

Conclusion: Summary and perspectives

The idea of subjectivity to be investigated at the intersection of its different dimensions was the starting point of this work. While retracing the development of the phenomenological views on the self, I drew attention to the fact that even the basic, pre-reflective level of subjective experience is not organized uniformly but it is rather constituted as embodied, temporal, affective, and intersubjective. The aim of this work was to explore the affective level of subjective experience and to see how affectivity contributes to the understanding of the unity of consciousness, of perceptual organization, memory, and the unconscious. The three chapters of this book covered three topics: (1) the unity of consciousness; (2) associative syntheses and affectivity; (3) affective memory and the unconscious. In what follows, I will, first, summarize the main points of each chapter. Secondly, I will point to several directions for further enquiry ensuing from this work, which fruitfully address, in my view, a series of questions worth asking and perspectives worth opening.

Synopsis of the first chapter: “Subjectivity and the unity of consciousness: A phenomenological approach”

I started the first chapter by addressing one of the main challenges of contemporary phenomenology which in my view consists in a clear need for a reassessment of its basic notion of subjectivity in order to be able to account for the essential unity and heterogeneity of subjective experience. I argued that there are two different ways of approaching subjectivity in contemporary philosophy. In its narrowest definition, subjectivity concerns the so-called phenomenal quality of experiences, which presupposes that mental phenomena, along with being defined as such or such (thoughts, memories, feelings, and so on), have an additional quality experienced by their owner, accessible to him or her from the unique first-

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person perspective—namely, the “what it is like” character of experience, which cannot be shared with anybody else. This narrow meaning, common among analytic philosophers, does not necessarily imply that subjectivity or phenomenality is central in understandings of the human mind but rather is just one characteristic among others. The broader meaning of subjectivity, belonging almost exclusively to the continental, especially phenomenological, tradition, does not refer to a specific quality but rather describes the totality of human mental life as an open unity of subjective experience. The principle of unity, in this regard, is crucial to the very idea of subjectivity and subjective experience.

In order to explore the phenomenological approach to the unity of consciousness, I addressed the development of this issue in the tradition of transcendental philosophy (§ 2). I distinguished three main steps in the elaboration of the transcendental approach to subjectivity that shaped what I call the synthesis-based model of consciousness. The three main figures who most significantly contributed to this issue are: David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and Edmund Husserl.

I argued that Hume can be seen as the first to formulate the problem of the connections between different mind states, and thus to give a new direction to the problem of personal identity. Hume’s aporia of the identity of the self, which is at the same time his greatest difficulty and greatest contribution to the problem, consists of the following dilemma: on the one hand, we have a bundle or a whole of distinct perceptions, and none among them would give us an idea of an identical self, but all the distinct perceptions constitute a certain unity, or we should, at least, perceive them as such a unity. On the other hand, we have no means of explaining how these different perceptions are connected to each other or to the whole, or, in Hume’s words, “*the mind never perceives any real connection among distinct existences.*” Thus, Hume’s most important step, which influenced no less than the subsequent tradition of transcendental philosophy, is an attempt to account for the connection between different perceptions, the *connection which, even in the absence of a self-principle, brings distinct pieces of our mind together.*

As Hume formulated the problem of connections, Kant made the most remarkable contribution, namely he suggested that combination is an essential feature of consciousness. Combination, which Kant also calls *synthesis*, is defined as an act of understanding prior to any experience, and as what allows the presentation of the manifold in the first place. However, Kant does not content himself with the simple indica-

tion that the combination of experiences is due to the *a priori* spontaneity of understanding. His crucial point consists in revealing that such a combination is possible only because of what he calls the “synthetic unity of apperception” or “the transcendental unity of self-consciousness” (B132), or, simply, thanks to an identical subject of experience to whom all multiple presentations belong.

