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The trajectory of pre-reflective self-consciousness

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## INTRODUCTION

Self-consciousness is often meant to denote a specific human characteristic. The ability to step back from our actions and thoughts – and to assess whether or not our acts are in line with the understanding of our nature – is a capacity that human beings develop in a long period of upbringing. Moreover, this ability potentially allows us to acquire the concept of “self”. In the philosophical discourse, the term “self” has been used to denote various entities, like a thing of some sort, a personal characteristic or a spiritual substance. Moreover, religion, philosophy and literature have in fact provided different conceptions. But according to a customary folk-psychological understanding, the self is nevertheless considered our most intimate part, suggesting that it is a relatively stable aspect, which perdures through trivial happenings and minor changes in our personality. The philosophical debate concerning the self is therefore intertwined with issues of identity, character, temporal continuity and accountability. However, within the philosophical and scientific debate, the notion of self has been expanded to include more basic and minimalist instances (Gallagher, 2000), in order to draw attention onto our primary engagement with the world – and to invite us to take into account pre-reflective, experiential forms of self. It is argued, in fact, that experiential processes of self-consciousness already carry a sense of self, even though we are not deliberately reflecting upon ourselves. Accordingly, the boundaries between “self” and “self-consciousness” seem to come apart, and the folk-conception of a deep personality core is extended to cope with these more ephemeral phenomena.

In the current literature on child development we can find studies that can be very helpful for understanding the role of the phenomenal awareness of the self. According to Philippe Rochat, for example, newborns come into the world with the rough capacity to distinguish their body from other entities (Rochat & Hespos, 1997; Rochat & Striano, 2000; Rochat, 2003, 2015). On this view, many years before being able to explicitly formulate the question “Who am I?” or “Am I the one who performed that past action?”, children experience a phenomenal presence of the self that is essentially bodily. This is meant to constitute the first step of an experiential attunement, which can potentially reach further layers of self-consciousness. Newborns’ reaction in front of a mirror suggests that they are initially unable to discriminate between their mirrored image and other objects in the environment. In few months, however, infants start to show some forms of coordination with the object they see moving in the mirror (i.e., themselves). This new behaviour shows a mere recognition of an object that has the same timing of their body, however: an appropriate identification with the mirrored image still lacks. Approximately at the age of two, they actively begin to explore the specular image, as suggested by their attempts to remove alien objects from their body, which they had not noticed before the exposure to the mirror – e.g., a sticker stuck on their forehead. This ability of self-experience evolves further when infants begin to partake in social activities. Around 4-5 years of age, while evaluating the mirrored image, children are able to take into account the presence of other observers. In these circumstances, a sticker on the forehead acquires a new relevance: if the sticker was also placed on the face of an adult who is present in the same room, the child would hesitate to remove it (the result, though, would probably depend on the role of the adult, e.g., an experimenter, a parent or a teacher) (Broesch et al., 2011; Rochat, 2003).

To add these basic forms of self-consciousness to more complex ones has widened the debate on the self in philosophy the cognitive sciences. As a result, we find a number of divergent notions (Strawson, 1999; Gallagher, 2000, 2011, 2013). In the present text, I will mainly focus on pre-reflective instances of self-consciousness. Indeed, I think that the current discussion on pre-reflective self-consciousness has

fostered the interest in subjective experience within the cognitive sciences. This has brought the attention back to issues that have been investigated in philosophy and, in particular, in phenomenology. As such, these disciplines have much to offer to the contemporary debate.

When it comes to pre-reflective self-consciousness, the question whether we should consider perceptual experience as merely world-presenting acquires a special relevance. A central subject of investigation concerns the presence of self-related aspect in our pre-reflective mental activity. Among the different notions that characterise the debate, the minimal – or core – self plays a key role in this respect. According to the advocates of this view, every subjective experience in itself is a form of self-experience in virtue of its being an experience for a subject. But rather than considering it a logical feature, theorists of the minimal self suggest that being “for-me-ness” is an actual aspect of experience – i.e., subjective experience carries a sense of experiential ownership. Individuals do not merely own their experiences as they might own a car or a house. They pre-reflectively perceive their experiences as being for them (Damasio, 2010; Zahavi, 2014, 2017; Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008; Ratcliffe, 2017). Some authors contend that the most basic form of self-consciousness amounts to an intrinsic feature of subjective experience (see, among others, Zahavi, 2014, 2017), whereas others argue that the experiential presence of our body represents the most primitive source of self-related information (as we have seen above, Rochat & Hespos, 1997; Rochat & Striano, 2000; Rochat, 2003, 2015; see also Bermúdez, 1998; Damasio, 2010; Gallagher, 2005; Gallese & Sinigaglia, 2010; Salomon et al., 2017; Tsakiris et al., 2007; Tsakiris, 2017). On this latter view, pre-reflective self-consciousness can be thought of as bodily self-consciousness.

These basic forms of self-consciousness have been contrasted, however, with those embedded in social and linguistic context. According to the defenders of more complex forms of self-consciousness, we could genuinely be self-conscious only when further capacities come into play, such as the ability to pick out the principle of our own action (Korsgaard, 2009), or to look at our life as characterised by narrative unity (Ricouer, 1992; Rudd, 2012; Schechtman, 1996, 2007), or to display social

behaviours (Mead, 1962). It is obvious, therefore, that these standpoints do not consider the minimal self – as well as bodily self-consciousness – a full-blown selfhood. At best, they might suggest that these basic forms of self-consciousness could be consistent with the mere presence of experiential subjectivity within phenomenal consciousness (that is, the feature of being for someone of subjective experience).

The attempt to define which form of self-experience should be regarded as an actual form of self-consciousness has, thus, become a central challenge in the debate concerning subjectivity and selfhood. Zahavi argues that, from a phenomenological point of view, this discussion runs the risk of being limited to a terminological dispute (Zahavi, 2014: 28). I think Zahavi has good reasons to affirm that, but I should also add that such a definitional problem has relevant implications in ethical, normative and legal contexts. Nevertheless, if we are to phenomenologically define self-consciousness, we have to tackle this issue on its experiential basis. In doing so, we might consider different forms of self-experience as parts of a multi-layered phenomenon. On one side, in fact, education and culture do affect how we become conscious of ourselves, while, on the other, this ongoing process of upbringing and development relies on basic experiential capacities. In the present text I shall therefore accept Zahavi's challenge, and focus on the experiential dimension of self-consciousness.

The present project, however, does not relinquish the current literature on basic and more intellectual instances of self-consciousness. The aim of the present text is in fact to show how pre-reflective self-consciousness unfolds through our lifespan. In doing so, a discussion and contrast of the different positions of the debate is essential to the research project, since they also provide valuable phenomenological analyses along with their normative assumptions. The minimal self hypothesis, for example, is meant to identify a basic, pre-reflective experiential features that characterise phenomenal consciousness. In what follows the key question will, thus, be whether we should consider pre-reflective self-consciousness a relatively constant phenomenon – as different advocates of the minimal self and bodily self-

consciousness point out<sup>1</sup> – or rather describe it as influenced by cultural and social facets.<sup>2</sup> While tackling this ontogenetic issue, I will argue that:

- The minimal self hypothesis, as well as the first level of bodily self-consciousness described by RoCHAT, is dependent upon two necessary assumptions: (i) it has to be experienced and (ii) is not affected by other forms of self-consciousness. I suggest that to hold both (i) and (ii) implies that such a minimal self could be identified within subjective experience only by means of a strong theoretical abstraction.
- Pre-reflective bodily self-consciousness is a good candidate to carry on the potentialities of Zahavi's minimal self. Our body, which is phenomenally present within subjective experience as a form of performative awareness, determines our experiential engagement with our surroundings and brings a primary form of self-consciousness – even if our body might not represent the object of the experience. Moreover, to affirm that pre-reflective self-consciousness is determined by our body opens up the possibility of further developments.
- Narrative and other reflective forms of self-consciousness have an impact on pre-reflective awareness. Nevertheless, we should not consider adults' pre-reflective self-consciousness as directly embedding our reflections upon ourselves. Narratives and reflective thoughts rather shape the social context where we continuously improve our performative awareness.

These claims might give rise to some objections. On the one hand, defenders of the minimal self hypothesis would affirm that my account describes a phenomenon that

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, RoCHAT, 2003, 2015; Zahavi, 2011; 2014, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> As Schechtman and Rudd argue (Schechtman, 2007, 2011, 2012; Rudd, 2012). As I see it, also Strawson defends a similar proposal (Strawson, 2004).

is just to complex and advanced to replace a more basic form of pre-reflective self-consciousness. In the chapters that follow I will reply to such a criticism and affirm that, if we intend to identify a minimal form of self-reference within subjective experience, we should make room for a developmental process as well. Philosophers who suggests that self-consciousness comes into play when we deliberately reflect upon our experiences and thoughts, on the other hand, could criticise my position for being inflationary, since it extends some evolved properties to basic phenomena. I must admit that I will not give an exhaustive answer to this second kind of objection in the following pages. Even though I do acknowledge the relevance of such a definitional problem, the implications of this issue are far beyond the scope of the present research project.<sup>3</sup> Since my goal is to assess the phenomenal persistence of a basic form of self-consciousness, and although I will take into account some epistemological consequences, the discussion will mainly focus on a phenomenological level of description.

When it comes to pre-reflective self-consciousness, a philosophical enquiry into the phenomenon has to deal with a general disagreement on the core concepts. For example, "self" might denote a number of different things, such as a specific entity or a psychological property. As a result, some might suggest that "self" is synonymous with "self-consciousness", while others might contend that selves possess an enduring ontological reality that does not depend on mental activity. "Self-consciousness", at the same time, has been accounted for in different forms, and some would surely deny that self-consciousness could be achieved within pre-reflective experience. Moreover, the very notion of "consciousness" is hard to circumscribe, as the vast scientific discussion that embodies countless contributions from several disciplines (neuroscience, biology, psychology, biology, and so forth) shows. The first sections of this research will therefore bring into focus these essential work concepts. The purpose here is not to give a preliminary introduction to these

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<sup>3</sup> I will nevertheless come back on this topic in Chapter 3.

topics, but rather to render explicit the conceptual background on which my position relies.

Like the developmental process that I will address in following pages, my proposal will thus be constituted by essential steps that lay the foundation for the subsequent discussion. Each of the sections of this investigation is therefore crucial to the pursuing of the general goal (i.e., to understand the basis of the ontogenetic process of pre-reflective self-consciousness). The present text is divided in three main parts. Part I (Chapters 1 and 2) is meant to define the conceptual and methodological basis for the next sections. Chapter 1 provides a first distinction between an explicit attitude towards the self and an experiential dimension that carries relevant self-referential aspects. Since the latter represents the object of my investigation, in Chapter 1 I will also look at the key concept on which it rests (e.g., "consciousness" and "subjective experience"). In light of the previous considerations, Chapter 2 identifies and focuses on a specific instance of the experiential self, that is, pre-reflective self-consciousness.

Part II (Chapters 3 and 4) examines the phenomenon of pre-reflective self-consciousness by taking into account those experiential features that have been considered as determining a pre-reflective sense of self within subjective experience. In this respect, Chapter 3 draws attention to the well-known notion of minimal self. Chapter 4 instead illustrates a different form of basic self-consciousness that originates from the experiential presence of the body. Here, bodily self-consciousness is construed as our prior experiential engagement with the world. Moreover, the analysis of this characteristic opens up a developmental perspective on the ontogenesis of pre-reflective self-consciousness.

Finally, considering the implications of the previous analyses, Part III (Chapters 5 and 6) shows the phenomenological and epistemological conclusions that can be drawn from such a developmental standpoint. Chapter 5 addresses the phenomenological dimension by comparing bodily awareness with the notion of narrative self-consciousness. Chapter 6 explains what kind of connections occur at different levels of analysis (i.e., between the pre-reflective form and instances of self-

consciousness; among certain variations of a single instance; among the factors that constitutes a single instance). While a hierarchical (and ontogenetic) order can be identified among the alterations of a single instance, the phenomenological constituents of the instance can be accounted for as neither prior to one another nor sufficient for pre-reflective self-consciousness to come into play.

# **PART I: Conceptual and methodological background**

# 1 SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND KEY CONCEPTS

The current philosophical debate on “self” and “self-consciousness” has been characterised by a number of different approaches and standpoints. Starting from such a theoretical complexity, the aim of this chapter is twofold. First, I will stress the distinction between two instances of self-consciousness. On the one hand, we can identify a deliberate and reflective understanding of the self. On the other, some authors have contended that a phenomenal appearance of the self is at stake in pre-reflective experience. This pre-reflective form represents the target of the present research. Second, I will clarify the methodological bases on which I will pursue this investigation. In this sense, I will point out some key features that are meant to define phenomenal consciousness, and that will be essentially relevant for the further discussion – e.g., reflexivity and global access. Moreover, I will affirm that my phenomenological approach neither relies on a reductionist program, nor onto an alleged equivalence between phenomenological and physicalist explanations. Rather, I will take into account the specificity of phenomenological and scientific findings while considering their heuristic interplay.

## 1.1 A linguistic preface

Accounting for a notion of self or self-consciousness within the contemporary debate implies at least two main issues. The first concerns linguistic indeterminacy. Indeed, to reach a wider audience, most of the current philosophical literature has been proposed in English. As a result, linguistic differences are often overlooked within the

debate. Yet, the semantic value of “self” differs from its available translations, and its syntactical role is affected by a specific grammar as well. If we consider French, Spanish, Italian and German, the term “self” is respectively translated into “*soi*”, “*sí mismo*”, “*sé*” or “*Selbst*”. For example, take into account the case of the Italian “*sé*”: like its English counterpart, “*sé*” can be used as a noun to point to a specific referent – an entity or an event, but also to refer to reflexive properties, like the English term “self” is used to describe self-directed qualities, such as self-driving or self-healing, to bring some examples<sup>4</sup>. This function can be accomplished by other Italian terms, though. Indeed, the Italian prefix “*auto-*” can be translated with “self-”, and is often taken to be equivalent to the Italian suffix “*-si*” (this one being derivative of “*sé*”). The availability of two plausible translations that are not exactly synonymous, however, shows that we have to face a subtle interpretative issue. In particular, the term “self-consciousness” has been translated, according to specific purposes, both as “*auto-coscienza*” or “*coscienza di sé*”. The two expressions are, nevertheless, not completely equivalent, as the one expresses a reflexive property of consciousness (i.e., the consciousness being directed towards itself) while the other gives the idea of a subject that is conscious of herself. And, in fact, the English term “self-consciousness” has been often intended to denote either the first or the second meaning, or both, as we will see in the following sections. This might raise the question of whether an intercultural investigation would have serious limits and whether would be possible in the first place.

Though pessimistic as this may sound, such concerns about linguistic indeterminacy should not undermine our philosophical quest. Rather, as suggested by Paul Ricoeur, «these divergences are themselves instructive, to the extent that each grammatical peculiarity sheds light on part of the essential meaning sought» (Ricoeur, 1992; 1). In addition, there are at least two methodological reasons for endorsing cross-cultural research on the self. First, according to a number of scholars,

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<sup>4</sup> In this case, also “*sé*” is employed either as reflexive pronoun (e.g., “*curare sé stesso*”, namely, “to heal herself/himself/itself”) or as suffix – analogous to the English prefix (e.g., “*curarsi*”, namely, “self-healing”).

to be conscious of oneself does not necessarily presuppose language acquisition. Indeed, it has been argued that various forms of self-awareness, such as bodily awareness, are already at stake at birth<sup>5</sup> (Rochat & Striano, 2000; Rochat, 2003). Furthermore, the body continues to play a key role in our self-consciousness before and after the language acquisition (among others, Gallese & Sinigaglia, 2010; Damasio, 2010; Gallagher, 2005). Moreover, other authors have argued that the reflexivity of consciousness is not constituted by means of cultural or intellectual achievements (Metzinger, 2003; Zahavi, 2014). For, even though we should not overlook terminological misunderstandings – or richness – a significant aspect of the phenomenon addressed here is supposed to be unaffected by linguistic and cultural variance.

