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Memory

We tend to take remembering as an unproblematic phenomenon – unless we try to remember something that is not instantly in our mind, at which point the process becomes problematic. When we forget something – to bring lunch to the office, the name of a street – we attribute it to a failure of the mind without reflecting too much about the phenomenon. Remembering may be taken in the way we think about taking something from a cupboard or bookshelf. Take the following exchange in which a colleague asks me about where I bought a particular bottle of wine.

- In which liquor store did you get this bottle of wine?
- The one in Broadmead Village.

In this instance, I answer without hesitation, remembering the particular store in which I have made the purchase. I recognize the question as pertinent, for the selections of the different liquor stores in my town are different. Memory is an important aspect of mundane, everyday life, when those getting older complain about not remembering so well anymore, when students' do an 'all-nighter' to 'cram' for examinations and subsequently brag that on the day after they have already forgotten everything, or when we go shopping and forget an important item or forget to put that item on the shopping list. In this chapter, I exemplify the first-person method by means of a series of investigations relating to memory, remembering, and forgetting.

Recognizing Something Forgotten

In the learning sciences, researchers generally use the term 'representation' or 'mental representation' as a main category for theorizing how the mind works. But what does such a category imply? How does memory work when we apparently have forgotten a 'mental representation' and yet, upon seeing some situation again, recognize that we have seen, heard, or known it before? A representation is some

entity that stands for a thing, phenomenon, or situation. But where is that representation when it apparently is out of sight? The idea of a representation is that it makes (allows making) present again in the here and now of the instant some idea or phenomenon that is not present itself. What is a representation when it is apparently unavailable? In the course of the two investigations in this section, we come to the understanding that it is the reproduced and reproducible sequentiality that matters: immanent processes that reproduce themselves and provide me with memory.

Memory in Context

In chapter 2, I describe my stay at the *Hanse Institute of Advanced Sciences* where I conducted extended first-person experiments and investigations in learning something new. It turns out that many of my research notes focus on memory and on remembering something long forgotten. I began to take note of a number of phenomena related to memory.¹ One entry on the second day of the experiment describes aspects of remembering and forgetting. Even today there is sufficient detail in the account that I wrote more than 12 years ago to allow me locating the farm and the Y-fork described on a Google satellite map.

Day 2. As I am riding along, there are features in the environment that I have not remembered yesterday at home after the trip, but which I nevertheless recognize the moment I approach them. As I come around the Y-fork, I remember that I had seen from here the child on the bike and with the dog ahead of me. They then turned into the farm some 200 meters further on. I remember the field with the freshly sprouting grain plants though I had not remembered them at home. Thus there are things that despite the complexity of the experience, I re-cognize even before I reach the place, that I start to anticipate when I get within reach. But then there were other farms, other signs, other features that I seem to see for the first time. . . [E01p15]

In this account, the first sentence tells us about experiences in general: There are repeated instances during this second trip that I have not written down – not remembered when doing so – after having completed the trip on the day before. I have not remembered those features even though I had done my best to do so, because this was the whole point of the experiment: remembering as much as I could. On that first day, following my trip, I actually sat at my desk attempting to visually retrace where I had been so that I could write down as many features as possible. But there was little that I did in fact remember. On the next day, during the trip, in several instances, one of which is then referred to in an exemplary fashion, I remember something just before I actually get there. In the described example, it is a

¹ In that chapter, I write about having set up a 20-day experiment intended to study learning something new. Riding the same circuit repeatedly, I was writing down after each trip what I remembered to have seen, and prior to each trip, make a list of things I anticipated to be seeing (again).

child on a bicycle accompanied by a dog, who had been just ahead of me after I turn left at the Y-fork. Just after the Y-fork, I remember the child, bicycle, and dog but had not remembered them the night before when I wrote my notes and had not remembered them before leaving on this day to make this trip for a second time. Moreover, on that second day while the images of the little girl on the bicycle with her dog return, I also remember that there will be a farm some 200 meters further on. Even today I remember that I have to make another turn and then will be, a little further, at the gates of the local army barracks. On that second day, I recognize and remember a feature while somewhere along my trip in the ‘neighborhood’ of that feature that I will be experiencing shortly after even before I actually reach it.