In order to better understand what exactly “unity of consciousness” means for Kant, I suggested distinguishing between (1) the original unity of apperception, i.e. unity as it concerns the pure form of understanding; (2) unity as it concerns the synthesis of the manifold of subjective experience (understanding combined with intuition); and, (3) unity as it concerns the identity of a person. This distinction does not mean that there are different kinds of unity, but rather that there are different implications of the first principle of the synthetic unity of consciousness on separate levels of inquiry (respectively: on the level of pure thought; on the level of thought as combined with the manifold of intuition, that is of experience as possible *a priori*; and on the level of psychological inquiry about a subject’s persistence over time). In § 2.2 devoted to the synthetic unity of consciousness in Kant’s philosophy, I discussed the first two moments on the basis of the *Transcendental Deduction of the Categories*, and further extended the discussion to the issue of personal identity in the *Paralogisms of Pure Reason*. In conclusion of this part, it was shown that even if Kant argues in favor of an original and *a priori* principle of unity, making the whole of experience possible, he nevertheless restricts this principle to be responsible only for a certain kind of subjective identity (that of the self-consciousness), from which the numerical identity of a person does not follow.

Moreover, Kant’s approach assumes that the principle of connection cannot be found in the experience itself, but rather on the side of the synthetic activity of the transcendental self-consciousness. I argued that this idea eventually leads to a separation between abstract and pure subject of thoughts and the experiencing subjectivity, which is left outside of any possible transcendental explication. One of the main challenges Husserl encounters in his philosophy is precisely the question of how to conceive of subjectivity as not being separate from its experience, but, essentially, as being constituted in and through its inner temporality.

In his phenomenological philosophy, Husserl develops the synthetic principle of unity applying it to experiential consciousness and claiming

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that the form of time can be seen as a principle of subjective connection. In § 2.3, I suggested distinguishing two steps in Husserl's approach to temporality as contributing to the issue of unity of consciousness. The first attempt to account for subjective unity features time as real (*reell*) connection, and can be found in Husserl's early work *Logical Investigations*. The second step opposes the idea that the temporal form belongs to the real part of experiences, and instead features temporal connection as a universal structure of consciousness.

The idea of synthesis in its application to consciousness finds its confirmation and further development in the *Cartesian Meditations*, where Husserl claims synthesis to be "the primal form belonging to consciousness" (Husserl 1960, 39). Consistently with his previous theory, he designates time as the fundamental form of synthesis responsible for "a connectedness that makes the unity of one consciousness" (Husserl 1960, 41). A new aspect of this theory belongs to the genetic phenomenology which explores affectivity and associative syntheses.

In the last part of the chapter (§ 3), I suggested that this phenomenological approach to synthetic consciousness represents a constructive alternative to the one currently prominent in philosophy of mind, which conceives of consciousness in terms of "qualia." Even if qualitative feelings, or "qualia," are often seen as phenomenological features, one should not confuse them with the phenomenological conception of consciousness. I proceeded by questioning the thesis that consciousness is essentially qualitative—i.e. that explaining consciousness *is* explaining qualia, or "what it is like"—as well as the implication of this view that the unity of consciousness can be understood in purely qualitative terms. My claim was that being aware of a mental state and all its qualities is not necessarily qualitative by nature.

By contrast, Husserl's approach presupposes that consciousness is not a higher-order, objectifying act, nor is it a quality added to experience; consciousness can be instead understood through its synthetic function which enables experience to be unified and congruent. The phenomenological explication of the unity of consciousness in terms of synthesis implies therefore that, besides formal unity ensured by temporal connectivity, there is another conceivable type of unity, namely, the unity of subjective experience established through concrete, content-based connections. Constitution of this latter kind of unity was the topic of the second chapter.

Synopsis of the second chapter: “Associative Syntheses, affectivity, and pre-reflective connections in subjective experience”

In the first part of this work, I have pointed out that the phenomenological theory of consciousness¹⁵⁹ relies essentially on its synthetic function. In the second chapter, I have investigated the topics of associative syntheses and affectivity inasmuch as they provide some principles for the content-based connectivity of consciousness.