Second, even if more intellectualistic approaches to the self might be concerned with characteristics that are dependent on the cultural context, such studies often address the general, cross-cultural basis on which self-consciousness phenomena come into play. Thus, although we might take the key role that language plays into account, the term “self” (or whatever term that may be translated into “self” from other languages) could nonetheless be seen as strictly intertwined with complex behaviours, which can be individuated in different cultures. Indeed, “self” appears to be crucial for moral reasoning, agency, narrative and self-improvement: even though such processes rely on a term that bears significant linguistic specificity, engaging with morality, agency and narration are widely considered cross-cultural phenomena.

In short, the term “self” allows for linguistic misunderstandings, like other meaningful terms in philosophy. Nevertheless, as we have seen, a relevant field of research is concerned with phenomena which are already displayed before language acquisition, while other more intellectualistic approaches – e.g., narrative and moral accounts of the self, in which the language plays a key role – consider linguistic complexity a side effect of cross-cultural behaviours.

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<sup>5</sup> In this text, “consciousness” and “awareness” are meant to define the same cluster of phenomena, if not furtherly specified.

The second main issue that concerns the investigation of the notions of “self” and “self-consciousness” is the broad variety of definitions and proposals (for a thorough overview, see Strawson, 1999; Gallagher, 2000, 2011) that have been developed to address both general and specific characteristics of the self. And, moreover, these various accounts entail different metaphysical commitments. In this chapter I will then clarify some basic distinctions between different forms of self and self-consciousness, which have been targeted by philosophical and scientific specific positions. I will try, in this sense, to offer some valuable tools for grasping the conceptual basis of the debate and stressing the crucial terms that will be at stake in this text.

## **1.2 Reflections upon the self**

To introduce the first distinction, I would like to invite you to consider an unpleasant, though possible, situation. Imagine Frank, a meticulous scholar of contemporary philosophy who likes his job. Suppose that Frank has had a really bad day. In the morning, the alarm clock did not work properly, so he woke up later than usual and missed the bus he normally takes to arrive at the office in time. Later, that day, he had to deal with an incredible amount of bureaucratic problems, which brought to the surface some unresolved issues with his colleagues. So he came home at night quite frustrated and started to criticise his relatives for any trivial mistake. Suddenly he became aware of what he had done, though, thus realising that it was not his actual intentions hurt his relatives’ feelings. Eventually, he sincerely tried to apologise by saying that, as upset as he was after the day’s work, he had been beside “himself” and that it was not his “true self” who had been behaving this way.

Although this fictional frame could seem fairly sketchy, it nevertheless suggests us that to appeal to the self could be take different forms. The first one is what we

might call a reflection upon the self.<sup>6</sup> In the above scenario, Frank refers to a substantial form of himself at some point, the “one” who is usually lovely and kind with his relatives. This substantial form of himself, which he is reflectively addressing, is what we might take to constitute the core of his personality. Likewise, by arguing that Frank’s frustration overwrote his usual polite form of behaviour, some of the readers may challenge Frank’s view and observe that it was the true, meticulous nature of Frank – his true self – that became dominant. In both cases the self, as the result of our reflections, is therefore meant to be something that persists, and its existence is held as widely independent from either trivial happenings or furtherly acquired layers of personality.

A the further step could be to ask for the nature of this self, or the dimension of reality to which it could belong. This entails a commitment to a metaphysical stance on the self. If we follow this line of thought, we have to face the question of whether are willing to consider the self an entity of some sort, or whether we should deny its actual existence. Lynne Baker affirms that, when it comes to the definition of the self, the metaphysical questioning is the foremost issue. Any other attempt to characterise the qualities that can be attributed to the self relies on the answer to this problem. To put it differently, Baker suggests that we should primarily individuate some criteria to identify the self as an entity of some sort. This «numerical-identity question» constitutes, then, the further «characterisation question», which aims to establish how we should consider some characteristic to be ascribed to individuals (Baker, 2016). If we attempt to account for the self from a metaphysical standpoint, however, we should notice the different metaphysical commitments that underlie the debate and, furthermore, the complex philosophical vocabulary that belongs to other significant topics as well.

Indeed, various metaphysical conceptions of the self have been developed so far. Materialistic approaches, for example, tend to identify the self with a physical

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<sup>6</sup> I would clarify in advance that, by introducing this definition, I do not intend to provide a new notion within an already inflated debate. Rather, as suggested earlier, such a definition allows us to make useful distinction within the different approaches on the self.

entity. In this perspective, the human body appears to be a privileged research object: we may individuate the self either by a specific anatomical structure (e.g., a neural area in the brain) or by appealing to the body as a whole. In this last respect, some have argued for animalism, suggesting that we should consider ourselves as human animals (Olson, 2003). A different kind of approach introduces a psychological dimension of the self. Among this perspective, some authors insist that we can speak of a self only when some psychological criteria are met. For instance, on Dan Zahavi's view, a minimal characteristic of our stream of consciousness has to be in place to establish a minimal form of self – i.e., the intrinsic reflexivity of phenomenal consciousness (Zahavi, 2014).

Next to these positions there are also philosophers who deny the actual existence of the self. Eliminativist approaches of this kind have been proposed by Daniel Dennett and Thomas Metzinger, for example. Although they endorse the practical, and evolutionary, usefulness of the concept of self, both affirm that strictly speaking there is no such a thing as a self. Dennett holds that narratives are prior to the self, which has to be considered the product of our ability to create stories (Dennett, 1991, 1992). Metzinger, on the other hand, describes the self as a specific feature of our cognitive system that has been developed through a phylogenetic trajectory (Metzinger, 2003a). Thus, those who accept the existence of such a thing as a self have to address, then, the question of what realm of reality it belongs to. In doing so, they have to assess a whole range of possibilities that go from radical materialism to rigorous spiritualism. Those who deny the existence of the self, on the other hand, typically argue that it amounts to a fictional tool. Daniel Dennett, for example, compares the concept of the self to that of the centre of gravity in physics (Dennett, 1992).

Moreover, these metaphysical approaches could be related to another puzzling issue: the problem of personal identity. The two debates on the notion of "self" and "personal identity" in fact rely on a common vocabulary, where terms such as "person" or "subject" are meant to be crucial for both topics. In addition, some relevant issues are shared as well. For example, the persistence through time plays a

pivotal role in both debates. Indeed to understand whether the self or personal identity holds through the lifespan has become increasingly relevant not only in philosophical discussions, but also within bioethics (e.g., consider the importance of determining what kind of change has to occur to establish the collapse of one's self/personal identity, regarding cases such as organ and limb transplants, blood transfusion, embryo research, as so forth).

Another shared issue concerns the discrimination of distinct problems. We have already seen Baker's distinction between the numerical identity and characterisation questions. Similarly, Marya Schechtman points out that approaches to define personal identity are driven by practical and literal concerns – i.e., the former concerns appeal to personal identity for everyday tasks, while the latter imply a defining feature, which allows us to determine whether it is the same person whom we are pointing to now the same person we pointed to earlier (Schechtman, 2014: 4). Thus, for either topics, we can distinguish a definitional attempt, which aims at defining the nature of self and personal identity, and a practical one, in which selves and personal identities are assessed within everyday life.

The literal (metaphysical) and practical concerns that we have seen so far are embedded in our reflective attitudes and capacities. If we consider the experiential presence of a "self", metaphysical and other reflections might nevertheless appear to be just (special) modes, among others, of referring to ourselves. Indeed, as we shall see in the following pages, it has been argued that a person who do not deliberately reflect upon her self can nonetheless experience herself. Some examples of such phenomena can be found in the fictional case that I described at the beginning of this section. In a moment of self-enlightenment, Frank is certainly referring to "his self" as the relatively persistent core of its personality, so that we might assume that "his self" *qua* entity of some sort is the object of his thought. However, should we argue that, during the rest of the day, Frank is utterly unaware of himself? Or should we rather affirm that Frank, as well as being conscious of the events that happen around him, is also experiencing himself? This last question suggests that a certain degree of self-consciousness might be in place in Frank's activity, even if Frank is not

deliberately reflecting on his true nature. To put it differently, we might interpret some of Frank's experience as phenomenally related to himself, although his self does not appear as the intentional object of experience. Indeed, in this case, a self – as, for example, the persistent core of his personality or identity – is not at stake in some of his conscious thoughts. Nevertheless, Frank is still handling some happenings as salient or significant for himself. His subjective experience might carry, therefore, relevant self-related information, although a self is not explicitly questioned.

I think that we can make use of the previous considerations to outline a significant guideline for what follows. "Self" has been meant, in fact, to denote both the object of our reflections and an experiential feature that characterises conscious life. In this sense, the distinction between reflective and pre-reflective consciousness allows us to stress two divergent attitudes towards such a thing as the self. Indeed, whereas self-consciousness might take place as a form of deliberate reflection on the self, we could also find other pre-reflective modalities of self-recognition.

### **1.3 Experiential selfhood**

By means of "reflections upon the self", I have outlined the attempt to explicitly and deliberately addressing that sort of thing that is a self. Yet, I have also suggested that, on a different perspective, the self can also be part of our subjective experience in everyday life, even if we are not explicitly reflecting on it. To some extent, however, reflections are part of our experience as well. Self-consciousness, indeed, obtains when we are thinking about, reflecting on or judging ourselves: these explicit attitudes partake in our experiential and conscious life as well. We might thus have an experiential relation with ourselves while the self amounts to the object of our conscious thoughts. Remember Frank's self-enlightenment: in the very moment he is questioning the real nature and deepest nucleus of himself, he is also experiencing an intense process of self-consciousness. In this sense, reflective and pre-reflective attitudes are likely to be both considered aspects of our conscious life. But whereas

reflections usually rely on a certain understanding of our deepest nature, thus depending on cultural, philosophical or religious assumption, a pre-reflective experience is often meant to operate within a more basic dimension.<sup>7</sup> The attempt to reflectively address the self might imply some definitional concerns about its ontological reality: which kind of entity the self belongs to? Does it really exist? How long does it persist? Could it be disrupted? Instead, in order to understand pre-reflective self-consciousness, we should stress the phenomenal character of self-referred experiential phenomena: to what extent do we own our experiences? Are there different ways of self-ascribing mental events? To what extent are we self-conscious in everyday practices?<sup>8</sup>

In the following pages, I will focus on this basic experiential givenness of a self. The phenomenon of pre-reflective self-consciousness will represent, then, the main target of the present research. I will therefore endorse a phenomenological perspective, in order to address the experiential engagement in which such a phenomenon comes into play. Thus, I will not question which portion of reality the self might belong to. Yet, I suggest that the present phenomenological analyses would be consistent with divergent ontological positions, like other phenomenological understandings of pre-reflective self-consciousness. Indeed, different authors have similarly argued for the presence of a minimal experiential phenomenon of self-consciousness while supporting conflicting views on the existence of an actual self. Consider, for example, Thomas Metzinger and Dan Zahavi: both contend, in specific manners, a form of minimal self-givenness within subjective

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<sup>7</sup> As we shall see in Chapter 2, we might stress different relations between reflective and pre-reflective forms of self-consciousness.

<sup>8</sup> In this respect, these two aspects represent specific issues in divergent debate. For example, reflective self-consciousness plays a significant role within law and bioethical debates, as long as self-consciousness is seen as related to certain topics which are morally significant (i.e., what counts as being a person, how we define personal identity, the relation between accountability and persistence through time). Instead, pre-reflective self-consciousness is a pregnant topic in psychopathology and developmental scenarios, wherein research is focused on the first-person experiential modality and its impairments and enhancements. In Chapter 6, I will nevertheless come back to the epistemological relation between reflective and pre-reflective instances.

experience, whereas their divergent ontological commitments lead to opposing conclusions about the real existence of a self (Metzinger, 2003a, 2011; Zahavi, 2014: 51).

Another issue related to the notion of “pre-reflective self-consciousness” concerns the plausibility of its classification. On one side, we have reflective thoughts upon our experiences, thoughts and personal traits. On the other, we have identified some experiential features that carries self-referred aspects even if one is not deliberately reflecting on her conscious life. If we agree that the former amounts to a form of self-consciousness, is it justified then to assume that the latter does? Zahavi suggests that this terminological discussion might prevent us from aiming at core of the problem. If we are to deny the presence of a basic form of self-awareness within subjective experience, he argues, we have to dispute its phenomenological basis (Zahavi, 2014: 28). I think that, at least to some extent, Zahavi’s has a point. To establish when it could be plausible to identify a form of self-consciousness is indeed vital within moral and bioethical debates. We should not therefore overlook the importance of such a discussion. Still, at a phenomenological level of analysis, to assess which features subjective experience does present should be our prior goal. Thus, even though the present phenomenological approach postpones the attempt to determine whether the term “self-consciousness” should be applied to pre-reflective forms, I will take on Zahavi’s challenge and investigate the experiential bases of this phenomenon.

Different facets of conscious life seems to suggest that a form of self-reference is already at stake in our pre-reflective experiential engagement. For example, infants have been reported to manifest certain capacities of self-differentiation, even before acquiring the ability to recognise themselves in a mirror (e.g., showing awareness of their body; See Rochat & Hespos, 1997; Rochat & Striano, 2000; Rochat, 2003, 2015). Moreover, adults also appear to hold some sort of self-reference when they are absorbed in everyday activities. The objects that we experientially run into carry a specific relevance with respect to our purposes, expectations and past experiences (Schechtman, 2007: 162, 2014: 100, 102; Rudd, 2012: 180). This phenomenological

approach therefore aims at questioning different notions of pre-reflective self-consciousness, while directly examining these experiential aspects. Furthermore, I will try to elaborate a conception of pre-reflective self-consciousness that takes into account the developmental dimension of subjective experience.

Yet, any phenomenological attempt to determine the presence of pre-reflective self-consciousness within experience ultimately relies on a reflective stance. Does such a phenomenological feature remain unaltered and endure through this change of attentional attitude? Or do we inevitably lose the authentic phenomenal character of minimal self-consciousness? As Gallagher and Zahavi do recognise, reflections on phenomenology entail both a gain and a loss (Gallagher & Zahavi, 62-63). On one side, our stream of consciousness can be thought of as a continuum and, as such, we merely recall, judge part of it only via inevitable abstraction. Take a look to the visual scene in front of you and then close your eyes while trying to retain all the phenomenal qualities. It will easily appear that our capacity to hold the phenomenal character of low-order states of consciousness is rather limited. Thus, to some extent, a reflective attitude does modify the phenomenology of the state towards which it is directed towards. On the other side, this does not imply that phenomenological reports should be discarded. Indeed, «reflection does not necessarily have to be untrustworthy» (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008: 63). Phenomenological reflection allows for critical thinking: even though stepping back from our experiences may hide some phenomenological aspects, it nonetheless opens up the possibility to pursue objectivity standards. In this last respect, we can intersubjectively confront our reports and compare them with empirical findings as well.

