A TRANSPERSONAL APPROACH TO MEMORY

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The seed of truth lies hidden deep within, and teaching fans the spark to take new life; Why else unaided can man answer true, Unless deep in the heart the touchwood burns? And if the muse of Plato speaks the truth, Man but recalls what he knew and lost.

Boethius (1969)

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I contrast two approaches to problems of memory. One modern, one ancient. My purpose in doing so is to revive an ancient, Platonic approach to problems of memory. The Platonic tradition of memory study was “transpersonal” in that it focused on the study of recollective experience. Recollection was considered a spiritual process which could lead to a recovery of one’s innate knowledge of the “eternal ideas” (Coomaraswamy, 1977). Writers in this tradition always distinguished between memory as retention on the one hand and memory as recollection on the other. According to Aristotle, for example, memory was passive, merely retentive and in service to recollection, while recollection was active, creative and the basis for self-awareness.

Recollection, for Aristotle, and others influenced by Plato’s theory of Anamnesis, was the act which made memory possible. Having a memory followed the subjective experience of, or effort at, remembering.

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I would like to thank Drs. Laird Cermak and Tony Stavely, as well as Christine Plaetzer, Kathe Swaback and Cynthia Merillat, for helpful comments on an early draft of this paper.

The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, 1992, Vol. 24, No. 1
The modern experimental tradition of memory study, on the other hand, has ignored recollective experience and attempted to model memory without it. Though the experimental tradition is generally considered to have begun with Ebbinghaus’s work on forgetting, in the nineteenth century, the tradition’s philosophical roots extend back into Cartesian rationalism and British empiricism. While the rationalists and empiricists disagree on most issues concerning mind and soul, both schools of thought took retention or the persistence of the past into the present as the essence of memory (Krell, 1990). If the ancients are correct, however, in asserting that recollection is what makes “retention” possible, then no theory of memory will work without including an account of recollective experience.

In what follows I try to construct the outlines of a description of recollective experience. In order to describe the processes which occur during recollective experience I have allowed myself to use whatever data sources were available since very little experimental work has been done in the area. I occasionally borrow from non-traditional sources such as philosophical analysis and accounts of recollective experience given by spiritual-mystical writers. I have also used accounts of disorders of recollective experience seen in the neuropsychology clinic.

Neuropsychologists are forced by their patient’s distress to take a larger view of memory than the experimentalists apparently take. Experimentalists must rely on their ingenuity in order to ask non-trivial questions of nature. Human ingenuity is, of course, fallible and constrained by existing paradigms in a field of study. The questions the neuropsychologist asks of memory, on the other hand, are prompted by the clinical picture presented to him or her in the person of the patient. These clinical experiments of nature guarantee a certain amount of ecologic validity—that the phenomena that are investigated (e.g. the patient’s experience or behaviors) are real and not mere artifacts of some experimental manipulation. Thus, data from the neuropsychology laboratory may be particularly instructive for a theory of recollection.

I begin with a summary of the theoretical limitations of modern accounts of memory as retention. I then attempt to show why any adequate theory of memory must be transpersonal in nature. I argue that at a minimum, the theory must assume a non-empiricist’s model of mind in order to account for memory phenomena. I then provide a sketch of the elements of a transpersonal approach to memory and conclude with a description of recollective experience.
The Modern Tradition Ignores Recollective Experience

Modern experimental science has studied retention or the persistence of the past, and appears to have forgotten that such a thing as anamnesis or recollection even exists. The old tradition, centered around the study of recollective experience, if acknowledged at all, has been considered obscure, unscientific and mystical by modern students of memory. This lowly assessment of the old tradition in the study of memory is still held by many scientific psychologists despite the fact that the experience of recollection is no more obscure and mystical than the belief that the “past” is retained in memory. Nevertheless, the assessment is widespread enough that recollection has not, until recently, been seriously studied by anyone in experimental science since the rise of scientific psychology in the late nineteenth century.