Why, we may ask, do I not remember these features when I am at home, whereas I do remember them during the trip but before I actually see them? The account shows that this is not the same for ‘all’ features, for there are many phenomena that I do see for the first time during later trips – such as the twin silos or regularly spaced white posts along the highway that feature in chapter 2. There are actually other experiences that we have in everyday life that share a lot of similarity with the present situation, and which may be taken as analogies. For example, I sometimes doze off or begin thinking about something else while reading some text, a book or an article in *Science*. When I return to the text on the following day without knowing where precisely I have left off, there are instances when the text ‘rings familiar’. When I go on, I realize that I have already read this part. But not all pieces of text give rise to this sense in an equally strong form. But eventually I come to a place where everything is new, often where a new heading begins – which are the places where I had broken off reading, if there are had been reasons for breaking it off. Similarly, we recognize parts of a melody that we have heard only once before without being able to remember the entire tune or even parts of it. But we can often anticipate the next few notes, as I have experienced during a pause between two movements of a symphony or concerto. I have also had the experience that upon hearing a tune on the radio, I begin humming another tune when the former ends. I subsequently realize that it may have been the next song of the same band on a particular album or that it may have been a song by another performer but it has been the next song on an audiotape that I recorded from the radio.

Returning to this second trip, it is as if I am recognizing, all of a sudden, a place that I have been before and know what will come next as long as this ‘next’ is not too far away. It is a replaying of sequences of images. Some images may trigger a sequence of images even though I had not been able to recall them. There are traces, fragments that lead to a replaying of past sequences in the same way that we hum on based on hearing a few notes even though we have forgotten the melody. At the time of the experiment, the (memory) traces are not strong or deep enough to allow me to recover them at home on the first afternoon. But over time – I have done the trip for 20 days in a row – the traces become sufficiently deep to give rise to the memory when I re-read the research notes of the time. It turns out that the memory is especially good and verifiable for those events that ‘marked me’: these ‘remarkable’ events can be ‘re-marked’ today, that is, made present again.

This episode tells us about the relation of presence and the capacity to make some presence present again at another place and time. Although I am present on the stretch between the Y-fork and the farm, where I see the child on the bicycle and the dog, I cannot make this presence present again while sitting at my desk following the trip on Day 1 of the experience. The ‘trace’ is not strong enough: I cannot yet activate the images on my own and therefore cannot use them to point me to the original event. In fact, therefore, the trace has already disappeared. But I know that I have been here before at the instant when I *recognize* the environs and then *remember* to have seen the girl and that following her farm I have to take a right turn where I then would see the gates of the barracks in the not-to-far distance. At that time, during this new presence in the place, the old presence returns in the form of a memory. Spurred by the actual images, not only does this fragment of the old presence return but also the images that temporally followed that former presence. The whole sequence is playing as soon as the first image appears, just as a melody in my mind unfolds as soon as any part of a familiar tune comes to be reawakened.

This remembering in context, therefore, is the beginning of memory, where there is an immanent memory. This form of memory is insufficient to stand on its own, yet it is sufficiently strong to return when activated by another presence. Familiarity with the setting, therefore, much better than ‘representation’ (in the psychological and cognitive sense) describes the development of the capacity to remember and think. The form of memory initially is immanent to the movement of images itself.

In such an experience, a person appears like a tablet, where some original experience leaves a trace that then somehow sinks into the past only to be resuscitated by a subsequent experience. This image of the trace is problematic when it is thought like a representation, which would take us back to metaphysics where there are structures in the human mind and body that stand for other things. Sigmund Freud introduced the idea of a magic tablet (slate), where the trace left by writing on it is erased by a pull on the sheet between the writing surface and the wax below. This is equivalent to having new experiences such as the ones that followed on the day when I see the child and her dog. These subsequent experiences write over and erase the preceding one so that when I arrive at my temporary home, I cannot write anything about the girl and her dog, which, in essence, I have forgotten (about). The magic tablet is an analogy that has permitted Freud to show how something apparent in consciousness can disappear – equivalent to forgetting – but remain in the unconscious of the person, as the impression in the wax itself remains, but is overwritten and changed by subsequent writing. This process of writing, therefore, also changes the person, as previous markings in the wax of the magic tablet come to be transformed and disfigured.

It has been suggested that this ‘Freudian concept of the trace has to be radicalized and extracted from the metaphysics of presence that still keeps it (in particular in the concepts of the conscious, unconscious, perception, memory, reality, that is to say, also of some others)’ (Derrida 1967b: 339). To arrive at a productive metaphor, we need to understand the trace as erasure, of its own presence, constantly threatened by its irremediable disappearance. This consideration shows us that we need to think the original experience, my seeing the girl on the bicycle and the dog

in this way, as a trace that is erased by the remainder of the experience on that day to such an extent that it is not and no longer can be made present when I am at my desk attempting to note *everything* that I have seen on this trip. This erasure is the fundamental experience and the few observations that are indeed retained, through repeated tracing, are the exception rather than the norm. Moreover, they are themselves subject to erasure, as we can see from the fact that the experience disappeared from my active thinking until I re-read the narrative of the event while writing this book. At that point, based on the description, the images associated with the trace returned – though not with their original vividness. ‘This erasure of the trace is not only an accident that can produce itself here and there, not even the structure necessary for a determinate censure that threatens this or that presence, it is the very structure that makes possible, as a movement of temporalization and as pure auto-affection, something that we may call the suppression in general’ (ibid: 339). When the thought of the trace is radicalized in this manner, we actually have a tool for ‘the deconstruction of logocentrism but also a reflection that works more positively in different fields, at different levels of writing more generally, an articulation of writing in the everyday sense of the trace in general’ (ibid: 339). These fields that would benefit from a radicalized thinking of the trace include, according to the author, psychopathology of everyday life, the history of writing, or the becoming-literary of the literal.