As the notion of association was given various misleading connotations in the history of philosophy and psychology, I considered it to be important to clarify the general philosophical context of the topic and to highlight the idea that association was originally expected to explore “the inherent lawfulness of mental life” and the principles of its organization. Already in the tradition of empiricist philosophy, especially in Hume, the principles of association were employed to describe mental connectivity on the pre-cognitive level rather than on the level of logical reasoning and high-order cognition. An original intuition behind an attempt to systematize the rules of associative connectivity consisted in seeing them as distinct from logical categories and yet as having universal validity. Somewhat similarly, in the contemporary psychological research on reasoning and decision-making, associations belong to the rules of the so-called automatic, intuitive thinking (as opposed to deliberate and rational reasoning). In the phenomenological perspective, the topic of association and of associative syntheses is instead taken to designate universal principles of consciousness determining the inner, implicit organization of the subjective experience (as opposed to explicit, predicative, narrative level of self-experience).

This task and the possibility of its phenomenological undertaking rely on the particular methodology of phenomenology itself, which differ significantly from the common methods of psychological research. Even though both scientific psychology and phenomenological philosophy intend to uncover regularities and essential rules pertaining to mental organization, they achieve this very differently. In order to make these methodological differences clear, I distinguished three types of regularities, namely *intuitive* (typical of everyday experience and commonsensi-

¹⁵⁹ The reference here is only to Husserl’s phenomenology, since, obviously, phenomenological philosophy today can hardly be called uniform in what concerns both its main principles and methodology.

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cal knowledge), *statistical* (based on analyses of categories and ensembles of data in the scientific research), and *eidetic* (based on the phenomenological method of “eidetic variation” and aiming to uncover essential structures of mental phenomena).

Another important point in delineating the phenomenological notion of association concerns its relation to associationists and Gestalt psychologies and to the dispute between the two concerning the primacy of holistic or atomistic views on mental organization. From the phenomenological perspective, both positions are unsatisfactory in what concerns their resulting or implicit views on consciousness. Husserl insists that the phenomenological approach to association can be developed only as part of the transcendental approach to consciousness, and association itself can be conceived of as a particular type of synthesis of consciousness. In accordance with the main idea of the first chapter, this confirms that Husserl’s view on consciousness and on associations belongs not to the empirical exploration of association, but rather to the tradition of transcendental philosophy and its idea of synthetic consciousness.

After having considered these general questions, I turned to Husserl’s transcendental doctrine of passive syntheses and discussed the topics of association and affection and their meaning for the phenomenological theory of synthetic consciousness and genesis of subjectivity. In an attempt to present a systematization of Husserl’s account of associative syntheses in the *Analyses concerning Passive Synthesis*, I suggested to distinguish between three main types of associative connections: (1) reproductive association; (2) anticipatory association; and (3) primordial association (*Urassoziation*); and then consequently to describe the principles of syntheses and unity-formations pertaining to primordial and reproductive association. While the topic of primordial association can be seen as a foundation of the phenomenological approach to perceptual integration and organization, the topic of reproductive association provides an insight on the phenomenological theory of memory and on the genesis of subjectivity as conscious of its entire life, with its past and future-horizons. An important concept here is the so-called “associative awakening of the past,” which might be seen as a genetic precondition of remembering.

The topic of association and the originality of its phenomenological elucidation become clearer when Husserl links it to the phenomenon of affection. The description of the basic principles of experiential organization appears to be incomplete as long as the affective dimension of the

subjective experience is not taken into account. The main reason for this is that the principles of association and the formation of unities alone are not sufficient to explain the conditions of prominence of particular experiences. In Husserl's words, the actual connectivity of consciousness and the formations of unities necessarily presuppose affective vivacity. In § 8 of the second chapter, I presented Husserl's account of affectivity of consciousness by inquiring into the notion of affection and the corresponding concepts of affective intensity, affective relief and affective awakening. The role of affectivity acquires special original meaning when applied to such issues as the affective constitution of the pre-reflective selfhood; the formation of affective unities; and the clarification of the affective dimension of memory-related phenomena (namely, retentive modification, recollection and constitution of the past). Moreover, in the larger perspective, it amounts to a new approach to consciousness, the unconscious, and subjectivity itself.