There are signs, however, that recollective experience is making a comeback. Tulving (1983), for example, has decried the neglect of recollective experience in the modern study of memory and has called for a new approach in the study of episodic memory (memory for personally experienced events). The new approach advocated by Tulving would make recollective experience the central object of study:

In theories of episodic memory, recollective experience should be the ultimate object of interest, the central aspect of remembering that is to be explained and understood. Yet... psychologists have successfully evaded problems entailed in recollective experience, and have gone about studying memory without mentioning it. If you wanted to find out what contemporary students of memory have to say about recollective experience, under what term would you try to locate the relevant material through the subject indexes of books, or what key words would you look for in the titles and abstracts of papers? You would find many references to recall, recognition, judgments of recency and frequency, and, of course, retrieval, but these terms refer to overt behavior of the rememberer, characterize different memory tasks, or represent hypothetical theories of memory and memory processing. You might think that recollective experience is related to, say, recall recognition or retrieval and no one would dispute such a claim, but the fact remains that theories of retrieval are silent on recollective experience (Tulving, 1983, p. 181).

Tulving goes on to point out that we may need to understand recollection if we are ever to fully understand recognition, retrieval, or any other element of memory. We need to have a grasp of
the big picture if we are to avoid mistakes concerning the basic elements of memory processing. Unfortunately, Tulving’s call for a return to recollective experience has largely gone unheeded. Most laboratory studies of memory reported in the experimental journals since Tulving published his call do not mention recollective experience.

Modern accounts of memory ignore recollective experience at their own peril. In a well-known critique of laboratory research on memory Neisser (1981) summarized results of this research in the following way:

The results of a hundred years of the psychological study of memory are somewhat discouraging. We have established firm empirical generalizations, but most of them are so obvious that every ten-year-old knows them anyway. We have made discoveries, but they are only marginally about memory; in many cases we don’t know what to do with them, and wear them out with endless experimental variations. We have an intellectually impressive group of theories, but history offers little confidence that they will provide any meaningful insight into natural behavior (Neisser, 1981, pp. 11-12).

Shalllice (1988) refers to Neisser’s critique and adds the following observations on the traditional experimental approach to memory:

Empirical phenomena in the corresponding study of normal processes—human experimental psychology—are very slippery things. Many factors affect any experimental procedure. Make a slight change in one aspect—rate of presentation, stimulus material, recall delay, amount of practice, and so on—and the effect disappears or reappears, although according to theory, it should not. Thus even if a phenomena is narrowly robust, the experimental result provides only the most insecure platform for theoretical inferences (Shalllice, 1988, p. 5).

In other words, results in the experimental study of memory have tended to be unreliable, and when they were not unreliable (or when they were “narrowly robust” as Shalllice put it), they tended to be trivial (“so obvious that every ten-year-old knows them anyway” as Neisser put it). One reason for the variability (and unreliability) in experimental results could be that the focus or object of experimental study is ephemeral and ill-defined (e.g. retention), or when it is well defined, it is trivial (e.g. repetition improves retention). Traditional definitions of memory as retention or as the influence of the past on the present are not well defined because “retention” and “pastness” are not well defined (see section below). Experimental results of studies of retention risk trivializing memory phenomena because retention involves only a minor aspect of the recollection process.
The Modern Tradition Illogically Defines Memory as the Persistence of the Past into the Present

Although remembering certainly involved the persistence of "past" events into the present, it cannot be reduced to persistence or retention of external sensory impressions. Even if we adopt the empiricist paradigm and focus on processing of sensory impressions, it is not clear that what occurs in a memory experience is simple retention of those sensory impressions. Subjectively, we always experience a memory as a memory for us. Experiential or episodic memories are rarely, if ever, neutral with respect to the experiencer. We know, for example, that a tremendous amount of reconstruction of memory representations occurs during a remembering experience (Bartlett, 1932). The reconstructive process transforms memories in such a way as to be relevant to the rememberer—to the rememberer's history. So much reconstruction occurs, in fact, that the veridicality of what is retained is suspect. It therefore seems odd to speak of retention when very little or nothing of the original event or its representation remains after the reconstructive process does its work.

