Fuchs ▪ Sattel ▪ Henningsen

The Embodied Self

Dimensions, Coherence and Disorders

Schattauer

Thomas Fuchs ■ Heribert C. Sattel ■ Peter Henningsen

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Preface

"Nothing human is altogether incorporeal[1]."
(Merleau-Ponty 1968, p. 178)

During the last decade, philosophical, psychological and neurobiological approaches to the self have increasingly overcome their disciplinary constraints and entered into a productive dialogue. Different levels of self-awareness such as the "core" or "minimal self" and the "extended" or "narrative self" have been distinguished and investigated from a phenomenological, developmental and neuro-cognitive perspective.

In this context, the embodied aspect of the self has attracted growing attention. It may serve as a crucial junction for integrating different approaches into a common framework. Since the original work of Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1991), theories of the embodied and enactive mind have gained considerable influence on philosophy and cognitive neuroscience. Embodiment refers not only to the embedding of cognitive processes in brain circuitry, but also to the origin of these processes in an organism's sensory-motor experience in relation to its environment. Thus, action and perception are no longer interpreted in terms of the classic physical-mental dichotomy, but rather as closely interlinked. Moreover, neuroscientists like Damasio, Edelman, Panksepp and others have emphasized the close connection between brain physiology, whole-bodily functions and aspects of the mind such as consciousness, emotion and self-awareness. Social neuroscience and social psychology increasingly endorse embodied models of social cognition and behaviour.

Approaches to embodiment, from a phenomenological as well as from a dynamic systems point of view, are usually opposed to simple mind-brain identity models. On the contrary, they regard both subjective experience and brain processes as being dynamically linked with the organism and the environment. From birth on, it is mainly through our embodied interactions with the world and with others that the brain matures and develops into an organ of interrelations. And it is only as part of embodied interactions that neuronal activities can serve as carrier processes of conscious experience. In this way, it is the living body itself that unites mind and brain.

This "recorporealization of cognition", as it has been termed recently in a special journal edition (Heiner 2002), has potential influence on psychiatry and psychosomatic medicine as well. Embodiment is on the way to become a major paradigm of psychopathology, as is manifested in a number of recent papers and monographs (Stanghellini 2004; Matthews 2007; Ratcliffe 2008; Fuchs & Schlimme 2009). Moreover, embodied and ecological concepts of mental illness emphasize the circular interaction of altered subjective experience, disturbed social interactions and neurobiological dysfunctions

1 "Rien d'humain n'est tout à fait incorporel." (Merleau-Ponty 1968, p. 178)

in the development of the illness. This opens up not only a rich variety of explanatory models but also promising perspectives for novel treatment approaches.

In view of these developments, the time seems ripe to integrate research strands regarding the self, its coherence and its disorders with the growing body of research into enaction and embodiment. This idea has inspired the European Marie-Curie Research Training Network "*Disorders and Coherence of the Embodied Self (DISCOS)*", a consortium of 10 European research facilities. This network started in 2007 with the intent to create an interdisciplinary forum for research on embodiment, self-awareness and its disorders. Special emphasis is placed on

- conceptual aspects of self-awareness and embodiment, focussing on non-reductionist approaches to self and brain;
- the interplay of biological and social factors for establishing self-coherence;
- the relevance of intersubjectivity and intercorporeality for the development of the self;
- neuropsychiatric disorders of the embodied self, their nature and origins;
- therapeutic and ethical consequences.

Based on the common ground of embodiment, four main disciplinary approaches are combined in DISCOS to investigate these major issues:

- *Phenomenology and neurophilosophy* investigate the levels of phenomenal self-awareness, in particular the relation between the core self and the narrative self, the role of embodiment for self-coherence, and the relation of self and intersubjectivity.
- *Neuroscience* explores neural correlates of the self in terms of consciousness, basic self-awareness, agency and self-other distinction. This is carried out by using novel research methodologies which combine evidence from brain imaging with behavioural measurements and introspective reports in order to study the "embodied brain".
- *Developmental psychology* investigates the origins of self-awareness and narrative self-concepts in the early social interactions and attachment relationships. These results are also pertinent to the question which interactive deficiencies undermine this development, and how psychotherapy can serve as a new attachment relationship changing dysfunctional patterns of interaction.
- *Neuropsychiatry and psychosomatics* investigate self-disorders such as occurring in sequelae of stroke or brain injury, schizophrenia, severe personality disorders, post-traumatic and somatoform disorders. Such conditions, where the subject's relation to the world loses its familiarity and the body becomes alien, have been particularly fruitful in elucidating hidden dimensions of subjectivity.

