

# Strategies of Remembrance



Strategies of Remembrance:  
From Pindar to Hölderlin

Edited by

Lucie Doležalová

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**P U B L I S H I N G**

Strategies of Remembrance: From Pindar to Hölderlin, Edited by Lucie Doležalová

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# Contents

Acknowledgements . . . . .	vii
Preface . . . . .	ix
1 TAMÁS VISI Memory and Immortality (Introduction) . . . . .	1
2 IVAN M. HAVEL What Kind of Episodes are Stored in Episodic Memory? On the Concept of Memory in Cognitive Science . . . . .	7
3 PETER AGÓCS Memory and Forgetting in Pindar's Seventh <i>Isthmian</i> . . . . .	33
4 LENKA KARFÍKOVÁ Memory and Language. Augustine's Analysis of Memory in Con- fessions X . . . . .	93
5 SYLVAIN PIRON Heloise's Literary Self-fashioning and the <i>Epistolae duorum aman- tium</i> . . . . .	103
6 MICHAEL W. HERREN Constructing the Memory of Alexander in the Early Eighth Century	163
7 RAFAŁ WÓJCIK <i>Populus meus captivus ductus est</i> : On the Polish Franciscan's Mnemonic Treatise from the Fifteenth Century . . . . .	175
8 ZSUZSANNA KISÉRY Raising the Dead to Raise the Money for the Living . . . . .	185

9	REGINA KOYCHEVA	
	Reminding and Remembering: Two Concepts of Memory in the Ninth-century Bulgarian Hymnography of Repentance . . . . .	201
10	CSABA NÉMETH	
	<i>Memorem quidem se esse, sed exprimere nullo modo posse quod viderat</i> : Hugh of St. Victor and the Recollections of a Medieval Sui- cide . . . . .	209
11	GERHARD JARITZ	
	The Memory of Late Medieval Thieves . . . . .	225
12	MICHAL AJVAZ	
	Hölderlin on Memory . . . . .	233
13	List of Contributors . . . . .	241
	Index . . . . .	245

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## Preface

At the beginning there was my research project on medieval reception of *Summarium Biblie*, a curious biblical mnemonic aid condensed so extremely that it does not seem to make sense at first sight. I was curious about the relationship between remembering and understanding, correspondence between strategies of storing and successfully retrieving information, and about the working of human memory as such. Organising two workshops on the subject clearly showed that the field is vast and complex.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the present book does not claim to be exhaustive in any way. It has a simple aim: to show the variety of approaches of different disciplines of the humanities to memory. The articles included are very varied in their scope, methodology, and research questions but that should hopefully encourage and inspire rather than confuse the reader. It has been our experience at the Center for Theoretical Study that getting an insight into perspectives and approaches of other disciplines may be very enriching. At the same time, the selection is, of course, limited and might seem random—like the contents of anyone’s memory, after all. If this volume succeeds in initiating further scholarly discourse and studies on this charming and mysterious topic, it has fulfilled its task.

*Lucie Doležalová*

1 Another collective monograph that I edited on the topic, *The Making of Memory in the Middle Ages*, is to appear with Brill this year.



# 1 Memory and Immortality (Introduction)

TAMÁS VÍSI (*Olomouc*)

Memory has become the elusive object of many academic discourses. The term itself becomes less and less definable when its usages are compared in different contexts. Human knowledge is more and more specialized today; there are many different branches of it that point to “memory” as their explicit object. Consequently, memory is treated in specialized scholarly discourses as varied as neurobiology and classical philology and this fact makes one doubt whether a consistent definition can be maintained throughout the diverse discourses or whether one should be content with a rather vague, almost empty understanding of what memory is in general.

Nonetheless, we are reluctant to give up the idea of a unified human knowledge, perhaps due to the cultural memory of the once powerful intellectual systems of Western civilization that attempted to explain everything within their specific theoretical frameworks, or, perhaps, because of our theoretical instincts which still require us to believe that all branches of knowledge must be compatible with each other if they are indeed entitled to be labeled as “knowledge.” In any case, the stubborn belief in the possibility of universal and not just specified knowledge cries for an approach that is termed “trans-disciplinary.”

This book offers such an approach to the subject of memory. The reader will encounter a panoramic view that attempts to embrace a number of different domains in which memory is discussed with a special emphasis on medieval studies.

Ivan M. Havel’s contribution investigates memory from the perspective of cognitive science. After highlighting a crucial distinction between semantic memory (which is responsible for storing knowledge such as linguistic competence), and episodic memory (responsible for retaining impressions of past experiences), Havel analyzes the latter in detail. The arguments lead him to propose yet another type of memory which functions through the combination of semantic and episodic memories. This third type—Havel’s “hybrid memory”—operates, for example, when we relate an episode of our past. When such an episode is related we obviously use skills that are depen-

dent on semantic memory: first and foremost, we use a language; moreover, our performance will be colored by techniques of narration that may have been learned from an oral tradition of story-telling or even from literature. These latter categories have been described as figures of “collective memory” or “cultural memory” by Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann respectively. Thus, Havel’s “hybrid memory” turns out to be a place where collective memory intersects with individual memory: linguistic and narrative competences stored in semantic memory are combined with our recollection of past experiences stored in episodic memory.

Peter Agócs begins his discussion with Maurice Halbwachs’ notion of memory as a social product. Individual memory is dependent on a network of external supports that is defined, maintained, and restructured by society and that regulates and limits the capacities of individual memory. What is filtered out by these structures will be forgotten. Thus, it would seem that individual memory is completely dependent on collective memory.