If we take "pastness" as crucial for the memory experience, we find that the relation between inferences to the "past" and remembering are tenuous. Even when the source of a piece of information is judged to be the past, conscious recollection may still not emerge. I can, for example, realize that I am being influenced by the past but still not experience remembering. Amnesics can refer to the past but cannot recollect the past. We can speak about the past with no accompanying remembering experience. If asked if I ever went to school, for example, I simply say yes. I do not need to make an inference to the past to recollect the fact that I went to school. In the neurology clinic one sees the opposite case also—a patient who believes he is remembering something when he is not—as in confabulation (Damasio, et al., 1985). The experience in these cases cannot have been based on an inference to the past since no such past ever existed. We are forced to conclude that the experience of remembering is not about the past—whatever that is.

Treating memory as the persistence of the past into the present, or as an image, copy, trace, imprint or representation of an external event, furthermore, creates intolerable logical paradoxes. If the past is past, then it is absent—it is not present. But if it is not present, what is it we remember? If what we remember is an image or copy of the original event, why do we not take the copy for the original? If the copy is not really a copy of the original event, then the veridicality of memory needs to be explained. If it is true that we, in fact, remember via an image or copy/representation of the original...
event, then what we remember is, in fact, not absent or past (since the image is present in our consciousness) so we really are not remembering at all—nothing from the past is in consciousness. Aristotle (in "On Memory and Reminiscence") put it this way:

But if memory really occurs in this way, does one remember the image or that from which the image came to be? For if the former, we would be remembering nothing absent [past]; if the latter, how can we, while perceiving this, remember the absent thing, which we are not perceiving? If the image is like an imprint or trace in us, why should the perception of this very thing be the memory of something else and not simply of itself? For in exercising memory one contemplates the image and this is what one perceives. How then does one remember what is not present? For this would imply that one could also see and hear what is not present (quoted in Krell, 1990, p. 17).

Sartre put the problem in the context of the issue of the experience of temporality in general:

All theory of memory implies presuppositions concerning the being of the past. These presuppositions, which have never been elucidated, have obscured the problem of memory and that of temporality in general. We say that the past is no longer. From this point of view it seems that one would want to attribute being to the present alone. This ontological presupposition has engendered the famous theory of cerebral traces: since the past no longer is, since it has faded in nothingness, the continued existence of our memory depends on the present modification of our being; it will depend, for example, on an imprint presently marked on a group of brain cells. Yet if all is present, how explain the pastness of remembering; that is to say, the fact that in its intention a consciousness that reminisces transcends the present in order to aim at the event back there where it was (Sartre, 1956, pp. 107-8).

Modern ideologies of memory privilege the present over the past and assign no ontological status to the past except insofar as the past influences the present. Thus memory theorists in the experimental tradition have asserted the existence of traces which represent the past in the present.

When Bergson (1908) confronted the paradox of the persistence of the past into the present, he concluded that the "past" was actually contemporaneous with the present—that the present is only a densely contracted portion of the past. In other words, Bergson privileged the past over the present. According to Bergson, if memory concerns the persistence of the past into the present, as the modern tradition asserts, then one needs to assume that time is linear and flows from past to present to future. The present needs to continually become past. But the present cannot become the past unless the past exists, i.e. has some ontological status. Each current present must be capable of "pastness." For the present to pass, to
flow, the past must be part of, or available to, the present. Thus all accounts of memory which reduce memory to pastness or persistence end in paradox.

Even if we ignore the paradoxical implications of modern accounts of memory which invoke pastness or imprints of sensory impressions as paradigmatic of memory, the accounts still may not work since, as Plotinus pointed out,

\[\ldots\] if memory were a matter of seal-impressions retained, the multiplicity of objects would have no weakening effect on the memory. Further, on the same hypothesis, we would have no need of thinking back to revive remembrance; nor would we be subject to forgetting and recalling; all would lie engraved within (quoted in Hermann & Chaffin, 1988).

In order to account for the selectivity of memory as well as the transformations of imprints or traces over time, representationally-based theories of memory need to postulate rich internal structures of memory which explain innate memory preferences and which do the work of transformation of representations. But once internal structure is assumed, we are no longer holding to the major empiricist assumptions of the modern experimental tradition.