Before moving on, however, I shall clarify some conceptual and methodological bases. The term "pre-reflective self-consciousness", as described so far, relies on specific concepts, such as "consciousness", "subjective experience" or "phenomenal character". These notions in fact play a key role within the theoretical framework I am trying to outline. In addition, I shall also illustrate how my phenomenological perspective is meant to cope with physicalist and scientific explanation of phenomenal consciousness.

## 1.4 The problems of consciousness

So far, I have suggested that the self, as it appears in our conscious life, can be accounted for in two different ways. We could in fact consider the self as the object of our reflection or thoughts. In this sense, the self might represent a crucial aspect for our concerns about identity, morality and metaphysics. A divergent perspective instead examines self-related facets of subjective experience that come into play even if we are not reflecting upon our stream of consciousness (see, among others, Gallagher, 2000, 2005; Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008; Zahavi, 2014, 2017; RoCHAT, 2015; Blanke & Metzinger, 2009; Tsakiris, 2017). This experiential self, which will be the target of the present text, therefore amounts to a form of self-consciousness that unfolds in our everyday activities. In order to investigate this experiential element, we should nevertheless make some crucial remarks on the experiential dimension in which this phenomenon takes place. Indeed, if we are to account for the experiential dimension of selfhood, terms like "consciousness" and "subjective experience" start playing a significant role.

### 1.4.1 Features of phenomenal consciousness

"To be self-conscious" defines a process by means of which a subject might become aware of her own activity. To put it differently, one might be conscious of some aspects in her experiential life that are essentially related to herself, as well as she might be conscious of the perceived objects surrounding her. Thus, before moving on what defines self-related elements in subjective experience, we should investigate how we become conscious of something.

How, to use Thomas Nagel's terms, should we define that «there is something that it is like to be» for an individual (Nagel, 1974)? Nagel considers "consciousness" as a primitive notion and defends a non-reductionist account. When it comes to an objective explanation of subjective experience, experiential consciousness appears to be an unavoidable starting point.

If physicalism is to be defended, the phenomenological features must themselves be given a physical account. But when we examine their subjective character it seems that such a result is impossible. The reason is that every subjective phenomenon is essentially connected with a single point of view, and it seems inevitable that an objective, physical theory will abandon that point of view. (Nagel, 1974)

On such a view, however, the term "consciousness" ends up being either treated as an unexplained explainer or described through a circular definition. As Ned Block acknowledges as well, this should count as an unsatisfactory outcome. He therefore suggests that focussing on the different functions of consciousness might shed some light on the topic. Indeed, he argues for a refinement of this «mongrel» concept that connotes several phenomena, as long as we are used to labeling with "consciousness" or "conscious" different aspects of our life (Block, 1995: 227). For example, I can affirm that I am conscious of my computer keyboard while I am typing on it, or that I am conscious that I have to prepare dinner for my family. Even though I am using the same word in both sentences, the phenomena they refer to are quite different.

Block is not concerned, however, with different kinds of consciousness: two mental states can differ in both content and type – in the previous example, one is a perception about a close object, the other is a recollection of some commitment – but either is nonetheless a current experience that belongs to my stream of consciousness. According to Block, what should identify "various consciousnesses" is the role that they play in one's behaviour. Block distinguishes, then, between phenomenal consciousness (P-consciousness) and access consciousness (A-consciousness): a mental state is P-conscious if it possesses a phenomenal character – i.e., if there is something that it is like to be for someone to have – while a mental state is A-conscious when it is employed as a premise for one's rational behaviour (Block, 1995: 231). When it comes to ordinary experience it seems likely, however, that these two functions often conflate. The experience of the keyboard guides my action control. The thought that I have to prepare the family dinner, on the other hand, not only affects my behaviour but also stems from my stream of consciousness.

Nonetheless, it is possible, at least conceptually, to think about cases in which P-consciousness is not accompanied by A-consciousness, and vice versa.

Following some insights from neurophysiological studies, Block uses the blindsight phenomenon<sup>9</sup> to elaborate a more radical case, that is, the «superblindsighter» (Block, 1995: 232): imagine an individual affected by blindsight, who has trained herself so hard that she can spontaneously tell which kind of object is standing before her. Her utterance would be then something like “I know that there is an object X in my blind field, though I do not see it”. In this sense, her sensation of the object X would be only accessible to another thought – a thought that is A-conscious and P-conscious as well – but it would lack phenomenal character. Another example can instead illustrate a case in which phenomenally conscious mental states are not accessible to the rational control of the subject. Suppose to be engaged in a demanding task, so that you cannot hear the ongoing acoustic signal which tells you to stop. Later you suddenly realise that the signal is ringing, and therefore you stop; moreover, you also realise, then, that the signal was going on for a while before you noticed it. We should say that you were phenomenally conscious of the ringing all along, but you became also A-conscious only when you suddenly drew your attention to it. It was only then that the sound experience became the premise for your behavioural response (Block, 1995: 234).

Although we may dispute the plausibility of the superblindsighter case, this example raises serious questions about the appearance of phenomenal consciousness. On Block’s view, even though we would not be able to use an experience in certain circumstances (e.g., thinking about it, recalling it, using it as a

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<sup>9</sup> Blindsight is generally ascribed to individuals who have suffered from brain damage in the anatomical areas where the visual information is processed. Thus, whereas the sensory organ continues to function properly, the brain is unable to elaborate the sensory stimuli. When asked to guess between two options which kind of object is actually present in their blind visual field, however, the success rate of patients affected by blindsight is reported to be more than fifty percent. A plausible interpretation is that the visual information is in some way “available” to the cognitive system, though it is not properly processed and it does not reach the consciousness threshold (for a recent review of blindsight research and its theoretical background, see Mazzi et al., in press; Silvano, 2015).

premise for our actions, and so forth), it seems likely to assume that we may still be phenomenally conscious of something. Indeed, how could we argue that we were unconscious of something all along? Another example in line with Block's is the long-distance driver case introduced by David Armstrong (Armstrong, 1968: 92). Experienced drivers likely know that on a familiar trip one may be so distracted by pressing thoughts that after arrival she may be unable to recall what has happened and what she was doing during the trip – as though she drove the car unconsciously. We can also imagine other similar examples. Consider Frank on his way back home from work. As you recall, Frank just had a really bad day at the University. We can easily imagine how thoughts about his problems absorb his mind. While sitting on the bus, Frank does not pay attention to the particulars of his surroundings (e.g., the worn textile of the bus seat, two young students discussing a forthcoming exam, an eye-catching yellow hat, and the like). Furthermore, he is so focused on his concerns that, if asked, he would be unable to recall most of the aspects that he encountered during the trip. Should we assume that Frank was not conscious of several experiential phenomena? Or rather should we agree that Frank was experientially conscious of those particulars in a minimal sense, but he was not fully aware of the circumstances? The former presupposes a distinction between conscious and non-conscious experiences: having a sensation might be necessary, but not sufficient for having a conscious state. The latter suggests, on the other hand, that there might be different layers of awareness, a minimal level of phenomenal consciousness is sufficient for subjective experience. Following this, even though Frank was not aware of some particulars in the way he would have been if he had carefully paid attention, to affirm that Frank was experientially engaged with the environment means that he was, at least in a minimal sense, conscious of something.

Given such considerations on the subjective experience, how could we cope with the issue of defining the emergence of phenomenal consciousness? As suggested by Uriah Kriegel, even if we might accept Nagel's assumption that consciousness is a property of mental states – since there is something that it is like for an organism to be in such mental states – we could account for the conscious

character of mental states in a different way (Kriegel, 2006; for a different overview, see also Block, 2009). Indeed, we might come up with two divergent conclusions regarding Frank's lack of situational awareness: either he is conscious of the environment even if he is not making use of such information, or he is not conscious of what is happening around him since he is not acting accordingly. The former stance presupposes that mental states *qua* mental states are self-evident, that is, phenomenal consciousness is an intrinsic property of any mental state. As such, percepts enter the stream of consciousness even without attending to further mental operations. In other words, while it presents – or represents – the object towards which it is directed, a mental state also presents – or represents – itself.<sup>10</sup> Thus, when Frank sees the bus approaching him, in order to be conscious of it he does not require another mental state that is directed to his prior perception of the bus – or, to put it differently, that takes the first perception as its object. Kriegel, in this sense, defends a self-representational account of mental states (Kriegel, 2002, 2003, 2008). From a different standpoint, Gallagher and Zahavi also claim that a mental state is conscious without demanding «an additional second-order mental state that in some way is directed in an explicit manner towards the experience in question» (Gallagher

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<sup>10</sup> To be directed towards something is what characterises the property of intentionality. According to Brentano, intentionality has to be considered as a defining feature of mental state. Moreover, Brentano contends as well that every mental act is also directed towards itself as a secondary object (Brentano, 1995; for a recent critical approach to this tradition, see Crane, 1998). Regardless of Brentano's view on self-directedness, however, there might be different understandings of the relation between the content and the intentional object of a mental state. Indeed, if a mental state is directed towards something – an object or a thought – the content carried by such a mental state may be construed as either related to the intentional object (Brewer, 2011; Campbell, 2002), or representing the intentional object (Dretske, 1999; Tye, 2000; for an interesting synthesis of relational and representational approaches, see Schellenberg, 2011, 2016). Regarding perceptual experience, the first option claims that what constitutes the perceptual content are properties of the intentional object: our experiential engagement is a direct relation with the environment. The second affirms that, even though we are in a relation with an external object, the content only represents some parts of it, since the perceptual state carries a specific perspective on the intentional object. To put it differently, «when you examine your experience of the world, you cannot but see the world right through it – as though the experience was in itself transparent» (Kriegel, 2006).

& Zahavi, 2008; for other views on first-order consciousness see also Dretske, 1999; Tye, 2000).

This Brentanian approach presents a major issue concerning the naturalisation of consciousness, though. Roughly speaking, to naturalise consciousness – i.e., to explain phenomenology through a physicalist perspective – means to introduce causality into the picture. Yet, by claiming that consciousness is a property of the mental state – and thus affirming that consciousness cannot be caused unless we may unlikely assume that mental states cause themselves – the self-representational view seems inadequate to account for a naturalistic view on consciousness (for a reply to this objection and a refined self-representationalism, see Kriegel, 2008).

Naturalistic approaches are more in line with Higher-order thought (HOT) theories, according to which mental states are conscious in virtue of being presented – or represented – by another mental state (Armstrong, 1968; Lycan, 1996; Rosenthal, 2004, 2005a; see also Gennaro, 2004). Thus, on such accounts, for first-order (FO) mental states are meant to be unconscious unless a higher-order (HO) state properly accesses it and make the content available for further mental processes. However, whereas this view could allow for a naturalistic explanation, as long as consciousness is not provided (or caused) by the same mental state, when it comes to phenomenal consciousness, the role acknowledged to sensory perception is secondary. Consider, for example, cases of hallucination. Hallucinatory states are something we can be conscious of. According to HOT theory, we are conscious by means of a mental state that accesses a lower-order one, like a sensory perception. But, during hallucination, the HO mental state targets a sensory FO mental state which does not exist. Nonetheless, targetless HO mental states are conscious, and their content carries a phenomenal character.

Thus, suppose a person has a higher-order representation to the effect that she is having a taste of white chocolate. But she is not in fact having a taste of white chocolate. She is not having a taste of anything. According to higher-order representationalism, this person does not have any conscious experience, but it

seems to her as if she does. In other words, the person is not conscious, but is nonetheless under the impression that she is. (Kriegel, 2006: 62)

In this sense, either we are not conscious throughout a hallucinatory state – and this seems unlikely to be the case – or the HO mental state not only provides the necessary condition for consciousness, but it is also sufficient for bringing about the phenomenal character. On this understanding, then, the HO are meant to do most of the work, while the FO could be also absent (within the HO theoretical framework, a reply to the misrepresentation and lack of target objections can be seen in Coleman, 2011).

An intriguing third option tries to reconcile FO and HO theories. Indeed, on one side, FO mental states seem to simply emerge from our stream of consciousness in particular circumstances simply. HO thoughts arguably appear to be absent when, to use a phrase of Hubert Dreyfus, “we are absorbed in everyday skilful coping”, even if we certainly maintain the ability to step back and attentively monitor our experiences (Dreyfus, 2007). On the other side, although being processed by the visual system, some sensory input has been reported to remain unconscious (for investigations on different cases of inattention blindness, see Simons & Chabris, 1999; Dehaene et al., 2001; Cartwright-Finch & Lavie, 2007). Such findings, then, suggest that phenomenal consciousness – and thereby subjective experience as well – requires a further step if compared with mere sensorial access. Thus, trying to reconcile these two facets of consciousness, the global workspace theory (GWT) elaborated by Bernard Baars is meant to stress how different stimuli sources cooperate and compete to achieve the level of subjective experience (Baars, 1988, 1997, 2005). According to Baars, our cognitive system relies on several specialised processors that normally run in parallel, and most of their activity remains unconscious. However, a content – i.e., the output of one of such sub-systems – may become conscious when the following necessary conditions are satisfied: first, the content has to be globally broadcasted, that is, it has to be made accessible by many specialized processors within a global workspace area; second, the content has to be internally coherent (i.e., the content cannot be

constituted by two contradictory aspects at one time. Think, for example, of Wittgenstein's rabbit-duck image); third, conscious content is informative, inasmuch as it requires the cognitive system to adapt to it; fourth, conscious content generates a certain form of reflexivity of consciousness; finally, conscious contents are percept-like with a minimal duration (Baars, 1988: 362-363).<sup>11</sup> One of the main features of this theory is that the distinction between first and second order mental states is no more necessary in accounting for consciousness. Rather, consciousness acquires a functional role: it allows cooperative interaction between different sub-systems of the cognitive apparatus, in order to support our coping with novelty. To that extent, either first-order perceptual states or HO thoughts can be conscious, as long as they are internally consistent, informative, coded in a percept-like manner, lasting for a minimal amount of time, and potentially accessible to further operations.

Thus, the global workspace theory seems to hold some insights from both the first and higher-order theory of consciousness. It allows for the possibility that some perceptual states simply break through our stream of consciousness, therefore becoming available to other parts of the cognitive systems. To be accessed could be understood, then, as a disposition, rather than an actual feature of the mental state: a mental state is conscious in virtue of its being potentially accessible, along with the other necessary features (for a dispositionalist account of HO theory that is consistent with the GWT framework, see Carruthers, 2000, 2004). This entails that not every FO state obtains consciousness. Indeed, even if we are disposed to call them experiences or thoughts – for example, Frank's sensory perceptions during the bus trip, but we may as well come up with other cases of inattention blindness, such as visual input that, while remaining unconscious, are nonetheless processed by the visual system – some "mental" states should be considered redundant and uninformative, since they are not potentially accessible by further cognitive operations (e.g., recollection).

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<sup>11</sup> As the analysis of pre-reflective self-consciousness will unfold in the next chapters, these features of phenomenal consciousness will become recurrent. As we will see, reflexivity and global availability will especially play a central role in accounting for a pre-reflective dimension of subjective experience.

In brief, in questioning of how consciousness occurs in our mental life, we have taken into account three different proposals. Either bears some drawbacks, but I do think that GWT shows a decisive advantage. On the one hand, FO theories seem unable to give a straightforward distinction between conscious and unconscious mental state that does not appeal to subjective experience (Marraffa & Paternoster, 2013: 57). That is to say; a first-order state is conscious if carries phenomenal character, i.e., something that it-is-like-to-be in for a subject. In turn, when a state is unconscious, this "what-it-is-like-to-be" is lacking. Thus, to explain the phenomenal character, i.e., a mental state being conscious (or a subject being conscious of some mental state), we have to appeal to subjective experience; but understanding subjective experience implies referring to the consciousness carried by the same mental state. To put it differently, in the best case scenario, FO theories are unable to account for the conscious character of some mental state without referring to the phenomenal (thus, conscious) character of the same mental state, therefore relinquishing any descriptive attempt to define consciousness in different terms (e.g., naturalism).

