to thank David Morris for serving as an external reader. David first introduced me to phenomenology as an undergraduate student. A class I took from him at Trent University about ten years ago began a process of thinking, reading and writing that culminated in this project. It was a real honor to have him carefully read and comment on the final product. Next, I would like to thank the professors I've taken classes from throughout graduate school. In particular, I'd like to thank Kym Maclaren and David Ciavatta who, over the years, have been both inspirational in their dedication to doing philosophy in a living, breathing, and

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Abstract

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Appearances of Selfhood: Merleau-Ponty, Enactivism, and Instituted Self-Consciousness.
Major Professor: Dr. Shaun Gallagher, PhD.

My dissertation addresses a classical philosophical question: In what way is the fact that there is something-it-is-like to be me related to my identity as a person in and among other people? To answer these questions, I turn to two principle resources: Enactivism and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The enactivist position in philosophy of mind and cognitive science argues that perception and cognition are not processes that happen in a representational or computational mental space. Rather, perception and cognition are activities engaged in by animals, with their bodies. Maurice Merleau-Ponty has been an especially influential figure in the field, largely due to his phenomenological analysis of the role played by the lived body in shaping the environment we perceptually confront. What enactivism and Merleau-Ponty share is a recognition that the objects we encounter in perception refer to the subject of perception in a minimal sense. I encounter ‘things’ in the world, not as objects, but as affordances or action possibilities based on what my body can do. I argue that Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy allows us to make sense of the overlapping connection between this minimal self of perception and the more personal self of social life. Merleau-Ponty stresses the role played by the situation in giving my body to me as a means of interaction in perception. It is because I am situated in a world that solicits me, that I can perceive. This means I must be passive and open to the world in order to enact myself as a perceiver – not just an active body (as posited in enactivist accounts). I trace this passivity through accounts of minimal selfhood and personal selfhood. I argue that the subject achieves herself as a perceiver and person only by

means of interaction with a situation that contains other people and perspectives more developed than she is. It is through engagement with the already instituted ways of perceiving and expressing oneself that one comes to enact oneself – both as a perceiver and a person - and ultimately, to take a perspective on oneself.

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Abbreviations

- BN Sartre, J.P. 1992. *Being and Nothingness*, translated by H. Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press.
- EM Merleau-Ponty, M. 1964. "Eye and Mind" translated by W. Cobb in *The Primacy of Perception*. Edited by J. Edie, Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- N Merleau-Ponty, M. 2003. *Nature: Course Notes from the College de France*, Translated by R. Vallier, Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- IP Merleau-Ponty, M. 2010. *Institution and Passivity: Course Notes from the College de France (1954-55)*, translated by L. Lawlor, H. Massey. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- PhP Merleau-Ponty, M. 2012. *The Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by D. Landes, New York: Routledge.
- SS Zahavi, D. 2005. *Subjectivity and Selfhood*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- VI Merleau-Ponty, M. 1964. *The Visible and The Invisible*, translated by A. Lingis, Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This is a dissertation about the self. It addresses a tension concerning the unity or identity of different aspects of the self. More specifically, I address the relationship between the self that we are for other people – the self that we name and tell a story about - and the self as a structure of our own first person experience. I aim to address the following question: In what ways is our public or personal self – the “me” who has a job, who has done this or that action, who has written this or that essay, who loves this or that other person in this or that way - related to the self that I experience myself as being right now as I type these words? I attempt to answer this question by investigating each aspect of selfhood – first, separately in Chapters 2 and 3 and then together in Chapter 4. Throughout the project I draw on Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the enactivist account of cognition for conceptual resources. Before going into detail about the moves of the dissertation then, I will first briefly situate the project within the field of enactivist accounts of cognition and Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy.

Prologue: Enactivism, The Problem of Meaning, and the Life-Mind Continuity

Thesis

Recent work in cognitive science has tended away from an understanding of the mind as a computational mechanism or collection of various such mechanisms.

According to such traditional accounts, as Tom Froese describes them,

Cognition is essentially a form of information processing in the head which converts a set of inputs into an appropriate set of outputs in order to solve a given problem, (Froese, 2009, 9)

Thinking of the mind in this way has highlighted a particular way in which the mind is fundamentally not like a computer. Specifically, if we treat the mind as a

computational system, we end up with a problem concerning meaning. As Froese puts it:

Take my laptop for instance: it can process inputs, store information and calculate the next outputs, and yet these events have absolutely no meaning for it. To put it simply, it does not understand anything at all, nor can it even care about this lack of understanding. In philosophy of mind and cognitive science this foundational issue makes an appearance every now and again. Today it continues to be debated under various related guises, e.g. the common sense problem, the symbol grounding problem, the frame problem, the hard problem of consciousness, and, most generally perhaps, the problem of meaning. (Froese 2011, 114)

The problem of meaning concerns how we get from a world of objectively meaningless inputs and outputs assumed by the computational model to a subjective experience of a world that is there for us and which appears as mattering to us in one way or another. One way to get around this problem postulated by Froese and others in the enactivist camp,¹ is to understand life as continuous with mind, rather than understanding the cognitive operations of the mind as separable from the organism and the activity in which a mind is instantiated (i.e. as a kind of information processing software instantiated within the hardware of the body).

From an enactivist perspective, the reasons a given problem arises to be considered for a cognitive agent are internal to its concerns as a living thing. Its “inputs” are not arbitrary and objective, but single out and refer to the agent insofar as they are shaped by the movements, actions and concerns of the living organism. Cognition is thus an enacted process of an organism’s concerned “making one’s way in the world,” (Dreyfus and Kelly 2007, 47) not a disconnected capacity separable from the life-activity of the organism. An easy way to cash this out is to think of the relationship between perception, cognition, and action.

¹ For examples, see Varela et al. 1991; Noë 2005; Thompson 2007; Chemero 2009.

On the computational account of the mind, perception, action, and cognition are three separable processes. Perception supplies the inputs that are passively received by the computational mind. Cognition is what happens to the inputs and leads to the output – action.² As opposed to this conception, enactivism holds that perception, cognition, and action are not three separate processes but that perception and action are themselves cognitive. For example, the enactivist position holds that perception is not a passive reception of inputs. Our minds do not simply take in sensory data from an otherwise neutral external world and then process it. Rather, for enactivists like Noë (2005) and Thompson (2007), perception is an exercise of “skillful know-how in situated and embodied action” (Thompson 2007, 13). As Noë writes, “perceiving is a way of acting. Perception is not something that happens to us, or in us. It is something we do” (Noë 2005, 1). From this perspective then, perception is different from computational account in two related ways. First, perceiving is not simply a process that takes place in the brain whereby an internal representation of the world is constructed from sensory data. Rather, perception is a process that is extended beyond the brain, arising from the relation between one’s entire body and the world one encounters. On this way of thinking about perception, only a creature with a certain kind of body – not just a certain kind of brain - could be a perceiver. The second point is more central and implies the first. For Noë, all perception involves the deployment of a certain kind of semi-conceptual, bodily know-how as a condition of possibility. Noë calls this sensorimotor knowledge or skill. When we put these two points together, we arrive at Noë’s assertion that perceiving is “a kind of skillful bodily activity on the part of the animal as a whole” (Noë 2005, 2).

² Hurley, 2002, calls this the sandwich model wherein cognition is the “meat” between perception and action. It is a separate process which connects the two.

Comparing this way of thinking about perception to a more traditional brain-bound, computationalist understanding of perception, Noë draws on an example of a photographer lugging his camera around. On the traditional view, a person's capacity for movement is like the lugging, while the perception is more like the picture that is produced when the photographer takes a picture. The two are related in causal way (i.e. I get this picture from this vantage point because I set up my camera at this spot), but not in a constitutive way (i.e. the qualities of the picture are entirely independent of how the camera ended up in the position from which it was operated). On this view then, perception, understood as a process of creating inner representations from sensory data can be studied independently of the body that moves the perceptual apparatus around. Noë's claim is that such a divorce is not possible. Rather, human capacities for movement are constitutive of perception, which is to say that perceptual experience acquires content only on the basis of a perceiver moving their body about and exercising certain bodily capacities.

The employment of these capacities involves the aforementioned sensorimotor knowledge. This knowledge is practical rather than theoretical and can be thought about in terms of the possession motor capacities or embodied skills. Consider for instance, the experience of hearing a loud noise 'off to the left.' On the enactivist understanding of perception, hearing a sound and knowing that it is off to the left are not two separate processes - one perceptual (hearing) and another cognitive (knowing). Rather, hearing something and immediately understanding that whatever made this noise was 'off to the left' presupposes that we possess certain capacities for action – that we could turn to the left and see what made the noise. In other words, it is only on the basis of having a body

with certain capacities, and a practical knowledge of how to employ them, that a sound can be meaningfully located for me as such a body. If I did not have the capacity for orienting myself towards the sound, then it would not carry with it the same kind of meaningful spatial location. In Noë's words, "Only someone who understands, implicitly, that turning the eyes to the left brings the item on the left into view can be said to experience something as *on the left*" (Noë 2005, 90). In this way, the meaningful content of our perception is premised upon our having certain sorts of bodies with certain sorts of possibilities for action and possessing the practical knowledge necessary for employing these capacities.

Taking all of this into account, the model of perception we end up with is much different than the computational model. On an enactivist account, rather than being a process that occurs in the brain, perception is a process that occurs in the world with my entire body and implicit knowledge of its sensorimotor capacities as its necessary condition. This leads us to a realization: "If perception is in part constituted by our possession and exercise of bodily skills...then it may also depend on our possession of the sort of bodies that can encompass those skills, for only a creature with such a body could have those skills" (Noë 2005, 25). At the very least, it seems that a creature with a different sort of body and different sorts of sensorimotor skills would have perception that was, phenomenally speaking, very different from our own.

All of this is to say that the kind of living beings we are and the kinds of bodies we have determine to some extent the kinds of movements we can make and thus the kind of environment we can encounter. In addition to this, the Life-Mind continuity thesis posits that any living thing which has such a body also has at least the minimal concerns

of altering its surroundings through movement so as to be able to maintain its body. Thus, a living thing is a mind insofar as it has a world that refers to it. It encounters a world that matters to it as a means of survival that shows up according to how the organism can move in order to alter its environment in service of this project. Meaning is built into perception, action and cognition in that the world an organism encounters matters to it for at least this minimal reason. Thus, cognition is not a capacity separable from the same capacities with which the organism deals or copes with the issues of its concern. Rather, cognition is continuous with other systems of embodied coping (perceptual capacities, self-movement, etc.) in that it is equally oriented towards the organism's relationship with its environment.

Merleau-Ponty: An Influence and Resource

Maurice Merleau-Ponty has been an especially influential figure in the development of this position, largely due to his phenomenological analysis of the role played by the body in the constitution of a world that is encountered by a perceiver.

Beyond this analysis however, Merleau-Ponty supplies to this discussion an ontology of nature.³ If we take Merleau-Ponty's work seriously, thinking of the mind as continuous with life demands rethinking the relationship between life and nature. For Merleau-Ponty, nature is not a fully constituted objective realm containing physical bodies related to one another *partes extra partes* out of which life arises by way of a mechanical process. Rather, on his account, nature is continuous with mind and life. In describing this continuity, Merleau-Ponty employs a series of difficult metaphors. He variously refers to the relationship between the living body, the thinking mind and the

³ For a book length treatment of the subject see Toadvine (2009). For discussion specific to what I discuss here, see especially Chapters 4 and 5 pp. 97-130.

world it inhabits as a “chiasm” “interlacing” “encroaching” “overlapping,” “blending,” “coiling over” “inversion” and “metamorphosis” of what he calls the “flesh of the world.”⁴ The metaphors and indirect expression of Merleau-Ponty’s later philosophy make it unwieldy at times. However, what is clear is that, for him, the meaningful relationship between mind, life and nature is not only a product of human activity. Nature does not just receive meaning from a constituting consciousness that confronts a world that matters to it on the basis of its own idiosyncratic concerns, but supplies a meaningful context for such activity to unfold.

In this way, Merleau-Ponty shares with enactivism an understanding of the problem of meaning. The problem does not concern how meaning gets produced by a mind from an intrinsically meaningless series of inputs. However, the agent-specifying nature of the world the body encounters is broader than the minimal concerns of the individual animal. Understanding the meaning of the world is not only a question of the organism’s concerns being centrifugally cast out into the world such that the organism then finds there, embodied in nature, an environment which is meaningful to it and it alone as a sense-making living body. Rather, there is a continuity between nature, mind, and life insofar as nature already contains meaningful differences and tensions that the activity of living things takes up and acts on. The possibilities for action we encounter in the world as meaningful to us are not wholly of our own making, but rather, arise out of an already meaningful nature which “carries us and is our soil” (*N*, 4). Nature makes room for a living organism and supplies a direction in which to move. An organism takes

⁴ These terms are found throughout Merleau-Ponty’s later works, but see especially *The Visible and the Invisible*, Ch. 4 pp.130-162; *Eye and Mind*.

up that direction in acting. In doing so, it expresses the realization of a potential that equally belongs to the world and the subject.

The problem of meaning then, is not just a problem concerning the purposive activity of living things, but also the world they interact with. A traditional computational understanding of the mind treats the world as objective and intrinsically meaningless. Starting from such an assumption, if there is anything like meaning in the phenomenal reality of conscious beings, it is something placed there or created by the cognitive activity of those beings. Noë's sensori-motor account tries to skirt this problem by extending cognitive activity to include the embodied coping of an organism. The Life-Mind continuity thesis stretches this further, suggesting that meaning arises as a result of the organism's concern for its own self-maintenance and the organism's world ceases to be an objective separate reality, but a meaningful environment that appears for it. On Merleau-Ponty's account however, the organism finds itself in a meaningful world full of problems for it prior to constituting itself in relation to this environment. Rather, it is through responding to the environment that a living being is enacted. The world is not just made meaningful by receiving a sense from a living thing. Living things arise in a nature which precedes them and they take up an orientation and direction which equally precedes them. Put simply, through their oriented activity, a tomato seed becomes a tomato plant and an amoeba acts like an amoeba. The world the organism encounters is already meaningful and it is this meaning that the organism's activity takes up, continues and expresses.

In both the analyses of Merleau-Ponty and the enactivists, there is an implicit and oblique reference to the issue of the self. As we noted above, one thing that marks out an

enactivist account of cognition from a more traditional one is the agent-specifying nature of the “inputs” involved in the cognitive activity enacted by an organism. On such accounts, cognition does not involve the disinterested manipulation of representations in a computational mind. Rather, cognition is an ongoing bodily process involving perception and action in which an organism gives shape to the environment it encounters. Organisms do not encounter a world of discrete external objects that they must then decide how to manipulate given a particular problem. Rather, they encounter a world of affordances or solicitations for action which are available to them on the basis of their capacities for movement. What enactivism minimally implies is that the world the organism encounters already refers back to the organism because it shows up for the organism on the basis of her abilities and goals.

Through Merleau-Ponty’s lights however, the bodily self encounters inputs that do not only refer to a self in this minimal sense. The bodily self does not create meaning, but rather takes it up, alters it, and is altered by it. This reflects Merleau-Ponty’s enactivism insofar as meaning does not involve the projection of an inner state out into the world but rather, involves embodied responsiveness to some tension in a situation. However, for Merleau-Ponty, there is more than a response to an idiosyncratic concern that belongs only to the self that is addressed.⁵ The bodily self in Merleau-Ponty is not in possession of the meaning they respond to prior to the response. Rather, it finds in the

⁵ It is not as though this problem has been completely overlooked in enactive cognitive science. Rietveld (2008) for instance describes the normative character of affordances, wherein one encounters, not just what “I can do” but what “one ought to do” in a social situation. For example, when we see an appropriate place in an elevator that is not too close to others, we don’t need to do any mental gymnastics. Rather, we directly perceive the optimal spot in a way that is informed by social practices. Becoming habituated to such practices means becoming responsive to the normative aspect of soliciting affordances.

world a meaning it did not create and the world solicits action more complicated than what they have accomplished in the past in order to express this meaning. Perception and action are then understood as expressive of a perspective that itself belongs to the world – a perspective which is “a certain unique position of the index of being in the world” (IP, 208). In what way, then, can we still say that the body’s world refers to a self? To what or to whom does the appearance of a solicitation or an affordance refer? What or who is addressed by the solicitation of a situation? It is the philosophical concept of the self then, that we will need to investigate if we wish to open up a space where we can relate the insights of Merleau-Ponty’s ontology back to cognitive science.

The Proliferation of Selves

One problem in the philosophical literature on the self is the vast array of different theories of self on offer. Galen Strawson (1999) recently noted at least the following 24 iterations:

[T]he cognitive self, the conceptual self, the contextualized self, the core self, the dialogic self, the ecological self, the embodied self, the emergent self, the empirical self, the existential self, the extended self, the fictional self, the full-grown self, the interpersonal self, the material self, the narrative self, the philosophical self, the physical self, the private self, the representational self, the rock bottom essential self, the semiotic self, the social self, the transparent self, and the verbal self (cf. e.g., James 1890; Stern 1985; Dennett 1991; Gibson 1993; Neisser 1994; Cole 1997; Butterworth 1998; Gazzaniga 1998; Legerstee 1998; Gallagher and Marcel 1999; Pickering 1999; Sheets-Johnstone 1999).

What we find by bringing Merleau-Ponty’s thought into conversation with more recent discussions of self is the way in which many more recent accounts often miss a crucial Merleau-Pontian insight: The world supports and makes space for the emergence of the self by preserving the continuity between the many different aspects of the self. This serves as a useful framework for making sense of the diffuse descriptions of the self

we find in more recent philosophical discussions. Before I can convincingly make that point however, it is necessary to turn to the subject of the self and identify a strategy for bringing it into conversation with Merleau-Ponty and enactivism.

So, how ought we best to think of the self if we wish to bring Merleau-Ponty's thought to bear on the subject? We can begin by distinguishing between two possible approaches. First, from a third person perspective, we could think about the self as an entity that is knowable by science or objective thinking. We can look for it in the brain (Northoff 2006; Northoff, Qin, and Feinberg 2011), we can identify it conceptually (Strawson 2004), we can think of it as the center of narrative gravity (Dennett 1992) or assign it a functional role in the organization of information necessary for a body understood as a self-organizing information processing machine (Metzinger 2003).

All these methods are useful for something, but they are not themselves concerned with the way of thinking about the self more proper to the solicitations we are concerned with: the phenomenological sense of self in our experience. There is another set of questions we can ask about this sense of self. Is it an invariant aspect of our lived experience (Zahavi 2007)? Does it persist through time or is it the same entity each time I encounter it (Strawson 2004)? Is it the substratum of character (Husserl 1977; Moran 2014) or the referent of personal pronouns like "I," "you" or "s/he" (Evans 1982)? Recently Gallagher (2013a; 2013b; 2013c) and Zahavi (2012; 2014) have made moves to operationalize this distinction between the self as object and sense of self in the interdisciplinary study of the self. Both of these writers advocate such a distinction along with a commitment to a sort of non-reductionism.

What we call the self, they claim, is actually a network of different aspects, some available to the first-person perspective as a sense of self, some available to third person inquiry as a thing or a process that is intersubjectively verifiable. A commitment to non-reductionism implies that no one of these things is *the* self. Rather, there is no single thing we call the self. Instead, the self is an umbrella term that includes a variety of analytically separable aspects of human consciousness. We should not, then, hope to identify a single aspect of consciousness as the proper referent of the folk term. Instead, we could ask how the many aspects that a multi-disciplinary study of the self has uncovered are related to one another in any single appearance of a self.

For example, at the end of his article “The Time of The Self,” Dan Zahavi concludes that, “We shouldn’t accept the alternative between viewing selfhood as either a socially constructed achievement or as an innate and culturally invariant given. It is both” (Zahavi 2012, 158). To claim that something like a self is innate and culturally invariant while simultaneously being socially constructed poses a serious philosophical conundrum. How could it be both? Zahavi approaches this conundrum by supposing that the self has aspects which belong to each of these realms and that can be studied in parallel using different modes of investigation. On his view, a phenomenological or experiential approach is best suited to uncovering the minimal aspects of the sense of self – those self-related transcendental conditions for the possibility of experience which are culturally invariant and innate. On the other hand, there are aspects of what we call the self, which are no doubt culturally mediated and thus require a different set of third and first person approaches for their study.

The Pattern Theory of the Self

Gallagher (2013c) extends this pluralist line of thought in his description of the self as a dynamic pattern of different processes. Gallagher's pattern theory is not itself a theory of the self, but a meta-theory conceived as a framework for interdisciplinary study of the self. Under this meta-theory, different aspects of the self (i.e. minimal experiential, minimal embodied, affective, intersubjective, psychological/cognitive, narrative, extended, situated) can be related in any specific theory of the self. On this view, "Such aspects are variables that can take different values and weights in the dynamic constitution of a self" (Gallagher 2013c, 3). The idea here is that conceiving of the self as a pattern of diverse aspects will allow for a productive interdisciplinary study of the self wherein aspects best suited to different sorts of research methods can be related, emphasized or lessened in importance but maintained as aspects of a dynamic pattern that is the self. Insofar as the pattern theory is a meta-theory however, it does not demand that any single aspect be emphasized in all avenues of investigating the self. Rather, Gallagher (in this paper) leaves precise configurations of the self or of different individual selves open for other researchers to determine. The idea here is to provide one possible framework for understanding the self as containing both innate and culturally mediated aspects.

The pattern theory thus allows a single self-related phenomenon to be studied without denying the validity of the phenomenon as a self-related one should it be missing some particular aspect. We can simply study different aspects of the self, emphasizing those of importance to the questions we pose. Gallagher, for instance, suggests that a pattern theory allows for certain pathological phenomena, where a self is described as

diminished or interrupted, to be addressed as a modulation of the self without denying that a self is present. For instance, one may “lose a sense of agency, as in some schizophrenic symptoms, without losing a sense of ownership or other aspects that define a self” (Gallagher 2013c, 4). This is made possible by not tying the existence of the self to any particular aspect by which it is constituted. As a result, we can still talk about a self that is modulated and validate an experience of such a modulated self as self-experience even though it may lack other self-aspects.

While such a pluralistic approach allows for the commensurability of multiple angles from which to study the self as a multi-faceted phenomenon and suggests possibilities for interdisciplinary research, a question remains regarding whether or not such an approach also provides insight into understanding the self from a phenomenological perspective. It raises the possibility that we can inquire into how the different facets of ourselves interact with one another within our lived experience. In this way, we could seek to uncover the way in which what we call innate and what we call culturally mediated in discussions of the self are actually encountered as parts of ourselves within our own lives.

By suggesting that the self is not the privileged object of any particular philosophical or scientific method, the pattern theory allows for practitioners within different disciplines to integrate insights from other disciplines into their own approaches. Suppose that I encounter myself in the world through a combination of a sense of ownership over my body (Tsakiris 2011) or perspective (Zahavi 2012), a sense of agency over my actions (Gallagher 2000; 2013b), as the subject of a continuous narrative (Dennett 1992; Ricouer 1994; Velleman 2006; Schechtman 2011) and from a position

afforded for a mode of behavior through feeling at home in a situation (Jacobson 2015). If I experience myself as all or some of these things, then how is it that these vectors of selfhood are related within experience itself? How, for instance, does my sense of narrative continuity give rise to, intertwine with, augment, diminish or otherwise influence my sense of agency? How do the minimal aspects of pre-reflective self-awareness or affectivity come to the fore differently in situations of danger and in situations of joy?

Gallagher's understanding of the self as a dynamic pattern levels the playing field regarding the primacy of the different aspects of self that he discusses. This suggests that, although it may seem as if the self has some aspects that are more developed and personal or more minimal and pre-personal - more socially constructed or more natural - it does not have a bottom or a base from the perspective of someone in the midst of living a life as a self. It does not have a foundation. Rather, the self is a moving and shifting pattern containing various aspects that interact, intertwine, and affect one another.

I consider this a strength of the pattern theory for thinking past the binary rejected by Zahavi at the outset of this discussion - namely that posed between viewing selfhood as either a socially constructed achievement or as an innate and culturally invariant given. While Zahavi's assertion is that it is both, one could just as reasonably answer that it is neither. At certain levels of analysis, the self may appear as one or the other, but as it is lived, it never appears as simply one, the other, or the two together, side by side, separate but in tandem.

A Way Forward

I also think that the pattern theory suggests a possible method for phenomenological inquiry regarding the self and it is this method I will follow in the dissertation. Given the wealth of literature that exists concerning each self-aspect, there is a way in which we can pose questions regarding the self without, at the outset, committing ourselves to a single account. This dissertation takes this as a starting point for investigating self-aspects so as to bring them into communication with Merleau-Ponty. We will inquire into how the two different self-aspects we are concerned with show up in our experience. We begin with the most minimal experiential aspects of the self. Next we move on to consider the personal self. The purpose of these investigations will be to establish a description of the important phenomenological structures of our minimal and personal experiences of selfhood. I will also demonstrate ways in which the accounts that I explore harbor unnecessary presuppositions which makes relating them to one another difficult. Finally, I will attempt to reconcile these different ways of experiencing our selfhood through a discussion of Merleau-Ponty and enactivism.

We will begin in Chapter 2 by investigating the minimal notion of self as defended by Dan Zahavi, and attempt to deepen this idea through an appeal to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological descriptions of the lived body. What I intend to show is that the minimal self Zahavi describes does not show up in experience as a purely formal condition for the possibility of experience. Rather, my experience of mineness is encountered as a reception of my past in the present by means of the bodily capacities I have acquired in the development of my perspective. From there we will move on to a different understanding of the self in Chapter 3– what I call personal selfhood. At first

personal selfhood seems unrelated to the minimal self. Under analysis however, we see how personal selfhood involves at least three separate notions of self: the embodied minimal self, the narrated self and the narrating self. In their first appearance, these notions of the self appear problematically disconnected. Chapter 4 will move towards reconnecting them by way of a discussion of enactivist accounts of Narrative and Merleau-Ponty's ontology. Ultimately, what is uncovered through this study is that these seemingly diffuse aspects of selfhood are held together in our lived experience by a situation that is more than we are responsible for making ourselves. But to see how this is so and what I mean, it is first necessary to give a more substantive account of the chapters which follow.