By uniting the contributions of the first DISCOS conference held in Heidelberg in October 2008, this volume provides a textbook for these four approaches. It may thus serve as an orientation in a rapidly growing and developing field. The format is not chosen at random: DISCOS places a strong emphasis on training young researchers and providing opportunities for interdisciplinary dialogue. The structure of the book reflects this approach by offering keynote papers of the main topics which are commented by younger researchers who are all fellows within DISCOS. This makes it possible to reflect the plurality of approaches and positions within and outside the

network. Finally, a glossary with a selection of central terms will give the reader an additional overview, complemented by a few recommendations for further studies.

The features of interdisciplinarity and open dialogue constitute the spirit of this enterprise. We hope that with this book we can pass on some part of the vividness and enthusiasm of the dialogues to the esteemed reader.

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Part I

Philosophy: What makes up a Self? Self Coherence and its Origins

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1 Minimal Self and Narrative Self

1.1 A Distinction in Need of Refinement

Dan Zahavi

Let me start with a quote from a recent article by Seeley and Miller. They write:

> *"Though once relegated to philosophers and mystics, the structure of the self may soon become mandatory reading for neurology, psychiatry, and neuroscience trainees. For the dementia specialist the need for this evolution is transparent, as shattered selves – of one form or another – remain a daily part of clinical practice." (Seeley & Miller 2005, p. 160)*

This quote nicely captures a recent tendency. During the last 10 years or so, the self has been subjected to increasing scrutiny in a variety of empirical disciplines including cognitive science, developmental psychology, neuropsychology and psychiatry. A database search conducted a few months ago on PSYCinfo, which looked for article-titles that included the term self, gave 64 000 hits. If one were to mention some recent representative publications one might list the volumes Models of the self from 1999, The Self in Neuroscience and Psychiatry from 2003 and The Lost Self: Pathologies of the Brain and Identity from 2005. One of the insights that has emerged from this ongoing discussion is the recognition that the self is so multifaceted a phenomenon that various complementary accounts must be integrated if we are to do justice to its complexity. More specifically, two different notions of self have received quite some attention in recent years. I am of course thinking of the concept of minimal self or core self on the one hand and the notion of an extended, narrative or autobiographical self on the other. I take most of you to be familiar with the concepts in question, but let me anyway briefly sketch their main features.

People defending the notion of minimal self typically argue that when I taste single malt whiskey, remember a swim in the North Sea or think about the square root of 4, all of these experiences present me with different intentional objects. These objects are there for me in different experiential modes of givenness (as tasted, recollected, contemplated etc). This for-me-ness or mineness, which seems inescapably required by the experiential presence of intentional objects and which is the feature that really makes it appropriate to speak of the subjectivity of experience, is obviously not a quality like green, sweet or hard. It doesn't refer to a specific experiential content, to a specific what, rather, it refers to the distinct givenness or how of experience. It refers to the first-personal presence of experience. It refers to what has recently been called perspectival ownership (Albahari 2006). It refers to the fact that the experiences I am living through are given differently (but not necessarily better) to me than to anybody else. It could consequently be claimed that anybody who denies the for-me-ness or mineness of experiences simply fails to recognize an essential constitutive aspect of

experience. Thus, the claim being made is that there is a close link between selfhood, self-experience, and the first-person perspective. An important feature of this notion of self is that the self rather than being regarded as something standing beyond or opposed to the stream of experiences is seen as a crucial aspect of our experiential life.