An important conclusion of this second chapter states the possibility to reconsider the very idea of consciousness and of the unity of subjective experience through the lenses of associative and affective connectivity. First, the thematization of affectivity and of affective vivacity brings about such a concept of consciousness and correlatively of the unconscious, which presents an interesting alternative to representational accounts; consciousness and the unconscious thus can be seen not as opposite and mutually exclusive notions, but as different levels on the scale of affective intensity. Secondly, the distinction between temporal and associative-affective syntheses allows the differentiation of several types of identities. While temporality is responsible for the experiential continuity and *formal identity* between the present, future, and past life of the subject, affectivity and associative connectivity is what makes its concrete, *affective identity* and meaningful coherence possible. This view suggests that the totality of the subjective experience can be seen not only as a continuity of conscious becoming, but also as a throughout interrelated affective nexus. Accordingly, subjectivity can be understood not as a singular subject for itself, but as a concrete unity of affectively interrelated experiences.

Synopsis of the third chapter: “Affective memory and the unconscious”

In conclusion of the second chapter, I stated that Husserl’s account of affectivity and associative connectivity of consciousness contributes to the explication of the pre-reflective organization of subjective experience. Moreover, I claimed that it represents an alternative to the representationalist views on consciousness and allows the overcoming of any strict separation between consciousness and the unconscious. In the third chapter, I pursued the direction opened by this idea and expanded the remarks on affective connectivity in order to account for the pre-reflective unity between the present and the past life of consciousness.

In this chapter, I covered several topics and mentioned different phenomenological and psychological approaches to the phenomena of memory and the unconscious. One main direction, however, remained consistent throughout these deliberations, namely the distinction between the two modes of subjective past-experience. The first corresponds to explicit remembering and designates such an experience in which the past appears as an intentional object. The second amounts to the way one’s past influences the present without itself becoming an explicit object of remembering. This latter type of past-relation corresponds to implicit memory and the constitution of the unconscious background of subjective experience. The distinction between explicit and implicit dimensions of past-experience was introduced in § 9 and was further elaborated at each stage of the present work.

The chapter is divided into two thematic blocks: the first explores the phenomenological approaches to the unconscious (§§ 10&11) and the second deals with the topic of implicit memory (§ 12). The narrative structures of these two parts are to a certain extent identical: I start by presenting the problem and the way it has been approached in phenomenological or psychological theories, then I turn to Husserl’s account of passive syntheses and discuss some possible approaches to the phenomena of the unconscious and implicit memory from the perspective of his studies on affectivity. It should be noted, that even if Husserl’s *Analyses concerning Passive Synthesis* are the main source of this chapter, Merleau-Ponty is its true inspiration. Many valuable ideas, which I have tried to lay out here belong to or ensue from his thoughts on these two related topics.

I introduced the part entitled “Phenomenological accounts of the unconscious” by inquiring into how phenomenology comes to the problem of the unconscious inside its own approach, or, in other words: how the problem of the unconscious arises from the investigations of consciousness itself. The starting point, which largely defined what Fink called the “implicit theory of consciousness,” can be found in Brentano’s view. For Brentano, the understanding of the problem of consciousness and correlatively of the unconscious revolves around the representational nature of conscious phenomena. In this perspective, consciousness is defined as a mental phenomenon accompanied by pre-reflective internal representation (*innere Vorstellung*). The unconscious, on its turn, becomes equal to internally unperceived representational consciousness. Within Brentano’s view, the thus defined unconscious turns out to be a contradictory phenomenon, essentially similar to the “unseen seeing” or “thinking that does not think.” The development of the phenomenological approach to consciousness in Husserl’s works and in other phenomenological theories opened instead new ways of thinking about the unconscious. I suggested distinguishing two main directions in the phenomenological understanding of this issue: the one exploring the intentional theory of the unconscious, and the other inquiring into the non-representationalist way of approaching consciousness and the unconscious respectively.