Outline of the Chapters of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 examines the minimal or experiential self. Through a close examination of Dan Zahavi's recent work on this subject, as well as Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, I lay out the self as a minimal structure of experience. Then, appealing to Merleau-Ponty, I demonstrate that this self is already given as particular and individual on account of the fact that the self is encountered from first person perspective as engaged in the world and motivated by what it encounters there. This means, importantly, that the minimal self has a past and this past is a part of its structure. I argue that because the minimal self is encountered in the world as a component of experience, and because this experience takes the form of motivated interaction with the world on account of the habitual capacities that it accrues in the development of the body as an active and engaged experiencer of the world, part of the experience of mineness is an experience of *my* past as a structuring component of *my* experience. There is thus an instituted

continuity in my life by virtue of the way that past development of my bodily capacities shapes the world I can encounter. My situation appeals to me and gives me my experience as my own on the basis of a sedimented past that structures my present.

Chapter 3 investigates a second component of self-hood – what I call personal self-hood. It is in this chapter that we encounter the central tension of the dissertation. Here I concern myself with the kind of self that is posited as the agent of an action and appealed to as the seat of our will. It is this sort of self to which we commonly attribute authorship of an action in assigning praise or blame. In the chapter I investigate two accounts of such a self – the Real Self theory and the Center of Narrative Gravity theory – put forward respectively by Harry Frankfurt and Daniel Dennett. I buttress Dennett’s account with empirical literature taken from social psychology. I demonstrate that when we take into account the experiential self we uncovered in Chapter 2, these reflective accounts lead to a problematic division of subjectivity. The problem, simply put, is this: the past that we showed to be operative in our minimal awareness of ourselves seems to be absent as a structure for the narrating position that is called for by such reflective accounts. From this position, the narrating self then creates a new past and a new self position – the narrated self. In this way both accounts posit a self-position that is outside the lived personal history of the body as a necessary component for the construction of a personal self. Through an examination of Merleau-Ponty’s thought on the concept of institution, I argue that such a division is untenable.

Chapter 4 attempts to resolve this untenable division. The main question I am addressing in this chapter is the one posed at the end of Chapter 3: How ought we to think about the relation between the self-position of the narrator, the embodied minimal self

and finally the self as the main character of the narrated story? My claim is that their identity is held together – they are the same self – only by virtue of their situatedness. They are importantly situated, not just in a world of their own practical concerns that the world reflects back to them in the form of solicitations. Indeed, the diffuse aspects of the self are held together by more than just the activity of the body. Rather, the world that I am engaged in plays an important role in that it continues and holds open the past for the body to take up. The body is thus not the only location from which meaning flows and by means of which the past is preserved. More than my own personal past is at stake in my perception and action in the present. The body then, is but one component in a meaningful situation which allows the enaction of the self to occur. Indeed, as I will argue in this chapter, there is a common, instituted world which bears a past shared in common by pre-reflective and reflective self-consciousness that serves as the hinge point between the minimal, narrated, and narrating self.

In service of making this point, I begin by investigating Merleau-Ponty's discussion of reversibility. Through exposition of his analysis of double perception in one hand touching another, I demonstrate that perception is an achievement of relations in the world that take it up just as it takes them up. I investigate Merleau-Ponty's confusing claim that in some important sense, visible objects look back and see their observers. The meaning of this claim is made difficult by Merleau-Ponty's metaphorical language. However, I argue that for Merleau-Ponty the assertion that the world sees me amounts to a stressing of the role played by the world in maintaining the sedimented past of the observer so that she may come to be herself through interaction with a world that holds and supports her subjectivity. The objects I see look back at me insofar as they deposit

within me a sense or an orientation that I am not responsible for conjuring up by my own power. For Merleau-Ponty, I argue this occurs at the primordial level and is what allows for the emergence of a minimal embodied perspective as a reflection of already operating relations between things that realize themselves in perception. I contrast this with a Sartrean account of being seen by others in order to make this clear. Merleau-Ponty's critique of Sartre on this subject demonstrates that the minimal self is not a primordial given of experience. The minimal self is, rather, already indebted to a system of relations, what he calls an "absolute past of nature" (PhP 139), that holds open its possibility of being achieved.

Having clarified the way in which the minimal self depends on a world of instituted sense that outstrips it for its achievement, I turn to the second and third self-positions parsed out in the problematic division I uncovered in Chapter 3 – namely the self as narrator and the self as narrated. In service of this, I examine enactivist accounts of narrative which cast it as a capacity for guiding and supporting purposive action. These accounts⁶ suggest that the ability to narrate one's experience first emerges, not as a capacity for explicit self-identification and interpretation in the autobiographical sense we understood it in Chapter 3, but as a means for centering oneself as the agent in a concrete, problem-oriented situation. It allows a child, for instance, to keep the various components of a problematic situation "in hand" such that they can be attended to in action. In such a situation, we see that the three positions of narrating, narrated, and embodied self are held together by the pragmatic concerns of the situation. They are not externally related, and therefore do not require a synthesizing power to put them back together. Rather, they

⁶ Hutto 2006; Menary 2008; Gallagher and Hutto forthcoming.

emerge in response to a situation that demands active narration of one's bodily movement and experience. This gives rise to the narrated self as one of the important components internal to the structure of the situation.

A second point that we find in exploring the development of this capacity is that thinking of the embodied self solely in terms of the ends posited by the body is insufficient for understanding its development. Meaning could not centrifugally flow from the body and its activity. Rather, the body is revealed as a position to engage a meaning only because this meaning precedes the enactment of the body's capacities. By appealing to the Vygotskyian concept of a zone of proximal development, we see how this is true for the child in her being solicited by a situation which calls on her to do more than she has done in the past. It is out of such a situation that narrative capacity emerges. The continuity between the different appearances of the self then, is guaranteed by a world which calls for action. This does not mean that the self is nothing more than a construction or something outside of the world it emerges from through solicited action. Rather, it is through the action of the body in the world that the relationship between the body, the world, and the self, is realized in the emergence of a self in its multifaceted appearances. It is the world to which all three positions belong which holds them together. I close the chapter with a phenomenological analysis of adult family life in service of this final point.

I conclude the dissertation with a recapitulation of the argument that serves to tie it back into the guiding questions we began with in the prologue of this introduction. I will then offer up some possibilities for future work based on this project.

Chapter 2: Minimal Lived Aspects of the Self

The purpose of this chapter is to lay out what is involved in our minimal experience of ourselves as selves. With this in mind, Chapter 2 is largely expository in nature. The purpose of this chapter is to explicate Zahavi's understanding of the self as the minimal subject of experience, and to deepen this analysis with Merleau-Ponty's account of perception as embodied and habitually developmental. The claim in this chapter is simply that a minimal notion of the self involves a pre-reflective awareness of oneself as the subject of one's experience and that this pre-reflective awareness is always embodied and engaged in the world. This embodied engagement includes a reception of the past development of our bodies in the way that the world solicits action from us in the present. The point here is simply to establish that (1) a particular kind of awareness of one's body and (2) the body's role in acquiring habits of perception are part and parcel of the experience of mineness.

Zahavi and Minimal Selfhood

In a series of papers and books over the last ten years or so, Dan Zahavi has argued for the non-trivial existence of a core or experiential self that is pre-reflectively perceived in any possible experience. Eventually, I will argue that the minimal self only shows up in experience against the background of an ongoing life that is instituted in the world. The minimal self is thus not necessarily minimal insofar as it is always already a part of a pattern of self-aspects, which are mutually informing. In Chapter 3, I will examine how a more robust understanding of the self as the subject of a will leads us to take into account a more autobiographical or personal self. At bottom in this analysis is the claim that a self is always situated and it is this situatedness at the nexus of various

experiential trajectories that allows for the achievement of more robust understandings of self-consciousness. For the moment however, this chapter will focus on explicating the minimal or experiential self that Zahavi describes. The aim will be to link Zahavi's understanding of an experiential self to an embodied account.

Types of Selfhood

Zahavi's position is developed mainly in response to two alternate understandings of the self – the constructivist or narrative account of the self, whereby the self is something that is not given in experience initially but which comes to be through a human being's interaction with the rest of the world - especially through the development of her narrative capacity for explaining her situation.¹ The other position is a no-self view, which argues that there is no such thing as the self, properly understood. Rather the self is an illusion or a mistake.²

The purpose of this section is not to take up Zahavi's project of offering an alternative to these views. Rather what I aim to do in the pages below is clarify and explain Zahavi's own position. I want to investigate the ways in which we are minimally acquainted with ourselves in our experiential life, specifically as living bodies and as related to other people and how these phenomena help us to understand even the most minimal conception of ourselves as importantly multiple. However, it will be helpful to briefly explain each of these positions so as to better specifically understand the sort of self-related phenomena with which Zahavi is not concerned.

¹ Schectman (1996) for example, argues that narrative is constitutive of a self understood as the bearer of personal responsibility.

² cf. Metzinger 2003; Albahari 2006.

A typical articulation of what we might call the no-self view can be found in Thomas Metzinger's work *Being No-one*. Using insights from contemporary neuroscience, Metzinger argues for the non-existence of such things as selves, understood as "process independent individual entities, as ontological substances that could in principle exist by themselves, and as mysteriously unchanging essences that generate a sharp transtemporal identity for persons" (Metzinger 2003, 626). Instead, Metzinger argues that the concept of a self, understood in this way, is simply a folk psychological concept that serves as a stand in for a particular set of representations generated by our brains. As a tool for explaining the *experience of selfhood*, he argues, such a folk concept of self is superfluous. We need not posit the existence of such a thing in order to explain the fact that we experience ourselves as someone.

On Metzinger's view, this experience is an illusion, a mistake we make when we confuse a set of phenomenal representations with an actually existing thing. Such experience, he contends, is better explained in functional and neurobiological terms, neither of which depends upon the existence of a transtemporal, unified, self-identical entity. What we call the self is actually a particular set of representations in the brain which serve to represent various aspects of the representational system to itself for the purposes of action on or about itself. For instance, given Metzinger's functional model, if a system wants to alter some aspect of itself, say shave, it requires a model of itself for doing so in order to guide its action, just as it would need to represent any other state of affairs in the world. This model is made up of representations of the current state of various aspects of the system some of which are experienced phenomenally. What we call the experience of being someone, then, is really just a collection of self-related

representations which satisfy a set of conditions for being phenomenal.³ Such a model of the mind, he claims, will lead to an exhaustive explanation of the role of any self-related representation in the system, rendering the concept of self and the experience of selfhood superfluous to a complete functional understanding of a system's behavior and the role played by consciousness therein.

Zahavi's response to such a claim is that the sort of self that Metzinger argues against the existence of is an overly reified, outdated notion of the self. This would be fine if it were the only sort of self on offer; however, in a wide variety of disciplines, selves are discussed which are not unchanging independent entities. Researchers interested in pathologies of the self – like schizophrenia - for instance, do not talk about something wrong with such an entity. Instead, self-related symptoms of the disorder can be fruitfully understood as “fundamental changes in one's relationship to one's own thoughts, actions, sensations and emotions” (Zahavi 2014, 5). For instance, Josef Parnas and Louis Sass (2003) have argued that attending to self-related symptoms - complaints about overly active self-monitoring - for example, allow for early identification of the disorder in the prodromal phase if attended to and looked for.

The point here is simply that an argument against the reality of a unified, ontological substance is not an argument against the existence of the self. There are many other ways of talking about the self that denote real phenomena but involve no such substance. The claim that there is no such thing as a self simply because there is no such thing as a reified, transtemporal, non-material entity, is unwarranted.

³ Cf. Metzinger 2003, Chapter 3.

The second conception of selfhood against which Zahavi situates himself is perhaps best thought of as constructivist model often taking the form of a narrative model of selfhood. According to such accounts, counter to the no-self position, the self is not understood as a singular ontological entity. Rather, coming to know oneself is a lifelong project that can be carried out with various degrees of success. In familiar parlance, this is the self that we find through reflection, not just on our immediate experience, but on the events of our lives and through our shared projects of meaning making with others. On this view, the self is not some soul-like entity, or even an ego-pole in any given experience – that which gives unity to my experience a la Kant’s transcendental ego. Rather, the self in question here is something I go about constructing through my concerned and reflective activity in the world with other people. It involves shaping a narrative of my life and organizing my life in accordance with this narrative. It takes shape in answer to the question “Who am I?” and involves answering this question through telling a certain story, emphasizing certain aspects and de-emphasizing those which do not conform with this story. It is according to this sort of narrative that we are able to make claims like, “I was not acting like myself” or “that was certainly out of character for her.”

Thus on a narrative view, a self is not something that is ever given in full, and is certainly not something that we are born with as an innate structure of our lives. Rather, it is through growth, interpersonal involvement, and especially the telling of our story to ourselves and to others that we become ourselves as selves.

While Zahavi does not doubt that our lives as we live them at the personal and interpersonal level contain an existential dimension of this kind, he claims that there is a

phenomenological self that precedes this narrative self as a “necessary founding supplement” (SS, 105). This more robust self depends upon first having experiential access to one’s own experience. It is thus a question of experience and “identified with the very first-personal *givenness* of the experiential phenomena” (SS, 106). If the self is claimed to have experiential reality (that is, something we experience ourselves to be), experience must exist in such a way that a self is given to us. “To be conscious of oneself, consequently is not to capture a pure self that exists in separation from the stream of consciousness, but rather entails just being conscious of an experience in its first-personal mode of givenness; it is a question of having first-personal access to one’s own experiential life” (SS, 106).

On Zahavi’s view, such first personal access to one’s own experiential life is a necessary condition for narrative self-consciousness or the project of self-discovery and self-shaping. Thus, if we wish to understand this broader notion of the self, we first need to inquire after the first-personal access to our experience that founds it. Zahavi seeks to posit his understanding of the minimal self as a replacement for a more traditional notion of the subject that can be traced back to Kant. On this traditional view, the self is that which remains invariant in the ever-changing manifold of experience. In a short period of time I may see a bird out my window, smell the coffee brewing on my stove, hear a knock at my door and remember that I have a friend dropping by. Each of these experiences is qualitatively different taken in isolation from one another. However, they all share something in common; namely, “they all have the same subject, they are all lived through by one and the same self, namely myself” (SS, 104). While particular experiences arise and pass within my conscious life, my self – my I – remains invariant

and is the same throughout the course of these experiential happenings. This self – my self – remains the same throughout time as “a distinct *principle of identity* that stands apart from and above the changing experiences and which, for that very reason, is able to structure it and give it unity and coherence” (SS, 104).⁴

On this traditional Kantian understanding of the self, the self is an ego-pole, a purely formal and abstract principle that must be assumed as a condition of possibility for coherent experience. This traditional self is not itself something that we are capable of experiencing. What we do experience are the contents of our experience, the objects that populate it. We experience the smell of coffee, the sight of a bird, the sound of a knock on the door, the recollection of an impending meeting, but we do not experience the “I” which does the experiencing of these things. Rather, it is pointed to or implied by each of my multiple experiences in virtue of the fact that they are experienced in a coherent succession. I can know that there is a self, but it cannot be an object that I experience. I can only know it by making an inference; i.e. given that experience appears to me as coherent, there must be some principle of coherence, some unifying ego that holds these experiences together.

In contrast to this, Zahavi argues that the self is perceived, but not as the object of perception. The minimal or experiential self does not require an inference in order to be known and is not an assumption that must be made such that there could be coherent experience. Rather, it is a structural feature of any possible experience. It does not have to do with an external unifying principle outside of conscious life, but is a feature of the

⁴ cf. Kant 1998, B 132-133 as the most exemplary exposition of this idea.

way in which experience is *given* to us. Experience itself is given in a first-personal manner, so to be conscious of oneself does not mean that *my* self must be the object of my experience, merely that my experience be presented in a first personal mode. In this way, the self, on Zahavi's account, is not an ineffable transcendental precondition, but neither is it only a construction that takes shape over time through the activity of self-narration or exploration. It is encountered, implicitly in any experience given the way that experience is structured, and thus precedes any narrative project of self-discovery or construction.

Mineness and the Minimal Self

So far, Zahavi's position looks something like this: There is certainly a sense of having a self that involves narration and interpersonal relations. There are certainly aspects of ourselves that we create by engaging in these activities. However, in order for this to be true, there must first be something about which to narrate and something that relates to others. In order to experience one's life as a story, there must be a place from which to begin telling the story. And in order for this to be the case, there must first be a more minimal sense of self that we experience. In Zahavi's words, "In order to begin a self-narrative, the narrator must be able to differentiate between self and nonself, must be able to self-attribute actions and experience agency, and must be able to refer to him- or herself by means of the first person pronoun. All of this presupposes that the narrator is in possession of a first person perspective" (SS, 114). So like the Kantian move, which posits a self as a transcendental condition for coherent experience, Zahavi argues that there must be something which is transcendental for narrative activity, namely a first person perspective. However, unlike the Kantian ego pole, Zahavi seeks to locate this

transcendental condition for narrative activity within experience itself rather than outside of it, accessible only by inference.

Zahavi makes the case for this position by way of two lines of argumentation. The first is in line with claims made in the analytic philosophy of mind literature concerning the nature of consciousness. This concerns a claim made by people like Thomas Nagel (1974) and John Searle (1992) that there is a certain kind of what-it-is-likeness to any sort of experience. The difference between conscious things like human beings or (at least) some sorts of non-human animals, and objects like chairs and coffee cups is that there is something it is like to be a conscious thing and there is nothing it is like to be a non-conscious thing. The difference is that conscious things have experience.

Given that we accept this claim, we still need to clarify what is meant by what-it-is-likeness. This is because there is an inherent ambiguity in the concept. If we ask about the what-it-is-likeness of the taste of coffee, for instance, what we find is that we end up asking about a quality of the object itself, not a quality of our experience. We describe the taste of the coffee as bitter or milky. We might be tempted to include other such properties as well, like hot or wet as being somehow pertinent to the experience of tasting coffee. But if our experiences have qualities of their own, then they must exist in experience over and above the qualities of the object of our experience. “The *taste* of the [coffee] is a qualitative feature of the [coffee] and must be distinguished from whatever qualities my *tasting* of the [coffee] has” (SS, 119). A problem then arises when we try to point to the difference between the what-it-is-like-ness of two different experiences. In doing so, we end up pointing to differences in the qualities of the objects, not necessarily

the qualities of the experiencing. The difference between tasting coffee and lemons, for instance, just is the difference in taste between these two things.

Based on this difficulty, Dretske (1995) has argued that experiences do not have intrinsic and non-intentional qualities of their own. Instead, the what-it-is-likeness of any given experience is simply composed of the qualitative properties the object of experience is experienced as having. The difference between tasting coffee and tasting a lemon consists only in the fact that different objects with different properties are represented in consciousness.

Zahavi argues that this sort of argument jumps to a hasty conclusion. Drawing on Husserl, Zahavi distinguishes between two ways of asking about what-it-is likeness. First, one could ask about “the how of [the object’s] determinations” and second, one could ask about the “how of its givenness” (Husserl 2014). As Zahavi re-words this distinction, “the what it is like question has two sides to it: “what is the object like for the subject” and “what is the experience of the object like for the subject”” (SS, 123). The claim here is simply that we are never only aware of an object and its determinations, but also the way in which these things are given to us through experience. In this way, experiences are not representations of an external world, and thus the difference between experiences is more than the difference between what is represented. Rather, experience is a mode of access to the world. Different kinds of experience are themselves different kinds of access to the world. We can, for instance, have different modes of access to the same object. To perceive the coffee is not the same as remembering the coffee, nor is it the same as imagining the coffee, etc. Properties of experience then, do not pertain to the objects of experience but to the various modes of access to those objects. In other words,

the properties of tasting coffee that are experiential involve the what-it-is-likeness of tasting rather than properties like milky or bitter. Tasting, as a particular kind of perceptual experience then, would have experiential properties that differentiate it from recollection or imagination.

This distinction is important for self-consciousness on Zahavi's account because it is this aspect of experience which involves a tacit recognition that one is the subject of one's own experience as different from the experience of another person. While the properties of the object of my experience are intersubjectively available, the properties of my experiencing that object are not so available. I could taste the coffee as bitter. So could my companion who is drinking coffee with me. Those properties could be given to my companion in the same way they are given to me. However, the subjective dimension of my experience, the what-it-is-likeness of the seeing or the tasting, is inaccessible to my companion, just as his is to me. While for me, it is impossible to separate the experiential dimension of my experience from the experience of a particular object, I am asking about something other than the experienced properties themselves when I am asking what it is like to experience an object. I am asking about the way in which the object is presented in my experience. One feature that is uncovered when I ask that question is that it is given to me in a first-personal mode. My experience is *for me* in a way that it could not be for anyone else. My companion might see that I am looking at or tasting a cup of coffee. He might be able to verify that I am tasting something bitter by tasting it himself. However, he will not have access to the first personal mode of givenness of those objects that I have.

Importantly, Zahavi contends, without a first personal mode of givenness, there would not be experience. There would be no what-it-is-like to something unless this involved a first personal-mode of givenness. “The first-personal givenness of experiential phenomena is not something incidental to their being, a mere varnish that the experiences could lack without ceasing to be experiences” (SS, 122). Rather, first-personal givenness is constitutive of experience as such. The point of all of this is simply that if there is an experience, one of its constitutive features is a first personal mode of givenness. This is a part of what the experience of an object is like for a person and is not to be confused with what an object is like for a person. In our daily life, these two things are not separated. We experience the objects we come into contact with through a first personal mode of givenness. We get the determinations of the object and the determinations of its mode of presentation together at the same time. However, when we want to ask about this experience, to understand it from a philosophical perspective, we find that there are two sides to experience – the subjective side of the experience and the side of the object. First, there is that towards which our experience is directed (the object or *noema*); and second, the mode of givenness through which that object is experienced (the *noetic* or subjective side).

Now, there are different modes of givenness of a first-personal experience (what Husserl calls *noetic* content). As I stated earlier, I could recollect, imagine, or perceive the same cup of coffee. However, each of these modes of givenness share one common feature, namely, *mineness*. The first-personal mode of givenness of these differing *noetic* acts entails a pre-reflective sense that the experience before me is my own. When I see a coffee cup, experience thirst, taste the coffee in the cup or hear a knock at the door,

imagine that I am doing these things, or recollect a time in my past when I did these things, I cannot be in doubt about the fact that it is me who does this, that it is for me that these experiences are occurring or that the experience is my own. This does not, however, depend upon a separate unifying “I” that exists outside of experience. The impossibility of my doubt is not something I discover through a subsequent reflection on my experience. Perhaps, from such an abstract position, doubt might become possible. This is what allows someone like Sartre in the *Transcendental Ego* to claim that what is certain is not “I am aware of this chair” but only that “there is awareness of this chair.” However, in order for there to be awareness of a chair, on Zahavi’s account⁵ such awareness must involve a subjectivity internal to the structure of the experience such that it could be awareness at all. In other words, it is not through an inference that this mineness is revealed. Rather, part of what it is like to have any of these experiences – that is, an internal feature of the experience itself – is an implicit awareness of myself as the subject of the experience. The point is simply this: “if the experience is given in a first-personal mode of presentation, it is experienced as *my* experience, otherwise not” (SS, 124).

Self and Other: Further Elaboration of the First-Person Perspective

A further way to sketch out what it means to have a sense of mineness in one’s experience is by differentiating it from what we see when we encounter another person. Zahavi (2014) argues for instance, that we are capable of being given the experiences of others in a non-inferential manner. Counter to the two mainstream accounts of understanding others in debates around social cognition, namely Theory Theory (TT) and Simulation Theory (ST), wherein one either uses a folk psychological theory or an on or offline simulation of another’s experience in order to infer the minds of others, Zahavi

⁵ And indeed in Sartre’s later account, cf. *BN*, pp.9-16.

contends that the experience of others is available to us in a direct way, without inference. Echoing earlier phenomenological accounts like those of Scheler, Stein, Husserl, Sartre, and Schutz, Zahavi argues that we can and do experience the minds of other people; however, we do so from a different perspective than the one undergoing the experience.

The purpose of this section is not to review the various positions in the social cognition literature. Rather, it is to help us to understand the nature of the first person perspective and the way in which it is the unique mode of presentation of our experience. The interesting point here is that when I observe another person, they are given in my experience in a way that is different, both from the way in which a mere object is presented, and the way in which my own experience is presented. I have a direct experience of the other as having a perspective, which upon reflection, clarifies what it means to have my own perspective. This point can be arrived at by way of phenomenological description. To this end, it is helpful to briefly examine Sartre's account of other perception in *Being and Nothingness*. He begins by noting that when we encounter others, we simultaneously grasp them as objects, but also as people:

I am in a public park. Not far away there is a lawn and along the edge of the lawn there are benches. A man passes by those benches. I see this man; I apprehend him as an object at the same time as a man. What does this signify? What do I mean when I assert that this object is a man? (*BN*, 341).

For Sartre, what makes the experience of the other person distinct from the experience of a mere object is the way in which the other alters my perception of other objects in my field of perception. I do not perceive the relations between the other person and the park bench in the way I might perceive the relation between a park bench and the

lawn in a moment of disinterested observation – say that they are three feet from one another. If I perceived the other only as an object, Sartre writes, “His relation with other objects would be of the purely additive type; this means that I could have him disappear without the relations of the other objects around him being perceptibly *changed*” (BN, 341). But this is not the case in my perception of the other as an other. Here, what we encounter is an alteration of relations between objects such that they are perceived as related to this other person, not as though the two are external to one another, but as parts of a meaningful whole. For Sartre, to see another is to have one’s privileged position as the zero-point of perception called into question, “for instead of a grouping *toward me* of the objects, there is now an orientation which flees from me” (BN, 342).