In contrast to this minimal take, which might be seen as an attempt to spell out the minimal requirements for selfhood, people defending the notion of a narrative or extended self typically argue that we need to distinguish between merely being conscious or sentient, and being a self. The requirements that must be met in order to qualify for the latter are higher. More precisely, being a self is on this view an achievement rather than a given. We are probably all familiar with the idea that self-knowledge, rather than being something that is given once and for all, is something that has to be appropriated and can be attained with varying degrees of success. The same, however, can also be said for what it means to be a self. The self is not a thing, it is not something fixed and unchangeable but rather something evolving. It is something that is realized through one's projects and it is therefore something that cannot be understood independently of one's own self-interpretation. When confronted with the question "Who am I?", it is not very informative simply to think of oneself as an I. Rather to answer the question "Who am I?" is to tell the story of a life (Ricoeur 1985, p. 442). I attain insight into who I am by situating my character traits, the values I endorse, the goals I pursue, etc. within a life story that traces their origin and development; a life story that tells where I am coming from and where I am heading. But such a narrative, it is claimed, does not merely capture aspects of an already existing self, since there is no such thing as a pre-existing self, one that just awaits being portrayed in words. To believe in such a pre-linguistic given is quite literally to have been misled by stories. Rather, the reason why narratives constitute a privileged way to obtain knowledge about the self is precisely because they constitute it. Thus, who we are depends upon the story we (and others) tell about ourselves. The story can be more or less coherent, and the same holds true for our self-identity. The narrative self is, consequently, an open-ended construction which is under constant revision. It is pinned on culturally relative narrative hooks and organized around a set of aims, ideals and aspirations (Flanagan 1992, p. 206). It is a construction of identity starting in early childhood and continuing for the rest of our life; it is one that involves a complex social interaction. Who one is depends on the values, ideals and goals one has; it is a question of what has significance and meaning for one, and this, of course, is conditioned by the community of which one is part. Thus, as has often been claimed, one cannot be a self on one's own, but only together with others, as part of a linguistic community.

In my view, it would be a mistake to present these two notions as alternatives we have to choose between, as it has occasionally been done, especially by ardent defenders of the narrative notion of self. In my view both notions complement each other, both notions capture something central and important. But although recognizing that the two concepts are compatible rather than incompatible is a step in the right direction, there are still many issues regarding their nature and relation that remain in need of further clarification (cf. also Zahavi 2005, 2007, 2009).

Take for instance the very term "extended" self. To use this term is to suggest that the minimal notion of self is non-extended. But is that really true? Does the minimal self only exist in the pure instantaneous now-point? Is it really correct to conceive of

the minimal self as one lacking any kind of temporal "thickness"? I think not. Quite to the contrary, in fact, since one of the more extensive phenomenological accounts of the minimal self is precisely to be found in Husserl's analysis of the structure of inner time-consciousness. His analysis of the interplay between protention, primal impression and retention is precisely to be understood as a contribution to a better understanding of the relationship between self-experience and temporality. Another pertinent question is whether the discussion of the minimal self as a structure or aspect of experience is meant to suggest that we are dealing with so minimal a notion that it de facto leaves us with a disembodied self, one that completely disregards the role of embodiment? Again, I would answer in the negative. In my view, the proper way to think of the minimal self qua subject of experience is to think of it as an embodied first-person perspective. But indeed, one might then ask how minimal the minimal self really is.

As for the narrative notion of self, one of the recurrent problems concerns the very notion of narrative. I think it is fair to assume that no defender of this view would argue that selfhood requires the actual composition of an autobiography. We need to distinguish deliberately constructed narratives from the narratives that characterize our ongoing lives. The former is merely the literary expression of the kind of narrative self-interpretation that we continuously engage in. Making this distinction is also crucial if one wants to avoid a standard objection that has frequently been raised against the narrative account, the objection namely that our selfhood cannot be reduced to that which is narrated, and that we shouldn't make the mistake of confusing the reflective, narrative grasp of a life with the pre-reflective experiences that make up that life prior to the experiences being organized into a narrative. To put it differently, the very attempt to present human life in the form of a narrative will necessarily transform it, since the storyteller will inevitable impose an order on the life events which they did not possess while they were lived. In that sense, the story telling necessarily involves some element of confabulation. I think the emphasis on a lived narrative in contrast to a reflective narrative can alleviate some of these problems. However, making this move makes it urgent to spell out precisely what such lived narratives amount to. Some authors have suggested that it is the very beginning-middle-end structure of our life events which is important and that this structure should be seen as an extension of certain temporal configurations already found in experience and action. The problem with this type of retort, however, is that it by severing the link between language and narrative, threatens to make the latter notion too inclusive and consequently vacuous.