An example of the first account can be found in Bernet’s analysis of the unconscious representations in phantasy. His approach underlines a particular aspect of the issue, namely the manifestation of unconscious representations in the reproductive inner consciousness. According to Bernet’s interpretation, the unconscious can be clarified phenomenologically not as “amputated, unperceived consciousness” (Bernet 2002, 330) but as another type of self-consciousness. Such self-consciousness is defined in respect of what appears (the absent, the alien) and how it appears in consciousness (reproductively as opposed to impressionally), but not in terms of this appearance being itself devoid of a certain “conscious” quality or accompanying representation.

Another direction is pursued by Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception as well as by Thomas Fuchs’ phenomenology of body memory. Unlike Husserl, Merleau-Ponty finds himself confronted with a challenge similar to the psychoanalytic endeavor, that is to say a view on consciousness as intrinsically intransparent for itself. Merleau-Ponty believes that the idea of representation obscures the understanding of both consciousness and the unconscious. He, therefore, rejects the view

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on the latter as another “I think,” storing repressed thoughts and feelings behind the back of consciousness. Merleau-Ponty seeks to understand the unconscious as a “sedimented practical schema” of subjective being in the world, which contributes to the way we implicitly interpret reality, fill in the gaps of uncertainty, and invest meaning in our interactions with people. He also applies his critique of representationalism to the phenomenon of memory and suggests that the subject’s relation to the past is mediated as much by forgetting as by remembering. Fuchs develops this line of research even further in his theory of body memory. In his phenomenology of the lived body, the unconscious is understood not in terms of representations or hidden intentionalities but as a sum of bodily dispositions which tacitly define one’s personality, individual relation to the world and to other people. While Bernet claims that the unconscious is the presence of the absent, appearance of the non-appearing, Fuchs develops Merleau-Ponty’s view that the unconscious is “absence in presence, the unperceived in the perceived” (Fuchs 2012a, 101). This absence, however, is not the concealed or isolated reverse side of consciousness, but its own way of being—the sum of incorporated predispositions, habits and alike which themselves do not appear in any graspable way, but instead constitute a background against which we relate to the world.

Another non-representational approach to the unconscious can be found in Husserl’s analyses of association and affectivity. In my view, his idea of affectivity as constitutive dimension of subjectivity paves the way to an approach to consciousness and the unconscious not as mutually exclusive phenomena but as different levels on the scale of affective intensity. In my interpretation of Husserl’s view on the affective unconscious, I suggested approaching this phenomenon from three main angles. The first concerns a formal definition of the unconscious as *Grenzphänomen*, which designates it as the zero-level of affective vivacity and features it as relative to the graduality of consciousness. The second corresponds to the idea of the affective past-horizon and the unconscious as “sedimented.” The third explores the topic of the affective conflict and Husserl’s take on the issue of repression.

In the second part of this chapter, I expanded the discussion on the phenomenological unconscious in order to account for the problem of implicit memory. As this topic received attention in both psychological and philosophical investigations, I believe it was important to start with a short review of the psychological approach to implicit memory in

order to, consequently, compare it with the phenomenological view on the same phenomenon. Interestingly, the development of research on this topic in both disciplines shows that the scope of implicit memory encompasses far more than just procedural or habitual body memory. I have shown that in cognitive psychology implicit memory refers to three phenomena: (1) procedural memory (“knowing how”) related to preservation of bodily skills and implicit learning; (2) priming, which corresponds to facilitation of memory performance based on previous experience in the absence of explicit recall; and (3) emotional memory without recall. In phenomenology, implicit memory is clarified as encompassing habitual bodily skills, situational memory, traumatic and intercorporeal memory, as well as involuntary memories and pre-thematic recognition. I argued that the conceptual definitions common to these two respective theories directly determine the categorization of phenomena that can be subsumed under the term of implicit memory. In cognitive psychology, such definition relies, first, on the presumption that implicit remembering is unconscious and, second, on the test-conditions in which implicit memory can be differentiated from explicit recall. In phenomenology, the definition of implicit memory is instead derived from the experiential structure which appears to be common to this kind of past-relation. In several phenomenological approaches, this structure is seen as non-representational, or as a pre-thematic relation to the past as opposed to the representational structure of explicit recollection. In the phenomenology of the lived body, this non-representational relation is further understood as essentially bodily. On this ground, implicit memory is clarified as body memory and includes different types of memory, which could not be ascribed to it on the basis of the psychological definition of the same phenomenon.