We already observe the disappearance of memory with the trace in chapter 2. There I show how the very appearance of the twin silos makes disappear the world that has existed for me, and which I have inhabited before. After the experience, I could no longer think of a world without the twin silos, even though until that ominous seventh day, there had been no twin silos in my life.

Memory in the Hand

When I grew up, adults often said to children to make a knot in the handkerchief as a form of reminder for something else. This, of course, as some of us found out, means remembering what the knot stood for. I have found myself in the store with the handkerchief in my hands but have forgotten *what* the knot was supposed to be a reminder of. Although the knot is in my hand, I have forgotten what I was to purchase for my mother. Curiously enough, there may be a form of memory in the hand itself, or any body part for this matter, which remembers something even though my conscious mind has long forgotten (about) it. Here is an account of an event, which happened a few years after graduate school while I was teaching at a private high school outside of Toronto.

One day in the office next to my classroom, I decide to call my former doctoral supervisor. But as I turn to the telephone, I realize that I have forgotten her telephone number. I try to remember it. But I cannot access the number in my mind precisely because I have forgotten it.² I turn my eyes upward and toward the ceil-

² This episode actually is of much greater interest than I can explore in this place. Already St. Augustine asked himself the question how it could be that I simultaneously forget something and

ing, as if the number were somehow available there. I realize that when I look up a word in dictionary, I pull the latter off the shelf and leaf through it until I have found the page where the item is. But it is different with the telephone number. I cannot *aim at* retrieving it in the same way. As hard as I try – whatever the signification of ‘trying hard’ may be – the number does not come to me. I visualize my supervisor’s face, the university, instances when I have called her during my years at the university, her home, and a variety of other instances from my life at the time. I am at a loss. I decide to call the telephone directory assistance in the state of Mississippi where she lives. I do remember the traditional directory assistance, which would be 1-601-555-1212. I begin to dial 1, for making the long distance call and then dial while articulating to myself 6 (‘six’), 0 (‘o’), 1 (‘one’), for the area code. My hand and fingers continue and, as the latter push the keys almost despite myself, a familiar melody begins to emerge from the receiver. The phone on the other side rings, and then *her* voice tells me not only ‘hello’ but also that my hand indeed has found the forgotten number. (The reasons for my hearing her voice rather than the voice of an operator can be found in the analyses of chapter 4.)

Two issues stand out. First, I have forgotten the telephone number; but I have not forgotten that it is the phone number that I now have forgotten. Second, the very *representation* that was to make the dialing process present again – so that I could consciously call her up – has itself disappeared but the process has remembered itself.

In this episode, my fingers remember a telephone number that my conscious I has forgotten and cannot recall. I do recall another number that begins with the same area code and which would have put me in contact with someone (i.e., the operator) who could have given me the number of my supervisor as soon as I had provided the name of the other party. My fingers dial a number that my mind has forgotten. Normally, this would have happened by typing the number I recalled, made present in my conscious mind at the instant of dialing, and then directed my fingers to do the dialing. This would have constituted a mediated access, because my mind could have been said to do all the work, recall the number and then provide the fingers with the instructions for dialing. The telephone number would have been a sign that mediates between my mind and the fingers: in fact, psychologists would have said that I used it as a representation, call it up from long-term memory, and use it for present purposes. But, to push this analogy a little further, looking for a phone number – or anything else for this matter – that I have long forgotten is like going into a storehouse looking for a kind of thing the specific instance of which I do not even know if it is there. Where would I look? How would I know which one of the many items I see in the storehouse is the one I am looking for?

remember that I have forgotten it. The only thing that we can conclude from this is that ‘I have kept by the same memory the image of the forgetting without the forgotten object; this forces me to conclude that my memory, the most intimate of my consciousness, doubles itself, because it reveals equally well what overcomes forgetting as that which succumbs to it’ (Marion 2010: 39). This also means that I am not in complete control over myself but have to submit myself to the immemorial and undo myself into an originary unconsciousness.