However, this image is one-sided. Through a meticulous study of Pindar’s Seventh Isthmian Ode, Agócs arrives at the conclusion that Pindar was an “artificer of memory” who had an understanding of how the mechanisms of remembering worked in his society and who had some limited means to manipulate these processes. Some individuals in archaic Greece, Pindar among them, understood that remembering and forgetting were dependent not only on the intrinsic values of the “memorable” things but also on the channels transmitting the information from generation to generation. These individuals did their best to exploit the structures of collective remembering for their own purposes and sometimes they even attempted to recreate the fabric of collective memory and thus to gain power over what was to be remembered by future generations.

In this way Agócs’ contribution shows that collective memory may become *problematic*: its structures can be challenged and changed; the memories it transmits can be reinterpreted in many different ways, thus opening a field of conflicts, a field of undecided questions, a field of uncertainties and a field of contest over memories. This situation makes it possible for an individual to act as an “artificer of memory”: to make decisions, to favor certain options at the cost of other ones; to perpetuate the memories of certain things and to condemn other ones to oblivion.

Michal Ajvaz discusses a similar topic in an analysis of Hölderlin’s ideas about memory. Hölderlin saw times of crisis, times of the decline of a “homeland”—be it a country, an empire, a society or a culture—as specific moments for recreating memory: the crisis dissolves the social bounds that regulate collective memory, thus liberating the poet to experiment with new ways of remembering.

Michael W. Herren's contribution describes in detail how the mechanisms mentioned above carried out the work of remembering in a particular case. His study on the memory of Alexander the Great in the early Middle Ages evidences the surprising degree of creativity with which the faded memory of a once powerful empire was kept alive and absorbed to serve goals which Alexander himself could never have dreamed about. The "decline of the homeland," in this case, the imperial culture of the Hellenistic period, indeed made it possible to create new ways of remembering.

On the other hand, an individual's memories may be no less problematic than those of a community. A paradigmatic case is Augustine's *Confessions*: a monumental meditation on the meaning of several memories that are partly reconstructed from the narrator's past life and partly from the books he read or doctrines he learnt. These meditations led Augustine to speak about the paradoxes of memory and forgetting as comparable to the paradoxical presence of God in the soul. Although Augustine's approach might appear to be highly individualistic, he actually comes close to positing memory as a common background of human understanding without which language could not possibly function, since words would not be understood unless they evoked similar memories in different individuals. Karfíková's paper is devoted to the analysis of these intricate relations between individual and community, language and meaning, human experiences and divine perspectives in Augustine's meditations about memory.

In Sylvain Piron's article almost all of the topics mentioned so far are woven together into a new argument. Piron identifies a theory of love that emerged during the twelfth century as a distinct cultural memory of late antique ideals. However, it was by no means a continuously transmitted piece of information from Late Antiquity to the High Middle Ages. It was rather the result of "creative remembering": pieces of texts and traditions dissolved from the contexts in which they originated were put together by Heloise into a new composition. From this point of view, Heloise was no less an "artificer of memory" than Pindar. Moreover, Heloise's "theory of love" in itself was something that concerned "semantic memory." Nonetheless, since Heloise applied it to her own relationship with Abelard it concerned her "episodic memory" as well. Thus, we arrive again at Havel's "hybrid memory" as a theoretical construction that can have explanatory force in analyzing medieval texts.

A similar microscopic analysis is carried out in Zsuzsanna Kiséry's study on the use and abuse of the memory of a recently deceased cardinal at the synod of Constance in 1417. Here we can observe the intricate mechanisms of what Assmann calls "communicative memory." It was already at the funeral of the deceased cardinal, Francesco Zarabella, that his memory started

to be exploited for the sake of political propaganda within the context of the controversies surrounding the synod of Constance. Italian humanists tried to manipulate the collective memory of Zarabella's public activities in order to justify their own agendas. The cardinal was "raised from the dead" again and again to talk to the living through the mouths of Poggio Bracciolini and Pier Paolo Vergerio, each serving as the "medium" of the dead cardinal and each delivering different messages in his name. At the same time, Kiséry also shows that the speeches delivered and letters written about Zarabella followed classical patterns absorbed according to the humanists' taste. In addition to serving temporal political purposes, these texts perpetuated the memory of the deceased cardinal. Thus, we can here identify a transition from communicative to cultural memory.

Raising the dead is a leitmotif not only for Kiséry but for Agócs, Herren, Ajvaz, and Piron as well, although differently in each case. Archaic Greece was a common world for the living and the dead, as Agócs points out. Herren demonstrates that the memory of the great conqueror, Alexander the Great was still compelling for people living centuries after him under very different circumstances. Ajvaz argues that Hölderlin, in speaking about the powers that bring about memory, describes "a life which contains death as a part of itself also". According to Piron, literary memories of ancient lovers provided Heloise with models to fashion her own love. What is this power of the dead over the living that is manifested in remembering?

This issue can be approached through the contributions of Koycheva and Németh. Old Slavonic chants for funeral services confronted the believers with the Church's doctrine of afterlife and redemption. Constantine of Preslav, a ninth-century Bulgarian hymnographer, describes the dreadful experience awaiting the dead after passing away and before encountering judgment. The widespread topos of *memento mori* is put into the service of propagating the teaching of the Church and also bringing about a spiritual awakening in the souls of the audience. The memory of one's future death—an apparently paradoxical concept—emerges in a cooperation between semantic memory (knowledge of the fact that human beings are not immortal, which is often encoded into mythic stories such as Adam and Eve's fall) and episodic memory (memories of dreadful experiences that are associated with death).