On the other hand, the HO theories introduce a further element into the picture. According to them, a first-order state is conscious by virtue of another, higher-order mental state that holds the first-order one as its own content. Yet, in addition to the misrepresentation and lack of target issues, this proposal appears to be overly demanding: it would require both an extreme load for the cognitive system and the mastery of mental skills that infants and other animals likely lack.

Even though it certainly demands further phenomenological refinements, the GWT seems well-suited to account for the complexity of the occurrence of consciousness: the GWT avoids the cognitive load that HO theories imply and furthermore allows for an explanation of consciousness that should prevent circularity. Nonetheless, a further problem emerges at the interplay between first-person reports and a naturalistic understanding: GWT avoids, in fact, the circularity problem by appealing to a functional explanation of consciousness, which ultimately relies on physiological insights. Thus, if the GWT should be meant to be a fruitful

theoretical tool to reconcile phenomenological and naturalistic explanations of consciousness, on what basis would this reconciliation take place? Subjective experience appears to be an unavoidable step that every theory of consciousness should cover. Could we describe the phenomenological facets of consciousness in different terms, that is, by means of the brain activity and hence physical elements?

#### *1.4.2 The hard problem*

The last concluding question introduces what David Chalmers called the «hard part of the mind-body problem» (Chalmers, 1996: 4). How should we close the explanatory gap between a micro-physical understanding of human behaviour and a phenomenological account of the “feel” that accompanies one’s experiences? I suggested that the GWT is a suitable candidate – though not flawless – to connect bottom-up and top-down sources of consciousness. Whereas the GWT requires an in-depth analysis of the phenomenal character of subjective experience, its objective explanatory level allows for a biological understanding of the phenomenon of consciousness. To focus only on this latter aspect would allow us to elaborate an account of consciousness that mainly relies on neural activity patterns – opting, thus, for a reductive notion of consciousness. Along these lines, Dehaene and Naccache have in fact elaborated a neuronal version of the global workspace theory (GNWT). Through a comparative analysis, they affirm that what distinguishes conscious states from unconscious ones is the elicitation of a brain-scale «coherent activity that involves many neurons distributed throughout the brain» (Dehaene & Naccache, 2001). In addition to Dehaene and Naccache’s there are other proposals that do not specifically embrace the global workspace approach, but likewise identify consciousness with a property of the brain. Among others, it has been proposed that the thalamus network should be considered «the heart of the neurobiology of consciousness» (Alkire & Miller, 2005), or that a specific pattern of electric oscillation in sensory areas is distinctive of phenomenal consciousness (Crick & Koch, 1990).

What all these different positions aim at is, nevertheless, an explanation of mental life through the insights provided by empirical sciences about physical properties.

Such attempts to define consciousness in (micro)physical terms rely on the strong assumption that an exhaustive scientific explanation of subjective experience is, at least in principle, possible. Even if a thorough explanation of consciousness in naturalistic terms is far from being achieved, either the conceptual gap between physical and phenomenological explanatory levels could be overcome or phenomenology would not be decisive for grasping the true nature of consciousness. Nevertheless, someone might object that to focus on the physical level entails the loss of a key aspect. Are we exhaustively defining phenomenal consciousness when we appeal to neurobiological processing? In his article "Epiphenomenal Qualia", Frank Jackson has developed a negative reply to this question through a well-known thought experiment (Jackson, 1982). Imagine a person, Mary, who has been brought up so that she has never experienced colours (she has only lived in a black and white room). Nevertheless, suppose that Mary is the finest neuroscientist and knows everything that it could be possibly known about the neurobiological underpinning of colour perception. In a certain sense, then, Mary knows all one could possibly know about colours and colour perception from a physical point of view. But does that mean that she really knows everything about colour? According to Jackson, Mary lacks the knowledge of the phenomenal character of color experience – i.e., she does not know what-it-is-like to experience colours, a specific knowledge that Mary can only gain by actually perceiving something colours. This shows that relevant knowledge goes beyond the knowledge of physical facts. Therefore, even if we are not inclined to infer a metaphysical conclusion<sup>12</sup>, Jackson suggests that there is a conceptual gap between physical and phenomenological explanations that implies the impossibility of any form of reductive understanding. Some may object, however,

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<sup>12</sup> A metaphysical inference would be that there are further facts beyond physical ones, since the exhaustive knowledge of the physical world does not allow for an exhaustive knowledge of what is worth to be known. Therefore, this conclusion could lay the foundation for an ontological pluralism.

that we are currently unable to determine what kind of knowledge an exhaustive understanding of neurobiological processes would amount to. Thus, it would be philosophical arrogant to deny some future and unforeseen findings.

A reply to this objection can be found in other examples. Consider colour perception again. One could try to give a naturalistic explanation of colour perception by describing phenomena that are correlated with it, but accessible to a physicalist description. For example, one could try to give a functional description of perceiving red – i.e., by illustrating the role that each neuron plays in the transmission of colour information. In a famous thought experiment, Ned Block has suggested that we could imagine the population of a great nation that flawlessly fulfils the functional role of the corresponding neural substratum. For example, the behaviour of one billion cells could be simulated by the population of China (Block, 1978). However, such a nation would likely remain unconscious of seeing something red. Thus, it may be disputed that a coherent functional explanation must identify the characteristic biological substratum. A more significant example concerns the inverted visual spectrum: when facing a visual stimulus, two similar sensory systems could provide two divergent outcomes, that is, while one subject experiences the red colour, the other could perceive green (Shoemaker, 1975). Again, defenders of a non-mentalistic account of phenomenal consciousness might argue that a satisfactory functional or causal explanation would allow for some differences between the two cases.

To conclude this line of reasoning, it seems that if we attempt to support a naturalistic explanation of subjective experiences, we are left with two demanding options. On the one hand, we can rely on the radical explanatory aim to reduce mental properties to the complex interaction of physical elements. In this case, however, we have to deal with some puzzling scenarios in which such physical explanations do not seem well-equipped to avoid some remarkable issues, even though we may invoke future exhaustive understandings of these phenomena. In this sense, the “interface problem”, as Bermúdez calls it, points to the intricacy of any reductionist program (Bermúdez, 2005: 44). On the other hand, we can therefore adopt a combined approach that integrates phenomenological reports with a

functional or causal framework. This last option appears to be rather challenging since it has to address the problem of conceptual equivalence between different theoretical frameworks. But it nonetheless allows for mutual support between various perspectives. As Shaun Gallagher sees it, a strict line between phenomenology and cognitive science might prevent a mutual benefit. That is to say, a continuous interplay might allow for a refinement of the vocabulary of first-personal level that is employed in empirical research, as well as to avoid the risk of «reading too much into conscious processes, or from sliding into theoretical construction» (Gallagher, 1997).

This explanatory interplay might result in a confusion of subpersonal and personal level, though.<sup>13</sup> Instead of paying too much attention to the isomorphism that might hold between two levels of description, we should therefore focus on the specific characteristics of each of them with the goal to establish an efficient and mutually convenient division of labour. In this sense, various level of explanation can provide fruitful explanatory patterns which could enhance another kind of investigations on the same set of phenomena.

The weaker version simply states that if we are to seek explanations of consciousness and cognition on subpersonal levels, we need to start with a precise description of what it is that we are trying to explain so that we can recognize a good explanation when we see it. This claim would not place strong limiting constraints on the shape of the subpersonal mechanism – it would not require that the subintentional level mirror the intentional one, and if it happens that the subpersonal process is isomorphic with the structure of intentional experience, it does not mistake this fact for an explanation. (Gallagher, 1997)

Furthermore, once a lower or higher level of explanation is established, it does not complete its heuristic role. Rather, as Craver and Wright suggest, psychological explanations carry out an ongoing influence on neurobiological research. As long as

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<sup>13</sup> The distinction between personal and sub-personal levels of description was introduced by Dennett (Dennett, 1969). The subpersonal level of explanation refers to the level of the parts that constitute a person (e.g., the brain, the body, the immune system), whereas the personal level denotes the level of properties that belong to a person as a whole.

the investigation on neural functioning seeks to attain better scientific understanding, neurobiological research continuously requires a sharp classification of the target phenomenon and the context in which it takes place. In this respect, the personal level of analysis provides a fecund tool for such a definitional purpose (Craver, 2007; Wright, 2007). We may also consider how taking into account various perspectives can bring about noteworthy results in practical scenarios. On a certain point of view, the mood that our fictional character Frank manifests at the end of the day "is caused" by some unpleasant happenings that he has consciously experienced throughout the day. From another perspective, Frank's feeling frustrated "is caused" by the lack or the abundance of some chemical components in his bloodstream (or in the brain). In this case, to only operate on the biological "cause" seems to be an incomplete solution. We certainly need to restore the chemical balance, but a personal level of explanation may help us to obtain long-term results (for example, by adopting a shift in personal behaviour). One might object, though, that other kinds of pathologies surely require a stronger focus on the physical level. However, contemporary medicine relies on the assumption that the healing process involves the individual as a whole, and not as a mere body, and thus top-notch procedures are meant to directly affect the psychological facets of one's recovery as well.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

In the following pages, I will focus on the phenomenon of pre-reflective self-consciousness. In this respect, I have established a preliminary distinction between a reflective and a pre-reflective form of self-consciousness. As we have seen, "self" may in fact appear in our thoughts and experiences in various ways. On one side, an explicit form of self-consciousness comes into play when we deliberately reflect upon ourselves. This might happen in virtue of literal purposes – e.g., identifying once and for all that sort of thing that is a self – and practical concerns – e.g., thinking about conditions for a self to survive as the same one, or the accountability for one's past actions (Schechtman, 2014: 4). However, several authors have also suggested that an

experiential form of self might appear in subjective experience, even if we are not engaged in reflective attitudes (Gallagher, 2000, 2005; Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008; Zahavi, 2014, 2017; RoCHAT, 2015; Blanke & Metzinger, 2009; Tsakiris, 2017). Although I do not consider these two forms of self-consciousness unrelated, in the present text I will examine the latter instance.

In this chapter, I have therefore outlined the methodological bases of this investigation. First, this research will address the phenomenological dimension of pre-reflective self-consciousness. Even though the terminological dispute about whether we should consider pre-reflective self-consciousness as mere subjectivity or an actual form of self-consciousness has become relevant in moral and bioethical debates, the consequences of such discussions are far beyond the purpose of the present text. In what follows, I will then examine some key phenomenal properties of subjective experience. Second, following this line of inquiry, "consciousness" becomes a crucial term. While examining such a concept, we have seen two features that will play a significant role in the next chapters. The first is phenomenal reflexivity. Several authors suggest, indeed, that a basic form of self-consciousness rests on such experiential characteristic (Kriegel, 2002, 2003, 2008; Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008). On such views, before any explicit attempt to reflect on our stream of consciousness, consciousness is already directed towards itself. The second feature is global accessibility. In this sense, I have thus suggested that the global workspace theory represents an intriguing tool – although not flawless – to account for phenomenal consciousness (Baars, 1988, 1997, 2005). The GWT identifies global access as a basic element of phenomenal consciousness: conscious contents are not merely accessible to specific processors of the cognitive system, but also to the organism as whole. In this respect, consciousness is essential for situational awareness and actions planning. In Chapter 4 and 5 we will in fact examine how consciousness – and especially self-consciousness – is intertwined with our activities. Moreover, the GWT avoids a circular explanation of phenomenal consciousness, and does not assume the cognitive load on which some higher-order theories of consciousness rely.

Another aspect of the GWT points to the third methodological assumption of the present research. The GWT might in fact allow for the interplay of phenomenological and naturalistic explanations of consciousness. A further question would be, then, how such an interaction could take place. In the following pages, although my approach to the issue of pre-reflective self-consciousness is to be considered as mainly phenomenological, I shall not avoid insights from the empirical science. But rather than establishing an overlap between first- and third-person perspectives, I will preserve such specific standpoints while nonetheless insisting on their mutual and heuristic influence.

## **2 THE “SELF” WITHIN EXPERIENCE: SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS**

In the previous chapter I briefly introduced the central topic of the present research – i.e., pre-reflective self-consciousness. Then, I clarified some key concepts and the phenomenological approach that I intend to pursue in the following pages. Chapter 1, in this sense, was especially intended to provide the conceptual and methodological bases for the following pages. In this chapter I will further examine the object of this investigation, in order to underline its peculiarity with respect to a reflective instance. I will then apply a top-down strategy to discriminate between different forms of self-consciousness, and how they depend on reflective abilities. In this sense, my aim is to identify a basic form, which could be meant to represent an essential feature of subjective experience and a non-objective instance of self-consciousness.

### **2.1 First steps into experiential selfhood**

If we are to understand the phenomenal appearance of the self within subjective experience, we should ask to what extent the relation between consciousness and self takes place. In Chapter 1, we have already seen some forms of reflective self-consciousness that rely on literal and practical concerns. From another standpoint, we may consider consciousness a property that selves must possess, or, likewise, to argue that the appearance of consciousness entails the presence of a self. The Cartesian tradition in this respect postulated a lasting connection between the self – as an entity with a specific and independent nature – and consciousness – as a quality

or property of the self. On this view, we can in fact infer the existence of a self by means of the appearance of consciousness. In this respect, the self is given within subjective experience in virtue of an inferential thought – i.e., for consciousness to obtain a self must exist. In sum, this standpoint does not require the self to be given in subjective experience, unless the self experientially appear as the object of our reflections. This view, as other approaches that we saw earlier, therefore appeals to a form of deliberate and reflective self-consciousness. The phenomenological perspective that I will pursue in the present text suggests, on the other hand, to examine the intrinsic feature of consciousness and subjective experience. This significant change of perspective allows, then, for shifting the investigation subject from the self as the object of our reflections to the self as an experiential aspect, that is, the self-directedness of subjective experience.

Let us apply this different perspective to Frank's case. While reflecting on the core of his true self, Frank is certainly experiencing his self. However, to affirm that the self is experienced only when it appears as the object of our thought could seem overly demanding. If we agree with this statement, we should affirm that self-consciousness arises only when someone can reflect on the concept of self, and she is currently doing it. We should deny, then, self-consciousness for any being that either lacks the concept of self or is not presently thinking about it (i.e., other animals, infants, and human beings during most of their life)<sup>14</sup>. Nevertheless, other definitions of experiential selfhood take into account cases where the self is not the explicit object of experience or thought. Indeed, in our fictional scenario Frank does not need to reflect whether or not he is the one who wakes up late that morning. Although he is not questioning whether he is the same person as the one who forgot to set the alarm clock before going to sleep, he is nonetheless acting in accordance with the persistence of such a self. Likewise, he is conscious of being the one who enters the University premises, and that he is the one who is criticising his beloved one – though eventually regretting what he has done. Thus, we may say that, to some extent, Frank

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<sup>14</sup> We might nonetheless argue that self-consciousness could be potentially achievable at any moment during conscious life.

is conscious of himself, even though a reflection upon himself is not explicitly at stake. Thus, in our fictional scenario, we might figuratively affirm that the self does not take the main stage of Frank's thoughts and experiences, although its appearance brings some critical consequences on the scene. We could thereby affirm that some sort of self-referentiality is in place, even if a self is not the intentional object of most of Frank's thoughts.