In my account, I note that at the time I am ‘trying hard’. What is it that one can do when the very thing one requires as the object of intention is not available? I cannot (‘mentally’) reach out and pull the number from a shelf precisely because I do not know where to look for it. *If* I have a telephone book or an address book with telephone numbers, I can take my supervisor’s name, look it up, and then find the telephone number next to her name. That is, I take another sign, her name, matched with the telephone number in a look up table. This name then becomes a mediational device in my accessing the right telephone number. In my trying to remember the number by thinking of familiar situations concerning my supervisor as well as the techniques we use to find a number when we do not remember it point to a fundamental issue: We know that we have forgotten something because in the total picture, the network of relations of significance, there is a void. Representations, these entities that allow us to make something that is absent present again, work because they work in concert. It is only as a totality of relations that these entities do the kind of work that psychologists ascribe to them.

‘The number does not come to me’. Note that I use the passive construction in this account. In all the considerations of memory, educators seemingly forget that if something does not stay current in the conscious mind on its own – the familiar things, the names and birthdays of our closest relatives – then we use other mediating devices to have access to them. Address books have been designed such that we have rapid access to those addresses and phone numbers that we use less frequently and therefore do not remember as easily. But when we use this tool, we still have to remember something: the name of the person that we want to write to or phone. The address book would be relatively useless if we did not remember the name of the person or whether we had entered the corresponding phone number. That is, the things we are familiar with on a day-to-day basis tend to be *present at hand* and do not require our conscious attention. They are seemingly present. It is precisely when such an item as a telephone number is absent, as well as the device that would provide me with a look up table, that the nature of memory comes into relief. As the subject of remembering, *I am given* the thing – phone number, name of person, street name – that is made present again precisely when I recall the number or name. Without this thing, number or name, I cannot make present again what is required to do such a simple thing as call my supervisor.

The story does not end here, as we see in my account. There are possibilities of remembering even when the things have been lost that allow us to make present again what it takes to do what we have done before. There is a popular saying that we never forget how to ride a bicycle, even though, if we have not done it for many years, it may take a little while to do it well again.³ In the present instance, it is the hand itself that remembers the phone number. Once I start dialing, the hand and fingers continue on their own. The fingers remember in moving: the movement *is* their memory. It is like what happens when we produce the first tones of a tune and then the melody unfolds on its own, coming from our mouths even though we had

³ Scientists are working on the problem of explaining why and how we remember certain motor skills even when we have not practiced them for a long time. In 2009, a Scottish team of researchers reported in *Nature Neuroscience* that they have found a kind of nerve cell that plays a key role in forming memories of motor skills.

forgotten (about) it. During the event retold in my account, my right hand and its fingers begin a *kinetic melody* while typing 1 - 6 - 0 - 1 and then the tune continues on its own in the same way that my body did not forget to ride a bicycle even though there have been several periods where I did not ride one for years, up to over a decade. I do not actually require the explicit memory for each of the digits or the melody as a whole. At that instance in my life, the melody plays itself once I begin with the first few ‘notes’ that I remember.

The mentioning of notes brings us back to the original account. There I write about hearing the *familiar* melody in the receiver co-temporaneous with the fingers dialing the number. As I hear it, I do remember the tune that corresponds to the telephone number even though I would have been unable to recall it (the tune). In that situation, I recognize the tune when I hear it. The kinetic melody that my fingers play is reflected in the auditory melody that I hear – in a situation not unlike a person playing the piano might rediscover a forgotten tune as soon as the hands come to play the first few notes of it without the conscious mind being aware of what the hands are doing.

The term *kinetic melody* has been used to describe the writing process: ‘In the initial stages, for example, *writing* depends on memorizing the graphic form of every letter. It takes place through a chain of isolated motor impulses, each of which is responsible for the performance of only one element of the graphic structure; with practice, this structure of the process is radically altered and writing is concerted into a single “kinetic melody”, no longer requiring the memorization of the visual form of each isolated letter or individual motor impulses for making every stroke’ (Luria 1973: 32).⁴ In the way the hand and fingers remember writing a word, my hand and fingers have remembered dialing the telephone number that I otherwise have forgotten. The same apparently is the case in the process where ‘the change to writing a highly automatized engram (such as a signature) ceases to depend on analysis of the acoustic complex of the word or the visual form of its individual letters, but begins to be performed as a single “kinetic melody”’ (ibid: 32). Those readers who type well may actually have experienced such phenomena when they find out that wanting to write one word their hands have written another one. In this case, a different kinetic memory plays itself out. Such changes from conscious writing to kinetic melodies are typical for the development of other higher psychological processes as well. The neuroscientist suggests that the organization of these kinetic melodies is different in that it no longer depends on other areas of the brain, those, I would say in my words, that do the mediation. For example, the ‘participation of the auditory and visual areas of the cortex, essential in the early stages of formation of the activity, no longer is necessary in its later stages, and the *activity starts to depend on a different system of concertedly working zones*’ (ibid: 32).