Németh's article takes the reader into the labyrinth of Medieval Latin theology. Németh shows how a report about a suicide who returned from death was absorbed into Hugh of St. Victor's theological anthropology of vision. What the resurrected man saw when his soul departed from the body defies human language and any comparison with what we can see in this life. Put in Havel's terminology, the link between semantic and episodic memory is missing here: the suicide knows what he saw, that is to say, he has a semantic

memory of it, but yet he cannot connect it to any experiences of his life in this world stored in his episodic memory. Hugh of St. Victor the theologian can easily explain what the suicide saw and why he saw it in that way. In other words, the theologian can absorb the suicide's extraordinary memory into his *semantic* memory and also into the *cultural* memory of the intellectual community of early scholasticism. However, Hugh of St. Victor could by no means enable his audience to imagine the after-life experiences. The connection to episodic memory could not be repaired in theological discourse.

Remembering death brings memory to its limits. We can imagine things that we have never experienced on the basis of reports about them and on the basis of some of our own experiences that resemble the reported ones. We can remember an imagined experience in absence of a real one. Thus, we can form a "memory" of the never-experienced. It can be stored in episodic memory while its sense can be retained in semantic memory and the two aspects may be combined in hybrid memory. By remembering imagined episodes, memory can therefore extend the scope of our experiences far beyond the core of first-hand experiences. But how far can this extension go?

In any case we can identify the domain of those experiences that are at the limit of human memory. In such limit-experiences the usual synergy between the faculties that cooperate in remembering is disturbed: we "remember" what we have never experienced. We can store in our *semantic* memory certain facts, such as the fact that we are not immortal, or that our fate is in the hands of spiritual powers, or that our civilization may bring about an ecological catastrophe. We might be *commanded* to recollect such memories: to remember death, to remember God, or to remember global warming. However, we lack the "flesh" of the experiences in our *episodic* memories, since we have not died so far and we have not directly seen God and other spiritual beings, nor can we foresee the exact consequences of global warming with precision. Imagination can attempt to make up what is missing; we can try to depict an angel following the report of the suicide in Hugh's text, or the state of the soul after death on the basis of Constantine of Preslav's poetic description, or the possible scenarios of an ecological catastrophe on the basis of Hollywood movies.

A possible reaction to such memories is to surrender to the authority of those who claim to have accessed such experiences and to having the right to tell us how to remember what we have never experienced. An obvious motivation for such surrender is the difficulty of proposing an alternative account of the never-experienced. One may doubt Constantine of Preslav's account of the soul's state after death, but it is much more difficult to offer a more believable alternative to it. For most people it is more convenient to subscribe to the consensus of society concerning such questions than to

begin experimenting with innovative approaches. Thus, the memory of the never-experienced can be a channel through which a society enforces its system of values: for example, when Constantine of Preslav makes his audience remember death, he also encodes an overtly Christian perspective on death and life into the prescribed memory of death. In this way memory may *force* the human mind to adopt certain perspectives, values, or beliefs.

On the other hand, memory can be the *result* of force. Gerhard Jaritz's study presents an overview of the memories of arrested criminals that were often acquired through torture. The minute catalogues of stolen objects in the confessions of late medieval thieves were certainly formed according to the requirements of the authorities. In these cases the individuals were forced to mold their memories according to the patterns prescribed by the society. Thus, Jaritz argues, these lists tell more about the memory culture of the society than about the individual "performances" of the criminals. Jaritz identifies a specific form of cultural memory in the context of everyday life. This "art" of memory was not designed to memorize myths, saints, heroes, texts, theological or philosophical ideas, or religious rites but to employ memory in the service of administrating everyday life.

Individual memory can be disciplined in less violent ways as well. In fact, memory was *a* discipline, an "art" for learned medieval clerics. Rafał Wójcik's contribution describes how late medieval Observant Franciscans taught their students at the University of Cracow and other institutes to improve their mnemonic performances by adapting a medieval version of the classical art of memory. Although Wójcik's study, just as the other contributions, concerns the relationship between individual and collective forms of memory, here the focus is shifted from the content to be remembered to the methods of remembering. The medieval "art of memory" can be interpreted as a special kind of cultural memory which had responsibility for molding the mnemotechniques of individuals and then transmitting this knowledge from generation to generation.

In sum, this volume will confront the reader with various, in fact, diverse accounts of human remembering. However, in spite of the diversity a number of themes reappear quite consistently in each paper. Semantic versus episodic memory; individual versus collective focus; cultural memory with its designed and explicit channels of transmission versus communicative memory with its spontaneous and rhizomatic routes of transferring information about the past and negotiating its sense are the main signposts that guide us today in the study of human memory. We hope that the studies published here will give insights into this difficult but important topic.

## 2 What Kind of Episodes are Stored in Episodic Memory? On the Concept of Memory in Cognitive Science

IVAN M. HAVEL (*PRAGUE*)

Our memory is our cohesiveness, our reason, our activity, our feeling.  
Without memory we are nothing.

---

Luis Buñuel

### Introduction

Contemporary cognitive science has evolved as a transdisciplinary endeavor combining knowledge from various diverse fields, including psychology, brain sciences, computer science and artificial intelligence, system sciences and cybernetics, linguistics, and philosophy. Recent extensive achievements of lived brain scanning, artificial models of neural networks, and last but not least, the recent turn in philosophy towards phenomenology and consciousness studies<sup>1</sup> brought forth quite a few new ideas penetrating through most of the mentioned disciplines. Besides that, also some long-standing fundamental concepts appear in a new shape. Among them, the concept of memory is the most pervading and most relevant.