I further presented Husserl’s account of affective memory and suggested that it can contribute to the phenomenological clarification of implicit memory. In the development of Husserl’s work, the investigations on the affective dimension of memory can be seen as the later stage complementing his analyses of intentionality and temporality. The application of these three fundamental categories of subjective experience (intentionality, temporality, and affectivity) to the investigation of memory implies that phenomenology aims to account for its three constitutive phenomena, namely: retention, recollection, and the constitution of the past. I hold that while intentional analyses of remembering and temporal analyses of reproductive consciousness belong to the realm of explicit memory, the

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investigations of the “affective awakening of the past” and of the “affective past-horizon” contribute to the phenomenological exploration of implicit memory.

I argued that retroactive affective awakening can be seen as implicit remembering which should be distinguished from explicit recollection. While the latter corresponds to an objectifying intuition, in which objects of past experiences come to present awareness, the former describes a passive occurrence in which a particular past experience regains its affective force by means of associative connection with the present. The intentionality of retroactive awakenings is in principle non-objectifying and its manifestation is not representational, as it rather concerns the way the past tacitly influences the present experience. In my view, this distinction between remembering and the affective awakening of the past can contribute to the understanding of memory performances in amnesia. For instance, it can be seen as a phenomenological clarification of “remembering without awareness,” which otherwise risks to fall into the obscure category of unconscious representations.

Another aspect of the phenomenological understanding of implicit memory deals with the constitution of the affective past-horizon. This topic brings together both parts of this chapter, due to the fact that, in Husserl, background consciousness of the past coincides with his understanding of the unconscious. The concept of affective past-horizon designates a particular mode of givenness of the past and intends to account for the connectedness between the present and the past life of consciousness which exists beyond the level of explicit memory and underlies the possibility of implicit remembering. This idea is also in accord with Merleau-Ponty’s intuition, according to which we relate to our past not only in the mode of recollection but also “in the mode of oblivion.” What is forgotten does not disappear but contributes to the tacit background of one’s life, which can be seen not as a hidden reservoir of memory-traces but rather as a horizon which constantly shapes the way we perceive and interpret reality.

I concluded this chapter with the brief indication that affective connectivity of subjective experience, which enables its pre-reflective unity, can also contribute to the issue of personal identity. As explicit and autobiographical memory serves as a foundation for the narrative identity, similarly implicit memory in the above mentioned sense allows the description of the “affective identity” of a subject.

Perspectives for future research

I would now like to outline three main directions for further research ensuing from the ideas developed in this text. The first line of enquiry links the synthetic function of consciousness to the preference for coherence inherent to subjective experience. The second explores how the phenomenological understanding of the inadequate character of intuitive experience can contribute to the issue of uncertainty. And the third further specifies some distinctive features of the phenomenological approach to personal identity.

In the first chapter, I argued that besides being heterogeneous, subjective experience shows almost ubiquitous and remarkable *preference for coherence* and is unified. The coherent organization of subjective experience can be observed on many levels: the unification and multi-sensory integration of the perceptual and bodily experience; the continuity of experience in its temporal extension; the preference for congruity in the construction of life-narratives, our relation to the past and to the possible future; the strong consistency bias in our behavior and decision making. In general terms, our conscious experience in the variety of its forms can hardly stand “blind spots,” and it shows a strong inclination towards coherence.

In my view, in order to account for this ubiquitous strive for coherence, it is fruitful to look into the issue of the unity of consciousness and the way connectivity of subjective experience is constituted. In the phenomenological perspective, the most consistent and sustainable claim consists in linking the unity of consciousness to self-awareness, stating thereby that it is the implicit, pre-reflective “mineness” of experience which accounts for its unified character. Importantly, this self is not conceived of as a substance or independent transcendental entity, but rather, in Zahavi’s words, as “experiential dimension” (Zahavi 2011). In this work, I argued that there is another phenomenologically consistent way to explain the unity of consciousness, which can complement the self-centered unity theory. According to this alternative perspective, the unity and coherence of subjective experience are enabled by the synthetic function of consciousness. I referred to the resulting view on consciousness as to the synthesis-based model of consciousness.