Finally, even if we recognize the need for both concepts, it remains urgent to understand their relation. One possibility is to dispute that the minimal notion of self really amounts to a full self, but that it should rather be considered an indispensable and necessary prerequisite for any true notion of self. Another possibility is to insist that the notion of minimal self is really meant to spell out the minimal requirements for something being a self, and that it is therefore both necessary and sufficient for selfhood. In the end, however, one might wonder how relevant the distinction between the two options really is. After all, with the possible exception of certain severe pathologies, say, the final stages of Alzheimer's disease we will never encounter the minimal self in its purity. It will always already be embedded in an environmental and temporal horizon. It will be intertwined with, shaped and contextualized by

memories, expressive behaviour and social interaction, by passively acquired habits, inclinations, associations, etc.

All of this, however, merely by way of introductory remarks. Let me now turn to what will be my main topic. As I have pointed out, we have to realize that the self is so multifaceted a phenomenon that various complementary accounts must be integrated if we are to do justice to its complexity. But I think it would be a mistake to think that the two outlined notions of self could jointly present us with an exhaustive account of self. For comparison, consider that Neisser in his well-known 1988 article distinguished and defended five notions of self: the ecological self, the interpersonal self, the extended self, the private self and the conceptual self. More precisely, I think we need to operate with even more notions of self than the two we are now familiar with. Let me in the following describe one such concept, one I will call the interpersonal self. To avoid misunderstandings, let me also just emphasize once again that these different notions are not meant to refer to different selves, but rather to different aspects or facets of selfhood. Thus, my endorsement of a multi-dimensional account of self is intended as an endorsement of an account that operates with a multifaceted self, and not as an endorsement of an account that operates with a multiplicity of co-existing selves.

Consider once again, the distinction between minimal self and narrative self. It should be obvious that we are dealing with two notions placed at each end of the scale. On the one hand, we have a minimal take on self that basically seeks to cash it out in terms of the first-person perspective. On the other hand, we have a far richer normatively guided notion that firmly situates the self in culture and history. Whereas the minimal notion captures an important but pre-social aspect of our experiential life, the narrative notion most certainly does include the social dimension, but it does so by emphasizing the role of language. The obvious question to ask is whether this doesn't leave a lacuna. Are there not pre-linguistic forms of sociality with a direct impact on the formation and development of self? Let me propose that our experience of and adaptation of the other's attitude towards ourselves contributes to the constitution of a crucial aspect of self.

This is of course not a new idea. Let me point to some philosophical sources of inspiration and then turn to some empirical literature that might corroborate this take.

In Mind, Self and Society, Mead argued that the self is not something that exists first and then enters into relationship with others, rather it is better characterized as an eddy in the social current (Mead 1962, p. 182), and he explicitly defined self-consciousness as a question of becoming "an object to one's self in virtue of one's social relations to other individuals" (Mead 1962, p. 172). Mead concedes that one could talk of a single isolated self if one identified the self with a certain feeling-consciousness, and that previous thinkers such as James has sought to find the basis of self in reflexive affective experiences, that is, in experiences involving self-feeling. Mead even writes that there is a certain element of truth in this, but then denies that it is the whole story (Mead 1962, p. 164). For Mead, the problem of selfhood is fundamentally the problem of how an individual can get experientially outside itself in such a way as to become an object to itself. Thus, for Mead, to be a self is ultimately more a question of becoming an object than of being a subject. In his view, one can only become an object to oneself in an indirect manner, namely by adopting the attitudes of others on oneself, and this is something that can only happen within a social environment (Mead 1962,

p. 138). In short, it "is the social process of influencing others in a social act and then taking the attitude of the others aroused by the stimulus, and then reacting in turn to this response, which constitutes a self" (Mead 1962, p. 171). Mead also argues that the individual's adaption of the attitude of the other towards itself allows not only for self-consciousness, but also for self-criticism and self-control. The individual becomes able to direct and control its own experience and response and it is this control which gives unity to the self (Mead 1962, pp. 159). Thus, one should notice that Mead not only defines selfhood in terms of reflexivity (Mead 1962, p. 134), but also argues that the distinctive feature of this socially mediated reflexive self-consciousness is that it enables the individual to contemplate itself as a whole. By adopting the attitude of the other towards itself, the individual can bring, as Mead writes, "himself, as an objective whole, within his own experiential purview; and thus he can consciously integrate and unify the various aspects of his self, to form a single consistent and coherent and organized personality" (Mead 1962, p. 309).