The principal use of the term memory relates to human individual memory—part of our daily experience of keeping in mind various facts, general as well as concrete ones, and being able to recall our past experiences. However, the term has found many other uses, originally figurative but gradually

1 From the vast literature in this area, let me just mention two journals: *Journal of Consciousness Studies* (Imprint Academic) and *Phenomenology and Cognitive Science* (Springer).

becoming a technical term in various areas where they are now used as if in the literal sense. It is used this way not only in cognitive science proper, but also in historiography, cultural studies, evolutionary biology, genetics, and even geology. And of course, in computer science. There, interestingly, the term “memory” was first metaphorically transferred from humans to computers, and later, when computers and computing processes became better known, the term was taken back from computer jargon to language on human thought processes.

In this essay I will discuss several ideas related to memory, especially to so called episodic memory, and especially the episodic memory as it is perceived in the first-person, subjective perspective. My primary concern is the multimodal structure of episodic situations that memories are about. I will introduce two new related concepts, that of “hybrid memory” as a hypothesized intermediary between semantic and episodic memory, and of “panorama of life” capturing the idea of the aggregate of all episodic situations that are, or may be the contents of the episodic memory of a concrete person.<sup>2</sup>

This essay may serve two purposes, first, to acquaint a wider audience, including historians (the anticipated readers of the present volume), with several key ideas pertaining to human episodic memory, and second, to propose at least tentatively some new concepts that are often implicitly conceived but hardly adequately thematized.

## The Psychological and Phenomenal Concepts of Episodic Memory

Psychologists and cognitive scientists distinguish several types of memory systems. First, there is *working memory* needed for complex cognitive tasks during the time they are performed. There is a lack of conceptual unity among theoreticians about working memory and its identification with the (somewhat older) concept of short-term memory, the various conceptions being mostly dependent on the concern with, and preference of, issues related to different cognitive skills like learning, reading, comprehension, rea-

2 The research was sponsored by the Research Program CTS MSM 021620845. Parts of this paper are based on my previous article in Czech: “Prožívání epizodických situací,” (Experience of Episodic Situations), in: *Mysel, inteligencia a život* (Mind, Intelligence, and Life), ed. V. Kvasnička et al. (Bratislava: STU, 2007), 27-70.

soning, and retrieval of old material from long-term memory.<sup>3</sup> This retrieval is, for our purposes, the most relevant function of working memory; it is enough to emphasize just two of its aspects, namely its limited scope and accessibility to consciousness.

Among long-term memory systems, so-called *procedural memory* is considered to be that which stores various skills and behavioral patterns, not very distinct from those performed also by non-human animals. We shall not be concerned with procedural memory here.

Distinct from procedural memory, *declarative memory* (also called *explicit* memory) is the aspect of human memory that relates to facts. It is called “declarative” since it refers to memories that can be consciously discussed and possibly declared as true or likely true. It applies to standard textbook learning and knowledge, as well as memories that can be “travelled back to” in one’s “mind’s eye.” Declarative memory depends on the integrity of the medial temporal lobe<sup>4</sup> and is subject to forgetting, even if frequently-accessed memories can last indefinitely.

Declarative memory is further divided to semantic and episodic memory. This distinction was originally made by the well-known psychologist, Endel Tulving<sup>5</sup> and has become quite common in psychology, neuropsychology, and cognitive science.

*Semantic memory* deals with general or “encyclopedic” knowledge of objects, concepts, words with their meanings, and facts, without being connected to any particular time or place. Even if the scope of semantic memory depends on the individual’s experience, its core is shared among individuals in a given culture.

Unlike semantic memory, *episodic memory* (also called *autobiographic memory*) enables storing and recalling events that were actually lived through and experienced by a person. Thus it is not only specific to times and places, but also to the individual. According to Tulving,<sup>6</sup>

Episodic memory is a recently evolved, late-developing, and early-deteriorating past-oriented memory system, more vulnerable than other memory systems to neuronal dysfunction, and probably unique to humans. It makes possible mental time travel through subjective time, from the present to the past,

3 Cf. A. Baddeley, “Working Memory,” *Science* 255 (1992): 256-259.

4 Larry R. Squire et al., “Recognition Memory and the Medial Temporal Lobe: A New Perspective,” *Nature Review Neuroscience* 8 (2007): 872-883.

5 Endel Tulving, “Episodic and Semantic Memory,” in *Organization of Memory*, ed. E. Tulving and W. Donaldson (New York: Academic, 1972), 381-403.

6 Endel Tulving, “Episodic Memory: From Mind to Brain,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 53 (2002): 1-25.

thus allowing one to re-experience, through autooetic awareness, one's own previous experiences. [...] Episodic memory is subserved by a widely distributed network of cortical and subcortical brain regions that overlaps with but also extends beyond the networks subserving other memory systems. The essence of episodic memory lies in the conjunction of three concepts—self, autooetic awareness, and subjectively sensed time.

Owing to episodic memory you can recall a concrete situation or event from your past life. It may be, for instance, an event from your childhood, a party, the wedding ceremony, your yesterday's search for a lost key. We shall call any such event, in general, an *episode* of life. When we later recall such an episode, whether vividly or not, we in fact do not *repeat* our original living through it; our present experience is an experience of something else: an experience of *recollection* of the past episode.