In this way, the other is presented in my experience as something beyond what is available for me in the world as the only perspective. Unlike the experience of a coffee cup or a knock at the door, which are disclosed to me as something to which I can respond from my perspective and meaningful to me and my projects, the experience of another person changes my experience of the world. I see things not simply as there for me, but for the other. If, for instance, I encounter a man walking down the street reading a book, I do not encounter two separate objects arranged spatially with respect to one another the way I might encounter a book on the table next to my phone. Rather, what I encounter is a “closed ‘Gestalt’ in which the reading forms the essential quality” (BN, 344). I am seeing the activity of another perspective; I am seeing “reading.” If I encountered the man and the book merely as objects, then these two objects would be given to me in such a way that the two were external to one another. There would not be “reading” that I observed, but a man and a book. The distance between them would be a

matter of inches or centimeters and their particular configuration would be a contingent fact about how they appear. For example, the relation, “the book is five inches from the face” would be maintained if the face and the book were to change positions. However, when I see the man reading the book, what I see is “a relation which is without *parts*, given at one stroke, inside of which there unfolds a spatiality which is not *my* spatiality” (*BN*, 342).

To encounter another person then, on Sartre’s account, is to encounter something which exceeds my perspective - that is, the world revealed to me as for me. However, it also exceeds the third person perspective which reveals separate and externally related objects indifferent to one another and indifferent to me. I experience the perspective of this other person by seeing the world as there for him.⁶

This allows us to circle back to the character of mineness in our experience. When I see the other and his activity as a meaningful gestalt, what I am seeing is the other person’s perspective. They are given, in my experience, not as a mere object, but a being for whom there is a world. I see this from my perspective. That is, his experience is given to me in a way that is different from the way in which his experience is given to him or that my own experience is given to me. The simple distinction, for Zahavi, is that I experience my perspective as my own. This is what makes the experience of my own perspective different from the experience of another person’s perspective and adds weight to the idea that to have a perspective is at the same time to experience it as one’s

⁶ Merleau-Ponty makes a similar point when he writes, “my gaze falls upon a living body performing an action and the objects that surround it immediately receive a new layer of signification: they are no longer merely what I could do with them, they are also what this behavior is about to do with them” (*PhP*, 369). Merleau-Ponty’s ultimate position on what makes this possible will, in the end, differ from Sartre’s, but this is something we will cover in later chapters. For now, the takeaway point is that the experience of another as a meaningful gestalt reveals the world as there-for-an-other, which is an experience of the perspective of another.

own. It is not simply the interchangeable qualities of the objects that I experience which could equally well be instantiated in my consciousness or that of the other. Rather, there is an irreducible quality to my experience that it is mine and not his. There is a structural difference to experiencing my own perspective, a what-it-is-likeness, that is not reducible to the contents of that experience, but that has to do with the first-personal character of it. My access to the world from my perspective is given differently in my experience than my experience of the world from the other's perspective.

*First Person Perspective as Motivated: Merleau-Ponty's Critique of
Intellectualist and Empiricist Accounts of Perception*

Through an examination of Zahavi's work on identifying a minimal notion of selfhood, we have seen that there is an aspect of our experiential life that is not merely the sum of the contents of our experience. I am sitting in a chair. My hands are poised above a keyboard and my vision is directed towards a screen. What Zahavi has explained is that there is something it is like to be in such a position that is not reducible to the properties of the chair, screen, keyboard and hands of which I am aware. Rather, this experience is given or presented in a particular way; namely, it is presented to *me* as the subject of experience. My tacit awareness that I am the subject of the experience is part of the experience itself. It is from *my* perspective that the screen is seen, the chair and the keyboard felt and that my hands are positioned.

Sartre clarifies this thought through the example of counting cigarettes. Through the act of counting the cigarettes, I disclose a fact about the cigarettes: There are a dozen. My act of counting posits the cigarettes as the object towards which my consciousness is directed. I take up a certain attitude towards this object – in this case one of counting. But

I could just as easily perform different sorts of acts. I could smell the cigarettes or weigh them, and in so doing, disclose different aspects of the cigarettes. Such acts posit the cigarettes as an object for my consciousness. They are that towards which my intentional acts are directed.

I could, just as easily, reflect upon myself and do the same sort of thing. I could, as Descartes does, posit myself as the object of my consciousness in order to doubt its existence. This sort of awareness differs from the pre-reflective awareness I have of myself. The self I am aware of pre-reflectively in doubting the existence of the cogito or in counting cigarettes is not posited as the object of my thinking, willing, doubting, admiring, or counting. Rather, the immediate consciousness I have of myself does not allow me such an interpretive distance. However, it is the condition of possibility of such a reflection. As Sartre notes about the activity of counting cigarettes, “If anyone questioned me, indeed I, if anyone should ask, “what are you doing there?” I should reply at once, “I am counting” (*BN*, 13). My counting is given as mine in non-pathological instances of experience as a feature of that experience such that I can then reflect upon it and take up an attitude of assessment. I can answer the question posed to me because I am already in direct contact with myself as the subject of the counting experience.

The point here is epistemological. Being conscious of oneself in a pre-reflective way is not the same as taking an epistemic position on one’s self. To be aware of oneself is not to know that one exists in the way that I know that there are twelve cigarettes in the case as the result of counting. If self-consciousness were this kind of knowing that I exist, then there would have to be a subject who knew this and who posited a self as the object of that knowledge. Thinking of pre-reflective self-awareness in this way would thus

insert a third term into the structure. There would have to be more than the counting of the cigarettes. There would be the subject who is counting, there would be the cigarettes that are being counted, and there would have to be consciousness behind consciousness that secretly knows, judges or believes that one is counting. This sets up an infinite regress, as this third term would require another consciousness behind it who judged it to exist and so on *ad infinitum*.

The solution to this problem is to recognize that consciousness of an object implies an indubitable sense that one is the one who is counting. It is an indubitable because it is a built in structure of experience and is not posited as an object of knowledge, but is the very medium of experience. It is not by reflection that I arrive at knowledge of such existence; rather, it is a point of departure towards other things that discloses me to myself non-positionally as the subject of my own experience.

In the early chapters of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty takes up this epistemological point and reveals the necessity of an active, embodied perceiver as the minimal subject of experience. What this reveals is that my minimal self is not just the awareness that I am the one for whom experience is given, but that experience is given to me as an active, embodied and engaged being, not just an empty *ipseity*. My pre-reflective awareness of myself includes a structure of motivation for embodied action and an inquisitiveness into my surroundings as not yet fully constituted for me that in part derives its motivation from a past that it carries forward.

This means that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological project is more than merely descriptive. Through faithful description of experience, Merleau-Ponty uncovers a truth about the way in which being a self means being a body for whom the world is not

already complete. This leads us to an alternative understanding of the starting point for knowledge and an understanding of perception as expressive.⁷ What is given at the outset of an inquiry for an engaged subject, is not an established state of affairs that she then formulates questions about. Rather, we are tacitly aware of ourselves as addressed by a question that is posed to us by the incompleteness of the world. Perceptual activity, then, is not like that of the scientist who approaches a world of established facts and then asks questions. Rather, it is closer to the position of an artist who pursues a nagging motivation to express her situation to others and, in doing so, to develop and make something of her abilities for expression. We will uncover this sense of oneself as embodied, engaged, and expressive, but only by first returning to the question of how perception is accomplished. It is towards this analysis that we will now turn.

One overarching theme in Merleau-Ponty's early work is an attempt at finding a middle position between two classical understandings of perception prominent in the psychological and philosophical literature of his time: empiricism and intellectualism (or idealism). According to these positions, human perception, thought, and action can only be understood by appealing either to a physical, mechanistic body, the cognitive work of a transcendent rational mind, or some amalgam of the two.

For Merleau-Ponty, the problem with this sort of approach is that it presupposes a more primordial, direct connection between the body and the world -- without which there can be neither perception of physical objects capable of acting upon the body in a meaningful way, nor any way for the mind to act upon the world.

Consider for instance, the phenomenon of attention, as Merleau-Ponty does early

⁷ As opposed, say, to being representational.

on in the *Phenomenology*. Imagine that while I am seated at my keyboard, typing away on this Word document, my mind begins to wander. I look up from the screen and see beyond it. There I encounter a shiny red apple. Given that I am engaged in a project of wondering about perception, I begin to perform some perceptual experiments. I focus my attention on different parts of the apple. I notice that this particular apple still has a stem attached to it and focus on the way the stem, dry and brown, disappears into a convex hollow in the top of the apple. Moving on from here, I notice that it reflects the light from my overhead lamp in a vague shiny location near its middle.

Empiricism attempts to explain this sort of activity by appealing to the objective properties of the apple, which cause corresponding sensations in consciousness. Once my gaze falls upon the apple, the light from my over head lamp reflects off the apple and hits my retina, which in turn sets off a chain of material changes eventually resulting in my perception thereof. Information carried by the light is interpreted by my nervous system and results in a conscious representation in my mind which corresponds to the objective properties of the apple – its color is really a representation in my mind of the wavelength of light it reflects.

On such an empiricist account, when I focus my attention on a particular thing or a particular part of that thing, this is analogous to passing a mental flashlight over representations that are already present in the mind as correlates of properties which exist in the object to which I am attending. If I am looking at my apple, for instance, and my gaze moves from its stem to its shiny middle, the whole apple is already present in consciousness as a collection of sensual data. In directing my attention, I simply focus on particular representations – the shiny redness of the middle, say, instead of the stem.

The problem with this is that there is nothing in these sensations themselves that suggests the unity of the object to which I attend. What is given is a bundle of discreet sensations that are not themselves internally related to one another. Among these sensations, there are only external relations that exist in objective reality. If attention worked in this way, then I could attend to ‘shininess’ without attending to the shininess of this particular apple or to redness without it being *this* redness before me which is shiny. There is nothing *in the sensation*, which tells me that this shininess I focus on is the shiny redness of an apple with a stem.

If this were how attention worked, then there would be no necessary reason for the world to exist before us in the determinate way that it does. On an empiricist account, attention merely juxtaposes one given sensation with another in an order of its own disinterested choosing. But once the subject of attention is granted such initiative, then it has total freedom to juxtapose any sensation with any other, in any order it wishes. Because there is no internal connection between sensations – merely an external, objective relation – there is nothing that necessitates which sensations go together or must be attended to simultaneously or in succession.

An empiricist account will try to solve this problem by appealing to an associative power of the mind. The common appearance of shiny and red together associates these two sense data such that I cannot focus my attention on one without the other appearing alongside or paired with it. Through repeated exposure to red and shiny being paired together and brown and dry being paired together, and their constant conjunction in a particular configuration being experienced in the presence of an apple, I have generated an ability to recognize an apple and distinguish it from its surroundings, such that it can

now appear to me as such. If this were the case, however, attention would not be needed in order to bring into focus the various aspects of the apple. Rather, they ought to be already given in the primal sense impressions, already encountered as conjoined, their unity ensured by the previous associative work of the mind. The hypothesis of a passive associative force renders the phenomenon of attention superfluous.

Intellectualism, on the other hand, attempts to solve this problem by beginning from the object-revealing power our attention seems to possess. The poverty of the stimulus revealed by the empiricist's account reveals that there is an active component required on the part of the mind such that perception becomes an inference or judgment. "Once vision has been defined in the empiricist manner as the possession of a quality inscribed upon the body by the stimulus, the slightest illusion, since it invests it with properties it does not have on my retina, suffices to establish that perception is a judgment" (*PhP*, 35). Here, the slightest illusion means anything we see that is not exactly as it should be according to the one to one correspondence between an objective property of the object of our perception and our experience of it. When I see a single cup next to my keyboard, this itself is an illusion as the cup actually casts images on two retinas. "Since I have two eyes, I should see the object in double, and if I only perceive one object, this is because I construct the idea of a single object at a distance with the help of the two images" (*PhP*, 35). Thus, perception becomes a process of interpreting sensory data and making inferences and judgments about the world that surrounds me based on partial information.

The problem here is that such an account again renders attention superfluous. I have the ability to synthesize the objective data provided to me by the stimulus into a

perceptual representation which is external to the objective data I began from. If I have such a power, then why do I need to direct my attention in order to further investigate what I have already judged to be present? To see an apple on this account is to impose a ready-made representation of an apple on the poor stimulus - to judge that this mess of sensory data is something that I already know. It could be suggested that I need to move my eyes over the apple in order to improve the quality of the stimulus. But, because the stimulus is external to the synthesizing power, it is not clear what function this would serve. If I am not seeing the real apple, but a representation imposed on the stimulus by the mind, why would the mind require sense data in the first place? As Morris explains, this becomes all the more troublesome when we wonder about the acquisition of such an ability in childhood development. In order to get better at identifying apples, I must already have the ability to identify them, to impose a representation on my sense data in the form of a judgment. But then I must already know what an apple is. In this way, an intellectualist,

cannot give an account of how a synthesizing capacity that must have been there all along if it is ever to develop, nonetheless develops in a manner contingent upon sensations external to that capacity. Why would a program that is already rolled up in cognition unroll only after exposure to certain contingencies? Would not a synthesizing mind unroll itself? (Morris 2004, 78).

The problem for the intellectualist account is that what is given in consciousness is already complete. If my attention merely brings into focus the scene which preceded it, this means, for the intellectualist, that the preceding scene, already the result of a judgment, must have already contained what I acquire through my attention. The apple on the desk, in my peripheral vision, must already be complete and fully present if I am aware that it is an apple. In focusing my attention on it, there is nothing to be clarified

that was not already in unattentive consciousness. Through attention, I cannot really acquire anything I did not already have.

In a re-formulation of Meno's paradox,⁸ Merleau-Ponty sums up his objections to these two positions, "empiricism does not see that we need to know what we are looking for, otherwise we would not go looking for it; intellectualism does not see that we need to be ignorant of what we are looking for, or again we would not go looking for it" (*PhP*, 30). Instead, what is required is an account which shows "how a perception awakens attention, and then how attention develops and enriches this perception" (*PhP*, 29). On such an account, we would not begin from a belief in a ready-made world interacting with a ready-made mind. Such an account demands an acknowledgement that we are not at first acquainted with a world of fully constituted and fully determinate objects. Rather, the world we encounter as determinate and ready-made - full of apples and keyboards and chairs - is itself the result of a long history of perceptual development rather than the starting point for an analysis of perceptual activity. This demands that our situation with regard to the world is not one of disinterested examination, but of motivated inquiry.

For instance, in my peripheral vision, beyond my screen, I do not see an apple, nor do I see a collection of equally present and externally related sensations. Rather, I see what might be or what could be an apple. Only through investigating this ambiguous phenomenon do I acquire the perception of a determinate, solid, apple. Thus, this ambiguous movement on the periphery of the visual field requires an act of attention in order to become a solid, determinate object for me. However, in its ambiguity, prior to its being determined as a solid object, it stands out as a part of my environment that is

⁸ For further discussion of Meno's paradox in relation to Merleau-Ponty's critique of intellectualism and empiricism, see the preface to Dillon 1997.

unclear and that could be investigated. It thus suggests to me a possible way of deploying my perceptual capacities. It *motivates* action in the form of a lived tension.

One way to understand such ambiguity in Merleau-Ponty would be to take it as the first moment in a perceptual dialectic on the way towards ever greater determinacy. It seems this way when we consider some perceptual examples he gives early on in the *Phenomenology*. We might, for instance, focus on his example of the mast of a ship in the distance that appears to us at first as merged with the forest behind it. He writes,

As I approached, I did not perceive the resemblances or the proximities that were, in the end, about to reunite with the superstructure of the ship in an unbroken picture. I merely felt that the appearance of the object was about to change, that something was imminent in the tension, as the storm is imminent in the clouds (*PhP*, 18).

As we move along the beach towards the ship, suddenly the figure changes and we come to see that what we thought was a strange sort of tree was in fact a mast of a ship all along. The alteration of the field from an ambiguous phenomenon into a beached ship “will resolve a problem only posed in the form of a vague uneasiness” (*PhP*, 18). Once this alteration has taken place, it is impossible to return to the world that included the mast as a funny sort of tree – as an ambiguous phenomenon soliciting our attention only so that the ambiguity can be removed and replaced by a determinate phenomenon.

On this way of understanding the role of ambiguity in perception, what is given in a situation is a phenomenal field, marked by ambiguous zones of indeterminacy. In their ambiguity, these zones, from which emanate a “vague uneasiness” (*PhP*, 18), appear to us as interesting or as motivating inquiry precisely because they are not quite right. They do not look as they should and so they outstrip our present and suggest a possible future,

which in turn, motivates an embodied response - in this case, simply approaching the ship.

In this way, prior to the presence of an objective world, we encounter an ambiguous one to which we help give form through our engagement with it. Only on the basis of such engagement can we come to think about a world made up of determinate objective properties or objects that do not require the presence of a perceiver. Thus the situation from which intellectualism and empiricism begin, with an already constituted world of objects external to one another and interacting in a causal manner, is not the situation in which perception unfolds. Rather, it is the result of motivated perceptual activity. Importantly, as we have already begun to suggest and as we will further see in the next section, it is always with our bodies that we carry out such engagement with the world.

Habitual Acquisition and the Body as the Medium of Experience

In the following chapters, we will spend more time investigating Merleau-Ponty's account of the body as a medium of perception. For now, however, all we seek to do is show how our experience of the world requires a pre-reflective awareness of one's body as a capacity for engaging the world and how the acquisition of such capacities enriches and enlarges the scope of what can motivate us towards further engagement. Thus a minimal awareness of myself would have to include a tacit awareness of my abilities for engaging the world as the way in which the world is given, just as it includes a tacit awareness that my perception is my own. We will do this by preliminarily investigating Merleau-Ponty's analysis of habits as perceptual acquisitions.

Unsurprisingly, under Merleau-Ponty's lights, empiricism and intellectualism give accounts of the human body as it is lived that are as problematic as their accounts of attention. For the empiricist, the body is an amalgam of physical parts, externally related to one another by a system of mechanistic causal reflexes. My awareness of my body is little more than interoceptive signals that are translated by a central sector (my brain) into a representation. For the intellectualist, the body is a concept, possessed by a transcendent rational mind, understood as a body which occupies a position in objective geometrical space and can be directed through acts of will.

In explaining the limits of a mechanistic account, Merleau-Ponty writes, "every mechanistic theory runs into the fact that the learning process is systematic: the subject does not weld individual movements to individual stimuli, but rather acquires the power of responding with a certain type of solution to a certain form of situation" (*PhP*, 143). In other words, rather than being mechanistically caused by an external stimulus in the environment, an agent's behavior is the motivated application of habit, insofar as it manifests itself as a preferred, general mode of response to a situation that affords a general mode of behavior. Such behavior differs in its precise motor elements, but exhibits a family resemblance of sorts across its separate instantiations. For example, when I form the habit of waking up early to the sound of my alarm clock, I do not weld a specific program of movement (removing my sheets in such and such a way, swinging my legs over the side of the bed to the same position every time, lifting myself from my bed with the exact same muscle movements, heading to the kitchen to make coffee along exactly the same path, etc.) to a specific stimulus (the ringing of my alarm clock). Rather, the ringing of the alarm clock is perceived as having a general meaning for me as an

agent already engaged in the world. It invites a familiar form of response whose specific movements may differ across instantiations – getting up to start the day.

For Merleau-Ponty, just as the body is not a mechanized system of stimuli and response, neither is the body a collection of material parts at the disposal of a transcendent decision making consciousness. This means that consciousness does not issue action commands based on its judgements about its situation. Rather, the body is the medium of consciousness through which consciousness is enacted within the world. Following Husserl, Merleau-Ponty writes, “consciousness is originally not an “I think that” but rather, an “I can”” (*PhP*, 139). On his view, this “I can” is always that of a particular body with particular capacities or powers. In order to look in another direction, for instance, I must move my eyes or my head. In order to see what is beyond the door, I must change my position.

These bodily movements which serve to alter my perception are themselves motivated by the incomplete character of the world as it is available to me as a body. This is because the particular body that I am is limited by its size, position and capacities. As a body so limited, I do not encounter a world full of present discrete objects and then make decisions about how to interact with them. Rather, my perspective is always incomplete. It contains horizons that suggest or hint at something beyond them. When I am motivated by a situation, this incomplete world shows me that there is an ambiguous “something over there,” just beyond the horizon of what is determinately present for me - some vibration in my peripheral vision, or a sound that seems to come from behind an object which obstructs my view. This ambiguous, indeterminate phenomenon, just beyond the horizon of what is determinately present, presents itself to me (perhaps) as something to

be moved towards, interrogated, gazed upon or made concrete by moving my body and altering my point of view. The world can only suggest this motivation to me insofar as I am a body with a limited perspective, but capable of a certain kind of motion and interrogative action that alters this perspective - in the process clarifying what had previously been fuzzy or ambiguous.

Importantly for Merleau-Ponty, these bodily movements and capacities are always habitual. The acquisition of a habit occurs when my body “has assimilated a new meaningful core” (*PhP*, 148) to the way it moves through, interrogates or acts upon the world. Such an acquisition gives rise to new possibilities for the appearance of ambiguous phenomena to be moved towards and made determinate. Habit thus provides a background against which particular action possibilities or affordances can show up as meaningful to perceiver. In this context however, such affordances appear as more than objective properties of the environment or logical possibilities for action. Rather, they appear as solicitations (Dreyfus and Kelly 2007) or invitations (Withagen et al. 2012) - that is, they invite or suggest a sort of action to a perceiver. Furthermore, an ambiguous phenomenon in the distance might suggest not only that it could become determinate, but that I ought to investigate it - a loud crash outside my room in the middle of the night, for instance. In this way, not only are affordances perceived in the environment as present possibilities, they can also be perceived as normative, that is, suggesting not only that something is present, but that I ought to do something to it, with it, or about it (Rietveld 2008).

Habit gives rise to such perceptual demands because it stabilizes or "freezes" perception (Morris 2004, 90), providing a baseline familiarity with the world and what is

required for my movement through it, and is carried over from my past negotiation of similar situations. This allows me to attend to a more general goal or activity rather than the more local, component movements necessary for such activity. For instance, if I am driving my car and decide to pass the car in front of me, I don't need to attend to the component parts of such a movement. I don't need to think, "blinker, mirror, blindspot, steering wheel, gas pedal" the way I was taught as an adolescent. Rather, having acquired the habit of driving, these smaller movements are incorporated into a single gesture. I simply pull out to pass and accelerate, accomplishing all of these smaller movements in the process. Similarly, I don't need to compare the objective size of my car with the objective space available in the passing lane the way I might have to if I were driving a school bus. Rather, because I am habituated to my car and the movement possibilities it affords, I directly perceive the passing lane as "space enough to pass" and seize my opportunity. Thus, my situation on the highway is not a frenetic one, involving countless perceptual variables that need to be monitored, mentally represented, and considered. Rather, by means of my habitual driving ability, the highway presents me with a meaningful situation which calls for a general response - passing the slower car in front of me. In this way, the formation of habits, as the method by which our bodies stabilize our perception into meaningful situations, is our "general means of having a world" (*PhP*, 147).

Thus, acquiring a habit like driving is what it means for our bodies to assimilate a new meaningful core. As a body that has acquired the habit of walking, I directly perceive a doorway as large enough for me to pass through. As a body that has become habituated to my car, I have a similar perception of space, but in this case the passing

lane is perceived as large enough to fit the car to which my movement capacities are tied.⁹ My bodily movement becomes habituated to the car as a perceptual apparatus in the same way that a blind person navigates by the use of a cane. Just as a blind person perceives the space around him in terms of the length of his cane and the space he marks out around himself by its movement, the space that surrounds me on the highway is perceived in terms of the car's movement possibilities rather than those of my organic body.¹⁰ I navigate the space of the highway not as a body that is within a car, but as a body fully integrated with a car on a highway. Thus, in having acquired a habitual way of driving, my body has acquired a new meaningful core, which is to say that my body "marks out the space around it" (*PhP*, 145) according to the movement possibilities of a body-car-highway system, not just a flesh and bone body.

Examples of coupling my body with perceptual appendages like a cane or a car demonstrate how the formation of a habit "gives the form of generality to our life and prolongs our personal acts into stable dispositions" (*PhP*, 147). The world I encounter is not neutral with respect to my personal history of movement within it. Rather, by means of a habit, understood as the acquisition of a meaningful core to my bodily movement, my situation is structured as calling for a general sort of response. Anything that I perceive as possible will appear so within the general terms of the habitual structure of the situation. I may, for instance, wish to pass the car in front of me, or slow down and follow behind him. But these options are only available to *me* on the basis of an accrued or sedimented general structure of my activity that is a result of my past engagement with

⁹ Cf. *PhP*, 144. "The subway door and the road have become restrictive powers and immediately appear as passable or impassable for my body and its appendages."

¹⁰ See Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the blind man's cane, *PP* 144. For useful analysis of this example see Morris 2004; Gallagher 2005; Noe 2005; Sterelney 2010; Chemero 2016.

the environment in which it takes place: my history of driving on a highway. Thus, to encounter a situation as soliciting action is not only to be aware of the givenness of the experience in the first-person perspective as a bare ipseity. It is rather to encounter my own particular past in the form of the sedimented general structure which allows any particular solicitation to appear for me. Minimal self-awareness includes a minimal pre-reflective awareness of my own past of habitual development as part and parcel of the givenness of a solicitation. In order to have a for-me-ness, I must be a particular self with a particular past that gives form to the first-personal character of my experience.