**The Modern Tradition Assumes an Empiricist Model of Mind**

Empiricist accounts of memory assume that memory is a passive, initially blank and unstructured slate upon which imprints leave traces or copies of external sensory impressions. Memory, in short, is treated as a neutral recording device designed to process or store external sensory impressions.

Underlying the empiricist position is a view of memory as an all-purpose learning device which allows human beings to "maximize fitness" or to adapt to, or learn virtually any set of environmental contingencies they encounter. According to current evolutionary psychology, however (Tooby & Cosmides, 1989), human beings possess no general learning capacities. Rather we possess complex and specialized psychological mechanisms which directly regulate and support individual behavior and maturation. Memory cannot be construed as a type of fitness-maximizing, general purpose learning device, because human beings do not appear to have psychological mechanisms which are non-specialized domain-general cognitive capacities. Domain-general cognitive capacities are faculties of the mind which are not pre-attuned to process specialized types of information. Most of the faculties of the mind which have received any serious study are quite specialized in their processing preferences and routines. The language processor, for
example, is "good" only with bits of language (Fodor, 1983). It cannot handle—it doesn't even see—the complex visual configurations of a human face. A separate processing system (in a different area of the brain, in fact) is dedicated to processing faces (Geschwind, 1979).

The number of these specialized, automatic processing systems is probably quite large since most of human behavior is routine, habitual and automatic. They accomplish such tasks as language comprehension, personality assessment, detecting emotion in another person, rapid assessment of risk in any given situation, monitoring codes of social exchange, sexual behavior, parent-child attachment and so on. These systems do most of the day-to-day work of the mind/brain, are largely automatized "devices" and are pre-attuned to selectively pick-up, process and store very restricted domains of environmental stimuli or information. They, therefore, cannot have been designed to maximize reproductive fitness.

What constitutes fitness, especially reproductive fitness, moreover, varies across sex, age and adaptive domains and it cannot be assessed/perceived within a single individual's lifetime. It is impossible for humans, therefore, to maximize fitness in a domain-general way. Memory cannot be a domain-general or neutral recording device in the mind because there are no such devices in the mind.

There are many other possible objections (besides the major ones listed above) to empiricist theories of memory. First, contrary to the blank slate view, memory appears to be structured and very rigidly organized. Studies of memory disorders (especially in brain-damaged populations) have forced investigators to conclude that memory is very richly structured (Cermak, 1988). There are patients, for example, who lose their episodic memories but not their semantic memories and vice versa. Similarly, procedural memories may be impaired in Parkinson's disease but not declarative memories, while the opposite is the case for patients with Korsakoff's syndrome (Oscar-Berman, McNamara & Freedman, 1991). Second, the development of various memory structures appears to follow a predetermined biological plan in that major spurts in episodic memory reports take place at roughly the same ages and in roughly the same sequence in children (Tulving, 1983). Development of memory, therefore, is not tied to quantity or quality of sensory impressions available to the child. Third, what any given child remembers is always more than (if the child remembers anything at all), and better organized than, what the child was initially exposed to. The child's memory is creative. Fourth, memory is selective—we remember some things better than others suggesting that our memories exhibit preferences and are pre-attuned to certain types of information (Houston, 1991). Finally,
memory is hard-wired into the brain. If you damage selective areas of the brain (particularly medial-temporal and frontal structures) you will invariably observe profound and selective memory disorders (Squire, 1987). For all these reasons memory cannot be a neutral information processing system designed to promote the persistence of past sensory impressions.

WHY ANY THEORY OF MEMORY MUST BE TRANSPERSONAL IN PERSPECTIVE

Modern accounts of memory labor under three major shortcomings: 1) They ignore recollective experience—a process central to the subjective experience of remembering; 2) they attempt to understand all memory phenomena as the persistence of the past into the present; and 3) they assume empiricist models of mind.

The greatest flaw, however, in modern accounts of memory is that they ignore transpersonal memory (recollective experience) and unnecessarily confine themselves to study of personal memories only (whether of the episodic or semantic varieties). They leave out the memories we all share by virtue of being human beings. The focus on personal memories encourages empiricist approaches to mind since the task is to explain how the individual acquires his or her knowledge and behaviors. A research strategy which focuses on individual differences before outlining general aspects of the phenomenon under study will inevitably founder.