Note that in the above quotation from Tulving the brain scientific discourse is somewhat carelessly mixed with a subjective mental discourse. This is typical for neuropsychological analyses and it is advisable always to keep this fact in mind. For instance, some authors mention "preservation of some sort of place keeping and time tagging" as a central characteristic of episodic processing.<sup>7</sup> In my view, however, there is no a priori temporal coordinate that would make such a "time tagging" objective. We may, and often do, forget any temporal assessment of concrete episodes of our life—even if we may remember them very well. In spite of that, we feel that such an assessment makes sense in principle and hence we intuitively apprehend the past episodes of our lives as if they were, so to speak, spread over a certain timeline.

Our next observation applies to the individual structure of a typical episode, above all to its inner temporal order. An episode can have a smaller or larger extension over time and a certain narrative content. Normally the existence of the narrative content is characteristic: think, for instance that you are meeting with a friend, have a lecture, write a letter, enjoy a view of the ocean surf. Such episodes comprise many additional features: spatial extension, scene, other participating persons, things, processes, events, and last but not least yourself—your body and your mental states.

Both duration and spatial extension of an episode are not unlimited, even if there are no sharp boundaries of its internal, episodic time and space. They do not surpass the *subject-related horizon* of the episode: the position of the subject, his range of perception and action, his interests and intentions, and,

7 Cf., e.g., K. Pribram, *Brain and Perception: Holonomy and Structure in Figura Processing* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991), 262.

in general, his sense of significance of things and events pertaining to the episode.

Think about one's presently lived actual episode. From its perspective one can experience other, non-actual episodes *indirectly*, through intentional recollection or imagination. They are beyond the horizon of the present episode. Thus if one recalls, say, a past episode of one's life not just by reference but by re-experiencing it, one lives, so to speak, in two times (albeit in different modes): you live in the virtual replayed time of the episode that you are recalling and concurrently you live in the time of the present episode in which you carry out the recalling. In fact, there is also a third time, the seldom-reflected background time of the autobiographic panorama which links together all episodes of your entire life.

It is worth noting that the distinction between episodic and semantic memory is supported by recent brain studies. For instance certain pathologies may help to reveal a neural basis for episodic memory:<sup>8</sup>

In patients with damage of temporal lobe cortex, years and even decades of autobiographical memory can be expunged irrevocably. [...] The patient inhabits a permanent present, unable to remember what happened a minute ago or 20 years ago.

Without semantic memory we are animals, without episodic memory we are nothing. Well-known neurologist, Oliver Sacks reports on his patient with Korsakov's syndrom:<sup>9</sup>

[He was] continually creating a world and self, to replace what was continually being forgotten and lost. Such a frenzy may call forth quite brilliant powers of invention and fancy—a veritable confabulatory genius—for such a patient *must literally make himself (and his world) up every moment*. We have, each of us, a life-story, an inner narrative—whose continuity, whose sense, is our lives. It might be said that each of us constructs and lives, a “narrative,” and that this narrative is us, our identities.

## Multimodal Structure of Episodic Experience

Considering *episodes* or *episodic situations* as the characteristic content of episodic memory—i.e., the *memories* of a person—brings us to ponder in

8 A. R. Damasio, “Remembering When,” *Scientific American* (Sept. 2002): 48-55, quote p. 51.

9 Oliver Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* (London: Pan Books, 1985), 105.

more detail over certain, more or less general, structural properties of episodic experience.<sup>10</sup>

*Episodic situations* (hereafter shortly *episodes*) are considered to be the basic elements of human lived experience.<sup>11</sup> As indicated above, each episode is inherently associated with a person who lives it through (hereafter to be called the subject of the episode). For the subject the episode is a unitary, complete piece of his or her own experience, with a distinctive meaning and as such worthy to be remembered, verbalized, reflected upon, and possibly narrated in the first-person singular. Every episode has a certain temporal and spatial architecture, its own micro-world, and it can be distinguished from other episodes or from the undifferentiated background. The temporal extension (duration) of an episode is typically short, but may also be moderately long; note that one larger episode may often be segmented into partial episodes that can be thematized (recalled, narrated) separately. A characteristic general feature of episodes is that they have no leaps in time, space, or flow of events.

When discussing episodic situations, two views can be distinguished: one view prefers the *first-person perspective*, i.e., a subjective phenomenal account of experience. The other view relies on the *third-person perspective*, i.e., on an objectified description of the episode behind such experience.<sup>12</sup> The former view is like from the eyes (and mind) of the experiencing subject, the latter prefers the detached view “from nowhere” and is typical for scientifically-minded observers. Note, however, that in our context both views are concerned with the episodic situation as it appears *to someone* (namely to the experiencing subject). In the former case we treat the episode as if it were experienced by *us* (more properly said, by *me*), with a privileged access even to our inner feelings and attitudes. On the other hand, in the case of third-person perspective, there is an assumed “someone,” the central character of the situation, who may be referred to in the third person singular pronoun *he* (or *she*). Neither of these two perspectives can be achieved in its “pure” form—if we choose one, the other always interferes.

Perhaps an illustrative example will be useful. It happens to be an episode from my own real life:

10 The topic discussed in this chapter will be elaborated in more detail in my book in progress, *Experience of Episodic Situations* (tentative title).

11 Note that the English word “experience” is somewhat ambiguous: it may be a one-shot *lived* experience (*Erlebnis* in German), as well as *life-long* experience (*Erfahrung*). Here I mostly use the word in the first sense and more or less synonymically with the term “conscious experience.”

12 Both terms are widely used in current literature as intentional allusions to linguistic forms.

I stand above the cliffs of the North Californian coast watching in awe for a long time—at least an hour—as the raging waves of the Pacific repeatedly launch unrelenting assaults upon the massive rocky cliffs, and how after each foaming failure, they bestir themselves to yet another attack from a different angle.