Summing Up

This chapter has been largely expository in nature. I explicated Zahavi's understanding of the self as the minimal subject of experience and then deepened this analysis with Merleau-Ponty's account of perception as embodied and habitually developmental. My claim in this chapter has been simply that a minimal notion of the self involves a pre-reflective awareness of oneself as the subject of one's experience and that this pre-reflective awareness is always embodied and engaged in the world. Our preliminary analysis of Merleau-Ponty's account of habitual acquisition has shown us that the body, as it appears in our lived experience, is not an objective thing made up of parts external to one another. Rather, it is my means of access to the world and is revealed simultaneously with it in and through my engagement of possibilities for movement and perception. I am aware of my body in a pre-reflective way, just as I am aware of my minimal self as the subject of experience through a non-positional experience of mineness. The world always shows up *for me* as inviting me to engage it through *my* bodily capacities. Indeed, my body appears on the subjective or noetic side of

experience. It is encountered as bound up with the “how of the givenness” of the object. The world is encountered as a place for my body and its capacities to engage what is possible for it. Importantly, however, this means that part of the experience of mineness, is an experience of *my* past as a structuring component of *my* experience. There is thus an instituted continuity in my life by virtue of the way that past development of my bodily capacities shapes the sorts of things I can encounter in my situation as appealing to me and giving my experience to me as my own. When I encounter a world that is given for me, I encounter a world that is given to *me in particular*, not as a completely anonymous ipseity, but as a particular body with a particular history. It is only through this particular history that a general field of possibilities is available *to me*.

Chapter 3: The Personal Self

In Chapter 2, I examined minimal experiential aspects of the self. There we saw that by investigating experience at the immediate level, our adult consciousness of the world is characterized by a tacit acquaintance with ourselves as embodied and motivated subjects of experience. I encounter the world as there-for-me, where the *me* implied is not like an idea, concept, or perceptual object, but a structural component of the experience itself. I encounter myself in the form of motivation to move towards the world and explore avenues of action that are open specifically *to me* based on my habitually acquired bodily possibilities for movement.

In this chapter, I will further explore this mode of givenness by investigating ways in which our experience addresses us, not just as minimal subjects, but as more robust selves. As we will come to see, the aspects of ourselves this chapter is concerned with are those often associated with discussions surrounding personhood. We will thus name the cluster of self-aspects we encounter here our personal self. As such we will come to see that as personal, we are incomplete beings with occluded and hidden aspects. In the act of reflecting on our own experience, we find that it is like the ambiguous objects of experience we discussed in Chapter 2, coming to take on more determinate characteristics through ongoing engagement. We will do this by exploring more personal aspects of the self – namely our encounters with ourselves as willing and agentive beings bound up in concrete relationships with other people. What we will see here is that our personal self so conceived is not something we can understand on the basis of experience as a self-same core-self, but, like the minimal embodied self we described in Chapter 2, we find a self that is in the process of movement and coordination. Whereas the minimal self is

revealed by the structure of embodied subjectivity - where embodiment is understood as concerning motor actions and solicitations that speak to us as bodies with habits of movement - our personal self can be understood as embodied in our ongoing self-interpretive activity.

The bogeymen in this chapter will be, on the one hand, the “Real Self Theory” (RST), which identifies the self of agentive action with an ability we have to identify ourselves with some motivations we encounter in the world over others. Such an account relies on what Frankfurt (1971) calls a second order position from which we reflect on and identify ourselves with some set of first order desires which pertain to our actions. I argue that this second order position is problematic in that its relation to our embodied experience is under theorized. While it helpfully picks out two additional important seeming aspects of selfhood – the Real Self that is the person we are as subject to the praise and blame of others and the self-position which gives rise to this Real Self in its reflective ability to identify with some desires over others – I argue that the self-positions described by the RST are problematically cut off from one another and related only externally. The first order self as subject of desires is one thing, our reflective capacity is another and the Real Self is a third thing created as a result of the activity of a reflective capacity. The problem is that we end up with three separate selves which require a fourth position of reflection necessary to re-unify them. But whence this position? We end up with a regress of reflecting positions which make sense of and unify our lived activity of self-reflection.

In contrast to this, I examine the possibility that there is simply no such thing as a Real Self. In service of this, I investigate Daniel Dennett’s Center of Narrative Gravity

theory (CNG), which posits that the Real Self is not real at all, but a helpful fiction we appeal to for explaining our lives and how we came to be where we currently find ourselves. On this account, the self has no real causal force. Rather, our actions and histories are more the product of objective forces in the material world which move us about. I support the CNG account by appealing to the so called “Situationist” challenge¹ to the concept of character, wherein moral reasoning and action is understood as influenced more by material properties of a situation than by a stable Real Self. Such accounts externalize the causes of human action in ways that are said to “bypass” any stable dispositional states of a second order reflective self, and locate the relevant causal explanatory mechanisms in an objective external world.

In contrast to these stories, I begin to explore Merleau-Ponty’s concept of institution in the service of developing an account of situated selfhood that revises the idea of a Real Self while rejecting the mechanistic account of Dennett’s CNG and the Situationist critique. In Chapter 4, I will go on to argue on the basis of this engagement with Merleau-Ponty that our reflective and personal selves are embodied in instituted ongoing engagements with others with whom we share both a past and a future. The three positions which RST helpfully points out will be shown to be internally related insofar as they arise out of these engagements and are deepened by moments of self-reflection that are afforded only within instituted ways of bodily engagement. In Chapter 4 we will go on to discuss further how such embodied and engaged interpersonal life is the source of self-reflective activity.

¹ Cf. Merrit et al. 2010.

First, however, it is necessary to investigate RST and CNG accounts to unfold their problematic presuppositions - ultimately demonstrating their insufficiency for understanding personal selfhood.

Self and Will

Where am I? Although this might not seem as important a question in considering selfhood as questions concerning who or what I am, it is a helpful one to consider if we eventually wish to answer those questions. Chapter 2 suggested that I am wherever my body is, or better, wherever I find motivation to act in the world on the basis of my body's past that has sedimented into a habit. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, "my body is wherever it has something to do" (PhP, 260), stressing the way in which my body does not inhabit objective space, but appears in and through a situation of bodily action and worldly engagement. As a bodily subject, then, I find myself wherever I am motivated to act, wherever I encounter an ambiguous tension that calls to be settled and in so doing suggests to me a mode of investigation or action proper to it.

However, in our daily lives, we encounter situations where we are inclined to identify ourselves with something beyond or transcendent of our bodies. It is true that much of the time, we go about on "auto-pilot," habitually navigating our world and pre-reflectively negotiating the problematical situations we encounter. However, it is commonly suggested that we are most ourselves when we resist or overcome our bodily inclination towards certain sorts of actions. In this way, we identify ourselves with our will – our ability to posit an end for our actions beyond, bigger than, or more self-possessed than those suggested to us by bodily inclination or motivation.

We see the significance of identifying oneself with one's will in the action of young men who hang by their fingers from high structures – cranes or skyscrapers - in a plethora of online viral videos. These kids climb high structures, walk to their edges, and lower themselves off the side. They hang there, sometimes only by the fingertips of one hand, as if to defy their bodily inclinations. We might say that they chase after the “rush” associated with such activity -that they are thrill seekers. But what is this thrill-seeking activity other than the bare assertion that they are more than their body and its sensations. Their bodies are on fire with sensations that scream to them that this sort of behavior is unsafe, unwise, or dangerous. They engage in these daredevil stunts in defiance of such sensations, these bodily inclinations for safety and comfort. They proclaim in so doing, “I am not just *this* body. I am more than that. I am a will.”

Such an identification of oneself with one's will is attractive and clearly at play not only in extreme cases like those of youthful daredevils, but also in more mundane situations. We talk about will-power, for instance, when we refrain from eating more than we should, despite the fact that a sweet dessert is tantalizing, or when we pull ourselves out of a warm and inviting bed only to go torture ourselves at the gym before a long day at the office. The identification of the will as extra-bodily is expressed in colloquial expressions from which we draw encouragement in such situations: “mind over matter” we might say to ourselves as we go for that extra rep at the gym or force ourselves across the last few steps of a long steep hike. Simultaneously, we might think “*you* can do it”; that is, *you* can push this tired body beyond the limits it seems to indicate it has reached.

When we engage in such activity, we identify ourselves with a power we have to direct our actions from a position that reflects on and considers our current situation. At

first pass, it appears detached and separate from the perceptual subject we discussed in Chapter 2. Unlike that situated, pre-reflective, almost anonymous self, this self is a subject which takes as its object the very pre-reflective consciousness that we *are* in our minimally embodied situations. And indeed, from the perspective of someone lifting weights, resisting dessert, or lowering himself off the side of a tall structure, such detachment is exactly what is required in order to resist the strong motivations we encounter in such a situation on account of our body's habitual propensities. It has the power to disavow the motivations we encounter as pre-reflective embodied selves and posit new ones in their place. In order to investigate these two seemingly contradictory accounts of the self then, let us investigate what is at stake here.

Self As Subject of Second Order Volitional Acts

In order to do this, let us briefly return to the description of embodied subjectivity that we began in Chapter 2. I am in a situation. Suppose I am in my kitchen. What we mean by this is not that my body is inserted into an objective relation with the things that surround it as if dropped into an already constituted and fully present objective space. We do not mean to say that I am situated three feet from the stove, four feet from the refrigerator the way Sartre described the objective qualities of a man he encountered in a public park (*BN*, 341).

What we mean by this is that I am not thinking about myself reflectively. My "I" is nowhere but in the world, it is geared into what my body is up to. I am engaged in some sort of activity, cooking perhaps. My action does not require guidance from a disengaged perspective. I am at home in my kitchen. By virtue of my stocking it with the sorts of things I require to cook and leaving them in familiar places, my kitchen has come

to support this activity. It allows me to move through the motions of preparing this dish without having to reflect upon what I'm up to. I am right there, *in the cooking*. I find myself in the way that the world of my kitchen speaks to *me* as the one for whom cooking here is easy. Much in the same way I have built habits of engaging the world in general, I have come to inhabit this place as one that is there for *me* and *my* activity and that shelters my subjectivity in the form of comfortable pre-reflective activity.²

A situation like this one seems devoid of any act of will understood as a detached reflective power to direct my life. There are ways in which I am pre-reflectively present to myself here as the subject of my life and the inhabitator of my kitchen. But there is nothing here that demands an explicit consideration of what I am or what I am doing. There is thus no obvious relation between this sort of pre-reflective selfhood and the sort of selfhood commonly associated with acts of will or acts of volition as understood in the examples above.

In what sense then, are my pleasant afternoons full of activity in my kitchen to be understood as an act of my will? One possibility, that lines up with a common sense understanding of the will would be to say that I am not doing anything *against* my will. That is, I am doing what I *want* to do. I am in no way coerced or forced into doing what I don't want to be doing. Making this move would allow the bodily solicitations and motivations that I pre-reflectively encounter in the world to be understood as being in accordance with my will.

Harry Frankfurt makes a move somewhat similar to this in his seminal paper "Freedom of The Will and The Concept of a Person." By moving from a common sense

² Cf. Jacobson 2016; Russon 2016.

understanding of a free act of will as “doing what one wants to do” and through a conceptual analysis of the sentence “A wants to X,” Frankfurt determines that in natural language, the statement holds in a variety of different sorts of situations. For instance, “when A is unaware of any feelings concerning X-ing, when he is unaware that he wants to X, when he deceives himself about what he wants and believes falsely that he does not want to X, when he also has other desires that conflict with his desire to X, or when he is ambivalent” (Frankfurt 1971, 7-8). The motivations we have identified in the pre-reflective situation of cooking in my kitchen might be thought of in Frankfurt’s terms as first order desires or “wanting and choosing and being moved *to do* this or that” (7). For Frankfurt, such desires are understood as mental states that motivate action. The condition of possibility for my finding a motivation in the world then is also having the mental state of wanting to do what the motivation solicits.

On this account, it is entirely possible that I have multiple desires which are conflicted or irrelevant simultaneous to my having the desire to engage in cooking activity. I may also want to become a professional basketball player, learn to play the cello, have a better relationship with my father or head back to bed and take a nap. However, these mental states are irrelevant to my current bodily situation. There is nothing in my perceptual field which motivates action towards fulfilling these desires. Hence they are not my effective desires in the situation I have described. To say that I am acting according to my will in this situation is just to say that the desire which currently moves me to act is the desire to cook and the desire to eat, while other desires, like becoming a professional basketball player or developing a better relationship with my

father, are not effective in this situation. This common sense account seems to be consistent with our analysis of the perceptual subject so far.

Understood in this way, Frankfurt contends, what we call our will is really just whatever mental state motivates the action that we end up engaging in. My “will” in this situation is really just the desire to eat that sets off my cooking behavior. This understanding of the will however, has little to do with the sort of will we talk about as being connected to personhood. For Frankfurt this sort of will is possessed by all sorts of beings that we would not call persons – other kinds of animals for instance may have such mental states. A dog is moved to chase a ball. It is perfectly fine to say that the dog wants to do this. The dog may want to do other things as well, say bark at a squirrel, but given a situation in which the dog’s desire to chase the ball is relevant, the dog acts on its desire to chase the ball and not some other desire.

What is peculiar about persons for Frankfurt is their ability to formulate what he calls second order volitions. The desires we have spoken about so far are first order desires insofar as they pertain directly to what we will do in a given situation and directly concern action. A second order desire would be one which would pertain to these first order desires. In other words, what is characteristic of a person is the ability to formulate a desire to have a desire that one does not currently have, or to have a desire concerning a different formation or economy of the desires one currently does have. To clarify, Frankfurt offers the following example: A man wants to be motivated in what he does by the desire to concentrate on his work. This entails that he already has the first order desire to concentrate on his work. It is something he already wants to do. The problem may be that when he is in a situation where work might be motivated, his will is determined by

some other desire that he also has, say to call a friend or to tidy his office. If this is the case, his first order desire to work is not fulfilled, but neither is his second order desire to be motivated by his desire to work. The fulfillment conditions of the first order desire are the man's actual working. The fulfillment conditions of the second order desire are that the first order desire constitute the man's will. They are thus two separate desires attributable to two separate subjects or self aspects – one first order and prereflective, the other second order and reflective. As we will come to see, the way these two self-aspects are related on Frankfurt's account will turn out to be problematic as the relation between them is external and requires a third position which synthesizes them.

On this reading then, we have an account of a divided self or of two related selves. One would be the embodied, embedded, minimal subject of first order desires. We described this subject in Chapter 2. The second would be the reflecting subject of second order volitions that Frankfurt identifies with personhood. Consider Frankfurt's paradigmatic example of the unwilling drug addict. The unwilling drug addict struggles with her addiction. She does not want to be driven by her desire for a drug. Rather, she wants a second desire to be the one which constitutes her will. She wants to encounter situations in the world as motivating restraint from drug taking activity, rather than drug taking. We might see the presence of this second desire show up phenomenologically in her agonizing, or attempts at resisting drug taking when presented with the activity. Thus what the situation motivates, or suggests to her, is unsettled on the basis of her already having two conflicting desires. In addition to this, she has a second order desire that her desire to refrain from drug taking be the one that constitutes her will. However, in

situations where it is possible that this desire could be fulfilled, she is “helplessly violated by [her] own desires”(12) and ends up consuming the drugs.

It would be strange to say here that the minimal subject that we described in Chapter 2 constituted the self that was violated by her own desires. This subject seems to be revealed precisely through the appearance of a situation with multiple possible meanings that is then settled by action. The self that is violated by her own desires is a second order self, a reflective self, a self that is characterized by her taking a stance with regard to the conflict between her two first order desires.

In order to clarify a little further, imagine a second sort of drug addict which Frankfurt calls a wanton addict (12). This addict’s actions only reflect the economy of her first order desires. It never occurs to her to consider whether she wants the relations between her desires to result in her having the will that she has. In this sense, she has “no *identity* apart from [her] first order desires...it is true neither that [she] prefers one to the other nor that [she] prefers not to take sides” (13). The identity of such a self then is only the identity of the minimal self we uncovered in Chapter 2. Her conscious life is always like the way my life is in the kitchen. It involves practical deliberation about what to do; that is, which of her desires she should enact in a given moment, but this largely takes the form of choosing by acting – actually doing one thing or another. It never comes up whether it is good to want to do one thing over the other. This simply does not concern the wanton addict.

On the other hand, the unwilling addict, through forming a second order volition, identifies herself with one of the conflicting desires over the other, even if this is the unsuccessful desire. In this way, she makes the desire to refrain from drugs more truly

her own and “withdraws herself from the other” (13). It is through such a process that the unwilling addict is able to claim that she is moved to take the drugs by a force that goes against her will – that she is “violated by her own desires” (12). What she means by this is that the desire she wishes to constitute her will is not in fact the one that does so. Her second order volitions are therefore unfulfilled because of the physiological addiction that she has but does not identify with – that she withdraws from in her endorsement of a second order position of a different desire.

Frankfurt provides us, then, with a preliminary framework from which to begin to investigate the interrelation of multiple forms of selfhood and to begin to phenomenologically investigate their relation to one another. The picture we have uncovered so far looks like this: an agent is divided into two parts. On the one hand, there are first order desires for particular courses of action. These show up in our lives through our pre-reflective engagement with the world in the form of motivations for action. On the other hand, there is a second part that is not so much concerned with action as it is with the desires which cause action – or on our account, the sorts of motivations which we encounter in the world as solicitous of action. It is reflectively concerned with what sorts of desires or motivations it wants to be operative in its life.

This second part has been called the Real Self³ because it is with this part of the agent that a person, properly understood, is identified. For the most part, a healthy adult

³ Susan Wolf, 1990. There are multiple Real Self Theories on offer. Some, like Frankfurt’s are hierarchical in nature, concerning first and second order desires (see, for instance, Dworkin, 1970; Neely, 1974; Stump 1988; Lehrer, 1990). Some are non-hierarchical and merely posit different sorts of mental states which all concern the world. Watson, 1975, for instance distinguishes between desires and values. A person’s constellation of values (what she deems to be good following rational reflection) constitutes their Real Self. Desires for things which are valued are understood to be in accordance with the will of the Real Self. Thus a Kleptomaniac, for instance, can be understood as acting against the will of her Real Self insofar as when she steals she does not act on a desire for something she values. However, what all Real Self theories hold in common is the distinction between the pre-reflective pull towards something that leads to action and the

agent's actual actions can be attributed to the Real Self insofar as, barring a physical dependency on a drug or a pathological compulsion like kleptomania or obsessive compulsive disorder, the agent is free to exercise her reflective power and is responsible for structuring the economy of their first order desires. The agent identifies with a first order desire as the one she wants to have constituting her will. This is what Frankfurt identifies as Freedom of the will as opposed to freedom of action. Thus insofar as the cooking activity I engage in (mentioned above) is something I want to want to do, it is a free action in accordance with my second order volition.

Returning to our case of the unwilling drug addict, we are able to say that her drug-taking behavior is not a free act of her will, and therefore she is not blameworthy in a moral sense because her minimally embodied self acts in direct opposition to the endorsement of her Real Self. Her Real Self is composed of second order desires which univocally want to not have a will constituted by her first order desire for narcotics. She is therefore not morally culpable for her drug taking behavior as these actions go against her well integrated Real Self. She does not identify herself with the first order desire that constitutes her will in any meaningful way. Rather, she identifies herself, through the formation of a second order desire, with a first order desire to do the exact opposite of what she actually does.

Second Order Self and The Body

The underlying assumption of such accounts of the self is that beliefs and desires produce actions. What we have uncovered in Chapter 2 is a pre-reflective structure of

reflective subject's consideration of what it would be good to be pulled towards in this way. For this reason, we will treat Frankfurt's account of the Real Self as exemplary of these theories as it is an early one, an influential one, and has important features for our account. It is also not the case that this view has been discarded in discussions of moral psychology. For a more recent treatment, see Arpaly and Schroeder 1999; Hursthouse 1999, p. 116ff.

perception and action that fills in the phenomenological structure of first order desires and beliefs. Rather than extra-bodily mental states, we have come to see that we live our beliefs and desires with and through our bodies. Through analyses of driving on a highway, walking on a beach, and cooking in a kitchen, we have seen that the world shows up as a place that is available to me on the basis of my body and its habits. Habits “prolong our personal acts into stable dispositions” (*PhP*, 147) and open us up to encountering the world in the familiar terms that our bodies are capable of taking up. Motivation is not an inner or transcendent mental state that sets off action, but a stable form of ongoing engagement that takes place between our bodies and our world. We encounter the traces of this engagement as the solicitation of a gap on the highway that is “big enough for me to pass,” a “strange tree” on the horizon as I walk along the beach, or a pan full of scrambled eggs that is “just about done.” The subject, or self of such first-order desires, is a component of the structure of this ongoing habitual engagement.

So our work in the second chapter may simply serve to modify the Real Self account. What we have provided are phenomenological descriptions that supply an account of the perceptual self at stake in first order desires and beliefs. Our desires and beliefs do not adhere to some transcendent subject, but to an ongoing process of living our lives as embodied, worldly beings.

What these Real Self accounts add to the picture is a second possibility for the existence of a transcendent subject. At the outset of Chapter 2, we noted a strong current in recent scholarship to resist appeals to such a subject. In opposition to this claim that there is no self, we offered up a phenomenological understanding of the self as a structure of embodied experience. If the minimal subject that Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Zahavi

have shown us is the subject of our first order motivations, then it is necessary to investigate the way in which this self is related to the transcendent second order Real Self. The main claim of the Real Self Theories like Frankfurt's is that the second order self *identifies* itself with an already present first order desire, withdrawing from other already existing first order desires. In the example of the daredevils above, it is through an act of identification with my desire to defy my bodily inclination for safety that I muster the strength to hang off the edge of something tall. Likewise, in the gym, I identify myself with a desire to complete my workout against the competing desire to take it easy. What is this act and how does the way it unfolds tell us about the nature of the self that it presupposes?

In order to investigate the nature of the transcendent self that considers and makes decisions regarding the self of first order desires, we will investigate phenomena wherein our own desires and motivations become the object of our considered reflection. Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the experience of love reveals that the desires that are revealed as motivation in our situation are not themselves transparent to us when we want to reflect on them. Their meaning is often ambiguous and requires engagement in order to be made determinate. Thus, like the embodied self, the second order or Real Self also requires actual enactment and development. There is something like this at play in Real Self theories in the zeroing in on an act of identification as the constituting event in the history of a Real Self.

However, if we are to understand the coming into being of the Real Self through engagement with our first order desires, this requires an inquiry into the way in which such desires are present to us. Merleau-Ponty's analysis of love demonstrates that

motivations that we encounter in a situation are not as easily mappable onto clear cut desires as is assumed by Real Self theorists. Certainty with regard to our possession of a desire is a condition of possibility for the real self. If there is a real self, it relies on its ability to identify itself with a desire that it knows that it has on the first order.

However, what we have learned in our analysis of perceptual consciousness and the self that is associated with it is that the perceptual self is inherently open to being mistaken. Constitutive of the phenomena of perception is an acquaintance with a world that is not given in such a way that certainty concerning it is a possibility. Rather, the determinacy of the world is worked up through sustained bodily engagement. The world is given to us in part, and the self that is associated with this ambiguous world lends further determinacy to the world by developing its own capacities at the same time. These capacities come to take on a recognizable and familiar structure in the investigation of the world and the familiar world that is worked up simultaneously calls to a self as a stable subject with a set of habitual capacities for engaging the world in familiar habitual ways.

Thus it is characteristic of perception that it is confronted with an uncertain world, an ambiguous world that requires engagement in order to be made stable and familiar. However, when we examine our own desires, given that they have developed hand in hand with the world that calls to them and solicits action by means of them, are we not given a determinate and whole object to reflect on? Are we not presented with a desire for drug taking, say, that is in opposition to a second desire to abstain that is just as ready-made and certain? How else would we be able to identify ourselves with one desire over another, and thus constitute a Real Self?

One possibility is that, as an inner or mental state, we have a privileged access to our own desires that we do not have with respect to things outside of us – trees on the beach, spaces on a highway, eggs in a pan. If we consider desire, for instance, it seems immediately clear that the moment I experience desire, I can be certain that I am a desiring subject. Likewise if I experience love or joy or sadness, it is immediately true that I love, I am joyous or that I am sad. Once I experience these things, I know, with certainty, what it is like to experience these things. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, it seems as though “within me, appearance is reality and the being of consciousness consists in appearing to itself” (*PhP*, 396). Indeed, in discussion of the minimal aspects of selfhood, we uncovered a pre-reflective awareness of our perceptual selves. Any consciousness, we said, is implicitly a self-consciousness, and so “a love or a desire that was not self-conscious would be a love that does not love, or a desire that does not desire” (*PhP*, 396), as it would not refer back to a desiring or loving subject in its structure. It would originate from nowhere and thus not be an intentional structure that is directed at a world.

In this way, it appears as though I simply can’t encounter a motivation in the world without at the same time being tacitly aware that it is me who encounters this motivation. This is what it is to desire, to love, to value. Regardless of whether or not we ought to love, desire or value the object which solicits the loving desiring or valuing, on the subjective side of the relation, we are in possession of our noetic activity in a pre-reflective certainty that it is ours.

Gallagher (2006) calls this the Sense of Ownership over one’s experience. This is separable on his account from a Sense of Agency, the pre-reflective understanding that I am the source of the actions of my body or the cause of my own thoughts. So, it may be

said that I do not have a Sense of Agency over the arrival in me of a sense of desire insofar as it is brought on by an object of desire that outstrips me. I am not the source of a desire at this level; rather, desire realizes itself in me. In this way my sense of agency may be diminished when I act on desires that I do not identify with - when I am “helplessly violated” by my own desires. All this said, there is little doubt that it is me who undergoes this experience. In the sense that these experiences are present to me, I am the owner of these desires and the experience of the actions that I undergo, as a result. I have an indeclinable sense of ownership over them.