I am not a neuropsychologist, nor am I particularly interested in finding out what this or that neuron or part of the brain does when scientists use various kinds of equipments to produce representations of my incarnate me. What I am interested

⁴ The idea of kinetic movements also appears in the work of Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (2009), who borrows it from Luria in making an argument for the primacy of movement, which she derives based on the phenomenology of dance movements.

in is describing phenomena that I (we) live and to derive from them knowledge that better accounts for what we do than common sense and its reification in many scientific (psychological) models of how we know and learn. What is interesting, though, is the fact that the close analysis of how the telephone number is in my hand is leading me to a form of description that has a high degree of similarity with the descriptions provided by researchers who take a very different approach. This is analogous to the situation that we find about eye movement – our first-person investigations lead us toward understanding fundamental processes of knowing and learning if we only engage in slow and unbiased, critical reading of primary experiences. It has to be noted, in passing, that Luria is different from most Western psychologists in that he looks at the functioning of the brain *in the context of societally motivated activity*. That is, he does not just isolate brain cells and study them, but, realizing the program of a concrete human psychology (Vygotskij 2005), he theorizes the most fundamental processes *in the context of* processes at the level of culture and society.

Specters

In the preceding section, we see how original experiences ‘sink into the past’, traces that are overwritten by subsequent experiences, traces too weak to re-voke past experiences. We *should not* think of these traces as permanent in anyway, but as continuously overwritten and changed – leading to the changing ways in which we view original experiences that sink into the past (Husserl 1980). Freud’s analogy of the magic writing tablet, thought in a radicalized and radicalizing way – not as sign, but as the writing | erasure dialectic – provides a useful analogy for this process and allows us to move away from a metaphysical conception of knowing and learning. The analogy also allows us to think through another experience, which I have had during the experiment in learning that took me along the same circuit of country and dirt roads for 20 days in a row. This episode exhibits yet another dimension of memory that further elaborates the analogy of the trace. We may look at or hear something and have an impression of having seen this or something like it before but cannot pinpoint the original experience. At the time, I capture the following notes in my research notebook.

First my eyes seem to be drawn to the thing, hold on to. Then, as in the case of the road sign ‘Landwehr’, I begin to think about the etymology of this compound noun – *Land*, land, ground, country and *die Wehr* [f], defense, *das Wehr* [n], weir, dam. I wonder if it has anything to do with a dam built by locals during the Middle Ages against some invaders coming from the side of the land. And finally, an even more striking re-cognition, I had a professor by that name. This second realization, re-presencing, came later, perhaps two or three seconds after my regard has been sucked into the word, I have noticed it, re-marked it as something that seemed familiar. Can I know whether something is re-markable? Perhaps I first re-mark some place, and then note it as remarkable. In this way, my vision is always re-vision. Each thing is

seen in terms of something else, each thing is a projection of the past, the past that makes present. I seem to re-member those places and things that my eyes were sucked in previously, and much less those that I was aware more superficially, more in the background.

Related to my experiences with re-marking particular places, signs, aspects of my trip: What aspects of the world (objects, actions, events) are salient so that they are re-marked at another point in time, at some later point? In my own situation, this seems to be connected to experiences that I associate with earlier other experiences. That is, events that I already re-marked from an earlier time.

When I ride along and pick out a particular house and discover that it bears resemblance with a house I have lived in for an important period of my life, I was already pre-disposed for ‘picking out’ this rather than some other house. My perception was already biased in picking this, ‘biased’ or pre-disposed because of the experience. Similarly, when I found myself thinking about the name ‘Landwehr’ that I had seen on a road sign, first in terms of its etymology, then I remembered it as the name of my solid states physics professor, and the day after as the name of a street where I had once lived . . . my perception is already predisposed.

There is something like a haunting memory. My gaze is drawn in without that I know why. Something appears to resonate, to be familiar. Yet I do not know why. I cannot give ‘Landwehr’ a place in my past. But it haunts me at this moment.

In this instance, I see a street sign with the word ‘Landwehr’ on it. The experience is one of affection. It is not just that the sign is seen and passes, but the seeing is associated with an affection that is contagious, making me ‘hold on to’ the thing. As the final paragraph in the quotation shows, excerpted from a note written a few days later, there is something haunting about the word ‘Landwehr’, which, as the first paragraph in the quotation shows, I cannot quite explain. It makes me think about the origin of the word: a form of defense against invaders from the landside of a town (e.g., located on a river). The note provides evidence for an experience of feeling pulled into the engagement. Then, all of a sudden, there is recognition: it is the name of a professor whose lectures on solid states physics I had attended some 25 years earlier.