I remember quite well the episode even now (it happened in 1990). I even remember my impressions, “what it was like” to perceive and enjoy the drama happening down the cliffs. Hence it seems more than appropriate to take up the first-person perspective. However, I have no way to describe my impressions to others and make them public in any way without at least partially converting them into a kind of third-person accessible narrative.

In fact, episodic situations are often presented in a third-person language as if it were somebody else’s experience or viewed as if “from nowhere.” This can be typically found in literary fiction, where it is on the reader whether to perceive a given situation as if in the shoes of the central character (or a chosen one). Consider, for instance, the following episode from the novel *Ignorance* by Milan Kundera:<sup>13</sup>

On the facing bench she saw a man and, after a few moments of uncertainty and surprise, she recognized him. In excitement she waited till their glances met, and then she smiled. He smiled back and nodded slightly. She rose and crossed to him as he rose in turn.

“Did we know each other in Prague?” she said in Czech. “Do you still remember me?”

We can easily notice several structural features shared by both sample episodes, even if some of them may not be explicitly mentioned in the narratives. Some of the features appear to be sufficiently universal to be pinpointed as internal characteristics of all episodic situations. First, we may easily detect the *temporal* character of the episode (watching a long time; after a few moments before recognition, waiting for a glance) as well as its *spatial* character (above the cliffs; the space to be crossed to the facing bench). The space is not empty, there may be objects of various kinds making up the *scene* and its structure (rocky basin of cliffs, different angle; the facing bench). Further, we can guess a certain line of the story, a hint of a *plot* (unrelenting assaults, yet another attack; recognition of an old acquaintance). This involves a *sense of efficacy*, i.e., something bringing about something else (raging waves—foaming failure), and, in particular, the *sense of agency* of the subject, i.e., the authorship of one’s own actions (she smiled, she rose and crossed to him).

13 Milan Kundera, *Ignorance*, trans. L. Asher (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 46.

I already mentioned the role of the subject, or central character, of the episode (myself in the first episode, “she” in the second—her name in the novel is Irena). Germane to such a subject is the *sense of selfhood*—awareness of one’s own presence and involvement in the episode; and the *sense of own body*—the awareness of one’s own bodily abilities. In the second example, there are two persons involved: the protagonist (chosen by us to be Irena) and her surmised old acquaintance. The plot of the episode is based on a gradual change of her attitude towards him, which implicitly presupposes a certain degree of empathy—anticipating his reactions and understanding them properly. This relates to the *sense of otherness* on the side of the subject. Obviously, there could be more persons present, so we may further consider also a *sense of sociality* (including communication, language, cultural habits, etc.).

To sum up, we may posit (at least) ten basic *modalities of episodic experience* (shortly *modalities*). Methodologically, the positing of various experiential modalities, and discriminating between them is intended to serve certain heuristic purposes—it is a cognitive guide in theoretical investigation of various patterns of subjective experience of episodic situations. Moreover, it offers a certain unifying conceptual framework for various disciplines pertaining to the study of human natural experience. However, one should keep in mind two things: first, that some of the modalities are interest-relative, and second, that discussing them separately may obscure their mutual interdependence (I will return to this point at the end of this article).

Whether described in the first-person or third-person perspective, the relatedness of the modalities to the subject of the episode is essential. In fact, we may view them as certain facets of subjective awareness of the episode and correspondingly I will treat each of the modalities as a *sense of something*, namely of a certain feature of episode, where the feature in question is more or less open to objective conceptualization. The purposeful hint to modalities of perception (different sensory faculties) is intuitively appropriate. Let us discuss the modalities separately.

**Sense of time (and of duration).** Time is the universal condition of consciousness and thus temporality is the most important experiential modality of episodic situations. The conventional third-person conception of time is based on the idea of an absolute universal objective time line that is homogeneous, infinite, continuous, and linearly ordered. On the other hand, we experience time subjectively as a flow of events from the future through the present towards the past. This endows even the shortest episodes with a polarity, and also yields the intuitive difference between nonexistent only

remembered past, the existent present, and nonexistent only anticipated future. In real life, when reflecting upon the temporal character of episodes, we actually use both views, the objective and the subjective one, in parallel; or to say it more precisely, in the background of our knowledge we are always aware of how to transit from one view to the other, or even better, how to oscillate between them.

**Sense of space (and of room for something).** The second most universal modality of experience is the sense of spatiality. Lived events and episodes take place not only in time but also in space. The spatial extension of an episodic situation is circumscribed by whatever the subject of the episode can perceive, access or affect. Similarly as in the case of time, experience of spatiality can be reflected under the first-person as well as the third-person perspective. However, unlike as in time, there is the characteristic freedom in space: except for special cases, the subject can willingly move around, possibly returning to the original position. Of course, moving and returning are unthinkable without time, but this should not discourage us from reflecting on time and space separately, as two different modalities of experience. In the third-person perspective we commonly resort to the idea of an objective three-dimensional space, open to measurements, transformations, and drawing maps; each object has its own concrete location, size, and shape. However, the first-person experiential account suggests a rather different concept of space. We, human beings, are free intentional agents, able to affect happenings in the environment. Thus for us the surrounding space is first of all a *room to act*. There are various kinds of human space-related action, like assuming a position, walking, occupying a place, moving objects, searching, approaching people, playing around, dwelling, and so forth. This concept of space as a room to act, incidentally, leads to a distinction of (at least) two types of episodic horizon: the typically more distant horizon of perception and the nearer horizon of action.