Let me add that Mead actually gives this whole line of thought a somewhat linguistic slant. Mead argues that the language process is essential for the development of self, and that its critical importance stems from the fact that communication requires the individual to take the attitude of the other towards himself – as Mead writes, a person who is saying something is saying to himself what he says to others, otherwise he wouldn't know what he was talking about – thereby allowing him to become a self in the reflexive sense, namely an object to himself (Mead 1962, p. 69).

But let us move on, and let us take a look at Sartre's famous analysis of shame. Sartre argues that shame is not a feeling which I could elicit on my own. It presupposes the intervention of the other, and not merely because the other is the one before whom I feel ashamed, but also and more significantly because the other is the one that constitutes that of which I am ashamed. I am ashamed of myself, not qua elusive first-person perspective or qua ubiquitous dimension of mineness, but qua the way I appear to the other. To put it differently, shame undeniably reveals to me that I exist for and am visible to others. Moreover, to feel shame is – if ever so fleetingly – to accept the other's evaluation; it is to acknowledge that I am what the other takes me to be. As Sartre writes, "I am this self which another knows." (Sartre 1943, p. 307). Sartre also characterizes my being-for-others as an ecstatic and external dimension of being (Sartre 1943, p. 287), and speaks of the existential alienation occasioned by my encounter with the other. To apprehend myself from the perspective of the other is to apprehend myself as seen in the midst of the world, as a thing among things with properties and determinations that I am without having chosen them. The gaze of the other thrusts me into worldly space and time. I am no longer given to myself as the temporal and spatial center of the world. I am no longer simply "here", but next to the door, or on the couch; I am no longer simply "now", but too late for the appointment (Sartre 1943, p. 309). This alienation is also manifest in my attempt to grasp my own being by way of what can be revealed in language. Thus, for Sartre language expresses my being-for-others in a pre-eminent way, since it confers significance upon me that others have already found words for (Sartre 1943, p. 404).

Sartre was not the first phenomenologist to entertain these kinds of ideas. In several of his writings, Husserl calls attention to a special and highly significant form of self-consciousness, namely the situation in which I experience the other as experienc-

ing myself. This "original reciprocal co-existence", this case of reiterative empathy, where my indirect experience of another coincides with my self-experience, can be described as a situation where I see myself through the eyes of the other (Husserl 1959, pp. 136). When I realize that I can be given for the other in the same way as the other is given for me, that is, when I realize that I myself am another to the other, my self-apprehension is transformed accordingly. I come to see myself as one among others, as one perspective among many, as a member of a we-community (Husserl 1974, p. 245; 1973b, p. 468). Moreover, it is only when I apprehend the other as apprehending me and take myself as other to the other that I apprehend myself in the same way that I apprehend them and become aware of the same entity that they are aware of, namely, myself as a person (Husserl 1954, p. 256; 1973b, p. 78). Thus, to exist as a person is for Husserl to exist socialized in a communal horizon, where one's bearing to oneself is appropriated from the others (Husserl 1973b, p. 175; 1954, p. 315; 1952, pp. 204; 1973c, p. 177). It is no wonder that Husserl often asserts that this type of self-apprehension, where I am reflected through others, is characterized by a complex and indirect intentional structure (Husserl 1952, p. 242).

I am obviously not claiming that Mead, Sartre and Husserl would agree on everything. In fact, one absolutely central difference between them is that whereas Mead distinguishes sharply between consciousness and self-consciousness and makes the latter be a question of becoming "an object to one's self in virtue of one's social relations to other individuals" (Mead 1962, p. 172), and even claim that we prior to the rise of self-consciousness experience our own feelings and sensations as parts of our environment rather than as our own (Mead 1962, p. 171), Husserl and Sartre would both argue that our experiential life is characterized by a primitive form of self-consciousness from the very start. Despite this important difference, however, I think all three of them are calling attention to the dramatic way our adaption of the other's attitude towards ourselves might contribute to the constitution of a crucial aspect of self; one that in a decisive manner takes us beyond the notion of a minimal self, while not yet amounting to a narrative self. To put it differently, and to repeat, I think the aspect in question is one that has been lost from sight in the recent discussion of and focus on minimal and narrative self.