This sort of certainty, in terms of a sense of ownership, is a necessary component of the emergence of a Real Self. In order to identify myself with one of my desires, I require first person access to those desires. Such access rests on a sense that my experience is my own -that it happens to me or in me. This is what allows me to recognize a first order desire and to then identify with it or disavow it. Turning to Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of love, however, we come to see that such access no more guarantees the clearness and distinctness of its object than our access to the world guarantees knowledge of a fully constituted world of discrete objects.

The first thing that Merleau-Ponty notes in his analysis of love is that there is a difference between a false emotion and an error of interpretation. False emotions are analogous to shadows or reflections in our perception of the world insofar as we might mistake them for the real thing. This is contrasted with errors of interpretation or times when we commit ourselves in bad faith and give the name “love” to other emotions or desires that are not worthy of that name. In those cases, there was “never even a semblance of love, I did not believe for a moment that my life was engaged in this

feeling, I carefully avoided asking the question in order to avoid the response that I already knew, and my “love”-making was merely performed out of kindness or in bad faith” (*PhP*, 397). In opposition to this are the sorts of experiences we are concerned with – false or illusory feelings, which ultimately reveal an ambiguity within our sense of ownership over our experience.

In a false love, I do not misinterpret or lie to myself. In such situations, it really was true that I encountered the world as mediated and motivated by a love for another person in the same way that I encounter the world of my kitchen as supporting and sheltering the “I” that cooks. As with the cooking which carries itself forward in an easy and enveloping way, “my life really was engaged in a form that, like a melody, demanded a certain continuation” (397). What makes such a love false or illusory however, is not present or given in the lived moment of the loving. Rather, it is revealed *après coup* to have been illusory when the relationship ends and I discover that I was *really* engaged in something other than love. In Merleau-Ponty’s terms, “when I later attempt to understand what happened to me, I will uncover beneath this supposed love *something other* than love: a resemblance of the “loved” woman to another person, boredom, habit, shared interests or convictions, and this is just what allows me to speak of illusion” (397).

The temporal structure of illusory feelings then, suggests that desires or emotional motivations are not momentary mental states that are available to a subject in the moment in which she is gripped by them. My in-the-moment sense of ownership over a feeling of illusory or false emotions does not include an indeclinable certainty that these emotions are the emotions they appear to be. For this reason, it seems that Real Self theory is right to separate the subject of such desires from an authentic or personal self – the real self

beneath my lived experience who will later be shown to have had other desires for other things all along. However, this also means that the desires to which a Real Self has access, as determinate desires for X, are not the ones undergone by the first order self. Rather, they are observable only with the appearance of the second order position of reflection. The truth of a feeling as a desire for X exceeds the momentary access we have to it – this truth cannot be found there. Rather, the truth of a feeling as a desire for something is only revealed in the retrospective analysis of our lives.

On first pass, then, the Real Self appears as a *post facto* construction that arises in order to make sense of a set of events that has already taken place. What allows me to identify myself with a desire that I did not act on, is the fact that I have already acted in a way that contradicts this desire. Let us break this down.

We encounter the world as an ambiguous tension that calls for resolution. In acting, I reveal the way I have developed and what I am. The fact that this is something *I do* allows me to say that I could have done otherwise. This is precisely because the world did not demand a certain response by external necessity, but on the basis of *my* body and its powers. I discover that I have made the world in the way it has unfolded and that my action has played a role in its constitution.

In doing so however, I also enact the abstract possibility of a different me. As a result, if I can later say, “I really wanted to do X, but what I did was Y,” that is, only in light of the fact that I actually did one thing as a being that settles ambiguity in situation. I really did determine the meaning of the motivation I encountered in and through my action. Prior to my act, the situation was ambiguous. This meaning settling power is a power I possess as an embodied being. My action makes sense of a situation of

ambiguous non-sense. But in making a determinate meaning appear, I also posit the abstract possibility of an alternative. In other words, I give rise to the logical possibility that I could have acted differently. Thus that other self that I now identify with is really an abstraction that is accessible only through the world of sense that I have made in my action. I can posit it only in opposition to the world that really exists.

The problem here is that the Real Self theorist decouples the power of settling ambiguity and making sense of a situation from the bodily capacities it requires. It is a recognition of the power that I possess as an embodied being, but it places this power in an abstract position that does not exist in the world I encounter and deal with. In the moment of decision, the situation remained ambiguous and unsettled until I settled it by acting *with my body and its powers*. In acting, I enact the habitual structure that constitutes my perception of the world. It tends towards drug taking, perhaps. If this is the case, it does not seem as though the Real Self that I construct in a narrative that follows an event has any actual efficacy in the process of settling the perceptual tension in question. There are only ambiguous tensions that call for a habitual structure to express itself. And this habitual structure that does express itself might say more about who I really am than my avowed identification with its abstract opposite insofar as it is what actually has constituted my will.⁴

⁴ As we will come to see in the next chapter, there is more to a narrative account of the self. Narrative can, for instance, be prospective. Given that I have made sense of myself in a given way for a long time, this itself settles into a sedimented structure that I then use for planning my actions. Should I go to law school or find a job after my undergraduate degree? I might make this decision based on how each of these possible courses of action might fit into the narrative I've been constructing – which one makes the most sense for the main character of my life story. Notice however that this still involves taking an outside perspective on myself and considering myself from a disinterested position which is an abstraction from lived, motivated, bodily pre-reflective experience. We are more proximally concerned here with the way the externality of the reflecting self from the pre-reflective self is necessitated by Frankfurt's account. For this purpose, I will focus for now on the retrospective narrative construction that is necessitated by such a position.

Dennett, Situationism and the Non-Existence of the Real Self

Our critique so far bears a certain resemblance to Dennett's argument against the sort of self argued for by the Real Self Theorists. On Dennett's account, we ought not understand the self of the second order sort that Frankfurt appeals to as an actually existing entity which has any kind of influence on the way that we act. Rather, a self of the sort Frankfurt is concerned with is a useful explanatory metaphor. According to Dennett, it is an evolved behavior of human beings to talk about themselves as though they possess a Real Self, but ultimately there is no such thing. For Dennett, the self is an abstraction – a fictional center of narrative gravity that human organisms utilize for keeping track of relevant information in their evolutionary niche. My “self” is the central character of a fiction written by my brain in the same way that a robot with an onboard computer might keep track of the things it has done and the spatial locations it has occupied and store this information in a file labeled “me.” The self and the contents of the file have no spatial location, but neither do they possess any power. They are, rather, abstractions from what is real – namely the material out of which my body and the robot are made and the interactions this material has with other material.

This is the picture of selfhood that Dennett provides in his thought experiment about Gilbert the robot.⁵ He invites us to imagine a novel-writing machine. This machine is capable of drawing on a database of information about the world and spitting out a coherent story about people and things in the world in a way that is indistinguishable from the novels we buy and read in our spare time. Now imagine that we attach wheels, a camera and a microphone to this machine as well as the necessary software and hardware

⁵ Dennett 1992.

for synthesizing the information that comes in through these artificial sense organs such that it can direct its movement according to what it “sees” and “hears.” The information it now uses to construct its story is the information that comes in through the camera and microphone and that is altered according to its position in the world by way of its wheels. In addition to this, imagine that the robot’s builders have given the directive to the robot: build an interesting story. The robot is able to do this by producing stories about the information and receiving feedback from the people who hear it. Eventually it gives the name Gilbert to the central character of all its stories and its stories resemble the situations it finds itself in. If it gets locked in the closet for a time, it writes a story about that. If somebody hits it with a baseball bat, it writes a story about “Gilbert” being hit with a baseball bat and so on.

The point is that the real reason the robot moves around has to do with some underlying bit of code in its programming that bears no resemblance whatsoever to the anthropomorphic character in the stories it produces. Analogously, we humans, understood as persons with names and life stories, bear little resemblance to the process of interaction between our genes and the selection pressures we face in our environments that actually motivate our actions. The characters in the stories we and the robot tell may have all sorts of interesting reasons for acting, moral dilemmas we confront, beliefs we have, love affairs we engage in. But none of these things play an explanatory role in what we are actually doing.

Simply put the name ‘Gilbert’ does not refer back to any part of the robot, least of all to a transcendent self or person. Rather, it recounts the story of what Gilbert has done and where he has been and ascribes a personality to Gilbert that is a shorthand for his

behavioral control system. This system is distributed across the network of circuits used for monitoring and controlling his action, and is thus, not really in any specific place “inside” his body, least of all in some immaterial mind or consciousness. It is embodied only in the story that Gilbert’s software spins about its movements. In this way, Gilbert is not so much a real thing with real agency, but the central character in a story that is made up by the robot’s electronic brain in order to explain his movements and actions to other language users. This does not mean that it contains the real reasons that Gilbert does these things.

This sort of account of the Real Self as a fiction seems to be supported by a plethora of empirical evidence found in social psychology. Drawing on a series of experiments commonly referred to in moral psychology, we can find strong evidence to support the idea that our bodies and the situational habits they accrue have more of an explanatory role in our behavior than any second order commitment we have to a cluster of mental states we take to be representative of who we really are. The latter is a fiction that is spun by our brains. Our brains and bodies understood as material are the real causes of our action.

Given the breadth of the experimental research as well as the wealth of interpretation of these experiments in the philosophical literature, I will provide a brief summary of these experiments rather than go into detail about any particular one of them. Generally speaking, there are three types of experiments commonly referred to in the literature in order to argue against character traits ascribable to a Real Self as having any predictive value in behavior. The first set have to do with social pressure:

- Millgram (1974) found that subjects would willingly punish screaming “victims” with simulated electric shocks at the behest of a polite request from the experimenter.
- Haney et al. (1972) found that college students asked to role-play as guards would routinely mistreat and punish other college students role-playing as prisoners in a simulated prison environment.

A second set of experiments have to do with “priming” effects. In these experiments, subjects were primed with some experience and then asked to negotiate a simulated moral dilemma.

- Isen and Levin (1972) found that subjects who had just discovered a dime in a phone booth were 22 times more likely to help a woman who had dropped some papers than subjects who did not find a dime.
- Darley and Batson (1973) found that subjects who were not in a hurry were 6 times more likely to help someone in distress than those not in a hurry.
- Matthews and Cannon (1975) found that subjects were 5 times more likely to help gather the books of an injured man who had dropped them when ambient noise levels were at a normal level vs. when there was a power lawnmower running nearby.

Finally there are experiments which support an embodied metaphor hypothesis⁶, whereby priming effects related to temperature affect the language used by subjects in their moral assessment of other people.

⁶ Cf Lakoff and Johnston 1980

- Williams and Bargh (2008) subjects asked to hold either a hot or cold cup of coffee for a short time were likely to rate other people as warm or cold. Those had been holding the warm cup were more likely to rate the target people as warm and those who had been holding the cold cup were more likely to rate the target person as cold.
- Gockel et al. (2014) found that subjects exposed to different (low, medium and hot) room temperatures were likely to differ in their assessments of pictures of criminals. Those exposed to hot temperatures were more likely to ascribe impulsive (hot-headed) crimes to the people in the pictures when compared with participants exposed to other levels of temperature.

The conclusion drawn on the basis of this empirical evidence largely has to do with the sort of character traits commonly appealed to in modern virtue ethics,⁷ but which equally apply to the efficacy of a Real Self. The basic point of these experiments is that there are better predictors of action available than those we come up with by appealing to a personality trait. If a Real Self is the subject of personhood, the bearer of responsibility for actions, and subject to moral praise and blame, then it ought to be thought of as the originator of an action. It also ought to have typical tendencies, if the category good can be applied to a person; i.e. so and so is a good person. However, given the empirical evidence, the following argument is possible:

1. Stable personality traits ought to have predictive value for behavior.
2. Non-relevant aspects of a situation function as better predictors than stable character traits whether this is social pressure or experiential priming.

⁷ Cf. Harman 1999; Merrit et al. 2010.

3. Therefore, stable personality traits are not empirically evident.

In other words, the experiments present us with evidence to suggest that the body and its inputs are really what is at stake in causing behavior – far more so than the well-integrated second order desires of a Real Self. Thus, we might agree with Dennett based on this evidence that my Real Self is far more like a convenient fictional shorthand for an undergirding process that it does not resemble. In this way, we might say, with Dennett that “the only momentum that accrues to the trajectory of a self [...] is the stability imparted to it by the web of beliefs that constitute it, and when those beliefs lapse, it lapses, either permanently or temporarily” (Dennett 1991a, 423). Given the account we have developed here, it appears that when we are engaging in non-reflective activity, the beliefs that constitute the fictional Real Self have little or no efficacy on behavior – that is, they lapse whenever we are not telling or being told the story. The take home point here is that robust character traits, the kinds of traits we would attribute to a Real Self in a retrospective, narrative description of the events that play out in the life of a human organism, play little to no detectable role in determining the behavior of a person in a morally relevant situation.⁸ They thus serve no real explanatory function in understanding what is at stake in such situations.

But should we expect personality traits to function this way? Let us return to the phenomenon that we began with and see what else is involved in its appearance. What appeared at first pass to suggest to us that the Real Self was a fiction was the existence of false or illusory feelings. Does appealing to a material body that is determined in its actions by its material interactions with its surroundings help us in any way to explain the

⁸ Doris 2002

distinction between illusory and authentic feelings? Should we expect it to? Are feelings, like the self, merely a component of a narrative that is constructed *post facto* to explain the actions of a material body?

What we are left with on this account is a position from which all feelings appear false. There is no truth to the lived experience of a feeling. What is real on this account is the material substratum which gives rise to such feelings. But as we saw in Chapter 2, appealing to a material substratum does not help us to explain the experiential reality of a minimal self. Metzinger's account of the self as a set of self-representations instantiated within a material mind was insufficient on account of the fact that as I live it, the self is not a representation but the structure of experience through which the world shows up – through which I have access to material. If there is an experiential reality to the self at this level, and if it is true that the minimal aspects of selfhood include an embodied maintenance of my past in virtue of the role played by habituation, then there is a level of reality to my feelings – a truth of them, that is overlooked on Dennett's account.⁹

In order to reconcile the results of Dennett's critique of the Real Self with what we uncovered in Chapter 2, we need to understand the role played by the past in our perception of the present. Dennett and the Situationists understand the past as a meaningless interaction of material forces that is given meaning through the construction of a narrative about the events. This narrative is not causally efficacious, because at bottom they assume a material conception of nature that undergirds and is the primary reality of our lives and the events therein. Turning back to Merleau-Ponty however, we

⁹ It is this sort of analysis which has led Searle (1995) to claim that Dennett's analysis is self-refuting because it winds up denying the very thing it was set up to explain – the existence of subjective reality. While I agree with Searle on this basic point, as it will become clear, my conception of subjective reality is quite different from his.

see that the way the past operates in our perception of the present does not resemble the objective account of the past assumed by Dennett and the Situationists.

Institution and The Problem of the Past

Before moving forward, let us briefly now, retrace the steps we have taken in the dissertation to this point so that we may make a turn towards a positive account of what we are calling personal selfhood. In Chapter 2, we examined what we called minimal selfhood. What we found there was that any particular experience we might find ourselves in the midst of is always structured such that part of the way in which it appears is that it is addressed to us as the subject of that experience. With Zahavi, we noticed that if we only consider one particular experience, the necessary condition of its appearing as an experience is that it is the experience of some self. From there we expanded our notion of the minimal self to include the way a situation is always addressed to us as a body. Following Merleau-Ponty, this led to an emphasis on the role of habit in perception. A habit takes on the form of a “past that is our true present” (*PhP*, 85) insofar as it allows us to forget the way we have developed. We no longer need to attend to the movements of our bodies that were once our explicit projects as young children in learning to walk, grasp, move our heads, etc. This allows our body to be forgotten in our engagement with objects and people in our immediate vicinity. Our past is forgotten along with our body insofar as it sinks to the level of the pre-reflective. Thus the world addresses me as something slightly thicker than the minimal transcendental condition of possibility for any experience whatsoever. Rather, my situation always addresses me on the basis of my own personal history of habitual development and acquisition. I live out of this past of acquisition and it remains my true present insofar as I encounter a world that invites me

to investigate it according to the bodily powers of locomotion I accrued. There is thus, not only a pre-reflective awareness of myself as an anonymous subject, but also a pre-reflective awareness of my body, its powers and importantly, its past.

We began this chapter by noticing that another power the self seems to possess does not easily line up with the picture of selfhood we began to sketch out in Chapter 2. We noticed that another aspect of self-hood has to do with the exercise of the will. Minimally, we identified this will with the ability of a person to disavow certain solicitations in my field of experience that address me as simply a body. Part of selfhood, we said, appears to have to do with our ability to identify with some desires over others. In line with our account of minimal selfhood in Chapter 2, we identified first order desires phenomenologically as lived tensions that call for some action on the basis of our past development. We further noted that we might have conflicting desires and that a situation might be encountered itself as a tension between phenomenal tensions.

Furthermore, motivation in our experience appears ambiguously. A sweet dessert, for instance, might solicit restraint and indulgence. Thus, the tension we encounter there might not suggest an obvious course of action; rather, we decide the meaning of the tension in the action we take. In eating the dessert or refraining from doing so, we settle the meaning of the tension as an opportunity for eating or for sticking to our diet.

For Frankfurt, we said, this doesn't yet involve the enactment of the personal self because this is the sort of sense-making that non-persons are also engaged in (i.e. dogs, wanton addicts, etc.). A properly personal self on Frankfurt's account involves a second order identification with a series of volitional mental states that take first order desires as their object. This then raises the question of how such identification plays out in the life

of a person. We noted that just as motivations are given in experience as ambiguous and requiring action in order to be settled, so too are our own mental states. Love, for example, may turn out to have been false love following a retrospective analysis of our experience. Dennett and the situationists suggest that this is a post-facto construction that is achieved through narrative explanation of the events in an animal's life. Desires, emotions, volitions, etc. lose their truth and serve to denote an underlying physical process that is the truth of the phenomena. Narrative serves as a stand-in explanation for a more real reality of causally related physical parts.

What has become an issue through the navigation of this terrain is the role played by the past in our experience of ourselves as persons. Each of the theories we have examined so far posit the past as a causal nexus of events that are external to the action of the personal self. The Personal self appears either as a component in a retrospective explanation of those events (a narrative center of gravity) or as a present identification with some desires over others (a present autonomous power). We encounter our present as structured by the past insofar as we find ourselves in a position of having to craft a narrative about those events in order to explain to ourselves where we are and where we want to go, or we are met with a world of motivations as the result of our past interaction with our environment that can overcome our more authentic or real desires that we cognitively identify with here in the present.

However, for each of these theories, the past remains an object for some present consciousness to consider or make sense of. The past has placed us in a here and now. Its causal power presents us with obstacles to forming a consistent narrative or with desires we encounter as alien to our own true desires. The unwilling drug addict, for instance, is

understood as unwilling insofar as her continued drug use does not line up with the story she has crafted about who she is and the kind of behavior she endorses. Her behavior, therefore, presents itself as something to be overcome insofar as it is “not her.” There is, however, no necessary connection between the past person she was and the power that she is in the present. There is only the present identification with a narrative spinning capacity that is fully present in the here and now but that is not connected to the narrative that she considers as her story.

Narrative capacity, although it is a capacity employed by a present me, does not itself carry the past forward so much as it takes the past as its object. My past appears for me as an already constituted narrative that serves as an explanation for my present. I have the power to revise that narrative in the face of what has unfolded since I last took stock, but the narrative itself is only a construction that I add to. I am now forced to remake the past here in the present as a response to the lived tension between the present position I find myself in and the narrative structure I currently endorse from a second order Frankfurtian position as being my narrative. We come to see then, that the two positions, although they at first appeared to be at odds with one another, agree on this point. Personal self-hood involves a present ability to identify a current in one’s past that one appropriates as one’s own. This happens from a second order position that reflects on the past of my organismic life and makes sense of it from outside of it.

In the *Institution* lectures, Merleau-Ponty is critical of this way of conceiving the subject’s relation to her past where, “by means of a continuous series of explosions, my past has given way to my present” (*IP*, 76). The problem is that the sort of being that constructs the narrative or identifies herself with some subset of lived tensions is itself

incapable of having a past. The critique here is similar to the one which showed us that the minimal self cannot ever appear as only an anonymous ipseity. Our embodied nature reveals the way in which a situation is only available to us on the basis of the acquisition of a set of habitual capacities for engagement that we have forgotten we possess so that we can be solicited by the world to act with those powers pre-reflectively. The minimal self as ipseity has no past. It is a bare and anonymous structure that appears within any possible experience understood from a level of abstraction at least once removed from the appearance of any particular experience. Likewise, the reflective personal self is not personal at all. It is an anonymous power of creating a self here in the present on the basis of an already fully constituted past. The self it creates is an object for it, rather than an agential being-in-the-world that acts in a way that expresses its past.¹⁰ The personal self is not capable of *acting*. Instead the personal self is the object of an “I think” rather than itself being an “I can.”

For Merleau-Ponty, then, the concept of institution is meant as a correction to this way of thinking. Merleau-Ponty contrasts it with the Husserlian idea of constitution wherein an object of experience is “the exact reflection of the acts and powers of consciousness” (*IP*, 76). For the accounts of the personal self we have investigated so far, this is exactly what is happening. The personal self is constituted through the act of narration or identification. The subject who carries out this constitution is not itself bound within the same contours of temporality as the set of material or psychic events it takes as

¹⁰ Velleman (1992) argues that the agent never acts in such stories. Rather, some part of the person performs a function in the constitution of the action. The action itself is attributable only to the whole person, not some functional part of it. So the person does not actually participate in the actions of a Real Self or a Narrative Center of Gravity as these only perform some functional role in the constitution of an action that an entire person engages in. “Psychological or physiological events take place inside a person, but the person serves merely as the arena for these events: he takes no active part” (461).

its object and spins into a coherent structure through a sense-giving act of constitution. When such a self considers its past “all that it knows is that there has been back in the past this other, which is mysteriously called me, but which has nothing in common with me except for an absolutely universal ipseity” (*IP*, 76).¹¹ Against this, by way of the concept of institution, Merleau-Ponty means to uncover,

Those events in an experience which endow the experience with durable dimensions, in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will make sense, will form a thinkable sequel or history – or again the events which deposit a sense in me, not just as something surviving or as a residue, but as the call to follow, the demand of a future (*IP*, 77).

Our analysis of a habit in Chapter 2 already points us towards the concept of institution and serves here as a useful example for uncovering the logic of a past which endows experience with “durable dimensions.” In the institution of a habit, we have a particular means of having a world, which is to say, a world that tends towards a suggested completion. To encounter a room as suggestive of dancing, for example, is to already encounter that world by way of an event in my past where I learned to move my body to the rhythm of music. As we said above, this does not entail the mediation of the world by an act of inference – a noticing of the objective features which make a place suitable for dancing and inferring based on those that dancing is a possibility for my body. Rather, the appearance of the space as one that is available for dancing is a way that my past returns me to myself in the present as a body with an acquired means for interacting with space and with others who share it with me. There is a passivity to institution insofar as the instituting event of learning to dance supplies durable

¹¹ It is exactly this problem which leads Galen Strawson (2004) to conclude that we are *not* the same selves throughout the course of our lives. Rather our lives are made up of a sort of “string of pearls” of episodic, minimal selves, each of which only bearing an external relation to one another that is grounded in the life of my human organism.

dimensions to an experience and relieves me of the need to learn to dance all over again, each and every time it is called for by the situation in which I find myself. Institution, therefore, involves a way in which the world remembers me and returns my powers for worldly interaction to me such that I do not need to actively constitute them, and along with them, their objects.

A constituting consciousness, on the other hand would have to conjure up the space for dancing. Through an act of recognition of a space as an opportunity for deploying my powers, the constituting consciousness is the location from which sense flows in a unidirectional manner. My dancing body would project a value onto the space and reveal it as dance-able. Institution, on the other hand, suggests that the dance-able space reveals my body to me as one that could dance there in and through my very encountering it as dance-able. Simply encountering the space as dance-able is already the realization of a past which structures my present – which “is my true present” (*PhP*, 85). Actualizing this possibility through dancing may serve to further sediment the structure - to confirm its power - but it is not the source of the dance-ability. I already had to encounter the possibility on the basis of a past such that I could be solicited to actualize it. I do not constitute the experience through my act, I rather act within a world where things are more or less possible on account of an instituted way of encountering situations.

Such passivity is what is missing from the accounts of the personal self we have examined so far. If I am nothing but a narrative center of gravity, then why do I encounter the situation as one that suggests a value? Why don't I simply make sense of it after the dancing has occurred as a result of objective situational factors beneath my

experience? On the other hand, if I am only the act of identification with the desire to dance, then why do I require a situation where dancing is possible to reveal my desire? Why don't I just decide in advance who I am and what desires I identify with? A self that is purely active, as in the Frankfurtian model, shouldn't need experience in order to develop. Likewise a purely passive self, like that of Dennett's center of narrative gravity, should never encounter uncertainty outside the retrospective act of explaining her experience. Once she finds herself in this situation of explanation, she finds herself in the active Frankfurtian position of constituting a narrative – a particular way of identifying herself with some aspects of her past and not others. She is removed from her unreflective flow and now occupies a second order position outside the temporality of the events of her life.¹²

In the *Passivity* lectures, Merleau-Ponty argues that these sorts of problems demand, not just a rethinking of the past, but first, a rethinking of the present, “since the past is that which has been present, we cannot comprehend the modalization *has been* [...] if we understand the present badly” (*IP*, 192). The problem with the accounts we have dealt with so far is that they conceive of the past as already complete. As Merleau-Ponty notes, this is the result of a prejudice that understands the present as a picture “impressed in me and grasped by synopsis” (*IP*, 192). Only if we understand the present in this way would we think of the past as a picture that is no longer present because it has been replaced by a new picture. If we understand the present in this way, then the force of

¹² Something like this idea is at play in Galen Strawson's account of the minimal self (Strawson 2011). Strawson argues against the idea of a diachronic unity of the self. As the subject of experience, he says, it is entirely possible, and indeed likely, that some selves only exist as long as a particular experience lasts. There is therefore, no identity between the self of the experience and the self that does the narrative explanation later on. Selves exist only as the subject of a given experience, so there need not be any confusion regarding the self of the past and the self of the present. They are simply different selves. As we'll see in Merleau-Ponty's critique of conceiving the present as a picture, this won't work either.

the past is reduced to that of something wholly external to the present – preserved perhaps in the receptacle of memory, so that it can be made present again as the picture presented in an act of recollection – but without its own internal relation to the present. Its relevance is decided by a present active consciousness that does the relating from outside of it. Its force is really the force of the consciousness which performs the operation of remembering.