The episode shares similarities and differences with that when I encounter the girl on the bicycle and her dog. In that event, I immediately remember her as I am nearing the place where I had first seen her. The trace is re-awakened as is the one of the surroundings, now without the girl, are written anew. There is no apparent time intervening and the image phenomenalizes itself apparently in an instant. In the case of the road sign imprinted with the word ‘Landwehr’, it takes some time, filled with a sense of being haunted, until the *recognition* instantiates itself – the realization that a professor who once taught me had the same (rather uncommon) last name. When I attended university, of course, I have had no problems recognizing or recalling his name. He was an internationally well-known professor; and one of his postdoctoral fellows, who taught our advanced laboratory course in solid-state physics, received the Nobel Prize in physics some 8 years later. But over time, I forgot about the professor and his name. Whatever trace there had been, it

had been overwritten many times since my university days. When I do see the name again, it is 'strangely familiar', but I cannot locate why this would be so. In fact, the initial engagement with the word-name suggests that it might be the etymology that was at the origin of the affection with this object. Then follows the recognition that 'Landwehr' was my professor's name. This recognition and even the reappearance of the trace cannot be explained by the notion of agency. The experience is one of a donation, where something I (the conscious one) have forgotten reappears for me on its own, without and despite my intention. It is the seeing of the name that triggers this reappearance.

There is another interesting and instructive phenomenon in this narrative. At the time, I write that the 'Landwehr' is the name of a street I have lived on. While working on this section of the book, I search Google maps and find out that none of the streets I have lived on has this name. Now 'Landwehr' or 'Landwehr Graben' (moat) is not just a name, it is also a noun denoting the structures that towns and cities built during the Middle Ages as part of their defense systems against intruders. I did live in an area where there had been a moat once upon a time, now filled in and covered by a park around the entire city. Moreover, about 100 meters from my old high school, where I had been attending fifth through eleventh grade and the two years of college level bears the name 'Landwehrstraße' (street of 'Landwehr'). That is, at the time I originally wrote the notes, I was convinced to have lived on a street that bears this name; I was so convinced, in fact, that I did not bother looking up whether such a street actually exists in the city.

This phenomenon modifies and radicalizes any idea that might have arisen from the episode with the girl on the bicycle with her dog. Based on this episode and the way it presented itself then, and the fact that I apparently remember it to the present day, might give rise to an idea about memory that is precisely that of metaphysics, where certain traces – e.g., letters or sounds – come to stand for things and ideas. If the *trace* were of this kind, we would not be able to understand why it exhibits the features apparent in the present phenomenon. Why would there be a signifier (the trace) changing its signified without apparent reason? The present experience and analysis shows that the very (classical) idea of the trace needs to be rethought in terms of the analogy of writing, erasure, overwriting – and, therefore, continual transformation of any trace. I remembered the word 'Landwehr' as the name of a street, but, as shown here, it was not at all the name of a street that I had lived on and therefore should have remembered more clearly. It's a spectral reappearance, a ghost, which, as something that has survived. I had been in the street that actually bears this name – I now believe that a classmate lived there, and I have likely taken it or passed its beginning frequently – but without the search on a map, I would not have been able to locate it. 'This survival also is a spectral return (the survivor always is a phantom), which remarks itself and stages itself from the beginning, at the instant when the posthumous, testimonial, and scriptural character of the narrative comes to deploy itself' (Derrida 1986: 182).

This investigation shows that we should not see in an indelible, constant experience, a trace, some stable feature that the individual later *interprets* differently. If we were to make this theoretical move, then we would have developed no further. Rather, the experience (trace) *itself* changes such that we never have access to an original experience. With *representation*, therefore, also comes a *denaturing*, a

change in the nature of, and a denaturalization of the living and lived experience. I return to this issue in chapter 8.

Forgetting and Moira

In the preceding sections, I present and analyze episodes that contain various aspects of memory. These episodes show that experience does not leave an indelible trace, which becomes or could become a sign for some events. Approached in that way, we find theories whereby individuals ‘interpret differently’ the experiences they have had or, rather, the traces that these have left. There is a problem with this approach typical for hermeneutic phenomenology, where differences in the relation between past events and the person are theorized as ‘subjective’ interpretations that change. There are no signs or original experiences, as our first-person inquiry shows (as well as the writings of J. Derrida on the topic), because the very phenomenon of writing also means erasure, overwriting, and change even as writing goes along. That is, we should not think of the writing of a trace that stands for a while in its original beauty before it disappears. Rather, thinking about writing as a spatio-temporal process that what it just has written as it goes along more often than not erases what happens. This then forces us to *explain* those instances where a more stable trace actually appears to form. In the case of the girl on the bicycle with her dog, returning to that part of the countryside around Delmenhorst made traces of the trace appear, though not definite and which, already on that first day, could have been changed much in the same way that the trace ‘Landwehr’ has changed over time. Returning to the same places strengthen certain aspects of a trace; but much like the tracks left by vehicles in the road, the traces are re-written, changed with the next passage. This erasure is, as we see above, a movement of temporalization and auto-affection. This auto-affection allows me to *recognize* in the manner described above.