Mead, Sartre and Husserl are all philosophers, but it is not difficult to find empirical researchers in the field of developmental psychology and emotion research that in various ways confirm and extend their suggestions.

Michael Tomasello and Peter Hobson have both argued that acculturated forms of cognition are characterized by the individual's ability to understand something through the perspectives of others (cf. Tomasello 2001; Hobson 2002). More specifically, they have both argued that the increased flexibility of perspective taking – the ability to adopt multiple perspectives on the same item simultaneously – allow not only for a more complex understanding, but that the internalization of the view of the other on oneself eventually leads to the ability to critically self-monitor one's own behaviour and cognition. By adopting the perspective of the other, we can gain sufficient self-distance to permit a critical self-questioning (Tomasello 2001, p. 172).

We all know of the cognitive revolution signalled by the emergence of pre-linguistic forms of joint attention, i.e., those forms of social interaction where the infant and the adult are jointly attending to something. Ordinarily, it is claimed that infants start

becoming aware of other's attention when they are around 9–12 months of age. But, as Reddy has recently pointed out, when exemplifying forms of joint attention and social referencing there has been a tendency to focus on triangulations that involved an object spatially separated from both adult and infant. But thereby one might overlook various other forms of joint attention, including those where the object of the joint attention is other people, or objects close to our bodies, or objects that are part of our bodies, or simply and most centrally, those situations where the object of the other's attention is the infant him- or herself (Reddy 2008, p. 97). As Reddy argues, if infants only started to become aware of other's attention around the end of the first year of life, why should they then engage in complex face-to-face exchanges with others much earlier, namely from 2–3 months of age? If the latter doesn't involve awareness that the other person is attending to them, what could it signify (Reddy 2008, p. 91)? According to Reddy, infants are aware of other's attention initially and in the first instance when it is directed at themselves – she takes this to be the most powerful experience of attention that any of us will ever have – and she argues that infants only subsequently become aware of other's attention when directed to other things in the world, be it frontal targets, objects in hand, distal targets or even absent targets (for instance objects placed behind the infant) (Reddy 2008, p. 92).

Although Tomasello, Hobson and Reddy might disagree about how early the infant is able to be aware of itself as the object of the other's attention, they all agree that this understanding is manifest in a whole range of complex emotions such as shyness, embarrassment and coyness. The presence of such emotions indicates that the infant has a sense of herself as the object of the other's evaluation, and that that evaluation matters to her (Tomasello 2001, p. 90; Hobson 2002, p. 82). Although emotions like these are often called self-conscious emotions, it might according to Reddy ultimately be better to call them self-other-conscious emotions, since they make us aware of a relational being, they all concern the self-in-relation-to-the-other. They all reveal the exposed nature of the self, they are all regulated by the visibility of self as an object of the other's attention, and she further claims that the infant already from early on plays with this issue of visibility when being coy or when showing off. Thus, when infants at 8 months of age repeat clever or difficult actions for approval this suggests that they recognize and enjoy being the centre of attention (Reddy 2008, pp. 126).

Let me in a side remark mention that Reddy's account – according to which self-experience is first and foremost an affective reaction to the perceived attention of the other – stands in stark contrast to the influential theory of Michael Lewis who argues that self-conscious emotions like envy or non-evaluative embarrassment only develop around 18–20 months of age, namely when the child develops a concept of self and an objective self-representation (Lewis 1992). Indeed, according to Lewis, prior to this watershed children have no emotional experiences, they are unable to distinguish self and others, and are as a result also unable to engage in any kind of interpersonal relationships. Thus, and this hardly needs to be pointed out, Reddy's analysis is meant to support the claim regarding the existence of primary intersubjectivity, is meant to support the view that interpersonal relation and self-experience occur far earlier than predicted by more cognitivist theory-theory oriented approaches.

To sum up. In my talk I have basically suggested that the notions of minimal self and narrative self are in need of supplement. As should be clear from my last com-