If we separate the personal self from the bodily self and conceive of them as separate aspects of selfhood related to one another only externally, one of which takes the other as its object, then we posit an “I think behind the I think” (*IP*, 190) that unconsciously performs the synthesizing act and delivers the relevant aspects of our past to the reflecting consciousness. The reflecting consciousness is still met with a past that appears as a picture “impressed in [it] and grasped by synopsis” (*IP*, 192). We have done nothing to place reflecting consciousness back inside the lived temporality of the person whose life is at stake. We thus have a picture of the past’s relation to the present that contradicts the structure of the present that we uncovered in our analysis of the lived pre-reflective awareness of ourselves in our habitual engagement with the world.

What is necessary then, is a way of understanding the situation of the reflecting, personal self within a temporality that is held in common with the body. The concept of institution is meant to provide the tools for thinking this through by placing the power of the past in reflection back into the same world that is encountered in unreflective lived activity. It is towards this answer that we will now turn in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Enactive Narrative, Institution and Reversibility

The problem we currently confront concerns the ability of a self to reflect upon itself. We have also made a few commitments in coming this far. We have said that a minimal notion of self is that of tacit experiential awareness that what we experience is our own experience. This “sense of ownership”¹ is just part and parcel of the givenness of our experience, as we saw, with Zahavi, in Chapter 2. We also noticed that this is not limited to a thin and anonymous sense of ownership, but is an embodied and motivated ownership. My situation is not simply surveyed disinterestedly, rather, my situation addresses me as the possessor of capacities. My minimal selfhood takes the form of an ‘I can,’ rather than an ‘I think.’

Importantly what this implies is a passivity with regard to the past in the way in which a given experience is presented. The world I encounter “holds my subjectivity”² and returns it to me by appealing to my body in its soliciting appearance as a “place for....” In this way, my “I can” is actually an “I already can”³ revealing the way in which my self as a body with powers is not an internal constituting power but an instituted mode of engagement that is embedded in a world beyond me. Importantly, this means that my past is implicated in my sense of ownership. My sense of ownership emerges through being addressed by a world that calls out to me for engagement. This engagement is revealed as already underway by the very solicitation of the situation. Recall from the previous chapter for instance, the way in which the arrangement of ingredients and cooking utensils support my activity as a body-in-the-midst-of-cooking. In this way,

¹ Gallagher 2006.

² Jacobson 2015.

³ Morris 2015.

places play a role in the way my body and its powers show up as a means of engagement in the world. They “re-member” us in the sense that I discover myself in a situation in the way an infant discovers the members of her body (her tongue or her fingers) as a power for exploration of her environment. In the pre-reflective givenness of my body the solicitation of a situation addresses me and my capacities for interrogation of my surroundings by giving back to me a power I have habitually acquired that comes along with its own possibilities for productive movement. Places provide me with my body as a means of engagement by holding open a position for me in relation to their meaningful appearance.

If reflective selfhood is itself an experience, it too is accompanied by a minimal sense of ownership. This ownership likewise is not an experienced by an anonymous *ipse*, but is experienced in being addressed by a situation that elicits my bodily capacity for reflection. The me who reflects is revealed by the address of a situation in which reflection is a meaningful possibility on the basis of a capacity for reflection that I have acquired. Just like dancing or cooking, it is something my body does and is solicited by a situation on the basis of my body’s past. What we discovered in Chapter 3 is that this second reflecting self cannot exist outside of the same lived time that our bodily-self inhabits. Rather, it must itself be a form of taking up a situation that re-members me, returning a body to me with particular capacities – in this case, capacities for reflection. Reflection is something my body accomplishes in and through a situation that calls for reflection.

In Chapter 3 we investigated our reflective capacity as a component of personal selfhood. We noticed that the way in which we usually think of personhood as given rise

to by capacity for reflectively registering who we are and identifying with some component of our bodily situated selves leads to a problematic division of the self into three separate self-positions only externally related to one another: (1) the embodied self of first order desires (2) the reflecting or narrating self which takes the first order desires of the embodied self as its object, and (3) the narrated, personal self or real self that is constituted in the identifying or narrating action of the reflecting self. There must, we said, be a way in which these different senses of self are internally related by means of a shared past if the personal self we reflect on in narration is to be more than a fiction. What is required then, is a rethinking of the mode of givenness of the first person perspective so as to reveal a common world out of which a pre-reflective and reflective self-consciousness arise. It is this common world which bears the past shared in common by these three senses of self, which serves as the hinge point between the minimal and the personal self.

Re-Thinking the Minimal Self Through Reversibility

In order to do this we will once again return to Merleau-Ponty. This time we will investigate his later work in order to uncover the instituted common world that holds the self together in the present. Merleau-Ponty addresses problems like the one we have now encountered throughout his corpus. His entire oeuvre can be interpreted as an attempt to ground philosophy in an ontology that resolves such problematic dualisms. Indeed as some commentators have suggested,⁴ Merleau-Ponty's later ontological works can be interpreted as an attempt to make explicit the implicit ontology of the earlier phenomenological works so as to uncover an ontology that goes beyond objective or reflective thinking. As we discussed in Chapter 2, in the *Phenomenology of Perception*

⁴ i.e. Dillon 1997, 123.

Merleau-Ponty attempts to analyze perceived phenomena in order to find a path between the privileging of consciousness and the privileging of the material world as fundamental to the appearance of phenomena. He posits the primacy of the perceived world as the starting point for such analyses. Later on, in *Visible and Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty attempts to overcome what he sees as a limitation of a phenomenological method that posits a constituting consciousness as a starting point for existence by attending to a more primary ambiguity in experience. A phenomenological approach which begins from an already instituted experience potentially misses such ambiguity by overemphasizing the role of the subject, casting the subject as a constituting consciousness which is a foundational structure of experience.⁵ For Merleau-Ponty, the ambiguity of certain experiences allows us to glimpse the meaningful relationships between things in the world which precede the subject and allow for its appearance.

The primary example of this ambiguity is the experience of double sensation in one hand touching the other - an example both he and Sartre⁶ take from Husserl.⁷ This example appears in both the *Phenomenology* and in *Visible and Invisible* and has been remarked upon by too many commentators to make a complete list.⁸ What Merleau-Ponty observes here is a lived ambiguity between my body as a subject and my body as an object. Merleau-Ponty first introduces this example in the *Phenomenology* as a way of

⁵ Merleau-Ponty seems to attribute such a mistake to the Husserl of *Ideas I* and especially to Sartre.

⁶ It should be noted that while writing *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre did not have direct access to *Ideas II*. He had read Husserl's published works but was without continuous access to unpublished drafts (which at the time of writing *Being and Nothingness* included *Ideas II*). What little access he did have came by way of Merleau-Ponty who was receiving material from the Husserl archives during the occupation. Cf. Moran 2010. It is not clear if this included Husserl's analysis of double sensation. Sartre only explicitly references Maine de Biran's idea of a "sensation of effort" in his discussion of the phenomenon.

⁷ Husserl 1989, §36

⁸ For a start, see Dillon 1997, p. 123ff, Morris 2004; Landes 2013; Toadvine 2009, 110-116; Moran 2010 (this one is especially focused on Sartre's account of the phenomenon in comparison to that of Merleau-Ponty and Husserl); Moran 2015; Gallagher forthcoming.

problematizing Sartre's dualistic characterization of these two ways of being a body as belonging to two "essentially different orders of reality" (*BN* 402). We will turn to this analysis shortly, but first, one further remark about the place of this analysis in the argument of the chapter.

For our purposes, Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the ambiguity revealed in the phenomenon of double sensation allows us to see the way in which the minimal self is indebted to relations of the world which precede it and allow for its achievement. We might still say that any experience would include a minimal sense of mineness such that it could be an experience. However, Merleau-Ponty helps us to see that this mineness of experience is nonetheless an achievement of the world rather than a starting point from which we build a world or construct a personal self. In addition to being something characteristic of experience, minimal self-hood is an expression of relationships between things in the world - one of which is my body. Through interaction on the basis of a shared corporeality, my experience emerges as a reflection of these interactions and posits me as a subject. This point will serve to deepen our analysis of the minimal self as situated in that it demonstrates the way in which the minimal self depends on the world for its appearance. This world includes instituted ways of experiencing that are both naturally and culturally informed. In this way, less the building block on top of which we build the personal self, as Zahavi suggests when he argues that the minimal self is a "necessary founding supplement" (*SS*, 105) for personal selfhood, the minimal self is shown to be one component of selfhood which is held together with more personal aspects by a situation on which it depends for its appearance. Let us now turn to this analysis, beginning with Husserl.

Husserl and the Significance of Double Sensation

Briefly investigating Husserl's account of the phenomenon of double sensation allows us to more clearly grasp the different interpretations that Sartre and Merleau-Ponty provide. Sartre privileges the object revealing power of the touching subject which Husserl associates with the power of the ego to spontaneously give rise to movement, while Merleau-Ponty argues that this power is an achievement of a relation between touching and touched which allows a subject to take up an interrogative position within a sensible world of which it is a part.

In Ideas II, Husserl's project involves examining the experience of his own body in order to see what is already involved there such that his body can be thought about as an object. The first thing that Husserl notes in this analysis is that certain parts of our bodies do not appear to us in the same way as other solid objects. Indeed, parts of our bodies, like our hands, which we can see and investigate from a variety of angles, are peculiar among the other objects that we can investigate visually. Like other objects, we can touch and see our hands. However, in touching one hand with another, we immediately become aware of a difference between the experience of touching one of our hands and touching other physical objects. In touching one hand to the other, we find that we do not only have the experience of touching one thing with our hands, rather, our hands become the bearers of a double sensation - that of both touching and of being touched.

When I touch my left hand with my right hand, I have sensations in both hands. This means that if I speak of touching my left hand as touching an object, then I am abstracting from this experience. That is, I am speaking of only one aspect of it (the

touching localized in the left hand), while ignoring another aspect (the being touched localized in the right). Importantly, this is not like our experience of other objects.

Consider for instance, the experience of touching a football. When I touch a football, I have a sensation of that football. I feel its rough surface and its peculiar firm, but easily graspable, solidity. If I lift it, I feel its weight. The football is an object that I interact with as a bearer of an indeterminate number of properties. It is a rich perceptual given that I could investigate further, and in doing so, discover more properties. But there is no sensation localized within the substance of the football. There is no sensation that I perceive as the "being touched" of the football. This is not the case when I touch my right hand with my left.

Importantly, adding the sensation of being touched to a description of the experience of touching one hand with another does not simply add properties to my right hand in the way that a further tactual exploration of the football might. Rather, the two sensations arise as simultaneous covariations of a single event. If I do include the sensations in the hand that is touched in my analysis, then the left hand does not just appear as a richer physical thing; rather, I simultaneously experience my own body as a bodily-psychic thing. My touched hand is also experienced as a sensing rather than a sensed. The localization of the place the touching occurs on my right hand, which is not the same as the localization I receive from my left hand, shows us that the body is constituted in perception in a double way.

First, it is constituted as a physical thing. It is matter that has extension just as the football does. It is the bearer of properties like color, smoothness, warmth and so on.

Second, it is constituted as a bearer of sense. In it or on it, there is a sensation of being touched.

Though it is perhaps most obvious in the context of one hand touching another, this second way I experience my body is in no way exclusive to such experiences. Indeed, whenever I touch anything, with any part of my body, there is simultaneously this experience of touching and being touched. As Husserl points out, I feel the tightness of my clothes or the dampness in my socks as localized in particular parts of my body. If I am wearing damp socks, my feet become cold. If I am wearing pants that are too tight around the belt line, this is localized in my waist (Husserl 1989, 153). Thus, there is an extra dimension to the experience of my body that differentiates it from my experience of material things: it is the bearer of localized sensings. As Husserl puts it, the “localization of sensings is in fact something in principle different from the extension of all material determinations of a thing” (157). So, in addition to the properties that my hands bear as material objects, there are specifically bodily occurrences or sensings.

With this in mind, Husserl notes that the body is not “constituted through a sensuous schema and manifolds of adumbrations” (157) in the way that material objects out in the world are. This is because my body is always with me. Consider a tactual exploration of a football with your eyes closed. As you move your hands over it, each temporary perspectival appearance hints at further perspectives that could be investigated, that is, new places to put your hands, in order to reveal new properties. Ultimately (and probably pretty quickly in this case) you would get an adequate grasp of it as a unified thing: a football. The localized sensings of my body are not hints at something more. Rather, they are my lived body itself. In Husserl's words, “the touch

sensing is not a state of the material thing *hand* but is precisely the hand itself" (157).

While the rough state of the football is perceived as something that belongs to the football, (as does its shape, firmness etc.) the localized sensing in my fingertips are mine. The space they are spread out across is not something external to be explored, rather, it is an inner space that belongs to me as the "subject of a body" (157).

Husserl thus reveals that there is a felt sensing localized in my body in the experience touch. This is one of the ways my body is revealed to me as my own and what makes it different from other kinds of objects. As we will see in the next section, Sartre argues that this bodily sensing is always experienced pre-reflectively. It is simply a part of the sense of mineness of an experience. I can become aware of my body as an object under the gaze of another person or by taking up the position of another person on my body. But as an investigating body-subject, I cannot experience my power of investigation as an object of investigation.

Sartre's Analysis of the Body: Two Bodies, Two Orders of Reality

For Sartre, the two ways my body is constituted – (1) as a physical thing and (2) as the bearer of sense – exist on “two incommunicable levels” (*BN*, 403). He associates my body as it is for me with the body as a bearer of localized sensings and identifies my body’s physical properties with my body as it is for another. As the investigator of the world, my body is experienced pre-reflectively as a subject. From the perspective of another however, my body is encountered as an object in the world – indeed, animated by some consciousness that it embodies, as the bearer of intentions, projects, goals, etc.⁹ –

⁹ Recall for instance, our discussion in Chapter 2 of Sartre’s description of encountering a person reading a book in a park. There we remarked how encountering another person in the midst of an action is unlike encountering a collection of objects. If I perceived the other only as an object, Sartre writes, “His relation with other objects would be of the purely additive type; this means that I could have him disappear without

but still as a body that I cannot experience in the same way that I experience my own. I can reflect on my body as though it were the body of another when I treat it like an object – when I investigate it in a reflective way, perhaps examining the skin on the back of my hand as I might examine the texture of the surface of a table or the way the light reflects off the inside of my windows at night time.

For Sartre, this means that consciousness always carries a pre-reflective sense of ownership, but it also carries with it an objectifying activity that makes it impossible to experience one's own subjective bodily activity as the object of investigation. Doing so requires taking up the perspective of another person on my own body and objectifying my body for my interrogative purposes. Reflection for Sartre is not a realization of a possibility of the same body that it takes as an object. These are two different "orders of reality." There is alternation, then, in my experience of my body. I can encounter it either pre-reflectively as the medium of my experience, or as an object that I encounter with my body as subject; however, "I cannot [reflectively] apprehend it in the process of revealing an aspect of the world to me" (BN, 402). What this means is that the self that reflects on itself has access to the self that it is in its activity only from the perspective of another self. My own body, when I interrogate it, appears only as a visible body which bears an invisible subjectivity that I only ever experience pre-reflectively.

For Sartre then, our bodies appear to us in two ways: as the invisible subject-body which I pre-reflectively experience and as the visible object-body that is there for others. These belong to "two essentially different orders of reality" (402). The body as subject is able to take a reflective attitude towards the body as an object. However, the two are

the relations of the other objects around him being perceptibly *changed*" (BN, 341). However, when I encounter a man in the midst of reading a book, the book and the man are in an irreversible relationship to one another. They cannot exchange places while maintaining the same relationship.

irreconcilable to one another. I can become aware of my body as an object, but I never live it as an object. Nowhere, for Sartre, is this more clear than in thinking about the body in relation to the things it is in and among in its Being-in-the-world. He writes, “Either [the body] is a thing among other things, or else it is that by which things are revealed to me. But it cannot be both at the same time” (*BN*, 304).

This is because, for Sartre, my investigating gaze is not just object revealing, but *objectifying*. My investigating gaze constitutes things in the world as objects there for me that I transcend towards my own goals. When this gaze is directed towards my own body, the same thing happens. My body becomes for me an object that I see or touch in light of what I am up to – as perhaps supportive or obtrusive for a project of putting on my pants or hiking up a hill.¹⁰ My activity of investigating my body or making use of it as an instrumental object in the carrying out of a project *constitutes* my body as an object. As Sartre puts it, “what I *cause* to exist here is the *thing* “leg”; it is not the leg as the *possibility which I am* of walking, running, or of playing football” (*BN*, 403, emphasis added). My experience of my body as the possibility which I am always remains pre-reflective. I transcend the objective qualities of my leg towards my possibilities by way of my meaning-positing life activity. It is this activity that causes there to be things out in the world for me.

This equally applies to the phenomenon of double sensation, the analysis of which allowed Husserl to make the distinction between the body-subject and the body-object. Sartre dismisses the experience of double sensation as non essential to an experience of myself as a subject. It is perhaps an interesting phenomenon which allows us to analytically differentiate between the two orders of existence to which my body belongs,

¹⁰ *BN*, 402 (pants), 584 (hike).

but on Sartre's account, it "is useless to try to reunite them by the term 'double sensation'" (BN, 403). He gives us two reasons for this dismissal.

First of all, the pre-reflective sense of ownership over my body does not require a simultaneous experience of touching and being touched, "cold, a shot of morphine, can make [the double sensation] disappear" (BN,402-3). Given this anaesthesia, however, I would still maintain a sense of ownership over my experience without this double experience of touch insofar as I could still take up my touched limb as an object that is there for me in the service of some project. I could still study it as an object the way a doctor might, or pick it up and move it in order to better position myself on my chair. These experiences would still be accompanied by the pre-reflective sense of ownership over my bodily perspective characteristic of minimal selfhood.

Second, the experience of being touched requires experiencing my body as it is for others. This means that I must take up the perspective of another person on myself in order to have the experience of being touched. In other words, *I have to reflect on myself* in order to experience being touched. Otherwise, I am touching.

Recall for instance, Sartre's familiar example of falling under the gaze of another person in the middle of peering through a keyhole. Prior to being seen in this situation, Sartre writes, "*I am my acts* [...]. I am a pure consciousness of things, and things, caught up in the circuit of my selfness offer to me their potentialities as the proof of my non-thetic consciousness (of) my own possibilities," (BN, 347) This means for Sartre, that in the mode of pre-reflective self-awareness "my attitude has no outside" (BN,348). It is nothing more than "a disposition of means [(the keyhole as it is for me)] in view of an end [(seeing what is behind the door)]" (BN, 349). There are no double sensations to be

found here for Sartre, because my body-subject is not experienced as an object that could be touched or seen. All that exists is the situation as it is for me - a free *positing* of my projects. Any awareness of my body in the form of kinaesthetic or proprioceptive sensing is itself only intelligible as a part of this situation – one more “thing” like the keyhole that is caught up in the “circuit of my selfness.”

In Sartre’s example, I only come to experience myself as seen when I hear footsteps in the hallway. The potential of being seen by the other objectifies my body, just as I do when it shows up to me as an obstacle or an instrument in the service of a project. I snap out of my absorption in my situation and see myself from the perspective of this other objectifying gaze. To experience myself as seen by another then, is to take up her perspective on me and recognize the way I appear to her. This requires a reflective subject that is simply not present in the pre-reflective experience of myself. This reflective subject comes along with its own pre-reflective sense of ownership and its own objectifying activity which reveals my body as an object that is there for others.

So for Sartre, it is true that reflection is something that I do with my body. My body is the body subject which, as he puts it, “nihilates” its object for its own purposes. But in the act of reflection, I cannot catch sight of myself as this nihilating gaze. Rather, I catch sight of myself as others might see me – as a visible and touchable body that is irreconcilable with the invisibility of the for-itself. These are two distinct appearances of my body, two ways in which my body is available to consciousness which are non-identical with one another. On Sartre’s reading then, like Zahavi’s, understood as a pre-reflective awareness that my activity is my own, the minimal self does not reduce down any further. Any account of my body that understands it as a thing or as an object would

belong to a different order of reality – it would concern my body as it is for others. It would therefore serve no explanatory role for the existence of my body as a subject. In this way, my body as it is for me as a subject - prereflectively encountered as a “possibility which I am” (BN, 403) - is an ontologically basic structure.

Merleau-Ponty's Analysis of Double Sensation

Merleau-Ponty's analysis of double sensation reaches a far different conclusion. For him, as we will see, the experience of touching one hand to the other does not reveal two incommunicable levels of existence, but rather a bodily subject that belongs to the same world as the objects she touches and explores. Only on the basis of this shared corporeality is it possible to achieve a position which realizes the difference between me and the objects I encounter. Only because I am in a sense the same as the things I investigate am I capable of realizing a difference between me and the world. Putting the same point differently, it is only because there is already a symmetrical relationship between my body and the world that there can be an asymmetrical relationship between my body as subject and the world as object.

When I touch my left hand with my right hand, what Merleau-Ponty notices is the way in which it becomes unclear which hand is touching and which hand is touched – that is which hand is the body-subject and which the body-object. Agreeing with Husserl, he notices that it is only with movement that the relation becomes clarified – importantly, *it takes time* to become an unambiguously exploring subject. In subsequently exploring the back of my left hand with the fingers on my right hand, I feel the sensation of my fingers running over my hand in the left hand at the same time that I feel the back of my left hand as the object which my right hand is exploring. In the double sensation of

one hand exploring the other, I notice that both hands play a role in the relationship of touching and touched. *They each reveal the other as the other side of a relation* – that is they are different components of the exploration at the same time.

In such an experience, contrary to Sartre's analysis, Merleau-Ponty asserts that the experiences of touching and being touched are not radically different or disjuncted. Instead of nullifying the touched hand for the purposes of its own interrogative project, touching one hand to the other "begins a sort of reflection" (*PhP*, 95), wherein "I glimpse momentarily the shell or the incarnation of this other hand, agile and living, that I send out towards objects in order to explore them" (*PhP*, 95). I glimpse the incarnation of this other hand when a gestalt switch occurs and the touching hand becomes the touched hand. My touched hand is experienced as sensitive and responsive to touch. As I continue to flip the relation back and forth, I experience my two hands reverse from subject to object pole reciprocally and learn through this switch that touching is possible on the basis of a sensitivity to being touched that can excite the touched hand and begin the process of reversal. In this way, the very sensitivity that allows me to interrogate the external world means I am open to being touched back – I am capable of undergoing a change of position in the relationship without the objectifying gaze of the other nullifying my lived sensitivity and forcing me into a reflective position outside this sensitivity.

For Merleau-Ponty this means neither that the hand which touches is identical with the hand which is touched nor that it is wholly separate. Rather, there is "overlapping or encroachment" (*VI*, 123) that requires a time to come apart. Each hand plays the role for the other of allowing a reversal from touching to touched to take place.

Each hand reverses from subject to object in contact with its counterpart revealing itself as having a reversible function. Each hand can both touch and be touched.

On Merleau-Ponty's account, then, Sartre has overlooked a fundamental ambiguity in pre-reflective experience. The subject is de-centered as the meaning-positing component in the experience and it becomes unclear whether it is the taking up of the position of touching or the receding to the role of touched which constitutes the experience. Instead, the object-hand plays a role in revealing the subject-hand's interrogative abilities by reversing from subject to object for the other hand. My pre-reflective awareness of myself is cast as an achievement of a process of the world that subtends it where the object hand allows me to interrogate it in a particular way – it allows for my reversal from touched to touching and back again. In this way, the experience of a self, even in pre-reflective experience, arises out of a reversal of the sensible back on itself. In order to be sensible, the sensible world requires a sensing subject that is itself a part of the sensible world.

Importantly, this is not achieved by a constituting act of consciousness. Rather, it is revealed by my body's sensitivity – the openness to being touched that is a condition of my ability to touch. My body folds back on itself in one hand touching the other allowing for a “sort of dehiscence that opens my body in two” (*VI*, 123). Contra Sartre, the touching body does not constitute the touched body as an object in light of its projects, nor do I experience the fact that I am also a body that can be touched by another perceiving body only when I feel myself touched and take up a reflective perspective. Rather, the very experience of touching one hand to the other is one in which I experience a difference within the unity of my body-subject that is not of my own making

and which undergirds my ability to encounter objects in the world. It is because I can be touched that I am able to take up the position of touching and vice versa.

This becomes clearer if we consider the way in which we are in and among things which are external to our bodies. For Merleau-Ponty, it is because we are at some level the same as the things that populate the world that we are able to encounter them as different from us. My hand “takes its place among the things it touches, [it] is in a sense one of them” (*VI*, 133). Only in virtue of belonging to the same world and being “made of the same stuff” (*EM*, 126) that it touches is my hand sensitive to their touch. Only from a position in which my hand can be touched does it open “finally upon a tangible being of which it is a part” (*VI*, 133). In order to explore the surface of a table with my hand, my hand must be touched by the table. This is just to say that if I were not myself a body, I could not touch other bodies - I could not interrogate and explore the world around me with my body. It is by virtue of my hand’s passive touch-ability that it can actively interrogate other touchable things.