The idea of synthetic consciousness, as I see it, is particularly well suited to account for the coherence of subjective experience as it clarifies precisely how the connectivity of consciousness enables different kinds of

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experiential organization. For instance, temporal connectivity makes continuity possible, as well as all forms of experience depending on it (such as perception of temporal objects, tacit temporal continuity of one's life, and formation of extended personal narratives). Associative connectivity, on the other hand, accounts for the perceptual organization in the living present, for the content-based connectivity with the past, and, as I argued, for implicit memory. Future research should clarify this connection between the unity of consciousness and experiential coherence more in detail and also explore all possible links between phenomenological, psychopathological, and psychological levels of inquiry.

The implications of the preference for coherence on the psychological level are of particular interest. Research on the attribution of causality shows that people tend to always interpret neutral data in the most coherent way ascribing goals and meanings to observed situations (Heider and Simmel 1944; Michotte 1963). Psychologists underline that people feel more confident when they can link (casually, systematically or otherwise) events or facts and construct a coherent interpretation which would make sense of partially available information. Moreover, the lack of information does not impede but rather facilitates the coherence of the resulting story. As Kahneman remarks, "The confidence that people experience is determined by the coherence of the story they manage to construct from available information. It is the consistency of the information that matters for a good story, not its completeness. Indeed, you will often find that knowing little makes it easier to fit everything you know into a coherent pattern" (Kahneman 2011, 87).

This last remark already shows that the unified and coherent character of subjective experience cannot be separated from its inherent incompleteness and inadequateness. In the *Analyses concerning Passive synthesis*, Husserl mainly discusses it on the example of external perception, pointing out that inadequateness belongs to it intrinsically. He famously claims that perception is a "constant pretension to accomplish something that, by its very nature, it is not in a position to accomplish" (Husserl 2001a, 39). Perception, as Husserl sees it, is a mixture of what is actually intuitively given (a particular side or aspect of an object) and what is intended as a whole object of perception. This latter is never and can never be fully given in intuition, its perception is intrinsically linked to the "intentional horizon" of possible appearances. The same applies to remembering, which even while allowing us some access to the past, can never fully exhaust it. Encountering other people and understanding

what is on their minds is the most striking example of all: while we have an immediate experience and contact with other persons, we possess neither direct access to their minds nor sufficient information. Not much different is our experience of our own past and future selves: we find ourselves only in the here and now, while the stretches of our past and future may remain obscure and foreign to us.

Within a larger perspective, this means that any intuitive experience¹⁶⁰ is in principle insufficient, uncertain, and incomplete and can never be considered a source of adequate knowledge.¹⁶¹ But, if this is the case, does it mean that our intuitive experience constantly fail us? Paraphrasing Husserl, we could ask: is our whole experience just *a pretension to accomplish something that cannot be accomplished?*

Husserl further adds that this incompleteness is at odds with the way we feel about our experience as indeed it *appears* perfectly adequate.¹⁶² In my view, these two aspects must be seen as interrelated: on the one hand, our experience in its different forms is intrinsically characterized by incompleteness and limited fulfillment, while, on the other hand, it shows ubiquitous preference for coherence and consistency. Consistency is not the opposite of uncertainty, it is its counterpart. Generally speaking, reality might be chaotic and disorganized but we, as conscious beings, always tend to see meanings and connections between things, often despite or even due to the fact that our knowledge is radically inadequate.

This particularity of the experiential organization can serve as a foundation for the phenomenological approach to *uncertainty*. Uncertainty can designate many things. In psychology, it mostly describes the

¹⁶⁰ The term “intuitive” here does not imply any reference to the so-called “gut feelings,” but rather means a group of intentional experiences, which Husserl called “intuitions”—intentional acts which rely on fulfillment and givenness of their objects. Intuitive presentations include perception, phantasy, pictorial consciousness, recollection, and intersubjective experience. Intuitive acts are distinguished from conceptual presentations, in which objects are never given but merely signified (Bernet et al. 1993, 141).