**Sense of scene.** The space (or room) associated with natural episodic situations is hard to imagine empty; the episode has its *scene*, filled up with things, or *stage*, where events may happen. Thus the sense of scene and of the layout of things is closely related to, and dependent on, the sense of spatiality. The term “scene” should stress more static relations (the dynamical aspects, making up the “plot” of the episode, will be discussed next). Accordingly, the term “layout” involves perceived positions and positional relations of things—especially those things that in one way or another are relevant or significant for the subject. Needless to say, for the experience of a scene and

its layout the visual (and partly tactile) perception is the most crucial among the cognitive capacities of the experiencing subject. Of course, the subject of a sufficiently complex scene may not consciously perceive the scene as a whole; he may be only implicitly or marginally aware of some its parts, knowing that he could, by suitable shifts of attention or by moving around, bring them into his actual awareness.

**Sense of plot.** As a modality of experience the sense of plot might be viewed as a counterpart to the sense of scene. The latter is more related to the static layout of things while the former to the dynamic flow of events. A non-trivial episodic situation would not be “episodic” if there were not a plot. (In this study I am using the term “plot” in a rather broad sense, broader than it is used in literary studies). Given an episodic situation, the plot associated with it should be understood as comprising everything significant for the subject that *happens* within the scope of the situation. Moreover, the above claim that the plot comprises everything does not mean that it is a heterogeneous collection of movements, changes, events, and perhaps even of several parallel component plots. As mentioned above, one of the characteristic features of episodic situations is their compliancy with the well-known classical rule of the unity of time, space, and action. In fact, instead of “action” I could quite appropriately say “plot.” Thus everything what happens in a situation from the point of view of the subject (i.e., at least marginally significant for him) is entangled, as it were, into a bundle of mutually related events. On the subjective side, the plot may be sensed with various intensities according to the degree of its significance for the subject and/or according to the degree of involvement of the subject in the affairs. In the latter case, the most basic degree corresponds to the subject’s passive and neutral awareness of what is happening around, how various objects change, move and mutually interact without interference of the experiencing subject. On the other side of the scale, the subject–protagonist is in a certain way deeply *engaged* in the plot (recall our example of Irena meeting a friend). There are, moreover, various kinds of engagement, ranging from having the plot entirely under one’s own active control up to the subject’s private thoughts and emotions merely induced by certain events. (In fact, we can alternatively think of the *sense of engagement* as of an additional modality of experience.)

**Sense of efficacy.** This modality is a constituting element of the experience of plots. If temporality and spatiality provide episodic situations with a certain breadth, efficacy endows them with inner dynamics. Here the term “efficacy” is used in a rather broad sense of something having impact on or influ-

encing something else. The most common case is *causal efficacy*—something is taken for a *cause* of something else, the latter being the *effect* of the former (the theoretical counterpart of it is the objective, lawlike *causality*—the notion connected to the nexus that provides the principal basis for scientific explanations.) The naïve, uninformed sense of efficacy enables us to separate various types of source of change. Besides intra-episodic causation, there is the case when a certain happening is, or seems to be, entirely accidental or random. This distinction is related (but not equivalent) to differentiating between ordinary, easily predictable happenings and something that takes us by surprise. Furthermore, there is the possibility of some intra-episodic events being effects of some events in the extra-episodic world (beyond the horizon of the episode and therefore out of the subject’s concern or knowledge).

**Sense of agency.** This is a special case of the sense of efficacy that is particularly relevant to the subject’s engagement in the plot. It is the case when the initiator or originator of a certain event or happening is the subject itself. In general, we can easily recognize cases of efficacy in which we are, or at least we consider ourselves to be, intentional agents responsible for effects, and distinguish them from all other cases of efficacy. In particular, the sense of agency proper can be distinguished from the sense of *ownership of bodily movements*, the latter related more to the modality of embodiment. When I say: “It is my movement (the movement of *my* hand),” it is not the same as when I say “It is my movement (it was *me* who intended to move the hand and initiated it).” In both cases the sense of Self is involved, even if in a different way, which brings us to the next experiential modality.

**Sense of Self (or selfhood).** This is inherently a first-person type of modality. When we referred to the subject as the protagonist (or the main character) of the episode we actually adopted the third-person perspective in which it is quite natural to count the subject as *belonging to* the episodic situation as if he were one object among others. On the other hand, in a proper first-person approach, we should either reflect upon our *own*, really lived episodes, or to contemplate about other people’s episodes empathetically, as being in the shoes of their subjects. Thus any episodic situation that *I* actually experience *belongs to me*, in a sense I say, “this is *my* situation.” When we are pre-reflectively absorbed in actual experience we are always at least marginally or peripherally aware of our experiencing Self. Even when we turn our reflective eye back to ourselves, we cannot inspect our Self as an object; we can only feel an unsurpassable inner horizon—a special kind of a

fringe encircling a vanishing central point never to be reached. As the Czech phenomenologist Jan Patočka puts it:<sup>14</sup>

Experience is like a tissue stretched between two horizons: one is my self, the other is the world. Experience is a kind of explication of these horizons, with the particularity that in order to explicate myself, I first have to stand on the ground of the world and only then can I return to myself.

In reflection we can perhaps imagine an absence of our body, but we can hardly imagine the absence of our Self. An interesting issue, in this respect, is the involvement of our actual Self in recollections of past episodes of our life. There is a salient continuity of the sense of Self between actually lived episodes and episodes retrieved from memory: our Self is always the *same* Self; in our recollections we hardly doubt that it was *us* who experienced the recalled episodes.