In this way, my passive touchability reverses into my active ability for interrogation and exploration of the world. The table, which Sartre understands as a passive thing nullified by my objectifying and instrumentalizing gaze, instead acts back upon my body, revealing my body as an active investigator of the table only by itself being capable of being touched back by the table. The point here is that I already have to be related to the table in a symmetrical way – as inhabiting the same tangible order of existence - such that I could then experience and realize my relation to the table as asymmetrical – the table as an object there for me as subject. There is thus an identity-within-difference in the sensing-sensed relation. The difference between that which I

touch and myself, the difference which I experience as a sense of mineness, is predicated on an identity held between me and the world – we are “made of the same stuff” (*EM*, 126).

Being Sensed By the World

From this examination of Merleau-Ponty’s thought on double sensation, then, we can extract two claims involving the conditions which allow for the emergence of a minimal self. The first is a rather straightforward generalization from our discussion of the reversibility involved in touch, and *prima facie* intuitively acceptable: in order to touch, see, hear, etc. the perceiver must itself be touchable, seeable, hearable, etc. This is clear if we accept, as we have been arguing throughout this work,¹¹ that the perceiver must be embodied. There is a second claim however, which is harder to grasp and which seems at first to go against our intuitions. In order to experience ourselves as selves, things must, in some non-trivial sense, see, feel, and hear us. The perceiver must be perceived and taken up by the things she perceives and takes up. This certainly seems to be Merleau-Ponty’s intent when he claims in *Eye and Mind* that at a certain point in the painting of a picture “one no longer knows who sees and who is seen, who paints and who is painted” (*EM*, 167), or in the *Phenomenology* that a blue sky is a for-itself insofar as it “thinks itself in me” (*PhP*, 222). But this claim is strange and hard to think about. What does it mean?

We must be very careful not to misinterpret this second claim. We should not, for instance understand it as a claim of panpsychism. Merleau-Ponty is not saying that the table is in some way conscious of me or that the blue sky has some phenomenal

¹¹ And indeed as Sartre claims as well.

consciousness inaccessible to my own in the way that other people do.¹² Rather, what Merleau-Ponty is saying is that there is already a direction, an orientation, a *sens*¹³ to the world of perceivable things that makes perception possible. “I do not look at chaos,” he writes, “but at things— so that finally one cannot say if it is the look or if it is the things that command” (*VI*, 133). On first pass this may seem very different from saying that things look back.¹⁴ But recall Sartre’s claim that in unreflective experience, the meaning of the situation flows only from the subjective side of the relation. I transcend the objects in my vicinity towards my possibilities. Against this Sartrean backdrop, Merleau-Ponty’s claim that objects look back at us is a way of de-centering the power that reveals the

¹² This claim has recently gained traction as a response to the hard problem of consciousness in analytic philosophy of mind. (Cf. Chalmers 2015; Strawson 2006). The claims made by these thinkers amount to a shift of the burden of proof to those who claim that matter itself is unconscious but that one particular arrangement of matter, namely the human brain, is conscious. The more parsimonious explanation, they claim, is that consciousness is a property of all matter or of the basic elements of matter.

¹³ Merleau-Ponty routinely plays with the ambiguity in the meaning of the French word *sens*. It can be taken to mean sense in the two usual English ways (involving sensation, but also meaning, as in sense and referent) but in French it has the added meaning of direction, as in the French phrase for one-way street: rue à sens-unique. For discussion, see Morris 2004 pp. 23-4.

¹⁴ Indeed, and as Sean Kelly (2005) has argued, Merleau-Ponty seems to further imply that things not only look back at me, but also that they look at the object I attend to. Kelly argues that this claim can be interpreted in very similar terms to the ones I develop here. Kelly focuses on a passage in which Merleau-Ponty claims that under sub-optimal lighting conditions, “the lighting directs my gaze and causes me to see the object, so that in a sense it [the lighting] *knows* and *sees* the object” (PhP, 358). The lighting directs my gaze, perhaps to a part of the object where the light falls in such a way that I can see and experience its “real” color. This, Kelly observes, is itself a motor activity that is directed by a perspective taken on the object by the lighting conditions under which it is observed. In a passage resonant with my own account he compares this with other motor actions like grabbing a mug. My body prepares itself in a way to grasp the mug that is proper to the mug’s size, shape and weight even though I myself never see the whole mug at once (i.e. I see it only perspectively). He argues that it is because the grasping motion is not only guided by the mug but by the situation as a whole – the hidden sides of the mug are seen by the background it appears against and this perspective helps shape my movement. It is this whole situation, including the perspective of the background against which the figure appears and not just the mug’s objective features that guide my grasping motion. In a few sentences which resonate with my own account, he writes. “Yet how much credit can *I* take for this? Is it up to me alone that as soon as my hand leaves the starting position it begins to form an appropriate grip? I certainly did not know that my hand was doing that. Yet the activity is intentional from the start. It is directed toward and responsive to what my body takes to be the features of the hidden side of the mug...As with lighting therefore, we must say that I experience my grip as *being led* to form itself in a certain way, led by something other than myself, something that knows more about the hidden features of the mug than I am capable of knowing from here. I have to say that objects see one another, in other words, to account for the motor intentionality of my activity, an intentionality that does not belong entirely to me” (Kelly 2005, 101-102).

meaning of a situation. Meaning arises through a two-sided relation rather than as the result of the untethered activity of consciousness.

As we discussed in Chapter 2 especially, but throughout this work as well, to encounter a world is not to encounter a world of complete and discrete objects. Such discrete ready-made objects are not what Merleau-Ponty means by things. Rather, as we discussed, I encounter a world that calls for action such that it can become more complete. Such completeness though, may not be only completeness for me but the completeness of the object which solicits action from me. The action called for may be nothing more than looking – in the case of looking at the blue sky for instance, losing myself in the depth of its blueness allows it to “think itself in me... [such] that each part of the whole is “sensitive” to what happens in all of the others” (*PhP*, 222).

This is meant to say that although I do not encounter a complete and determinate world, neither do I encounter James’ blooming buzzing confusion such that I must make sense out of utter non-sense in each and every encounter with the world, which, as we argued in Chapter 3, would follow from a conception of unreflective experience as involving a constituting consciousness that transcends the bare materiality of things towards its own possibilities.

In Chapter 2, we noticed the importance of habituation for “freezing” perception and preserving the results of past engagement with the world such that a habit maintains a “past that is our true present” (*PhP*, 85). However, our examination of the reversibility involved in double sensation reveals that my bodily comportment to the world is perhaps necessary but not sufficient for preserving the world in this way. As Merleau-Ponty writes, “my attitude is never sufficient to make me truly see blue or truly touch a hard

surface” (*PhP*, 222). Rather, to look at the sky is to see it as it can be seen – as it offers itself to my gaze – as the “milieu of a certain living vibration that my body adopts” (*PhP*, 222). Prior to a *noetic* act of constitution, there is an instituted world that I encounter by means of the relations already at work there. To encounter the world is to encounter the things within it as already suggesting a meaning and a means of interaction. I encounter a dance-floor as danceable, a kitchen as supportive of cooking, or indeed, a sky that interrupts my hurried stride and demands that I stare because it is “so blue [that] only blood would be more red” (*VI*, 132). It is by means of this arrangement of the things that I encounter and the relations they bear among themselves and to me - this *sens* of the world - that my activity springs forth and takes place within the same world that I perceive. In this way, the world *senses* me – it provides me with a meaningful context for my action - an orientation and direction - that I could not conjure up by my own means but that allows my action to take place. Merleau-Ponty calls this a fold or hollow in the sensible that affords me a place among things from which I am able to realize (literally, I make real) both their potential and my own through perceptual activity.

Given this conception of perception we see that the present is not a “picture grasped by synopsis” (*IP*, 192), but the emergence of a fold or a hollow in an instituted sensible reality that allows for the difference between me and the world to manifest itself as a solicitation in my experience. It is because I take up a place in the sensible world – because my body is itself sensible and exists in an instituted world among sensible things – that my awareness of myself as a sensed and sensible thing is pre-reflectively present in my being addressed by other sensed and sensible things. In sensing, I reflect the *sens* of the world that is instituted – already underway and suggesting a possible future. In this

way, my sense of mineness, my minimal selfhood, is an achievement of a process of the sensible world. It is not of a distinct order of reality, but the reverse or the lining of a relation that is already instituted in the world of *sens*-bearing sensible things of which I am one. A minimal sense of self is thus an achievement of a system of relations in the sensible world which precede it and condition its appearance not an irreducible structure of a separate order of existence.

Enactivism and Embodied Narratives

Having now upset our picture of minimal self-hood so as to make room for a link to the personal self through a common world of sensibility, it is necessary to turn to the other side of the relation we are investigating to see how it is related to this pre-reflective world of instituted perception. In Chapter 3, we cast the personal self as a product of reflection and narration. The problem that we uncovered there was that the personal self requires a position unrelated to the past of the human being that it takes as its object. According to this line of thought, if the subject is to actively narrate the history of its life to itself, it must have some vantage point outside this lived flow from which to do so. What we will have to show is that this position and the narrative it considers are themselves the reverse of the pre-reflective relations we have sketched out among things and ourselves. In this way we will seek to show how our habitual and pre-reflective activities are themselves “pre-narratives” that allow for the making explicit that occurs in the act of narration that they lead up to and motivate. There is an instituted *sens* to our action before there is an identifying act that such an act can take up and express.

In order to do so it is first necessary to get clearer on the concept of a narrative self. With what sort of self-related phenomena is the narrative self associated? Paul

Ricouer helpfully points out that, the narrative self is a self that is the main character of one's life story.¹⁵ As we pointed out in Chapter 3, the narrative self includes two self-positions. First, there is the narrating self. This is a reflective self position and is married to a subject's ability to identify itself with some current in its life history. It is associated with the construction of an autobiography – a narrative where the narrator is also the protagonist of the story. This protagonist is the second self position in the relation. It is an object self that the narrating self produces through an act of narration. Insofar as we have explicated it by examining Dennett's fictional center of narrative gravity and a narrativist interpretation of Frankfurt, we have encountered a problem wherein the narrating and narrated selves appear to be different from the embodied self who actually lives through her experience.

One way that this problem has recently been taken up in cognitive science is in discussion around the idea of "Embodied Narratives."¹⁶ Menary, for instance, contrasts the embodied narrative account of the self with the accounts we have so far investigated, which he calls abstract accounts.¹⁷ He understands the sorts of accounts of narrative selfhood we investigated in Chapter 3 as abstract insofar as they understand the self as analogous to a mathematical abstraction (i.e. as a center of narrative gravity). Menary's criticisms of the abstract narrative accounts echo the critique of these accounts that we introduced with Zahavi in Chapter 3.¹⁸ The fundamental problem with such accounts, he

¹⁵ Ricouer 1994.

¹⁶ Menary 2008; Mackenzie 2007; Gallagher and Hutto forthcoming.

¹⁷ Dennett's but also Velleman (2006) and Schectman (1996).

¹⁸ All the way back in Chapter 2, we noted that for Zahavi, while there is no doubt that our lives as we live them at the personal and interpersonal level contain a narrative dimension, there must be a phenomenological self that precedes this narrative self as a "necessary founding supplement" (SS, 105).

says, is that they ignore the minimal sense of self that is central to our experience of ourselves as selves. “There is a more fundamental sense of self than the narrative self,” he writes, “and that is the embodied or feeling self; something which feels and perceives and is happy or sad, before it ever narrates” (73).

Menary attempts to move beyond the terrain we covered in Chapter 2 by offering an account which grounds the narrative self in the embodied experience of the subject of a life. On this account, “the self is constituted both by an embodied consciousness whose experiences are available for narration and narratives themselves” (Menary 2008, 63). According to Menary, “we become fully fledged narrative selves by constructing a narrative point of view from which we can narrate our embodied experiences” (64). Importantly, as we pointed out in Chapter 3 as well, this point of view is, for Menary, fundamentally embodied. His ultimate claim is that “embodied experiences have a pre-narrative structure that lends itself to narration” (64). In what sense, though, does Menary understand embodied experiences to have “a pre-narrative structure”? Will understanding the construction of a “narrative point of view” help us to solve the problem of reflection?

On Menary’s account, the embodied self is the same self that is the protagonist of the story and the narrator of the story. The minimal self “anchors the narratives in the unfolding sequence of embodied and embedded perceptions of the individual” (76). There is thus a minimal embodied pre-narrative that exists in the temporal unfolding of our experience. In service of this point, Menary references Marc Slors: “If we go from a to b, we will pass through all intermediate places separating a and b according to the route we take, thus producing a sequence of perceptions narrating the story of this route

(the position of our bodies at different places, the position of our eyes, etc.)”¹⁹ The temporal character of our embodied experience then, is already given in a form that, as Hutto puts it, is “ripe for narrative.”²⁰ On this reading, we first live through our experiences, then we turn those experiences, already given according to a pre-narrative temporal order, into a narrative by employing a narrative capacity. It is thus “not narratives that shape experiences but, rather, experiences that structure narratives. Experiences are the sequence of events that give structure and content to narratives” (79). The mistake made by the abstract accounts wherein we identify ourselves with some past psychological event, thus constituting ourselves as personal beings in an act of narration, is that they suppose that narratives, conceived from a position outside the lived temporality of the embodied self, could structure and give meaning to experiences which are themselves already ripe with meaning and structure.

This is all well and good for a critique of Dennett and the narrative reading of Frankfurt we developed in Chapter 3; however, there is still a question of how the embodied self can use a narrative perspective to take up her past experience while still being affected and bound by that same past. Menary offers a developmental account whereby the acquisition of inner speech is what allows for self-awareness. Reflection then becomes a capacity based on a habitual skilled acquisition that opens the embodied subject to a new kind of activity wherein her own embodied experience becomes something which can itself solicit narration. The narrator position is an acquired position

¹⁹ Slors, M.V.P. 1998 “Two Conceptions of Psychological Continuity”, *Philosophical Explorations*, **1** (1), pp. 59-78., p. 73.

²⁰ Hutto 2006, 237.

akin to that of my driving self or my dancing self. It comes into being in much the same way.

The idea is basically this: Children learn to speak and talk about events first in an inter-personal situation. The acquisition of speech then is not initially in the service of an internalized monologue concerned with reflection, but a form of interaction with other people. Appealing to Vygotsky, Menary argues that most higher cognitive functions like memory and reasoning appear first in on the plane of the ‘intermental’ rather than the ‘intramental’ – between people rather than within a single person. Only later with the internalization of speech does reflection of the embodied self on itself become possible in solitude.

For Vygotsky, the intermental is understood as part of “the zone of proximal development.” From our perspective, as a developmental situation, this zone is the child’s lived position between what she is *actually* capable of – her habitually acquired capacities for movement and speech - and what is solicited by her environment on the basis of these capacities which exceed what she has done in the past. That is, what she is *potentially* able to do given the right sort of guiding solicitation. In the child’s developmental situation, this guiding solicitation is often provided by another person who acts as a tutor (usually the child’s caregiver, peers, siblings, etc.). What goes on in the intermental situation – the joint process of reasoning between the child and caregiver – allows the child to exceed her own acquired intramental capacities. Children and caregivers talk through their actions together in a joint project of play or problem solving.

Gallagher and Hutto (forthcoming) elaborate on this idea. On their recapitulation of such an account, this ability to move beyond what we are capable of towards what we

are potentially capable of is bound up with the expressive function of our action. If the embodied activity of an infant is situated in the right sort of intersubjective contexts, it becomes expressive rather than merely being the solipsistic concerned activity of a single body. For instance, a baby reaching for a cup that is just out of reach becomes, in the presence of a caregiver, an expressive gesture of desire. The reach, from the perspective of the infant, begins as an instrumental movement. It concerns her enacting a desire she has at the perceptual level, attempting to modify her situation so as to settle a tension. She wants the cup and reaches for it. The reach becomes expressive because it is situated in and among other people who recognize this activity as expressing desire. The adult caregiver then moves the cup within reach of the infant. Over time this activity takes on a new sort of instrumentality for the infant and becomes a ‘pointing towards’ desired objects rather than a reach in order to grasp. The pointing is now a means of calling attention towards an object in the world so that it may be attended to by someone else – so that they may jointly attend to the same object.

The achievement of this ability to share attention on an object with a caregiver opens the door to ways in which the infant gets taken up into the world of language and narrative. One such instance that Gallagher and Hutto highlight is that of pretend play.

Such play is often accompanied by narration from the caregiver:

The mother takes the toy car and says “Zoom zoom zoom.” The child then takes a turn. The vocalization, and gradually, the words, become part of the structure of the pretend play. Commenting on this, the mother says, “the car goes zoom.” Later taking the first steps towards linguistic narration, she says, addressing the child, “you played so nicely with the car this afternoon, didn’t you?” Later the child appropriates this account saying, “I play with car”²¹

²¹ Gallagher and Hutto, forthcoming, 7.

On this account, then, the roots of full blown narration as a capacity that the child employs are planted early on and are helped along in their development by engagement with others who already have and perform such a capacity. This allows us to draw a clear line of development from the experience of an embodied individual through to narration.

1. The child's embodied experience is already structured by her agential activity as a successive ordering of events with a beginning middle and end. A reaching for the cup for instance begins with a solicitation, is followed by a sending out of the arm, climaxes in reaching and grasping the cup and returns to the body in a sort of embodied *denouement*. The complete gestural structure of the reach envelopes and makes sense of the parts as internally related to one another.²²
2. This action has an outside, it can be seen by others. This means that it takes on a social meaning given the right sort of intersubjective situation.
3. The temporal structure of experience is taken up into language through the narrative description of the reach by others. It is mirrored back to the child in speech, centering her as the agent in the story.

The child is reflected back to herself by her caregivers and is solicited to tell a story about the action by caregivers who ask her to recount what she did that day, i.e. "We played with the car today, didn't we?"

²² Citing Trevarthen and Delafield-Butt 2013, Gallagher and Hutto identify this structure all the way back in the womb, pointing to evidence that the action of pre-natal fetuses "exhibits a distinctive pattern that unfolds over a fourfold temporal sequence marking the following phases: introduction; development; climax; and resolution." (p. 6).

The child thus builds up her narrative capacity little by little through repetition of these sorts of experiences in a zone of proximal development. She is solicited by the world to do more than she has already done in the past. It is towards this intermental situation that her activity of narration is first oriented as a means of interaction with the others who share her situation. Only later does speech become internalized and directed towards her own actions first for the purposes of problem solving and later for self-understanding and interpretation.

For instance, after some development, children begin to make use of the sort of speech that others use in playful activity when they are away from others - especially in situations where they must act in such a way as to bring about a goal. By narrating her own activity as she performs it, a child is able to better direct her behavior towards the goal. In service of this point, Menary references an experiment cited by Vygotsky (1978), wherein a four year old girl was asked to get candy from a high cupboard with a stool and a stick as tools. During the experiment, narration similar to the sort that occurs in pretend play with others spontaneously occurs: (experimenters descriptions in parentheses, girl's speech in quotation marks):

(Stands on a stool, quietly looking, feeling along a shelf with stick). 'On the stool.' (Glances at experimenter. Puts stick in other hand) 'Is that really the candy?' (Hesitates) 'I can get it from that other stool, stand and get it.' (Gets second stool) 'No that doesn't get it. I could use the stick.' (Takes stick, knocks at the candy) 'It will move now.' (knocks candy) 'It moved, I couldn't get it with the stool, but the, but the stick worked,' (Menary 2008, 81).

Following Vygotsky, Menary argues that the child's self-directed speech is as important as the action in attaining the goal. The speech and the action are "part of one and the same complex psychological function" (Vygotsky 1978, 26) involved in getting the candy. In this way narrative capacity emerges as a problem-solving strategy whereby

the child represents to herself a series of embodied perceptions and sensations so as to keep the situation in hand – she “gives a cognitive structuring to the embodied perceptions” (Menary 2008, 82). The dialogue the child has with herself mirrors the scaffolding provided by the caregiver in earlier similar situations. It helps her to order her perceptions and centers her as the agent in the situation. Importantly, this occurs while she is in the midst of the very activity she is narrating – she is the agent of the story and the storyteller in the very unfolding of the action. As she develops, situations begin to solicit this sort of reflective activity for the purposes of problem solving as one more embodied skill in the child’s tool-box. In this way, “the unity of the [reflective] self is pragmatic, it is anchored in the experiences of an embodied self which is embedded in an environment” (83).

This picture of the narrating self as one possible perspective taken up by the embodied self, on the face of it, seems to solve one of the primary problems we encountered with the personal self in Chapter 3. There we said that one problem with the personal self was that as a construction that is constituted by the very narrative act which names it, the personal self was not itself capable of acting. It became an object posited and considered by a thinking ipseity – perhaps an ipseity employing a narrative strategy for thinking – but the protagonist of the narrative who carries out the actions is not the same as the narrator. By describing the ontogenetic development of a narrative capacity, we have been uncovering the way in which the acquisition of inner speech becomes one of the capacities which guarantees continuity between the past of my body and my present situation. As with the acquisition of any other habit, when I learn to narrate, I am opened to a new “general means of having a world” (*PhP*, 147).

The Self as Supported and Held by the World

What we are beginning to see then, is that the unity of the narrated, narrating, and embodied selves is anchored in the experience of pragmatic contexts. We have spelled this out in terms of acquired capacities. However, we are also beginning to see that simply having a capacity is not sufficient for the unity of these three self aspects. My narrating self requires a situation that maintains its continuity with the embodied and narrated selves. It is because my activity carries on a process that is not of my own making that its continuity is guaranteed.

In service of this point concerning continuity, I invite you to think with me about a particular space and a particular time: My apartment on a Thursday in the fall, sometime around 7am. Right around this time, my day usually begins with the familiar sound of an alarm clock. The sound of this alarm clock pulls me out of sleep and sets me in motion almost automatically. I swing my legs out to the same location and hoist myself up to a standing position. Once I am standing, I'm in a position to get ready for the day. From here, I can set about preparing myself for leaving the apartment. I can shower and brush my teeth, I can dress and feed myself. I can make coffee. I can make my bed.

Simply by thinking about the first moments of my day, we can see a continuous temporal dimension of the "I can" emerge in the way that certain established positions allow for more complicated activity, i.e. standing allows the beginning of a routine, the routine allows higher order cognitive activity - perhaps I listen to the radio or rehearse my lecture if I am teaching that day. In this way, to encounter a world as an "I can" with a determinate set of possibilities for action is to be living out of a time that is not just the present clock time. Rather, it is to find oneself in the midst of a moment that already

began at some time in the past and to live out of that moment towards the future. To walk off and brush my teeth is to live out of the establishing moment when I stood up. Further back, I learned to stand as a very young child, so to be connected to the world as it could be engaged from a standing position is to be still living out of that moment when standing was instituted in my life as a place from which to begin. Thus, to be an “I can” is to find oneself positioned and oriented towards a world that is not simply reducible to a present and determinate spatial or temporal position. It is rather, to depart from some already established and ongoing moment towards a world in which one can act – to continue a directed movement towards its fulfillment.

Of course, as I’ve already suggested, I am never just living out of a single moment. I’ve already said that just standing up in the morning and beginning my day involves living out of two moments that establish my lived connection to the world as an “I can” – the moment at which I stood up and the moment I learned to stand. As Merleau-Ponty explains, “time is not for us a system of objective moments through which we pass, but rather a moving milieu that recedes from us, like the landscape from the window of a train” (*PhP*, 443). In such situations, the “attendant at the railway crossing whizzes by but the hill in the distance hardly moves” (*PhP*, 443). Likewise, “my day” moves by more slowly than the determinate events which it contains. It also frames them, as a moment of which I am still in the midst, that began with standing up and that I am still living - just as the mountain in the background moving more slowly reveals that the attendant is closer to me in space. Similarly, brushing my teeth precedes and anticipates the drive to work with my day in the background lending these determinate events a position in my day closer to me. The drive to work announces the start of my working

day and the end of my preparatory private time. All of this is located within the depth of other moments I am still living: my week, year, life, etc.

Returning now to standing up, notice that in doing so, I am living out of a moment that began prior to my being present. At some point in the very distant past, a group of apes that were not yet human began walking on two legs. Perhaps only for short distances or supported by water at first,²³ but eventually for this group, standing up and walking on two legs established itself as the primary shape of their connection to the world – an instituted posture that facilitated their engagement with their environments as an “I can.” To stand up each morning is to still be living out of this moment just as much as it is to still be living out of the moment in which standing became an established way of engaging the world for me within my own life. It is to be re-membered by a natural past that furnishes me with a situation and a self now and which is kept open through my action that expresses this past.

I propose that we ought to think of the acquisition of language by a child in a very similar way. In acquiring the ability to narrate her actions, a child preserves and expresses a way of living that is already instituted in the world as a practice that others hold open for the child. She finds herself as an agent of expressive action only in and among others who are able to recognize her action as expressive before she herself intends to express anything. Likewise, she is solicited as a being who is potentially capable of addressing others in speech before she is capable of doing so. In such a solicitation, she encounters a situation that demands more of her than she was previously capable of as only a body. She is able to do more than she has herself accomplished on the basis of an instituted

²³ Kuliukas 2011.

world of meaning that preserves the past. It is only because this past that is not her own is preserved in the world that the child is able to become capable of more than she has done in the past.