¹⁶¹ Underlining this particularity of perceptual experience, Husserl was developing some ideas about the possibility of apodictic knowledge in the acts of so-called “eidetic intuition” (see § 6).

¹⁶² “No matter how completely we may perceive a thing, it is never given in perception with the characteristics that qualify it and make it up as a sensible thing from all sides at once. [...] And to our mind it is not just a mere statement of fact: It is inconceivable that external perception would exhaust the sensible-material content of its perceived object; it is inconceivable that a perceptual object could be given in the entirety of its sensibly intuitive features, literally, from all sides at once in a self-contained perception” (Husserl 2001a, 39-40) – my emphasis.

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conditions under which decisions have to be made in absence of sufficient information. In general terms, uncertainty is everywhere, not as a property of the world but as the way we relate to it.¹⁶³ Our perception, our relation to the past, to the future and to other people are in principle uncertain and we rarely possess enough knowledge to make correct predictions and calculate all possible outcomes, let alone to make purely rational decisions.

Uncertainty, as Dennis Lindley points out, is essentially a modern phenomenon, which became of interest to science only in the last century (Lindley 2014). Husserl, following the Cartesian ideal of rigorous science and apodictic knowledge, sees uncertainty as a lack of perfection and completeness in our cognition. (Husserl 1960). He describes the latter as a constant process of fulfillment and a quest for evidence, and he features the concrete intuitive experience as fragmentary and unfolding in a constant process of approximation. One could say that for Husserl, certainty represents an ideal of science, while uncertainty is taken as integral part of subjective experience. Contemporary science, however, develops not only in the realm of absolute truths or empirical facts, but also tries to account for the rules of chance and probability. The phenomenological approach to uncertainty must inquire, therefore, not only into the way we experience uncertainty, but also into how it constitutes an integral part of subjective cognition and, moreover, how it challenges the scientific ideal of perfect evidence.

Another topic which lies at the intersection between unity and incompleteness concerns the issue of *personal identity*. On the one hand, it is clear that any self-experience at any given moment cannot be a reflection of one's whole personality. On the other hand, the totality of one's experience and self-identity are presumed in any single experience. Personal identity relies on the sameness of the subject in time, while any attempt to encompass the totality of one's life inevitably misses out on this task. Even the most coherent and complete narrative can never exhaust the complexity of subjective experience. Moreover, the coherence of one's personal narrative, like the coherence of any story, not merely allows for incompleteness and limited perspective, but necessarily presupposes them.

As I pointed out at the beginning of the third chapter, our subjective experience is defined by this fundamental ambiguity and is found at the intersection between self-familiarity and self-foreignness. Encountering one's past self and not being able to fully identify with it, dealing with

¹⁶³ More on this, see: Lindley, Dennis: Understanding uncertainty (Lindley 2014).

the consequences of one's past actions, or making decisions for one's future without knowing what kind of person one is going to be, are just few examples of the ambivalence characteristics of subjective experience. These phenomena make clear that, in the words of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "it is neither true that my existence possesses itself, nor that it is foreign to itself" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 401). In the same vein, many phenomenologists pointed out that self-conscious and the temporal character of subjective experience not only enable its identity but equally testify to "an internal fracture" between the possibility of reflection and remembering, on the one hand, and the totality of one's subjectivity, on the other hand. As Gallagher and Zahavi remark, there always remains "something about ourselves that we cannot fully capture in self-conscious reflection" (Gallagher and Zahavi 2015). A possible phenomenological approach to personal identity must not only take this ambiguous character of our self-identity seriously, but also explore what constitutes this identity beyond the formal conditions of temporality and self-reflection. This latter perspective could allow the effective investigation of the affective and embodied identity of the subject in the world, in addition to providing a constructive alternative to both minimalist and narrative approaches to the self.