ELEMENTS OF TRANSPERSONAL MEMORY

The defining characteristic of a transpersonal approach to memory is the assumption that memory itself is transpersonal. To say that memory is transpersonal carries with it two theoretical presuppositions. First, that transpersonal memory is a species power—a power or competence which all human beings inherit by virtue of their humanity. Second, like any other inherited competence, transpersonal memory is structured and exhibits special characteristics and contents (or outputs). According to writers in the Platonic tradition, the contents of transpersonal memory may be the source for much of the spiritual experiences of humankind. Plato, for example, suggested that the contents of transpersonal memories are the eternal ideas like beauty, truth, justice and so on. Jung suggested that species memories were characterized by the archetypes of divine personages such as the contrasexual figures: anima and animus (Jung, 1959). For the ancients, however, access to the contents of transpersonal memory was possible only through recollective experience. This position concerning the contents of transpersonal memory is called the doctrine of recollection.
Doctrine of Recollection

The doctrine asserts that "...what we call learning is really a remembering and that our knowledge is by participation in the Omnipotence of an immanent spiritual principle..." (Coomaraswamy, 1977, p. 49). This immanent spiritual principle is very often experienced as a divine witness or recorder of all events—a memory or a providential self.

For Socrates recollective experience was direct experience of this providential self or soul and the soul's knowledge.

The soul, then, as being immortal and having been born again many times, and having seen all things that exist, whether in this world or in the world below, has knowledge of them all; and it is no wonder that she should be able to call to remembrance all that she ever knew about virtue, and about everything; for as all nature is akin, and the soul has learned all things there is no difficulty in a man eliciting out of a single recollection all the rest—the process generally called learning—if he is strenuous and does not faint; for all learning and all inquiry is but recollection" (Meno, 81c-82a).

As to the objects of recollective experience Plato has this to say in the Phaedo (74-76c):

And if we acquired this knowledge before we were born, and were born having the use of it, then we also knew before we were born and at the instant of birth not only the equal or the greater or the less, but all other such ideas; for we are not speaking only of equality, but of beauty, goodness, justice, holiness, and of all which we stamp with the name of absolute being in the dialectical process, ..."

For the mystic and Trappist monk, Thomas Merton (1955):

Recollection is a change of spiritual focus and an attuning of our whole soul to what is beyond and above ourselves. It is a conversion or a turning of our being to spiritual things and to God. And because spiritual things are simple, recollection is also at the same time a simplification of our state of mind and of our spiritual activity ... [recollective] purifies our intention (Merton, 1955, p. 217).

Initiation of Recollection

According to Merton, recollection entails a direction of attention or libido away from the things of the world to things of the spirit. It is as if withdrawing our libido from the world allows us to entertain a simplified set of intentions—even a single intention.

In Merton's account, only individuals attached to the world require recollection since recollection is by definition withdrawal from the
world. As Plotinus once said, "Memory is for those who have forgotten" (Enneads, IV). To recollect is to take a step back from the world. Now, since the ego must relinquish its attachments, it grieves its losses and mourns its defeat by an agency more powerful than it. It is interesting that some authors have traced memory's roots to the Indo-European root: (s)mer—to mourn and to the Greek: merimma—care, sorrow (Casey, 1987). Suffering, it seems can trigger recollective experience.

According to Plato most of the men in this world have lost their memories and therefore they suffer:

But all souls do not easily recall the things of the other world; they may have seen them for a short time only, or they may have been unfortunate in their earthly lot, and, having had their hearts turned to unrighteousness through some corrupting influence, they may have lost the memory of the holy things which once they saw. Few only retain an adequate remembrance of them; and they, when they behold here any image of that other world, are rapt in amazement; but they are ignorant of what this rapture means, because they do not clearly perceive. For there is no radiance in our earthly copies of justice or temperance of those other things which are precious to souls: they are seen through a glass dimly; and they are few who, going to the images, behold in them the realities, and these only with difficulty ... (Phaedrus 249c).