Just as the world which is set up as engage-able from a standing position addresses the infant who has not yet learned to stand, so too does the speaking world address the infant who is not yet capable of speech. In this way, it is not only on the basis of the body and its powers that the infant progresses through the stages of her development or that I set off from a standing position next to my bed to brush my teeth. Such development requires a world that holds open a place for the body to take up. In this way, the instituted world of standing affordances as well as the instituted world of narrative practice *sens*-es the self. It provides a meaningful context of action that is what allows her to act and which pre-exists her. In acquiring the ability to speak and to act, the child takes up and makes real the demands of the situation in much the same way that my perceptual activity realizes the potential of the sensible world or my walking around my apartment realizes the potential of a standing position that I did not invent. These demands are present in the situation on the basis of a shared past of human expression which remains present in the child's situation as instituted forms of worldly engagement embodied in the action and speech of others and the material arrangement of the tools that facilitate human action. Likewise, her action takes up and develops the instituting moment that occurred long before her birth when these practices sedimented into place, just as much as it is the development of her own powers. She guarantees the continuity of this practice just as the practice guarantees her own personal continuity as an agent within the instituted world.

We are now beginning to see a solution to the problem of reflection that we began with at the outset of this chapter. It is not just the body which maintains the identity of the narrated subject and the narrating subject. That is, it is not just because I possess a minimal sense of ownership over my own experience that I am able to recall and narrate this experience from an outside reflective position. Rather, the narrating self, the narrated self and the embodied self are held together because they all take up a position in the same world that solicits their appearance through action. The relation of identity between them is preserved by the world in which the practice of narration is instituted and is what allows for their productive divergence. It is this identity-within-difference which allows for narrative reflection of the self on itself. The narrating and narrated self are thus not externally related to one another as separate entities or separate orders of reality. They are the reverse of one another whose communion is guaranteed by their continued living adherence to a world that addresses them in such a way that opens up productive dehiscence between them. This dehiscence that is opened up within the subject, the way my body opens in two (*VI*, 123), allows the weight of both my personal past of action and the past of an instituted practice to bear on me in the form of a solicitation which calls on me to do more than I have been previously capable of and to express myself through action and narration.

Institutional Embodiment and Re-Membering

Let us now retrace the movement of this chapter so as to clarify the relation of the reflective and reflected selves we have been describing. We began by asserting that there is a common, instituted world which bears the past shared in common by pre-reflective and reflective self-consciousness that serves as the hinge point between the minimal and

the personal self. We then investigated Merleau-Ponty's analysis of double sensation and uncovered an identity-within-difference in the touched and touching relation. We demonstrated that my minimal sense of self is already an achievement of the instituted relations between things – one of which is my body - that allows for the subject-object relation that I pre-reflectively experience as a sense of mineness which itself takes time to appear. My body, we said, must itself be one of the sensible things in the world such that it could reverse and realize this relation by becoming a body-subject. This reversal is made possible by the way in which I am *sens*-ed by the world – provided with a context of action that allows me to act in a meaningful way.

We then gave a developmental account of narration that understands it as one more capacity that my body makes use of to navigate my embodied situation. We saw how this capacity does not unfold solely from the purposive striving of the individual, but is rather allowed for by the instituted practice of narration that we are inaugurated into as children.

Once again we see that my self is embodied not just in my body and its capacities. Rather, my body is able to enact its capacities only because a place has been prepared for me within an instituted world of significance and expression. Narration is a capacity that I develop by being taken up into an instituted world of narrative practice. I become able to narrate because I am already a narratable being in virtue of my being situated in an inter-subjective context which bears on me. This intersubjective context *sens*-es me as a potential narrator on the basis of the divergence between my own embodied perspective and the instituted practices of narrative which envelop me and lend sense to my actions.

In this way, the past of the world bears on me and gives me a position from which to begin my own self-narration in relation to this world.

Let us briefly now, think through the way in which this conception of the self shows up phenomenologically in more developed, adult relationships. The purpose of this description is to see the way in which the past is preserved in an instituted relationship in the world that I encounter. I do not simply carry the past around with me in my body. Rather, my body appears for me on the basis of a past that is held open by a meaningful context. The past gives my body back to me – it senses me - in a familiar way by soliciting action from my body as an ‘I can.’ Consider for instance the experience of returning to one’s family home for a holiday meal. Returning to my family home, is not just to go back to an objective space in which I can act as I do in other situations, such as at work or at dinner among friends who know me as an adult. I do not bring with me my adult self and reinsert it into a neutral situation with other adult subjects who happen to be people I knew as a child. The development that has occurred since moving out of my family home, away from the members of my family does not easily follow me back to the family dynamic out of which it emerged.

To return home is to re-open a past and make it present once again in the same way that an embodied practice is supported by the material arrangement of a situation – my cooking in the kitchen, for instance, is supported and made easy by the way I have arranged my cooking tools and ingredients in familiar places. Returning to my family home supports a personal self with strongly held beliefs and desires and makes those real by affording me a place in which to realize them. For instance, perhaps my relationship with my sister is characterized by a deep disagreement about the value of public life – for

her, it is the family that lends meaning to life and which must be held above all else as what is important. For me perhaps, the family is an important institution only insofar as it produces individuals who can contribute more broadly to public life – to politics or to making advancements in a field of human knowledge. These values are not internal mental states, but dispositions of our relationship. We come to see our commitment to them through our continuing familial relationship and the disagreements that this relationship affords.

To return home is to encounter a situation that brings such conflicts to the fore, not as an object of consideration, but as the context of my behavior. My embodied experience is *sens*-ed by the instituted relationship which makes my experience of myself possible. I may, prior to going to the holiday gathering tell myself that I will not re-engage my sister in our decades long conflict. I will not lose control of myself in this way. After all, we are now both adults with a world of concerns that has come to replace those which structured our childhoods – perhaps, for instance, competitions for attention and validation from our parents. Despite my best attempts to avoid conflict at the family dinner table, I find myself, somewhere in the middle of the main course, bickering with my sister about something, that hours earlier, I found completely unimportant. This is because the situation affords me a position to be a person with a set of beliefs and values. These come to the fore, not because they have been called out of some inner reserve where they have been waiting to be enacted, but because they are instituted in the present encountered as structured by the past.

The important point that we are drawing out here is that our personal pasts are not wholly internal to a conscious subject. We do not store our values and beliefs in some

kind of inner or transcendent mental space. Rather, memory crosses the body and the world in such a way that the act of remembering is accomplished through interaction with one's instituted environment.

Situations, places and people re-member us. That is, they return us to ourselves by supplying to consciousness a situation in which things are recognizable and a path of action presents itself. Such an experience of returning home is an experience of being re-membered. By re-member,²⁴ what I mean to say is that returning home returns us to a past by making that past present once again in the form of a return of bodily possibility. The term member here has multiple senses. First, there is that of being a member of a family. It is as a brother and son that I am membered in the context of the family dinner. My situation is not a neutral one, but one in which I am called upon to answer to certain norms attached to this position in my family. These are themselves mediated by cultural norms associated with these positions as well as those idiosyncratic to my own family and its dynamics.

Second, there is the bodily sense by which we might refer to an arm or a leg as a member. Remember though, that for Merleau-Ponty, to have an arm or a leg is not to have an objective appendage, but to encounter the world as available to me on the basis of the activity that such a member affords. To have an arm is to encounter a world where things are graspable. To have legs is to encounter a space that is traversable by walking. In this sense, to be membered is to be connected to the world as a body that has possibilities present for it. Here I am invoking the idea that all consciousness of the world is that of a body and what shows up to that body as possible for action – the “I can.”

²⁴ Thanks to Kym Maclaren for this helpful neologism.

What I am pointing to here however, is not just the determinate actions that any similar body could perform in a situation like the one at the dinner table (i.e. reaching for a glass or passing the peas), or what I can perform on the basis of my own learned capabilities, but also the way in which we are affectively connected to the situation at the dinner table. Tensions which arise and animate the situation are not encountered by a cognitive agent who recognizes and evaluates the situation, but are lived through in a way that involves being passively affected. I become uneasy when my sister behaves in a particular way or speaks about certain subjects. My body is given to me, shows up in or structures my experience, as a body with a history with my sister by way of such affective phenomena - the hair on the back of my neck, for instance, stands up when she begins discussing her career in a way I find flippant and not sufficiently considerate, or when she asks when I plan on finally settling down and having children. Her way of engaging the world calls my own into question and elicits a response from me in a way that forces me outside of my self. As if I am not in control, I object, perhaps incoherently, to what I affectively encounter as her style of engaging the world. My situation is not mediated by norms of my own choosing, but by the instituted norms of the relationship I have with my sister. Thinking of re-membering in this way helps us to understand how the norms of my life operate beyond the boundaries of my body and are instituted in the practices in which I am engaged, which have their own momentum on account of their own past.

Finally, and perhaps most obviously, I am talking about a particular way that memory works, a particular kind of remembering. The sort of remembering I am concerned with here however is not a cognitive act performed by a subject, but rather

something that is accomplished in and through bodily interaction with an intersubjective situation revealed through the first and second types of being membered that I discussed above. It comes as much from the subject as from what she encounters. In this sense, it is not we who perform an act of remembering so much as it is the situation in which we find ourselves – already with particular possibilities appearing as likely – that does the remembering – it re-members us, giving us back a body that is affectively connected to other bodies. The situation re-members us in that it provides an atmosphere of meaningful bodily interaction with others. It gives us to ourselves in the form of a position from which to act, and emerges as a present that is animated by the norms of a past through lived affective connection. To be re-membered, then, is to be re-connected to an intersubjective world whose norms were settled in the past and are operating here in the present insofar as we feel the pull or the weight of certain avenues of engagement over others – even if we might cognitively recognize that those other unlikely possibilities are more desirable or more representative of the people we would like to be.

This productive divergence between who we are and who we would like to be is at the root of narrative self-reflection. It is the zone of proximal development that we inhabit as adults which opens us up in such a way that we are able to craft a more determinate sense of identity from the very worldly momentum which structures the solicitation we encounter to do so. It is by means of my belonging to this world that I diverge from it – by means of being membered in multiple ways that diverge from one another - just as it was by means of being sensible that I am able to sense.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this project I have performed an analysis of two aspects of self-hood. First, the way in which the self shows up to us minimally as a structure of our own first person experience. Second, the way in which we each have a self that is the protagonist in our life stories. The purpose of this was to show the way in which these different aspects of the self are related to one another through their situated belonging to a world. In sketching out this relationship, I believe I have provided a framework for thinking about the way in which selfhood could be developed and utilized as a concept in enactivist accounts of cognition, as well. Before I address this in the next section, however, I will briefly recount the argument of the preceding three chapters.

I began by investigating Dan Zahavi's recent accounts of what he calls minimal self-hood. I showed through an examination of Merleau-Ponty's thought on the lived body that the minimal self is not just a bare ipseity, but is encountered in the form of motivated activity. This requires that the minimal self has a past. In order to encounter a world, I argued, it was necessary that the world showed up as inviting or soliciting activity from me on the basis of my own embodied past of interaction that led to my habitual development of skills and strategies for coping with the world.

I then investigated theories of the personal self and found that there were at least three separate senses of the self whose connection is undertheorized in the accounts I explored. I argued that the self splits into (1) an embodied experiential self with a past, (2) a reflective position which takes the experiential self as an object and identifies itself with a set of desires encountered as motivation by the experiential self and, constructs (3) a narrated self that is the person or agent who acted or refrained from acting on those

desires. I argued that the abstractive accounts of Frankfurt and Dennett failed to give a satisfying account of how these three positions were related by way of sharing the same past. The reflective position as they describe it requires an abstract and active position outside of the past required by the habitual structures which allow for its appearance.

In order to show how these three positions were related by means of sharing a past, I moved on to explore a different sort of account of narrative selfhood. I began by demonstrating how Merleau-Ponty's analysis of reversibility helped us to open up the minimal self and showed how, according to Merleau-Ponty's ontology, the minimal self is dependent, not just on a set of capacities accrued by the body but on an instituted context that allows the minimal self to be realized. The minimal self – understood as the realization of a perspective which belongs to a self – is itself dependent on a fold or a hollow in the perceived world which it senses it or orients it by providing a meaningful context for action.

From there I explored enactivist accounts of narrative selfhood that trace the ontogeny of the narrative position in the development of a narrative capacity. Such accounts cast the narrating position of the reflective self as one more habitually acquired capacity that the embodied self employs in a pragmatic context. I argued that this gave us reason to stress the role played by the situation over a way of thinking about the acquisition of language as simply the acquisition of a capacity. The continuity between self positions is preserved, not only in its ability to deploy a capacity and the endurance of an entity with capacities, but by solicitation of situations which address the body and call for action. The ability to narrate my experience is not simply an ability I possess as a being with a narrative capacity and an embodied sense of self that I inhabit in my

experience. It is not just because the same self has lived through things and then can remember them – not just because my minimal selfhood provides me access to my experience that is already “ripe for narration” from a narrative position outside of it. Rather the act of memory deployed in narration depends on a situation which re-members me and supplies me with a body that is solicited to narrate. I want to briefly show the significance of this account of the self for the enactivist research program by showing how it helps solve a problem that sometimes arises there.

Bringing it all Back Home: Enactivism, Sensorimotor Empathy, and the Self

At the outset of this project, I identified enactivism as an area of philosophical thinking that was informed by Merleau-Ponty’s work but that could benefit from further engagement with it. I also noted that the concept of the self was often undertheorized in enactive accounts of perception, cognition, and action although it was indirectly utilized. Tony Chemero’s (2016) recent account of what he calls “sensorimotor empathy” is an excellent example of the way in which enactivism continues to draw on insights from Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the lived body, but could benefit from a more sustained engagement with Merleau-Ponty’s later thought, especially the way in which it helps us to see the multiple interrelated ways in which we live as selves. It is not that the ideas which I think could clarify some problems in Chemero’s account can’t be found in the *Phenomenology*. Indeed, Chemero’s use of Merleau-Ponty seems to imply the ontology that Merleau-Ponty himself tried to make explicit in his later works. However, focusing only on the lived body and not addressing the themes of institution and reversibility in Merleau-Ponty’s later work lead Chemero to make some confusing claims that I think

could be clarified based on the work I have done in this project. I will get to those in a moment, but first, a brief recapitulation of his argument.

Chemero attempts to add an amendment to the sensorimotor account of enactivism we explored in the introduction. Very briefly, this account holds that perceptual capacities like vision are enacted on the basis of capacities for movement we possess as embodied agents. Such capacities come along with an implicit knowledge of what Noë and O'Regan refer to as sensorimotor contingencies.¹ On this account, it is only because we have a certain type of body that can move in certain ways that we are able to encounter the world as oriented according to our body and its capacities. Hearing something “off to the left” requires an ability to re-orient ourselves to look for the noise that we heard to our left. Having such abilities means that we have a tacit understanding of left and right that we encounter perceptually.²

Chemero complains that the sensorimotor account's reliance on a particular kind of knowledge, even tacit or implicit practical knowledge, renders it too intellectualistic. This makes it difficult to reconcile the sensorimotor approach with both the anti-intellectualist current of enactivism more broadly³ and the anti-intellectualist tradition that it draws on for conceptual resources.⁴ In addition to this, there seems to be an internal contradiction between the anti-intellectualist aims of the sensorimotor approach and the way in which it relies on a special kind of knowledge to get perception off the ground. Recall for instance, Noë's claim (that we cited in the introduction) that

¹ O'Regan and Noë 2001; Noë 2005.

² For further discussion see the Introduction to this project.

³ Cf. Chemero 2009; Rowlands 2010; Hutto and Myin 2012.

⁴ Chemero cites Ryle, Gibson, and especially Merleau-Ponty as such influences.

“perception is not something that happens to us or in us. It is something we do.”⁵

Chemero argues that despite this avowed commitment, the sensorimotor approach to perception remains committed to a picture of cognition that is based on knowledge of counterfactuals. You need to *know what it would be like* if you turned your body to the left in order to hear a sound “off to the left,” not necessarily do anything. This renders the sensorimotor account “essentially Kantian” (Chemero 2016, 2). The claim of the sensorimotor approach is supposed to be that you can’t have the kinds of experiences you have without a particular kind of body with particular capacities for movement. But appealing to sensorimotor knowledge of counterfactuals actually means that “you can’t have the kinds of experiences we have without a particular kind of knowledge” (Chemero 2016, 2).

Chemero offers an amendment to this theory. He argues that we ought not think of our embodied capacities as supplying a kind of conceptual framework for perceptual understanding. Rather, we ought to think of perceiving as an actual deployment of skills. We do not entertain the possibility of looking to the left in hearing something “off to the left.” Rather, we encounter it by actually deploying our capacities for listening – hearing something “off to the left” is the result of successful listening activity. This means that we need to go beyond just the possession of skills or knowledge and recognize that experiencing means actively exploring the world with our skills.

In arguing for this point, Chemero explicitly appeals to Merleau-Ponty’s account of the lived body. On Chemero’s reading, Merleau-Ponty’s insistence that “experience requires being incarnate” (Chemero 2016, 4) means that having a particular kind of body

⁵ Noë 2005, 1. Chemero claims that this is a point made by Noë in almost every paper he has written on the subject.

is necessary but not sufficient for having the sort of experience we have. It is not simply the implicit knowledge of the world that the body supplies which allows us to see or to hear in the way that we do. Rather, we have to actually engage the world with our skills and interact with the things around us in order to perceive them. Experiencing a tomato as a three-dimensional object (Noë 2005) or a sponge as spongy (O'Regan 2011) requires actually exploring those objects, either by moving your eyes and head⁶ or by tactually exploring the sponge or tomato. Rather than sensorimotor knowledge of counterfactuals, Chemero suggests that perception involves “sensorimotor empathy,” an actual embodied process of “feeling into” the world to which we are sensitive, actively engaging it with our unreflective habitually embodied skills.

In support of this claim, Chemero argues that our bodies form temporary “synergies” with the objects we investigate. He borrows the concept of a synergy from the physics of far-from-equilibrium complex systems. In a synergy “energetic and/or chemical constraints are applied to a system, causing some of its components to form units that work together,” (Chemero 2016, 6). The whirlpool that forms when you flush a toilet is an example of a synergy. There, a potential energy gradient from the release of water in the tank constrains the water molecules to act as a temporary unit in which a collective pattern of activity emerges. Sensorimotor empathy is the formation of such a synergy between the body and the world in which the body’s capacities are constrained by features of its environment. Chemero’s claim is that knowing what I would see if I moved around behind a tomato is insufficient for experiencing a tomato as a three dimensional object. Rather in order to actually experience the tomato, we need to form a

⁶ In support of this point, Chemero argues that even a punctual seeming, instantaneous glance at a tomato that lasts only milliseconds involves between two and ten saccadic eye movements and several degrees of bodily sway. (Chemero 2016, 12).

temporary synergy with it when we “feel into” it by engaging our skills for exploring it. “During this sort of exploration, your motion causes changes in what you are exploring which cause changes in your motion which causes changes...” (Chemero 2016, 12). This constitutes a sensorimotor feedback loop that Chemero suggests we understand as a single synergy-like process. In exploring the sponge or the tomato, the perceiver and the object are connected such that they temporarily “form a single unit” (Chemero 2016, 11) in their interaction.

There is a lot to like about Chemero’s account from the perspective that I have developed in this project. It is a fully enactive and embodied account of perception which also recognizes the important role played by the world in supplying a direction or sense to the activity of investigation. A problem arises however in the breadth of Chemero’s concept of sensorimotor empathy. This problem becomes clear when we consider the different sorts of self-positions involved in the different sorts of activities Chemero cites in arguing for his account. As evidence for sensorimotor empathy, Chemero cites his own research on activities involving the use of tools⁷ and interaction with other people in accomplishing a task.⁸ I think that by considering the phenomenological appearance of the self in its various ways helps us to draw some important distinctions between the sensorimotor empathy that Chemero identifies in these cases from the sort that is encountered in exploration of the tomato or the sponge.

The first thing to notice is that there is something very different about cooperating with another person or using a tool to accomplish a task from investigating a

⁷ Dotov, Nie and Chemero 2010; Anderson, Richardson and Chemero 2012; Dotov and Chemero 2014; Wagman and Chemero 2014; de Oliveira and Chemero 2015; Chemero 2015.

⁸ Riley et al. 2011; Nalepka et al. 2015.

sponge or a tomato. In the first two sorts of activities, the synergies Chemero describes are on the noetic side of the relation. It is from the perspective of a body-body synergy or a body-tool synergy that some “thing” out in the world is attended to. In the case-study of co-operation that Chemero cites, it is as a member of a team that I coordinate my action directed towards a sheep-herding simulation. In the studies he cites of using a cane or an enactive torch to explore a room, it is as the cane-body synergy that I attend to space around me. When investigating a tomato, however, the thing to which we are attending is what Chemero claims we form a synergy with. It is on the other side of the relation. I will now briefly treat each of these examples and show how the account of the self we have been sketching out helps us clarify the different sorts of sensorimotor empathy involved in the different cases.

In appealing to habitually incorporated tools like the blind man’s cane, Chemero argues, convincingly, that we ought to think of these sorts of acquired appendages as being incorporated into the body schema of the investigator. In this way, these tools form a constitutive part of our minimal sense of ourselves. Our sense of ownership over our bodies, for instance, extends to include the instruments we make use of. These instruments become “ a part of ourselves” insofar as situations solicit action from us on the basis of our forming a unit with the tool. The “I can” as a lived connection to the world is structured by our coupling with a tool. So far so good. I would agree here with Chemero that the minimal sense of self we encounter in our daily lives includes the body schema as a structural component that I am pre-reflectively aware of insofar as we encounter ourselves as solicited by situations to act according to the habits and capacities

we have accrued. When these capacities include the use of tools, then it does seem as though they become “part of ourselves” at this level.

However, in drawing a parallel from this sort of sensorimotor empathy to the case of investigating a tomato or a sponge, Chemero seems to confuse this sense of mineness with the relation we have to the things we investigate, perhaps from the position of an embodied self that includes the tool. He argues that the same sort of sensorimotor empathy which characterizes my relation to the tools I take up into the body schema is necessary for our investigation of things. We need to “feel into them” in the same way because from a certain objective perspective, we form “synergies” with things that we investigate as well as the tools we use for investigation.

When we take the experience of selfhood into account however, we see an obvious difference between the two sorts of relationships – Chemero runs together two senses of self-identity. First, there is the stronger identity that we experientially encounter as a sense of mineness. This includes a sense of ownership over our bodies and the artificial appendages we appropriate. Second, there is the identity-within-difference which subtends and makes possible the relation of a self to a thing. As we saw with Merleau-Ponty, it was necessary that I am in some sense the same as the things I investigate in order to be sensitive to them. In Chemero’s language, it is because I am a malleable body that I can interact with other malleable bodies and form a synergy with them. However, this is not the same as saying that these things are “a part of me” in the way we might talk about a cane being a part of my perceptual habit body. Rather, they are “a part of me” insofar as we are both a part of the same sensible world – we both participate in establishing a meaningful perspective on the world. It is through my

relation to them as the same that I can accomplish my minimal perspective as a realization of difference – that is, encounter myself as an investigating subject which investigates objects.

However, such a realization of difference is not a part of my experience of tools as such. Rather, in coupling with a tool I establish a unity between me and the tool in opposition to a space that we are both different from in the realization of an embodied self-position that opens onto a world. In the coupling example, it is me and the tool as a synergy that are addressed by a soliciting affordance of the world. In the case of investigating the tomato, it is a synergy between me and it which subtends and allows for my embodied perspective on the tomato.

A similar objection can be made concerning the cooperative task that Chemero describes. Here I experience myself as a member of a team in completing a simulated sheep herding task. The synergy I form with my teammate through sustained interaction allows me to see opportunities for action in the world that I cannot see on my own. I jointly attend to the task at hand of keeping the simulated sheep in the center of the table and realize my ability to do this through coupling with my teammate. Over time we establish a successful strategy, a joint action that we could not accomplish on our own. It is from the perspective of a team member then, that the task at hand solicits action from me. I experience myself as being “membered” in this way. Again, this is different from the relation of me to the object to which I am attending. Coupling myself with another person allows me to encounter the world differently than I could by myself. But I still attend to a world that is on the other side of the perceptual relation.

This team-member position is itself subtended by an identity-within-difference between me and the world that I confront. My sense of myself as a body with artificial appendages or as a member of a team depend on a world of instituted meaning that allows me to take up a position on it which I am not responsible for creating. I am able to realize a meaningful position from which to act, only on the basis of a position that the world holds open for me. Only insofar as the world allows me to encounter myself as different from it, is the world I confront “a part of me.” It is thus in diverging from the world that I realize my selfhood as a perspective – that I become an expressive witness to a relation that preceded any lived sense of “me” in my very experience of myself as myself.

Enactivism and The Problem of Meaning

In this way, we can supply enactivist accounts like Chemero’s with a response to the problem of meaning we discussed in the Introduction. We will do this by noticing the various senses of self that show up in embodied experience and the internal relations that hold between them. When it comes to solving the problem of meaning, the self seems like a useful concept for supplying an answer. As we discussed in the Introduction, on enactivist accounts, it is not because I cast meaning out into the world on the basis of a cognitive operation that the world appears meaningful to me. I do not judge the world to be meaningful. Rather, the world already shows up as meaningful because I encounter a world which refers to me. I encounter a world of affordances or solicitations that appear on the basis of my capacities for action in the service of my own ends.

What this dissertation has uncovered is that the self is already the realization of a meaningful relation in the world which subtends it – an identity which allows for

difference. The self does not construct meaning on its own. Rather, it is already, in its minimal appearance, a realization of a relationship between a body and a world that pre-exists it. In perception, I realize the potential of a position, pregnant with possible meaning. The world holds this position open for me and allows me to take it up. I do this by diverging from the world and realizing the possibility of a perspective on it – which was a possibility I did not create but realized. I do this through action that is expressive of my relations with the world and with the others I live alongside. These relations hold open the possibility of being more than a minimal perspective. They are what allow me to be a person by soliciting me to act as a member of a team or a member of a family and to realize the possibilities for perception and action that teams and families hold open. Practices established in this intersubjective world are what allow me to take a perspective on myself – realizing a possibility that is held open by the instituted practice of self-reflection that itself belongs to the world.

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