To question the presence of a non-objective self-consciousness in such cases amounts to the attempt to either define or deny a form of self-referentiality in subjective experience. In this sense, the term "self-consciousness" should be intended as cluster terms, which includes several cases where the self is at stake, even though it could not be the object of our thoughts.

Rather, self-consciousness is a many-layered phenomenon. It comes in many forms and degrees, and whereas one of the most advanced forms might involve contemplating one's life as a whole and reflecting on the kind of person one is and on the values one holds dear, the most primitive form of self-consciousness is a question of the ongoing first-personal manifestation of one's own experiential life. (Zahavi, 2014: 14)

As Zahavi argues, the self does not only come into play when it becomes the object of our reflections or thoughts. It rather should be considered a specific mode of our experiential life. What is at stake here is, then, a self-referential modality of our experiences and thoughts.

To recapitulate, there is a key feature that distinguishes experiential selfhood from a reflective attitude. Experiential selfhood does not require an explicit reference to a self – that is, a self as the intentional object of our thought – but rather it appeals to a self-referential aspect of experience<sup>15</sup>. While reflective attitudes might aim at answering literal and practical question about the self, as we have seen in Chapter 1,

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<sup>15</sup> Whether substantial self-consciousness also occurs when we are not explicitly experiencing or thinking about our "selves" is one of the main topics of the current debate. Yet, several approaches suggest that one's explicitly thinking about oneself is not necessary for self-consciousness to occur (among others, Metzinger, 2003; Damasio, 2010; Zahavi, 2014).

a pre-reflective form of self-consciousness might carry the experiential sense that we are the ones who are currently experiencing.<sup>16</sup>

To help clarifying what I am illustrating here, consider a different case, that is, the notion of "game". As it may happen with "self", we could address "game" from a theoretical standpoint. In this respect, "game" stands for a wide cluster of activities governed by rules and, as the target of our thoughts, could be the subject of some fine-grained reflections. Nevertheless, these theoretical concerns are more complex steps if compared with learning to play particular games: indeed, we primarily learn some games, especially while playing them. Think about pretend play or make believe. As it frequently happens, this game itself and its rules could a disputed matter. However, as suggested by Kendal Walton, young children and parents can start playing pretend game without any discussion on either the rules or the name of the game (Walton, 1990). Suddenly, a father may pretend to be a ferocious monster that chases his child, so that the toddler quickly begins to flee all over the place. Nonetheless, the child's mix of scare and amusement expressions unveils that she has understood the pretence and she is enjoying the game as well. According to Abelev and Markman, children's ability to play these alleged simple games relies on the acknowledgement of the pretender's gestures and acting, rather than on finer theoretical grasp or explicit discussion of the game rules (Abelev & Markman, 2006). Moreover, further empirical evidence suggests that already at the age of three children already recognise the pretence and engage in these games at the age of three, even though they lack an accurate notion of reality/fiction distinction (Lillard & Flavell, 1992; Wyman et al., 2009). Therefore, during our first games, we are not theoretically shaping a specific notion; rather, we are putting in place – and, at the same time, refining – an ability that guides our experiential engagement with the environment. For instance, while we entertain ourselves at pretend game, we are

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<sup>16</sup> This last question is therefore slightly different from Nagel's expression (Nagel, 1974). If Nagel has tried to highlight the phenomenal character of subjective experience, by means of the locution "what-is-it-like to be" for an organism, the experiential self concerns not only the phenomenal character, but also the self-related givenness of subjective experience.

immediately able to experience our surroundings as a place of potentialities. In the previous case, the father is seen as a monster which the child has to run away from, whereas some environmental features (i.e., hiding places) become noticeable in virtue of the goal of the game (i.e., running away).

Likewise, we can make a distinction between a reflective attitude toward the self and a non-objective mode of referring to it. Indeed, some authors suggest that forms of self-consciousness are already in place before the development of an explicit conception of the self. For example, infants early discriminate between their body and other objects in the environment, and between external and self-generated stimulation as well (Rochat, 2015). On this view, then, while the self might be the object of experience and thought, a pre-reflective form of self-consciousness should be rather considered a mode of our engagement with the environment and ourselves. Consider again Frank, who is anxiously looking at the grey bus that is approaching the bus stop, which is the intentional object of Frank's experience. In this scenario, the appearance of a self is not something which is added to the experienced object – namely, the grey bus. Rather, this experiential self is supposed to be a specific feature of the experience itself. Again, suppose that Frank turns his gaze to check the bus ticket. Besides being visual perceptions, what connects these two experiences is their being self-referred, that is, the relation with their owner – or what should allow us to attribute both experiences to Frank. He is the one who has them. Thus, whereas the object could be interpreted as the "what", pre-reflective self-consciousness might be assessed as part of the "how" of subjective experience.

Such a self-referential aspect of experience has been accounted for by different positions. For example, Dan Zahavi, among others, has defined this phenomenon as the "minimal self" (Zahavi, 2014: 89; Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008: 204). I will thoroughly examine Zahavi's notion in the next chapter. I should mention, however, that although both mine and Zahavi's conception pose a self-referential modality within pre-reflective experience, my conception diverges in two respects. First, while Zahavi's concept implies a specific ontological standpoint since the experiential structure of the self constitutes its reality (Zahavi, 2014: 18), the notion at stake here is not meant

to presuppose a specific metaphysical commitment. In this sense, my broader notion could do justice to other approaches that are embedded in a different metaphysical standpoint. It could allow, for example, to focus on the experiential dimension of self-consciousness while denying the actual existence of a self, as for example Metzinger insists (Metzinger, 2011). Thus, although I do not affirm that an experiential approach should be utterly immune to metaphysical insights, to focus on the experiential dimension concerns specific issues and could allow for different metaphysical outcomes.

Second, Zahavi's notion is strictly intertwined with the strong claim that a minimal form of self-consciousness is an enduring character of first-person perspective (Zahavi, 2011, 2014:18). It is considered to be an intrinsic feature of conscious life, and it also belongs to newborns and non-human animals. But more importantly, it is phenomenally fixed and does not change through lifespan. My proposal is instead committed to a milder claim, insofar as it allows for an ontogenetic understanding of this phenomenon. In this sense, if we are to define pre-reflective self-consciousness from a phenomenological perspective, I suggest that we should take into account the experiential development that individuals undergo in their life.

The notion of pre-reflective self-consciousness at stake here is still vague, though, and might be consistent with divergent positions within the debate. For example, forms of pre-reflective self-consciousness have been contended even by who affirms that self-consciousness is only acquired in social and linguistic contexts, while others contend that pre-reflective self-consciousness is achieved when a subject acquires the ability to reflect on its conscious life. In the following section, then, I shall take into consideration different levels of interaction between reflective and pre-reflective self-consciousness. Here, the purpose will consist in identifying a basic feature of subjective experience that could be the privileged target of the present phenomenological investigation.

## 2.2 Reflection as a necessary condition

In order to capture the relation between reflective and pre-reflective self-consciousness, and thereby understand their defining features, we should stress the conditions for self-consciousness to occur. As we have seen, the term "self-consciousness" allows us to refer to some self-referential features within conscious experience. Some might affirm that a straightforward way of experiencing ourselves occurs through the attempt to pick out what identifies with our self. In this case, we hold the self as the object of our thoughts (e.g., when we address the core of our personality or wonder whether we are the same person as the one who made a promise to a friend one week ago). Other examples are the recollection of past experience as one's own, and the definition of one's personality traits. All these experiences are brought about by explicit reflections upon the self. But they can be considered, nevertheless, as just a special case of "experiential appearance" of the self. Indeed, if we assume that the self as the object of our thoughts and experience is a necessary for self-consciousness, we certainly endorse a narrow position. On such a view, in order to obtain self-consciousness, one would have to acquire the concept of "self" and apply it by holding the self as the object of her thoughts. This condition might seem plausible for some higher forms of self-consciousness, however, but it does not do justice to other cases in which self-related aspects arguably plays a central role, such as bodily awareness, sense of experiential ownership, sense of agency and mirror self-recognition.

We can find this narrow understanding of self-consciousness in David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*. When it comes to the self, he argued, we may try to seek ourselves in the manifold of our experiences. But what we are left with is just the richness of our phenomenal consciousness: for we cannot find the self as essentially tied to our stream of consciousness.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Hume emphasises John Locke's insights concerning the notion of self and personal identity. According to Locke, self and personal identity rely on the unity of consciousness, that is, on the possibility to understand several experiential phenomena as belonging to same stream of consciousness. However, while Hume considers this understanding as the outcome

But self or person is not any one impression, but that to which our several impressions and ideas are suppos'd to have a reference. If any impression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue invariably the same, thro' the whole course of our lives; since self is suppos'd to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable. Pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations succeed each other, and never all exist at the same time. It cannot, therefore, be from any of these impressions, or from any other, that the idea of self is deriv'd; and consequently there is no such idea. (Hume, 1978: 251-252)

Eventually, we may become aware of ourselves, but only as a fictional, complex idea that we create by means of our imagination, and that we entertain as an object of our thoughts.

According to Hume, phenomenal consciousness is thus necessary, but not sufficient for self-consciousness. One must meet further requirements, such as possessing language and other socially acquired capacities, in order to step back from her experiences and employ a reflective standpoint on her own mental state. Hume therefore contended what we can identify as a "reflective self-consciousness": as long as we recall significant episodes of ours, or make some guess about our future, or commit ourselves to achieve some outcome, we are developing a concept of ourselves as enduring subjects, by means of directing our consciousness towards several experiences and thoughts.

Hume's understanding of reflective self-consciousness allows us to stress, then, that this specific instance of self-consciousness needs at least two conditions: the self has to be the object of our experience or thought and consciousness has to be reflectively directed towards itself – i.e., one's awareness has to be directed upon other conscious mental states of one's own, such as experiences, recollections, beliefs or judgements. In this strong sense, self-consciousness appears to be a rather

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of the faculty of imagination, he denies the Lockean assumption that consciousness bears a kind of reflexivity – i.e., «it being impossible for any one to perceive without perceiving that he does perceive. When we see, hear, smell, taste, feel, meditate, or will anything, we know that we do so» (Locke, 1999: 318).

demanding task, so that someone might plausibly argue that we are genuinely self-conscious only rarely in our life.

A milder understanding of reflective self-consciousness relinquishes the first condition – i.e., the self being the object of our thought – while holding on to the second – i.e., having a reflective standpoint on our mental life. As David Rosenthal sees it, when we draw the attention on our phenomenal consciousness by employing higher-order mental states, we become conscious of the unity of mental activity and, thus, self-conscious: «so introspecting our mental states results in a conscious sense of unity among those states even when the states are conscious by way of distinct HOTS» (Rosenthal, 2005b). For example, when Frank recalls, during the travel to his place, the annoying events happened at work, he is certainly not aware of himself as though he would be by reflecting on the core of its personality. And yet Rosenthal would arguably assume that he is conscious of the unity of consciousness: even though a self as intentional object remains in the background of Frank's thoughts, by means of his act of remembering he is nonetheless building a bridge between the conscious experience of the recalled phenomena and the current conscious act of recollection.

Yet, even if we contend only this second requirement (i.e., self-consciousness occurs when we apply a reflective perspective on our conscious life), we should affirm that pre-reflective consciousness is merely self-less: what is given within phenomenal consciousness is just the richness of subjective experience. On this standpoint, we can therefore access a dimension of self-giveness only by means of having consciousness directed towards itself.

### **2.3 Pre-reflective forms**

But do pre-reflective conscious mental states just present the phenomenal character of experience? Anthony Rudd suggests that we certainly achieve a form self-consciousness when we think about our conscious life. Rudd defends a narrative account of self-consciousness: we interpret experiential phenomena within the stories

that we narrate about our whole lives. Interestingly, though, Rudd also affirms that such narratives are not only employed as higher-order thoughts which instantiate a more basic experiential engagement, but rather that pre-reflective conscious mental states implicitly carry such considerations and evaluations. He thus contends that we are not surrounded by bare sensorial stimuli, which we may reflectively ascribe to our lives in order to shape a coherent image of ourselves. Our experiences are already given within a context that makes them meaningful – i.e., relevant to our actions and scopes (Rudd, 2012: 180-181). Conscious experiences are thus implicitly interpreted in the light of past events and plans of the future, and also in virtue of our current goals, specific commitments and moral evaluations which belong to ourselves. On Rudd's view, although we might not deliberately think about our experiences, we are nonetheless aware of something more than the mere objects that are presented within subjective experience. And this kind of awareness pertains to what matters to ourselves. For example, whether or not we are tired of walking affects the experience of a chair in front of us. Similarly, we do not need to actively recall when a friend slighted us to feel disappointed whenever we meet him. Thus, Rudd concludes, a narrative self-consciousness is embedded within the phenomenological background, which is nonetheless experienced and carries significant ("narrative") information about us.

My experience of the world is had by me – the complex subject who recognizes himself and the world he is involved with in terms of a continuing (largely) implicit narrative, and who thus experiences things as useful, familiar, puzzling, inconvenient, and so on. There is no more basic level of selfhood at which experiences are had before being interpreted in narrative terms. (Rudd, 2012: 196)

Rudd argues therefore for a narrative form of pre-reflective self-consciousness, since our experiential engagement with the world and others is permeated with implicit narrations. However, the ability to reflect on subjective experience is still held as a requirement, even if it could not be currently employed. Although we can make our

thinking implicit, a previous reflective stance is nonetheless necessary to achieve such experiential complexity. Pre-reflective self-consciousness is consequently considered, from this standpoint, a specific experiential kind of (adult) human beings.

Rudd endorses, in sum, a form of pre-reflective self-consciousness that ultimately relies on reflective abilities. Other authors, instead, defend an opposite understanding of the interplay between reflective and pre-reflective self-consciousness. Uriah Kriegel, for example, holds the independency of non-reflective states by introducing a subtle distinction between different forms of self-consciousness. In Kriegel's terms, reflective self-consciousness former is defined as a case of transitive self-consciousness, that is, a subject being «self-conscious of her thought that  $p$ », as opposed to intransitive self-consciousness, whereby the subject «is self-consciously thinking that  $p$ » (Kriegel, 2003). Intransitive (pre-reflective) self-consciousness is thought to be ubiquitous, involuntary and effortless if contrasted with our rare, voluntary and more demanding acts of reflection and introspection. Rudd, however, would also agree that pre-reflective self-consciousness could seem effortless, if compared to a reflective instance. But Kriegel's account lies on different premises and appears to be more minimalist than Rudd's.

As we have already seen in Chapter 1, Kriegel argues for a self-representationalist view on conscious mental states: to be conscious, a mental state not only represents the object which it is directed towards; it also represents itself. In this sense, each conscious mental state is self-conscious as well. Whereas Rudd claims that we implicitly embed our narratives in subjective experience, so that our experience becomes pre-reflectively significant to us, Kriegel argues that we are peripherally conscious of being in such an experiential state each time we are conscious of the qualitative character of experience. Here, the "self" in question is not the owner of volitions, attitudes or impulses, but rather «the seat of the relevant experience of thought» (Kriegel, 2004). Kriegel, in this sense, suggests that the objects we are focally aware are accompanied in the background by a form of self-consciousness. Therefore, as he affirms, self-consciousness does not necessarily depend on a reflective stance, but rather is considered an intrinsic feature of

subjective experience and constitutes thus a prerequisite for further reflective and introspective acts. It follows that intransitive self-consciousness is meant to lay the foundation for transitive forms. That is to say: I can deliberately reflect on my conscious experiences and myself having them in virtue of an more basic layer of self-awareness. Thus, pre-reflective self-consciousness can also denote reflection-independent aspects of the subjective experience (Kriegel, 2004).