While loss of memory is the soul's true malady, recollection's ability to lead the soul back to its true nature or homeland constitutes a healing journey for the soul:

Now I know the other cause, or rather the major cause of your illness: you have forgotten your true nature. And so I have found out in full the reason for your sickness and the way to approach the task of restoring your health" (Boethius, 1969, p. 51)

Recollection allows the soul to return to God—the stillpoint of the turning world—and thus allows the soul to avoid becoming disturbed by the ups and downs of the wheel of fortune.

...to the extent that we are able to identify ourselves with the Providential self itself ... we rise above the sequences of Fate, becoming their spectator rather than their victim. Thus the doctrine that all knowledge is by participation is inseparably connected with the possibility of Liberation ..." (Coomaraswamy, 1977, p. 50).

The higher, Providential self is memory; it sees all, records all, witnesses all. "Memory is from the Self or Spirit (aimatah smar-ah)" (Coomaraswamy, 1977, p. 51). For the self knows everything.

That which remembers, or that which is aware of all things, must be a principle always present to (anubhu) all things, and therefore una-
fected by the duration in which these events succeed one another. We are thus reduced to a Providence (praśna) or Providential self or spirit (praśnatman) as the ultimate source on which all memory draws, and with which whoever attains to the same uninterrupted omniscience must be identified as in Prasna Upanishad IV.10" (Coomaraswamy, 1977, p. 58).

Recollection’s ultimate goal is transpersonal: to put us in touch with that Providential self. That is the solution to suffering.

Suffering, however, is not the only potent trigger of recollective experience. Merton’s analysis suggests that recollection can be initiated by the subject as a spiritual discipline. But we have just seen that the ego must relinquish its attachments to the world in order to undergo recollection, therefore recollection is probably not initiated by the ego. We must ask: if the ego does not initiate recollection, what agency does? The superego is an unlikely candidate since it is concerned only with mores and vaguely ethical/behavioral issues. The id, of course, cannot initiate any actions at all. Who then is the agency of recollection?

One candidate might be the will. Assagioli (1973) has said that

The will has a directive and regulatory function, it balances and constructively utilizes all the other activities and energies of the human being without repressing any of them” (Assagioli, 1973, p. 10).

He goes on to quote Calo:

The will is just this activity of the I which is a unity which stands above the multiplicity of its contents, and which replaces the previous impulsive fractional centrifugal actions of these contents” (Assagioli, 1973, p. 12).

The will has energy, mastery, concentration, determination, persistence, initiative, organization. Another will identified by Assagioli, the transpersonal will, is especially interesting from the point of view of recollective experience because it seems to be equivalent to Jung’s idea of a transcendent function (Jung, 1960) which unifies all psychic polarities (e.g., remembering/forgetting; good/evil; male/female). Unfortunately, virtually nothing is known of these matters.

Finally, Plotinus (204-270 A.D.) suggested that beauty could trigger a recollective experience:

Now if the sight of beauty excellently reproduced upon a face hurry
the mind to that other sphere, surely no one seeing the loveliness lavish
in the world of sense—this vast orderliness, the forms which the stars
even in their remoteness display—no one could be so dull-witted, so
immovable, as not to be carried by all this to recollection, and gripped
by reverent awe in the thought of all this, so great, sprung from that
greatness” (Enneads II, 9,16).

EFFECTS OF RECOLLECTION

Once recollection has been triggered and a subject undergoes a
recollective experience, what are its effects?

True recollection is known by its effects: peace, interior silence,
tranquility of heart. The spirit that is recollected is quiet and detached,
at least in its depths. It is undisturbed because the passions are momentarily
at rest. At most they are allowed to trouble only the surface of the
recollected soul” (Merton, 1957, 217-18).

Autonomy

Recollective experience frees us from undue dependence on the
external world; it temporarily severs the intense attachment to the
external environment or “world.” Without the ability to periodically withdraw from the world and its attachments, the external environment would pretty much constitute the primary determinant of human behavior . . . it would excessively control our behavioral options.