In the preceding sections, my analysis shows that we need to think forgetting at the same time and together with remembering. They are different sides of the same coin. The trace both enables remembering something all the while it erases this something. On the one hand, when I try hard to forget something, an embarrassing instant in my life (at the time of working on this book, a traffic ticket I received for passing cars on my bicycle to get ahead the first in the left-turn lane) or a painful event, the very attempt to forget retains the event in my active thought. The harder I want the event to disappear from my consciousness, the more persistently and saliently it remains. Although I want to get the thought about the traffic fine behind me and out of my mind, it stays there – longer? – the more I try to abandon the thought. This has helped me, as a child, at least part of the way to the grocery store, when my mother wanted me to get something. I am thinking about it, repeating the list of items over and over again as I cross the meadow and walk up the hill to the store. But then I may have been distracted by something, just as I arrive at the store, and I have forgotten what I had gone there for (to buy). I have had to return home and ask my mother what it was that she wanted me to buy. (Of course, it would have been easier to actually use a pencil and leave a relatively permanent

trace on paper. But this is not the same kind of writing.) In this early episode, then, as long as there is repetition, the traces become temporarily permanent only to be destroyed by a subsequent thought right next to the store.

We are all familiar with the techniques and technologies of collective memory: commemorations. Every year, wreaths are laid at war memorials and volunteers sell poppies to be attached to the lapel. It is a form of keeping memory alive. It shows that there are symbols that point back to the event that is not to be forgotten. These symbols – memorials, poppies, or gravestones – are the very reason why we do not and cannot forget. Words and images, that is, things that make events of a different presence present again in the now-presence, have the same function. We tend to call them *representations* – things, beings, that can make another presence present again.

Just as remembering is given to me, I have to accept forgetting as a gift. Just as with going to sleep, the harder I try forgetting the harder it becomes to actually forget (and to fall asleep). Conversely, because writing is accompanied and indissociable from erasure, any thought and experience may vanish immediately. Remembering it then has to be accepted as a gift.

Presence and the Presence of the Present

In effect, how is it that I cannot only forget but also remember *that* I have forgotten that which I nevertheless have forgotten. (Marion 2010: 38–39)

‘To remember’, from post-classical Latin *rememorari*, remember, composed of the classical Latin *re-*, again + *memor*, mindful (of), remembering, unforgetting, grateful, commemorative. *Memor* itself derives from the Proto-Indo-European root (*s)mer-*, to remember, care for. This same root becomes, in Greek, *moira*, allotment, fate, destiny. *Moira* (capitalized) has an interesting role, according to the pre-Socratic philosopher Parmenides: ‘for the same thing is thinking and Being’ (Fragment 5).⁵ He later elaborates, ‘thinking and the thought that it constitutes are the same. For without what is, in which it is expressed, you will not find thinking; for nothing else either is or will be except that which is, since *Moira* [fate] bound it’ (Fragment 8, 34–37). A later philosopher of change quotes and then comments on this fragment: “‘Thinking and what thinking is about are the same. Because not without beings, in which it articulates itself (manifest, *en hō pephatismenon estin*) will you find thinking; for it is nothing and will not be anything outside of beings [Seiendes]’”. This is the main idea. Thinking produces itself; what is produced is a thought; thus, thinking is identical with its thought, for it is nothing outside its being, this great affirmation’ (Hegel 1979: 290–291). But there is a tension between what is articulated and Being, that is, that thinking and that which it produces as the said are different. *Moira* bound it into one. Thinking is the same as being, but

⁵ The fragment . . . *tò gàr autò noeîn èstín te kai éinái* (‘for the same are thinking and being’) (Parmenides 1906: 117) appears as number 5 in the edition I perused but is generally quoted as Fragment 3. A German and three English translations of the Parmenides text *Peri physeos* (‘On nature’) can be found at URL www.parmenides.com/about_parmenides/ParmenidesPoem.html.

thinking is found only in what is said, which is, in what *only stands for* thinking (Heidegger 2000). In the process of finding something, thinking itself is change; because what it finds is the result of its own prior activity, thinking rewrites itself continuously: its writing constitutes erasure.

We also find a hyphenated version of the word: re-member, to put together again, reversing the process of dismembering, adding a new member. Member, from Latin *membrum*, limb, constituent part of a 'body'. Writing is a process of erasure, dismembering the organism at hand.