Another self-representational account that does not rely on reflective processes has been developed by Thomas Metzinger, whose proposal rests on a number of insights from different disciplines, thereby combining scientific and philosophical approaches. On Metzinger's view, the experience of a self is thought of as immediate and real. Indeed, while normally performing our everyday tasks, the sub-personal processing monitored by the neural system is not available to attentional focus – i.e., it is phenomenally transparent. Indeed, rather than disclosing the functioning of a number of different, domain-specific processors that elaborate certain types of information, our experiential engagement is characterised by a sense of immediate touch with reality. The same immediacy, then, is felt when we deal with self-directed aspects of subjective experience. On Metzinger's view, the naive realism that accompanies the phenomenal character of experience also defines the experiential presence of a self within conscious life (Metzinger, 2003a: 285). What is carried through experience is the immediate presence of a unique subject. To put it differently, a transparent phenomenal self-model (PSM) determines the presence of a subject of experience.

As I pointed out earlier, transparency is a special form of darkness. It is a lack of information. For the system operating under a PSM, transparency generates a specific kind of internal darkness, a systematic lack of access to system-related information. This time it is not that we don't see the window, but only the bird flying by; this time it is that we don't see the mirror, but just ourselves. (Metzinger, 2003a: 387)

The PSM is characterised by two defining features. First, it is meant to be a transparent model. Thus, even though some phenomenal opacity may potentially occur, the structuring of the model is mainly unavailable to the subject. To understand this closure we can look at the example of self-monitoring machines. Machines are usually built to operate through a system-model that provides them with an as fine as possible control on their components while performing tasks (Metzinger, 2003a: 330). Instead, our neural system does not provide us with a fine-grained image of the functioning of the whole system. At a conscious level, we do not receive any insight about the inner chemical and electric cerebral activity (the brain has limited sensory capacities, which is why it is possible to undergo neural surgery with local anaesthesia). As a result, most of the parts of the causal chain on which phenomenal consciousness relies are definitely unavailable to phenomenal access. This means that «phenomenal selfhood results from autoepistemic closure in a self-representing system; it is a lack of information» (Metzinger, 2003a, 337). Thus, by means of phenomenal transparency, PSM carries an experiential sense of a phenomenal self, rather than revealing properties of the system.

The second feature is that the PSM affects the phenomenal character of subjective experience. Within our experiential engagement, phenomenal contents appear to be fixed. Contents that refer to our selves are in fact experienced as phenomenally stable in different contexts (Metzinger, 2003a: 333, 339). Although sensory circumstances might undergo radical changes, we still experience some facets of reality as our own, as belonging to us, or even as being us. The PSM, therefore, carries a sense of ownership, a “mineness” that constantly accompanies certain phenomenal contents.

What you feel are simply your *own hands* as integrated parts of yourself, effortlessly given in the Here and Now. Your tactile sensations, the subtle sense of muscular effort, the almost implicit information about your body’s position in space, and the almost unconscious sensation of the temperature of your hands (to which, however, you can at any time direct your attention) are as immediate as they are concrete. They are an integrated form of presentational content,

which—phenomenologically—has nothing representational, inferential, or cognitive about it. (Metzinger, 2003a: 334)<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, on Metzinger's view, phenomenal contents are not experienced as the result of several information processors. The epistemic closure of the PSM prevents us from being aware of the different sub-systems that elaborate specific stimuli. In contrast, at the phenomenal level we deal with an integration of multimodal information that are subsumed under a phenomenal self-model.

Some might object, however, that the complex interaction of such perceptual stimuli is not sufficient for bringing about that sense of ownership, and that in order to achieve a genuine form of self-consciousness a further cognitive effort is required. Metzinger would suggest, nevertheless, that such a self-model represents an evolutionary outcome which brought significant consequences in animals' behaviour. It allows the cognitive system to allocate its resources and to decrease the cognitive, by means of making globally available – and thereby conscious – certain relevant information. This function is described by Metzinger through the "total flight simulator" metaphor (Metzinger, 2003a: 557). Remember that, according to Metzinger, the phenomenology of subjective experience allows to establish an immediate identification with phenomenal contents that refer to the self while we navigate in the environment (Metzinger, 2003a: 285). As a result, it is "me" who phenomenally acts in the world, while our sensory system provides a certain perspective upon reality, or, to put it differently, singles out certain experiential aspects. Even though our environmental engagement is processed by the brain with higher-speed updating and greater reliability, this might naively reinforce the image of being like a student pilot who enters a flight simulator: the depiction of reality that is carried by the neural system for conscious access is the result of a representational processing that simulates actual objects. On Metzinger's view, however, a significant feature distinguishes our neural system from a flight simulator. Whereas the latter only elaborates and renders our experiential engagement, the neural system also

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<sup>18</sup> On the experiential immediacy of selfhood, see also Metzinger, 2011.

simulates the subject of experience. Thus, according to Metzinger's metaphor, while elaborating a model of reality, the system also creates the pilot within itself (Metzinger, 2003a: 557).

Interestingly, although they are based on divergent premises, Kriegel's and Metzinger's positions insist on two similar aspects. First, the content of subjective experience is thought of as the result of a representational process. Second, the appearance of a self is meant to denote a peculiar object of phenomenal consciousness. On one side, Kriegel's notion of transitive and intransitive self-consciousness can be respectively thought of as focal and peripheral awareness. However, both are to be considered forms of object-consciousness, since the same conscious state takes also itself as its intentional object. On the other, Metzinger's PSM relies on experientially fixed contents. As such, the self is represented as a relatively stable experiential object. Thus, according to these perspectives, a minimal sense of self is added onto the phenomenal character of subjective experience, or, to phrase it differently, to the "what" of phenomenal consciousness.

From a non-representational standpoint, Zahavi argues for a more fundamental understanding of pre-reflective self-consciousness. Rather than focussing on an objective notion, Zahavi suggests that we could find an essential modality of subjective experience that determines all conscious phenomena. Zahavi's conception of pre-reflective self-consciousness shows, therefore, an essential difference with respect to Kriegel's and Metzinger's accounts. Zahavi in fact contends that self-consciousness is brought into subjective experience by an inner and formal modality of phenomenal consciousness.

Along with Kriegel, Zahavi claims that a minimal form of self-consciousness rests on a reflexive property of phenomenal consciousness: what determines the phenomenon of pre-reflective self-consciousness is the intrinsic reflexivity of conscious mental states, which allows for a first-person perspective on one's own mental life, and thereby for a basic form of subjectivity (Zahavi, 2014: 24, 29). As such, the distinction between reflexivity and reflection points to a basic property of subjective experience. Whereas "reflection" denotes the process in which a conscious

state is directed towards another one, which represents its intentional object, “reflexivity” is meant to describe, in this context, the self-givenness of conscious states. On Zahavi’s view, however, the intrinsic reflexivity of subjective experience does not come into play as another experiential object, but rather represents the phenomenal appearance of an essential modality consciousness. This allows for a stronger reading of the relation between consciousness and self-consciousness, since consciousness is meant to be essentially reflexive in its very mode of presentation, without requiring a further intentional act directed towards itself.

Zahavi’s notion of “minimal self”, from a phenomenological standpoint, is thus intended to capture the most basic form of self-consciousness as the condition of possibility for consciousness. Such understanding is therefore quite far from the perspective that I have introduced at the beginning of this section – i.e., self-consciousness depends on a reflective and deliberate form of self-directedness of consciousness. Nevertheless, if we are to investigate the phenomenological bases of pre-reflective self-consciousness, in order to determine its experiential appearance and development, Zahavi’s analyses acquire a central role. Thus, to determine which phenomenological feature should count as the starting point of the present developmental perspective, in the next chapter I will assess the concept of minimal self and its plausibility.

## **2.4 Conclusion: prior to reflection**

This chapter aimed at analysing the object of the present investigation. While in Chapter 1 I illustrated some key concepts and the methodology that I rely on, here I have in fact offered a subtler description of pre-reflective self-consciousness. First, I suggested how we could construe self-consciousness as a multi-layered phenomenon. To put it differently, different notions of self-consciousness appeal to a reflective or intellectual form of self-awareness, whereas others insist upon a phenomenal character that also accompanies our everyday mindless activity. From the latter point of view, self-consciousness – as pre-reflective self-consciousness –

could be an experiential feature that comes into play within the conscious life of newborns and other animals as well.

Second, to further define the notion of pre-reflective self-consciousness at stake here, I applied a top-down strategy that has allowed to show the divergent understandings of the relation between self-consciousness and reflective attitudes. In this regard, to quote Shaun Gallagher's expression, I have stripped away some specific features, in order to obtain a basic notion of pre-reflective self-consciousness that can represent the starting point of the present phenomenological investigation (Gallagher, 2000). I have thereby drawn the attention to those conditions that are required for self-consciousness to appear within subjective experience. The first requirement demands the self to be the object of our thoughts. This condition is nevertheless rather challenging: it might be objected that, on such premises, self-consciousness can be achieved by few beings, whereas it seems plausible to affirm that self-consciousness occurs relies throughout less intellectual activities. A milder requirement appeals to reflective attitudes: self-consciousness comes into play when one's is actively reflecting on her conscious life. Still, this condition forces us to overlook some experiential features that appear within pre-reflective consciousness.

Several authors argue, instead, for the presence of a self-referential aspect in conscious states that do not hold other ones as their intentional objects. This suggest that self-consciousness might be at stake also in pre-reflective experiences. Moreover, it seems that different layers of pre-reflective self-consciousness could be identified as well. Anthony Rudd, for example, contends that pre-reflective self-consciousness is a characteristic feature of our experiential engagement with the world. On Rudd's view, however, reflective abilities are needed to implicitly embed our narratives within subjective experience. A different understanding of pre-reflective self-consciousness suggests, on the other hand, that a basic level of self-awareness is prior to any reflective attitude. Kriegel and Metzinger in fact argue for the experiential appearance of a sense of self in pre-reflective scenarios as well. Both Kriegel's and Metzinger's contends that this form of self has a representational structure and pertains to what consciousness might be directed towards. On a

different view, which nevertheless holds as Kriegel's that an intrinsic reflexive property of consciousness brings about the phenomenal character of self-givenness, Zahavi defends a notion of pre-reflective self-consciousness that appeals to an experiential modality. As such, Zahavi's proposal can be seen as a slightly more basic account: whereas Kriegel affirms that self-consciousness is experienced as a peripheral object, and thereby pertaining to the "what" of subjective experience, Zahavi contends that this minimal form of self-awareness should be rather thought of as the "how" of phenomenal consciousness. This suggests that any phenomenological enterprise that aims at disclosing the phenomenal bases of self-consciousness should deal with Zahavi's notion of minimal self. Indeed, in the next chapter I will thoroughly examine this conception, and question whether it could serve as a necessary step within a developmental perspective on pre-reflective self-consciousness.

## **PART II: Pre-Reflective Self-Consciousness**

### 3 THE MINIMAL SELF

The first part of the present text aimed at providing the conceptual and methodological bases, as well as defining the research subject, for the following sections. More specifically, Chapter 2 applied a top-down strategy in order to identify a notion of pre-reflective self-consciousness that could operate as the starting point of this phenomenological investigation. Zahavi's minimal self, in this sense, is meant to denote an essential form of self-consciousness that is thought of as a necessary requirement for subjective experience. If we are to study the phenomenological bases of self-consciousness, and question whether pre-reflective self-consciousness could undergo a developmental process, the analysis of Zahavi's proposal should be considered a necessary step. In this second part of the text I will therefore take into account those notions of pre-reflective self-consciousness that can be construed as the bedrock of an experiential development. Chapter 3, in this sense, focuses on the notion of minimal self. Thus, I will initially distinguish it from a transcendental view of the self. I will then compare objective and non-objective notions of pre-reflective self-consciousness, and moreover illustrate how experiential ownership is meant to occur by means of the temporal extension of phenomenal consciousness. In the last section I will argue, however, that the minimal self account, as such, relies on a theoretical abstraction that prevent us from addressing humans' specific forms of self-consciousness. Consequently, in Chapter 4 I will examine a more promising instance – i.e., bodily self-consciousness.

### 3.1 The self as an essential part of experience

In the first part of the previous chapter I started addressing a rather demanding instance of self-consciousness, which is intertwined with the question “Who am I?”. Such an experiential dimension not only poses the self as the object of our thinking and speculations, but also requires some abilities that the subject must possess. Indeed, one must be able to distinguish oneself from other entities – other subjects and objects in the world – as well as to master the linguistic ability to articulate this distinction by means of the terms “I”, “me”, “myself” – or whatever term in different languages might denote a consistent reference. The form of self-experience that is operative in these occasions, then, appears to rely on a socially construed environment, where linguistic practices are regularly employed and the question about the persistence of one’s identity acquires an essential relevance. We have seen, however, that authors like Kriegel and Zahavi argue for a “non-deflationary” account of self-consciousness that draws the attention to a pre-reflective form of self-consciousness (Zahavi & Kriegel, 2015: 37; see also Kriegel, 2003; Zahavi, 2011, 2014, 2017). According to them, our stream of consciousness carries self-referential aspects is even though the self is not the current intentional object of our experience. Thus, in order to achieve self-consciousness, a reflective stance on one’s self might be considered unnecessary.

On Zahavi’s view, this form of pre-reflective self-consciousness can be construed in terms of a sense of ownership, which accompanies our experiential engagement – to put it differently, the being-for-me-ness of subjective experience (Zahavi, 2014: 19). Zahavi suggests, then, that such a “minimal” or core self-consciousness should be conceived as the background of phenomenal consciousness, and as an essential feature of experiential engagement as well. But before examining Zahavi’s account, we should ask what could mean, for a given property, to be an essential aspect of phenomenal consciousness. Indeed, to affirm that a minimal self should be considered an essential feature of subjective experience could rely on two divergent understandings. According to the first, a self is meant to be a prerequisite for conscious experience, even though it is not actually involved in it. This view was

initially developed within the Kantian tradition and can be called the “transcendental self”. The transcendental self is strictly related to the experiential dimension in virtue of laying the foundation for phenomenal consciousness. Yet, a transcendental self might not be phenomenologically present in the experiences it makes possible. Thus, an experience  $E$  cannot exist without the specific transcendental self  $t_e$ , even if  $t_e$  is not experienced within  $E$ . This transcendental view would assume, in this regard, that a subject of experience is essential for experience to come into play. But it would not necessarily follow that the subject of experience has to be experienced as well – and thereby leading to a process of self-consciousness. On this standpoint, then, self-consciousness would only be achieved by means of an explicit reflection on that transcendental condition (i.e., the transcendental self), unless it would be also contended that self-consciousness could also occur in other circumstances.

Thus, according to the transcendental view, we can become conscious of transcendental conditions by reflecting on them. My experiences rely on a self that is transcendental to them, and that makes them possible. As long as I do have some experiences, such transcendental self must therefore exist. Moreover, to reflect on such a transcendental role of the self is what makes me conscious of it. To some extent, then, the transcendental self is something I can be conscious of. But this conception radically narrows the possibilities for self-consciousness, since it appeals to a transcendental principle that does not appear within conscious experience, unless we are actively reflecting on it. However, if no other circumstances of self-consciousness were considered, the transcendental self view would appear as narrow as the first account of reflective self-consciousness described in Chapter 2: that is, a self that is meant to be beyond experiential happenings and that we might be conscious of only by means of reflecting on it. This suggests that if we are to point out a certain self that is essential for subjective experience, and anchored to phenomenal consciousness as well, we should look at different positions within the debate.