A most striking example of the power of the external environment
to “excessively” control an individual’s behavior due to a loss of
memory comes from the realm of neuropsychology. One neuropsychological syndrome which implicates personal autonomy in a
very direct way is the “environmental dependency syndrome”
described by the neurologist, Lhermitte (1986). This neuropsychological syndrome occurs in patients who have suffered damage to
their frontal lobes. The frontal lobes are believed to specialize in the
monitoring of internal and intrapsychic events and in promoting
distance from the environment. The frontal lobes function in opposition to the parietal lobes which are sensitive to events in the
external surround and which foster approach to the environment
(Mesulam, 1986). The optimal functioning of these two cerebral
regions involves a state of reciprocal inhibition such that the individual is never unduly influenced by one pole of the inner-outer polarity.

Patients with bilateral frontal lobe damage display a pattern of
behavior which reflects the now unopposed activity of the parietal
lobes. Their behavior comes under the influence of the “approach
tendencies” of the parietal lobes. These patients are excessively
influenced by the external environment. They are stimulus bound,
concrete, socially inappropriate, and display a remarkable inability
to grasp context. Lhermitte also demonstrated that these patients
exhibit a tendency to imitate the examiner’s behaviors and gestures even when this behavior entails considerable social embarrassment. The mere sight of an object may elicit the compulsion to use it. In a very literal sense, then, the immediate external environment controls these patient’s behaviors. It is unclear which elements in the repertoire of frontal functions are crucial in "opposing" the approach tendencies of parietal functioning, but memory is likely to be the most crucial. There is a lot of evidence, for example, that memory depends on the frontal lobes and fronto-temporo interactions (Oscar-Berman, McNamara & Freedman, 1991).

The environmental dependency syndrome constitutes an extreme example of loss of personal autonomy when influences of the stimulus environment go unopposed by recollection. Recollective experience allows us to avoid losing ourselves in the world. It does so by a process Heidegger called “in-gathering” (Casey, 1987).

"Gathering-up and In-gathering"

When I am not present to myself, then I am only aware of that half of my being which turns outward to created things. And then it is possible for me to lose myself among them. Then I no longer feel the deep secret pull of the gravitation of love which draws my inward self toward God. My will and my intelligence lose their command of the other faculties. My senses, my imagination, my emotions, scatter to pursue their various quarries all over the face of the earth. Recollection brings them home (Merton, 1955, p. 221-22).

It is impossible to have a sense of one’s self if one’s self is nowhere to be found!

The philosopher Casey (1987) seems to have a similar idea in mind when he writes:

If it is now evident that personal identity is dependent upon the free activity of remembering, we still do not know how this activity actually works. A clue is contained in a statement of Heidegger’s: "Memory is the gathering of thought" (M. Heidegger, What is called thinking? 1968). In its free action, memory [as recollection] gathers much else besides thought; it also gathers emotions, perceptions, bits of discourse—ultimately all the parts of our life history. . . . Gathering connotes assembling, drawing together of items into a provisional unity. . . . It is striking that the word "recollection," understood in terms of its origins rather than in terms of the use to which it has been put in Western thought, captures these same two aspects of memorial gathering. "Collection" derives from the Latin collecta, a "gathering together" and, still more primordially, from colligere, literally a "binding together" (as is signified in the English verb "to colligate"); whereas "re" signified "back" or "again." In a primary act of recollec-
tion, I bind things together, keep them in a gathered unity, so that I can return to them again and again (Casey, 1987, pp. 292-93).

Presencing

Casey goes on to point out that the gathering action of recollection is a gathering-in.

Within what? Within the remembering subject. . . . As Plato himself put it, remembering of the most significant sort—and this means recollection of forms, anamnesis—takes place "within oneself" (ex hautou) (Casey, 1987, p. 293).

Following Heidegger, I call processes related to in-gathering, presencing. What is occurring during these varied recollective states is nothing less than the coming to presence of a self.