**Sense of one's own body (embodiment).** Our body is in many important ways an interface between ourselves (our Self's) and our environment. It is located in space (unlike the Self) where it provides us with the egocentric perspectival frame of reference. It is one of the objects in the scene that (partly) appears in our perceptual field and, at the same time, it is involved in continual enaction<sup>15</sup> of our lived world as well as of the presently lived situation (for instance of the room to act). Without body we would not be able to manipulate with other objects and, in general, interact physically with the environment. In the first-person perspective we can make a clear distinction between consciously *attending to* one's own body and being *marginally aware of* it. For instance in the case of physical movements of the body we are not conscious (and are aware of not being conscious) of the details of initiation and control of movement, especially when it is a complex movement involving cooperation of various parts of the body—we are conscious only of the whole act. In this sense our body becomes *experientially transparent* to us, at least to a certain degree depending on our past practice. There are two crucial concepts related to human body: *body image* and *body schema*. In Gallagher's formulation: <sup>16</sup>

14 My translation. Cf. Jan Patočka, draft of a lecture on corporeality (manuscript No. 1980/8), in: *Přirozený svět a pohyb lidské existence* (Natural World and Movement of Human Existence), ed. Ivan Chvatík (archive collection, Prague, 1980).

15 F. Varela's term; cf. F. J. Varela, E. Thompson, E. Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991).

16 Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 24.

A *body image* consists of a system of perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs pertaining to one's own body. In contrast, a *body schema* is a system of sensory-motor capacities that function without awareness or the necessity of perceptual monitoring.

As so defined, the body image and the body schema differ in that only the former and not the latter is accessible to the first-person conscious experience. When the subject is occupied with something in the surrounding scene and is entirely absorbed in it, then his body—its presence and role in perception—is passed over in favor of the perceived. Yet the forgotten body remains pre-reflectively and unthematically still around, always ready promptly to become the object of the subject's focused attention. Last but not least, it permanently provides for the perspectival view of the scene.

**Sense of otherness.** There are episodic situations with other people physically present (like in our example with Irena). In such a case, the others may be, in various degrees, also engaged in the episode (take part in its plot); a particularly interesting case is when some of the others are significant for the subject of the episode—then *the sense of the Other* (or *otherness*) is worth being counted as a specific modality of experience. Dan Zahavi<sup>17</sup> outlines four different takes on the relation to the Other; two of them are applicable to episodic situations: (1) The face-to-face encounter with the Other is accompanied with a specific mode of consciousness called *empathy*; (2) The encounter with the Other (including empathy) is conditioned by a form of *alterity of the embodied Self* (not to be conflated with the alterity of the Other). We have met a face-to-face encounter in the example of Irena recognizing a friend (what is distinctive for the episode is the gradual elevation, in the eyes of Irena, of another person from the category of stranger to the category of her acquaintance). Incidentally, the sense of the Other may be associated with a person that is not physically present in the episodic situation. Whatever is the case, the attitude towards another person is not the proper third-person view (as it is towards non-human objects), but at the same time it is not the proper first-person perspective since the other is still the Other. Hence we might introduce a new concept, namely of a *second-person perspective*. An important component of the second-person view is the empathic understanding expressive facial and bodily behavior of the Other (smiles, glances, nods, frowns, and of course, language).

17 Dan Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First-Person Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005), Chap. 6.

**Sense of sociality.** Let us imagine an episode whose subject belongs to a certain group or community of other people, who typically share with you some intentions, interests, worldviews, rituals, etc., or who are, as a group, in a certain way significant to you. The subject may adopt a separate second-person perspective toward each individual member of the group, but this would not be a proper identification with the group. There is something more to it. First, the subject is related to the group as a whole, and second, the relation is of a specific type: the subject is a member of the group. Then the concept of sociality, as one of the experiential modalities of episodes, may be defined on the basis of these two relations. It seems appropriate to associate sociality with a special perspective—that of a higher-level collective “we”; hence, to stay with our linguistic metaphor, we may talk about a first-person-plural perspective. An individual’s sense of sociality actually involves two closely interlinked perspectives: the first-person view of the group from the standpoint of its member, and the first-person plural view of the world from the standpoint of the group as a whole. What was for the sense of otherness the face-to-face encounter, is for sociality the actual membership of, or identification with, a group. Note, however, that sometimes the group is associated solely with the episode in question, in which it may emerge and vanish, but often it is an extra-episodic entity and as such it is more something belonging to semantic memory (or hybrid memory).

Obviously each modality of experience is inherently linked with other modalities, for example the sense of efficacy is linked with the sense of Self and (often) with the sense of one’s own body. As already mentioned the modalities of experience, as introduced here, are more or less heuristic notions. As such, and in spite of the fact that their distinctions can be supported by objective as well as phenomenal analysis, they implicate the explanatory and interpretive stance of a theoretician. In general, a conceptual analysis of an inherently complex problem can be often simplified using a “disentangle-and-conquer strategy” even in cases when the wholeness or unity of the object of study is substantial. The first phase of the strategy consists in decomposing the problem into several components that can be studied separately, one after another. In each separate study, however, one should not completely ignore the existence of other components; they should remain available to the extent they may contribute to the understanding of the component we are aiming at. In the second phase, after a certain familiarity with individual components is achieved, the attained knowledge is integrated into a deeper understanding of the whole. I believe that such a strategy may turn out to be useful, in particular, in the analysis of the structure of episodic experience (only the first phase is outlined in this essay).