The notion of minimal self, in this regard, implies that a self is essential for phenomenal consciousness, and that it is also experienced as well. According to

Zahavi, the minimal self is in fact intended to lay the foundation for subjective experience (Zahavi, 2014: 22). And, at the same time, it also obtains a phenomenal appearance (Zahavi, 2014: 24). Reflection is thereby not required, in order to be aware of it. The minimal self is, in fact, «a built-in feature of experiential life» that accompanies our stream consciousness (Zahavi, 2017: 195). In this last respect, we can consider it a minimal and pre-reflective form of self-consciousness.

Such a minimal self-consciousness, if compared to the transcendental self, is not only meant to specify the conditions of possibility for subjective experience, but also to pinpoint a phenomenological feature. As argued by Zahavi and Gallagher, we should therefore distinguish, at least conceptually, those two notions.

The crucial idea propounded by all of these phenomenologists is that an understanding of what it means to be a self calls for an examination of the structure of experience, and vice versa. Thus, the self is not something that stands opposed to the stream of consciousness, it is not an ineffable transcendental precondition, nor is it a mere social construct that evolves through time; it is taken to be an integral part of the structure of our conscious life. More precisely, the claim is that the (minimal or core) self possesses experiential reality, and is in fact identified with the first-personal *appearance* of the experiential phenomena. (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008: 204)

The minimal self is thus conceived as a genuine form of experiential selfhood. It is meant, furthermore, to be a prior condition for phenomenal consciousness and, as such, a requirement for further forms of self-consciousness (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008: 61-62). This makes the minimal self a privileged subject for any phenomenological investigation that is concerned, like the present research, with the ontogenetic trajectory of pre-reflective self-consciousness.

### **3.2 Sense of ownership and inner time**

As we have seen above, a minimal phenomenal self requires experience to carry some self-referred information. But how should we identify such a basic requirement? To

some extent, although being necessary, the reflexive property of phenomenal consciousness might not be sufficient to convey minimal experiential selfhood. One could argue against Zahavi and Gallagher that, even if individuals can be conscious by means of the reflexive nature of phenomenal consciousness – on the basis of which phenomenal consciousness is directed not only towards its object, but also towards itself – their subjective experience remains nonetheless selfless. To put it differently, conscious states might be self-conscious as well in virtue of a reflexive property. But, in order to consider the minimal self a genuine form of self-consciousness, it should also be determined whether a subject could be self-conscious of her experiences within a pre-reflective dimension. In this sense, Zahavi appeals to the key concept of “experiential ownership”: a certain (minimal) sense of ownership has to be in place within subjective experience to allow the subject to be pre-reflectively aware of being the one who is having the respective experience (Zahavi, 2014: 39-40, 43). She has to be pre-reflectively conscious of owning her experiences.<sup>19</sup> When it comes to the minimal self, as Zahavi suggests, pre-reflective self-consciousness should not be considered a mere form of self-directed consciousness – as the term “self-consciousness” might allude to. Rather, the reflexivity of self-consciousness conveys the first-personal character of subjective experience and is what distinguishes experiences that are mine from those that are made by others. Thus, subjective experience rests on an intrinsic sense of “mineness” or “for-me-ness”.

To deny that such a feature is present in our experiential life, to deny the for-me-ness, or mineness, of experience, is to fail to recognize an essential constitutive

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<sup>19</sup> This distinguishes experiential ownership from an inferential form. E.g., I am aware that I have just had a first-person experience  $E_1$ ; presently, I am having the first-person experience  $E_2$  that is consistent with  $E_1$  since they share the same standpoint; a first-person standpoint belongs to a subject of experience; as long as two experience share the same standpoint, they are also owned by the same subject; thus, a further experience  $E_n$ , that conveys the same standpoint should be considered as belonging to the same subject. It should be evident that such an argument is very akin to the experiential presence of the transcendental self that we have seen earlier.

aspect of experience. It is to ignore the subjectivity of experience. It would amount to the claim that my own mind is either not given to me at all (I would be mind- or self-blind) or present to me in exactly the same way as the minds of others. (Zahavi, 2014: 22)

Following this line of reasoning, we might formulate a general notion of minimal self: a minimal form of self-consciousness is best understood as a pre-reflective sense of being a subjective experience for a subject of experience. Another way to put it is that a subject "owns" her own experience in virtue of some phenomenal features that relate to the subject herself and, at the same time, do not require a reflective attitude. In the debate on minimal self-consciousness, a number of different views have been expressed on how this experiential feature might be achieved. As I have already pointed out, in this chapter I focus on a notion of pre-reflective self-consciousness that is meant to be prior to further forms – that is, an experiential feature that is meant to be non-conceptual, unlearned<sup>20</sup> and shared with other species. This will help us to examine the basic phenomenological aspects of subjective experience and, eventually, to comprehend the developmental process of pre-reflective self-consciousness.

I have introduced, in Chapter 2, Kriegel's account of the peripheral appearance of self-directed phenomenal aspects within subjective experience. Kriegel in fact argues for a form of self-awareness that is independent of reflective attitudes. His position, in this regard, appears to be akin to the phenomenological tradition in important respects. Indeed, by suspending our theoretically informed attitudes towards reality, the phenomenological approach established by Edmund Husserl aims at describing things as they are given within subjective experience. Phenomenologists, therefore, focus on intrinsic features and *a priori* conditions of experience. On this view, a reflective attitude is only seen as a specific moment of one's stream of consciousness – a moment that is considered neither necessary nor a

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<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that the term "unlearned" slightly differs from "innate". An innate capacity is especially intended as being already displayed at birth, whereas an unlearned one can be developed at a later time, regardless of the specific upbringing.

preliminary step for phenomenal consciousness to occur. Thus, phenomenology aims at developing a pre-reflective image of subjective experience. But is self-consciousness already operative in pre-reflective phenomenal consciousness? For example, Jean-Paul Sartre has contended in *Being and Nothingness* that pre-reflective consciousness is in its very being a form of self-consciousness (Sartre, 1984: 76). Here, the self is considered a constitutive part of consciousness, even though in non-objectified manner. That is to say, we are not merely conscious of another phenomenal aspect, but by means of an experiential modality we are rather pre-reflectively aware of being a subject of experience.

In the contemporary debate, the phenomenologists Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi similarly argue, as we have seen, for a form of self-consciousness that is intrinsic to phenomenal consciousness and independent from reflective attitudes (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008). Whereas other phenomenological approaches, such as Rudd's, may argue for the embodiment of implicit narratives, volitions and evaluations in pre-reflective consciousness, Gallagher and Zahavi insist that a minimal sense of self is present in the basic reflexivity of phenomenal consciousness. But what is the place of the self in such a picture? How could be the self given within consciousness reflexivity? Kriegel's answer, for example, rests on the peripheral sense of being conscious: for example, while being focally aware of the laptop screen, I am also peripherally aware of myself seeing the laptop screen. Thus, according to Kriegel, pre-reflective (intransitive) self-consciousness is the phenomenological background wherein consciousness manifests itself.

Another option is to affirm that we should not consider the givenness of pre-reflective self-awareness as though the self would be merely added to the qualitative character of experience. As Zahavi sees it, a minimal form of self-consciousness rather amounts to a modality of phenomenal consciousness: it is the mode that shapes and constitutes subjective experience (Zahavi, 2014: 21-22). Furthermore, it should be distinguished from the type of experience as well. For example, suppose that, while looking at the red bus, our fictional character Frank imagines the yellow bus he normally takes, or that he judges that the old-fashioned yellow bus is obsolete. In

these cases, we have different objects (the red and the yellow bus) and different types (imagination, judgement) of experience. Nonetheless, the notion of minimal self-consciousness that Zahavi employs is meant to grasp a common feature that all these experiences share. A feature that can potentially allow Frank to say, from a first-person perspective, that he is the one who owns such experiences, even though his essential nature (his self) is not explicitly addressed.<sup>21</sup>

A relevant aspect of Zahavi's minimal self is that, while it constitutes phenomenal consciousness, it is experienced as well (Zahavi, 2014: 21). What allows us to experience a sense of ownership, according to Zahavi, is the temporal extension of conscious states. This does not mean that experiential ownership might be inferred by deliberately recollecting different episodes in our lives, and then relating them to same first-person perspective. As Zahavi argues, the relation between time and consciousness rests on a more fundamental dimension – at a pre-reflective level. Zahavi relies, in this sense, on Husserl's investigations on the temporal extension of phenomenal consciousness. On Husserl's view, the temporal dimension of phenomenal consciousness is not confined to the present moment. Rather, to consider a conscious mental state as a single, unrelated phenomenon is a matter of abstraction: every mental state carries both a "retention" of previous conscious states, as well as a "protention" to future experiences (Husserl, 1991). The experience of hearing a melody constitutes a straightforward and well-known example: while listening to a tune, we do not merely hear the succession of single notes, which we then put together within an overall melody at a later time. Indeed, the hearing of a single note is always accompanied by a retention of the previous ones. For the

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<sup>21</sup> Matthew Ratcliffe takes a critical stance towards this view, arguing for an intriguing notion of minimal self-consciousness that is not independent from the type of experience. He insists that even such a minimal form of self-consciousness is constituted through social interactions: we develop our specific intentional attitudes through social practices and, as long as self-consciousness is conveyed by such attitudes toward the intentional object, minimal self-consciousness is meant to be an acquired feature, rather than an innate or unlearned aspect of subjective experience. However, Ratcliffe still holds a form of self-consciousness that is pre-reflective and pre-conceptual, and that does not require the self to be the object of experience – that is, the self is not given as a further intentional object. (Ratcliffe, 2017).

experience of the preceding part of the melody neither vanishes nor has to be deliberately recollected: consciousness of previous mental states is retained within the current experience. Moreover, the current experience opens up possible experiential scenarios: for example, the hearing of a sequence of tones comes along with expectations concerning the ones that are yet to come. Even if we are not paying too much attention to a tune, we are nonetheless expecting an alleged continuation of the melody: whenever this expectation is disappointed, we suddenly find ourselves surprised to hear such incongruous notes. In the light of Husserlian intuitions on the inner time-consciousness, Zahavi contends the stronger claim that the temporal extension of conscious life constitutes a diachronic and pre-reflective unity of consciousness, and thereby brings about perspectival persistence.<sup>22</sup> As long as the perception of the melody is constituted by a continuum of auditory states that preserve earlier cues and project themselves in further experiential scenarios, our stream of consciousness bears an implicit sense of continuity. Even if we may theoretically abstract single points on this ongoing stream, each conscious state nonetheless retains a direct and pre-reflective relation with the closer components of the stream. On Zahavi's view, this minimal sense of continuity is the experiential clue for sense of ownership to occur. In fact, the relation between different but temporally close conscious states yields a perspectival continuity, that is, a persistence of a certain experiential perspective from which conscious states are experienced. In this sense, our conscious states pre-reflectively appear as belonging to a unique first-person perspective or, to phrase it differently, as experientially "owned" by the same subject of experience. Therefore, Zahavi concludes, inner time-consciousness conveys the implicit feel of a unique *locus* of subjective experience that owns experiential events.

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<sup>22</sup> Some might nevertheless object that, on this view, we could only identify a weak sense of diachronicity through phenomenal consciousness. This temporal extension is in fact easily interrupted when we fall asleep, and moreover it does not carry diachronic aspects that could be significant for one's life (see, in this regard, Slors & Jongepier, 2014).

The retentional process consequently not only enables us to experience an enduring temporal object; it does not merely enable the constitution of the identity of an object in a manifold of temporal phases; it also provides us with a non-observational, pre-reflective, temporally extended self-consciousness. (Zahavi, 2014: 64-65)

Zahavi's minimal self, then, relies on this phenomenological aspect of subjective experience. This basic, pre-reflective awareness of consciousness diachronicity allows the subject to experientially own her experiences. Being in this state is, then, not only a matter of what-it-is-like to be in a certain mental state, but rather a «what-is-it-like-for-me-ness» (Zahavi, 2014: 19). As such, according to Zahavi, we can find a minimal form of self-consciousness in the very structure of phenomenal consciousness, which is antecedent to any form of reflective, propositional or conceptual understanding of the self.

### **3.3 The minimal self and developmental perspectives**

Zahavi's view on minimal self raises a number of criticisms about the feasibility of this notion. Some question the soundness of the underlying interpretation of the phenomenological tradition, and especially the proposed reading of Husserl's theory of inner time-consciousness. Even if we may accept that subjective experience should be construed as a continuum in which every single point that can be abstracted is essentially related to other points of the continuum that are in its vicinity, it is not obvious what we should conclude from this. For example, does inner time-consciousness actually yield experiential ownership? Is perspectival continuity a sufficient condition for self-consciousness? A related objection, then, will concern the use of the term "self". In this last respect, who is committed to more intellectual forms of self-consciousness might find Zahavi's view as depicting a mere form of subjectivity.

The last strand of criticism might be considered terminological. Indeed, one might not question the existence of certain experiential phenomena (e.g., perspectival

ownership), and acknowledge the experiential presence of certain phenomenological properties, but nonetheless affirm that our pre-reflective consciousness is utterly selfless (see, for example, Albahari, 2009, 2011). On this understanding of subjective experience, phenomenal consciousness is not thought of as merely world-presenting, but there is no need to commit ourselves to the further claim that perspectivalness already denotes self-reference. In this respect, I agree with Zahavi when he points out that such a criticism does not affect the core of his conception of the minimal self – i.e. that experiential perspectivalness and ownership characterise pre-reflective consciousness (Zahavi, 2014: 28, 62).

This reply also applies to a second order of terminological objections. For example, it could be argued that a genuine form of self-consciousness only emerges when a subject deliberately reflects upon herself or upon some self-referential aspects of her life. Only in doing so, she can engage in self-shaping processes – e.g., elaborating narrative about some episodes or her whole life, or defining the core of her personality. Nevertheless, it does not follow from this more demanding view that subjective experience should be understood as lacking the phenomenological properties that Zahavi, as well as other advocates of the minimal self hypothesis, describes. A different and stronger objection should instead require us to reject Zahavi's description of subjective experience. Therefore, Zahavi does have a point when he affirms that some of the criticisms of the minimal self are doomed to fail if not based on more substantial grounds.

It does not follow, though, that we should simply set aside the terminological debate in favour of a phenomenological investigation of experiential structures. The terms "self" and "self-consciousness" have in fact noteworthy practical implications. Consider, for instance, legal purposes. In Italy, in order to judge someone to be fully accountable for her doing, she has to be considered capable of intending and wanting (i.e., "*capace di intendere e di volere*"). This means that full-blown legal accountability not only comes with the will to do something, but also with being a subject who is aware of doing it. Thus, whether someone is to be considered self-conscious can have relevant consequences. This explain us, to some extent, why many

advocates of different forms of self-consciousness hold on to the use of such terms – as Zahavi does – and thereby continue to engage in the terminological debate: to appeal to “self”, “no-self”, “self-less” or “self-consciousness” has in fact dramatic outcomes in areas where phenomenological explanations are embedded in a broader picture (bioethics, medical science, social theory, and so forth). The implications of the terminological issue are, nevertheless, far beyond the purpose of the present work. Rather than arguing over what set of experiential features we should appropriately call “self-consciousness”, the purpose of this chapter has been to focus on the phenomenological bases of such phenomena that might be referred to as self-consciousness. In this sense, my criticism about the minimal self that concerns a different line of reasoning. Indeed, whereas a terminological objection might not necessarily entail a denial of the phenomenological bases, this different approach points at the core assumptions of the notion of minimal self.