There are three important processes related to recollection's support of presencing. One process concerns our most primitive sense of place. Place is where presencing happens. A second process linked to the phenomenon of presencing and the sense of place is the experience of personal boundaries each one of us carries about our persons. Boundaries may be an effect of the "gathering-in" process which occurs during recollection. Boundaries and the sense of place are undoubtedly linked. The third process related to recollection's presencing powers is the emergence of a sense of self or identity.

This process of an emergence of a sense of a unique self or identity is, of course, crucial for clinical work and may be important in the etiology of various dissociative disorders of memory such as Multiple Personality Disorder and Fugue states. In these disorders the recollective process proceeds without the establishment of boundaries so that selves are created instead of a single self.

Critchley has discussed the neurology of the experience of a presence (1979). The cases he discusses demonstrate that the experience of presence is related to identity, personhood and recollection:

The identity of the visitant or "presence" is but rarely established . . . though realization of the fallaciousness of the belief may engender its own emotions of awe, wonder, bewilderment, or fear (Critchley, 1979, p. 1).

Intentional actions may sometimes be ascribed to the visitant:

A boy of fifteen was taking coffee in an open-air cafe. He suddenly imagined he saw something glistening far over to his right. His mind
immediately leapt to the conclusion that someone was standing behind him and to the right, trying to hypnotize him by shining a light into his eyes. In alarm he turned his head and eyes to the right, and then lost consciousness (Critchley, 1979, p. 3).

In all of these cases the presence is not yet localized to a place ex hootu—within the remembering subject. Rather, “it” is displaced to a point outside the subject.

There are cases where localization of the presence fluctuates (within—without), or is in the process of being localized within the subject:

... a patient who showed a left-sided hemiparesis and a hemianopia. The patient declared that the left half of the body did not belong to him. Sometimes while walking he got the notion that behind him and to his left he was being followed by someone, namely his double. Whenever this idea developed he would lose the feeling of strangeness which affected the left half of his body (Critchley, 1979, p. 4).

When the presence was “in” his body, the patient felt strange, as if the left half of the body belonged to the presence and not to the patient. Whereas, if the presence was localized to a place outside of the patient, the patient no longer felt “strange.”

Then there are cases where the presence is well-constructed enough to carry an identity and to be localized within the subject and yet still not be identified as self:

A well known poet told me that during a childhood illness he developed a curious feeling as if someone had entered his body. Thus he became a composite being with this other person sharing his pains and discomforts (Critchley, 1979, p. 4).

Sometimes in cases like this the subject is just on the verge of realizing that the visitant is self:

... a case of a woman with biparietal atrophy who, among other numerous symptoms, would often wake in the night with a trenchant feeling that someone was in the room—a person whom she knew very well indeed. Sometimes it would dawn on her that this visitant was none other than herself (Critchley, 1979, p. 5).

Finally, it should not be hard to imagine other phenomena like possession states as aberrations of the recollective process. Here the visitant is localized within and is identified as malevolent. Out-of-body experiences (OBEs) might also be understood in the context of recollection’s presencing function. In non-pathological cases the subject voluntarily dissociates presence and body. Consciousness is experienced as localized to the presence outside the
body. Voluntary OBEs may be a by-product of recollection—available to some individuals and not others.

The ability to manipulate aspects of recollective experience (especially the experience of presencing/embodiment) might confer special advantages on some individuals. Once an individual could manipulate his own experience, he might then be able to do so to or for others. These "magical" abilities would mark the individual as special. Tribal healers or shamans apparently used OBEs in their healing rituals for millennia. The shaman would leave his or her body in order to contact the spirit world where the necessary healing powers could be obtained (Eliade, 1964).

It appears, then, that recollection is initiated by the will for reasons we cannot know a priori. Besides allowing us to experience ourselves as unique embodied persons influenced by a unique history, recollection may also allow us to access transpersonal memories in such a way as to be enriched by the infusion of their transpersonal energies. Whatever else they are, these archetypal energies must be the common inheritance of the species. In recollection it is as if the individual is taken out of the world of mundane things and concerns and delivered into the realm of species concerns. He begins to deal with the life-force as embodied in the human species. But these tremendous transpersonal energies are put in the service of a single unique self—a presencing self.

REFERENCES


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