*Moir*a allows us to understand that presence is erased when it is made present again in the form of representation. The representation destroys presence at the very instant it makes present, but without representation, no presence can become present again. The trace that is erasing itself is a better metaphor for the process of Being, because it erases its proper presence. If a trace were ineffaceable, 'it would not be a trace, it is a full presence, an unchangeable and incorruptible substance' (Derrida 1967b: 339). The failure of metaphysically thinking researchers is to mistake presence and the things that make a former presence present again. Thus, for example, researchers tend to model the problem-solving process in terms of representations as if the presence of the person in the situation could be set equal to and modeled in terms of representations. It is as if presence required *r*epresentation, which it does not because only the non-present requires representation to be present (again). It is precisely because full presence is impossible that there is a gap between what traditional research on thinking, learning, problem solving and the likes and the events that they believe to be researching. It is precisely why researchers who draw on hermeneutic phenomenology as method fail to recognize that there is a difference between narration and the content of narratives.

Shortcomings of Hermeneutic Phenomenology

The difference between the first-person methods advocated and described here and the approach commonly denoted by the term hermeneutic phenomenology is clear. Although we do indeed find acknowledgments of the changes that occur between an experience and its account, the changes are possible rather than inherent. In one chapter describing methodology and the method of hermeneutic phenomenology we can find this description:

Despite my instructions to not interpret their experiences – 'just write them down as they happened' – the students' lived-experience descriptions had been interpreted long before I asked for them on paper. Furthermore, as experiences are put in writing retrospectively, they probably are reinterpreted in the light of the present. The relationship between the phenomenological life-world and the hermeneutic theoretical world is not only obvious but also inevitable. That identical events can be experienced and interpreted in completely different ways, by different people, is an immense challenge for human science research. Is that not what creates a sense of true wonder: to

look for the ontological being through the ontic being, the universal through the unique? (Henriksson 2008: 43–44).

The author notes that there is a difference between experiences and the lived-experience descriptions, *despite* her instructions to the narrators. She notes that the experiences *probably* have been ‘reinterpreted’ in the process of writing. The difference between the orientation toward the ‘original’ experience that this author takes and the one I take consistent with the writings of Derrida is clear. In the quotation, an original trace is assumed to exist that is ‘reinterpreted’ differently over time; the reinterpretation may or may not occur, leading to differences within and between people. These changes are challenges only in the approach where experiences are taken as traces to be interpreted in the way scriptures are. The concept of writing that comes together with erasure – writing that erases itself as it progresses – leads us to the understanding that no trace whatsoever will be identical to a previous trace. The trace, as a way of denoting writing, is equivalent to forgetting so that it needs to be explained what memory can be and under what conditions. Experiences do not form original texts (traces) that remain in their self-identity to be subject to changing interpretations. Writing and erasure are processes; memory that is interpreted differently is state. If we want to understand life as a process, we need to use a radicalized notion of the trace developed in and through analyses of memory phenomena rather than in terms of traces that are somehow stable features carved into the memory of a person. Moreover, the ‘obvious relationship’ between the two worlds, the phenomenological lifeworld and the world of representation has already been thought in the concept of *moira*, which constitutes the contradictory unity of presence and the presence of the present.

The Folly of Metacognition

The pinnacle of the folly to think presence in terms of representation exists in the idea of metacognition. Here, not only is the presence of the person in the situation thought in terms of representation – representation replacing and being equivalent to presence – but also mind is theorized to be present to itself, again, in terms of representation. That is, in metacognition the working mind is thought to represent itself to itself, analyze it, then correct itself – and all of this is happening while the mind is occupied doing what it is supposed to do, for example, learning or getting the mundane work of the day done. The investigation described about the (left) hand touching the (right) hand that touches should dispel any belief that full presence – i.e., awareness of touching a surface, and awareness of the touching – is possible. It was the master theorist of the mind who realized the fundamental problems and aporia that are inherent in the idea of self-presence:

How the I who think differs from the I that intuits itself (as I can at least imagine other ways of looking at something), and yet be one and the same subject with the latter; how, therefore, I am able to say ‘I, as an intelligent and *thinking* subject cognize myself as an object *thought*, so far as I am, moreover, given to myself in intuition – only, like other phenomena, not as I

am in myself, and as considered by the understanding, but merely as I appear' – is a question that has in it neither more nor less difficulty than the question 'How can I be an object to myself' or 'How I can be an object of my own intuition and internal perception?' (Kant 1787/1956: 151 [B155–156])

That is, there is a fundamental problem in the idea that the thinking I gives itself in its entirety in its intuition, that is, precisely at a distance and as *ob*-ject, that is, as something thrown (Lat. *iacēre*) before and against (Lat. *ob*-) myself. The folly of this became quite clear to me when I was asked to write a review of an edited volume on metacognition (Roth 2004). It turns out that there were up to 40 errors per page – typographical, grammatical, and conceptual. At a minimum, one would have thought that researchers working on 'metacognition' would be a bit more metacognitive about their own writing processes.