One of the most intriguing features of the minimal self is its persistence over time. The fact that we find an experiential continuity of minimal self-consciousness, however, does not entail that no other forms of self-reference might emerge through developmental processes. Indeed, the minimal self is seen as the phenomenological foundation for further ways of being self-conscious. In this regard, Zahavi is adamant in affirming that early manifestations of self-consciousness are the onset of more complex modality of self-experience, which, for human beings, might develop up to the ability to reflect upon one’s identity (Zahavi, 2014: 90-91, 2017). Yet, Zahavi insists that a basic form of self-consciousness endures such a development. Experiential ownership, on Zahavi’s view, is not something that merely attends the content of our experience or, to put it differently, it is not something which our experience is directed at – i.e., another experiential object. Rather, the “for-me-ness” character of experience amounts to the “how” of subjective experience – i.e., its intrinsic modality (Zahavi, 2014: 19). Thus, even if we accept that “what” we experience is affected by ontogenetic processes that allow us to single out meaningful aspects of the world, subjective experience holds a specific phenomenological modality which is applied to different experiential contexts, and at different times of our lifespan.

It is difficult to see how language acquisition should change and transform the very basic structure of pre-reflective self-consciousness. It is consequently important not to lose sight of how formal a notion of selfhood the minimal notion is. To stick to the dye and water analogy, the fact that the water becomes coloured shouldn't make us overlook the fact that the coloured water remains water and retains its liquid properties. (Zahavi, 2014: 62)

Do adult language users really have nothing in common experientially with infants and non-human animals? What we experience will undoubtedly change through development, but will development also affect the most fundamental structures of phenomenal consciousness? Will it also change and transform the most basic structures of pre-reflective self-consciousness and inner time-consciousness? (Zahavi, 2017: 96)

Zahavi's conception therefore rests on two strong premises: (i) the minimal self is experienced, since it carries a form of experiential continuity as part of the givenness of subjective experience (Zahavi, 2014: 24; Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008: 204); (ii) in addition to being a necessary component of conscious life, the minimal self is also considered an unchanging aspect of subjective experience (Zahavi, 2014: 62).

To hold both these premises brings significant consequences. If we follow them, we should then argue that a minimal sense of self is constantly experienced and also remains immutable through our lifespan. From a phenomenological standpoint, however, it is hard to understand how we could interpret this experiential constancy. Indeed, as Zahavi would argue, the minimal self is strictly intertwined with the intentional contents that characterise phenomenal consciousness, as long as consciousness is consciousness of something. Experiential ownership is thus experienced through the interplay with the phenomenal character of subjective experience: we do not experience experiential ownership by itself. It follows that, being a formal feature of subjective experience, the minimal self can be genuinely grasped in virtue of a theoretical abstraction.

By affirming this, I do not suggest that we should rather look at other notions which do not appeal to abstract properties. Indeed, the very theoretical attempt to

define pre-reflective self-consciousness is meant to identify some phenomenal features and to abstract them from actual instances of subjective experience. However, the question that I would ask is whether Zahavi's formal notion could be considered too formal. The point, here, is that we could lose some significant phenomenal features in the process of stripping away what is conceived of as unnecessary for self-consciousness to come into play. For example, the protentional aspect of phenomenal consciousness – by means of which phenomenal consciousness opens up some experiential potentialities – might be responsive to a developmental attunement that could make some expectations more vivid than others. Similarly, the phenomenal continuity of Zahavi's minimal self has been questioned by Matthew Ratcliffe, since he argues for a developmental form of minimal self-consciousness that does not persist from infancy.

In the case of minimal self, it is equally coherent to maintain that infants possess a minimal self of type A, a capacity for certain types of distinguishable and coherently integrated intentional state, but that adults possess a minimal self of type B, involving a repertoire of intentional states qualitatively different from A. When development is derailed, the resulting lack of phenomenological coherence is quite unlike both the typical infant and adult cases. (Ratcliffe, 2017)

On this view, the target phenomena we are trying to pinpoint in infants and other animals may differ to some extent from its supposed equivalent in adult human subjects. From a genuine phenomenological standpoint, in fact, we can just hypothesise about the phenomenal character of newborn's and other animals' subjective experience.

To these objections, Zahavi would reply that his notion is meant to capture an intrinsic property of consciousness. Even though it may appear too formal, the minimal self is an inner feature of consciousness as such. In this regard, to deny the presence of this experiential feature would be tantamount to affirm that newborns and other animals cannot be conscious. Thus, with respect to Zahavi's minimal self, we should decide between two options. On the one hand, we might agree with

Zahavi and affirm that a minimal form of self-consciousness is already at stake in pre-reflective experiences. Even though the notion of minimal self may be the result of a theoretical abstraction, it nevertheless identifies the conditions of possibility of phenomenal consciousness, and thereby for further forms of self-consciousness. Still, this approach relinquishes any attempt to define a developmental understanding of pre-reflective self-consciousness. As an immutable, unchanging feature of subjective experience, we might wonder how it could relate with developing and variable structures apart from providing an initial condition. Indeed, the notion of minimal self singles out a basic feature that is meant to characterise all conscious phenomena, even those of other species. As such, it is supposed to close the gap between human beings and other animals; and, at the same time, to lay the foundation for specific forms of human self-consciousness. But in order to examine more complex instances, we would require further insights into the phenomenology of pre-reflective self-consciousness. A conception of pre-reflective self-consciousness should therefore describe what kind of relation it instantiates with other forms of self-consciousness. For some disciplines like pedagogy, psychiatry and developmental psychology, then, the understanding of the developmental path of self-consciousness is of the utmost importance. Moreover, as Thomas Metzinger takes it, we are far from thoroughly knowing how different levels of self-consciousness are achieved throughout lifespan (Metzinger, 2003a: 624).<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, a second option might allow us to comprehend the development of pre-reflective self-consciousness. Indeed, like the minimal self, other phenomenal characteristics have been pointed out as playing a basic role in subjective experience. Among them, the phenomenal presence of a body appears to be a good candidate. The body, in fact determines our experiential milieu by establishing a certain perspective, and also phenomenologically accompanies our different experiences, even though we do not particularly pay attention to it. And, as

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<sup>23</sup> I shall come back to the epistemological aspects of this issue in Chapter 6.

we will in the next chapter, a specific conception of bodily awareness makes room for an ontogenetic perspective on pre-reflective self-consciousness.

### **3.4 Conclusion: too minimal**

In the first part of the text I clarified the methodology and the subject of the present investigation. As such, I identified a minimal instance of pre-reflective self-consciousness that is meant to lay the foundation for further forms of self-experience. In this chapter, I have thus examined such a notion – i.e., the minimal self. First, I have distinguished the minimal self from a transcendental form of selfhood: whereas a transcendental self only represents a condition of possibility for subjective experience unless differently articulated, the minimal self is thought of as an essential feature of phenomenal consciousness and is taken to be experienced as well. Then, I have suggested that Zahavi's notion of the minimal self could be considered as more basic if compared to other positions. Kriegel, for example, argues for a self-representational view of consciousness, which nevertheless conceives self-consciousness as a peripheral kind of objective-consciousness. However, Zahavi contends that minimal self-consciousness pertains to a specific modality of subjective experience. Instead of adding another objective facet to the content of experience, the minimal self rather determines how a subject experiences the surroundings and herself.

According to Zahavi, a minimal self-consciousness allows us to experientially own our stream of consciousness. Experiential ownership, in this regard, brings a pre-reflective sense of being the one who is currently experiencing. This experiential feature comes into play in virtue of an inner temporal structure of consciousness. While attending to a specific perception, our phenomenal consciousness is in fact accompanied by the retention of prior experiences and is also implicitly directed towards potential perceptions. This ensures a minimal form of perspectival continuity, and therefore a basic experiential sense of owning these experiences.

Zahavi's conception picks out, in this regard, a phenomenological feature that is meant to characterise all conscious phenomena. This outcome, as I have suggested,

comes at a high price as it rests on a strong theoretical abstraction. Since it defines a basic feature of phenomenal consciousness, it lacks the explanatory power to deal with further forms of pre-reflective self-consciousness, as well as specific kinds of humans' self-consciousness. On a different view, another notion of pre-reflective self-consciousness might permit to address the phenomenological bases of subjective experience. Indeed, as we will see in Chapter 4, while referring to basic structures of phenomenal consciousness, the notion of bodily self-consciousness can also make room for a developmental understanding of pre-reflective self-consciousness.

## 4 BODILY SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

At the end of Chapter 4 I suggested that although Zahavi's minimal sense might capture an essential feature of all conscious phenomena, it nevertheless lacks the explanatory power to account for the development of specific forms of self-consciousness, such as humans' ones. Thus, I claimed that the analysis of bodily forms of pre-reflective self-consciousness can shed some light on this issue. The aim of this chapter is, therefore, to elaborate a proper notion of bodily self-consciousness. In doing so, I will initially focus on the appearance of a body within subjective experience by appealing to two different perspectives (i.e., Philippe Rochat's studies and Metzinger's and Blanke's PSM). I will argue, then, that these positions maintain an objective understanding of bodily self-consciousness. In what follows, I will therefore take into consideration a more fundamental account, in which the body determines our experiential field even if it does not appear as an experiential object. As Gallagher suggests, we can in fact distinguish between body images and body schemas. This distinction can allow us to separate an objective – which is usually proprioceptive – and non-objective forms of bodily awareness – which will be taken as “performative”. The analyses provided by Gallagher, Gallese and Sinigaglia on a form of performative awareness will represent, in this sense, a central target for this chapter. Moreover, I will foster the understanding of the experiential appearance of the body by introducing Metzinger's insights. Finally, I will thus claim that performative awareness can be considered a basic form of self-consciousness, while, at the same time, its comprehension will make room for a developmental perspective.

#### 4.1 The body as a special experiential object

While Zahavi insists on the minimal temporal extension of pre-reflective consciousness, a different approach focuses on another aspect that accompanies our experiential engagement with our environment – that is, the body. This approach, then, construes the phenomenal self in terms of bodily self-consciousness. Indeed, our body puts ourselves in a certain space, thus giving us a specific experiential perspectivalness. It accompanies our experiential life and also constrains our experiential potentialities. A number of authors, then, has acknowledged the experiential role of the body in subjective experience, since being conscious of our body makes us pre-reflectively aware of occupying a certain place in the world, and thereby allows us to act accordingly. The notion of bodily self-consciousness, however, is rooted in a longstanding phenomenological tradition. In fact, thorough understandings of relation between body and consciousness have been developed in the works of Husserl (i.e., by means of emphasising the distinction between *Körper*, the anatomic body, and *Leib*, the lived body of an organism; Husserl, 1989), James Gibson (i.e., through the analysis of the visual field of perception; Gibson, 1979) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (i.e., by illustrating the experiential space which our lived body constitutes; Merleau-Ponty, 2002), among others. The embodied turn of the last decades in cognitive science has nevertheless drawn once more the attention to the key phenomenological role that the body plays within the constitution of subjective experience and self-consciousness (to give some examples, Bermúdez, 1998; Damasio, 2010; Gallagher, 2005; Gallese & Sinigaglia, 2010; Rochat, 2015; Salomon et al., 2017; Tsakiris et al., 2007; Tsakiris, 2017).

A common trait in such accounts is that experiencing one's own body is construed as an early phenomenon, as long as several studies suggest that basic kinds of bodily-consciousness are already in place prior before birth (Rakic, 1995; Bermúdez, 1998: 131; Lagercrantz & Padilla, 2016; for a recent review of early brain development studies, see Lagercrantz, 2016). An influential research program, concerning the development of bodily self-consciousness in newborns, has been elaborated by Philippe Rochat (Rochat & Hespos, 1997; Rochat & Striano, 2000;

Rochat, 2003, 2012, 2015). Through a number of empirical studies concerning different ages and cultures, Rochat has developed an intriguing model to understand the various steps that newborn undergo, which he calls the “onion” or “layer building” model (Rochat, 2003, 2015). These metaphors lie on the assumption that new layers add onto previous ones, thus creating a structure composed by multiple strata. If we apply such a model onto a phenomenological and ontogenetic perspective, then, earlier forms of experience appear to lay the foundation for more mature, culture-dependent ones.

The model is additive in the sense that a new layer of awareness simply adds onto what already exists. In other words, it adds a new range of subjective experience, and more importantly a new range of self-experience. Central to the model is the fact that a new layer adds new degrees of navigability across ranges of subjective experience and self-experiences, in other words multiple possible “phenomenal tunnels”. (Rochat, 2015)

However, what the onion metaphor emphasises is that new layers of awareness are simply piling on top of their phenomenal predecessors. As such, basic experiential forms remain available to the subject. Indeed, according to Rochat, mature kinds of awareness, which are developed through social interactions, neither re-organise nor re-construct our more basic experiential engagement. Thus, since we hold the ability to dynamically change our experiential perspective in accordance to our environment, the phenomenal layers on the top do not «eliminate the possibility of experiencing all ontogenetically anterior mind states» (Rochat, 2015).

Given this scenario of fluctuation between different levels of self-awareness, interesting questions would be, then, about which of the layers is the most basic one and whether this first layer should count as a form of self-consciousness or not.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that Rochat introduces an ontological distinction between awareness and consciousness (Rochat, 2015). “Awareness” entails the implicit and pre-conceptual sense of being present in the world, which emerges before explicitly reflecting on wakeful states. On Rochat’s view, instead, conscious states are defined through a much stronger cognitive load, as long as being conscious requires reflective attitudes. In these terms, however, the notion of awareness employed by Rochat appears to be consistent with the concept of pre-

According to Rochat, we can distinguish different kinds of mental states as they unfold throughout the life span, ranging from non-conscious to conscious ones – the latter being embedded in social cognition (Rochat, 2015). It is important to note, though, that on this view newborns already display the capacity of being aware. Moreover, this capacity is construed in terms of bodily self-awareness.

They [newborns] do show some rudiments of self-world differentiation. The question is what might be the origins of such innate capacity? I propose that at the origins, there are some basic perceptual experiences that are uniquely specifying the own body as opposed to the experience of other entities in the world. (Rochat 2003)

In this sense, proprioception – that is, the perception of the body and its parts as located in a certain space – can be conceived as the «the modality of self “par-excellence”» (Rochat & Striano, 2000). Rochat suggest that proprioception operates in accordance with our sensory system. Although we do not pay a particular attention to proprioceptive perception, it nevertheless accompanies the continuous flow of consciousness. Consider, for example, tickling. When we try to tickle ourselves, the result is completely different from being teased by an external object or agent. The presence of proprioceptive stimuli in fact allows the cognitive system to “recognise” whether the tickling is self-generated or not. On Rochat’s view, a basic form of proprioception that interplays with the sensory system is present already at birth. The integration of proprioception with multisensory perception gives the newborn the first self-specifying experiential information, by means of which she can discriminate between external and self-related stimuli. As a result, the body appears to be a special experiential object from birth on – and arguably even earlier.

Obviously, this capacity initially appears to be rather coarse-grained. The improvement of proprioceptive skills, Rochat argues, rests on the motor exploration

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reflective consciousness that we are adopting in these pages. In this sense, the set of phenomena that Rochat points out as self-awareness is akin to some notions of minimal self-consciousness that we are dealing with.

of environment. As the infant constantly explores this intermodal experiential dimension through her uncoordinated movements, she develops a more refined body schema, that is, «an implicit, perceptually based “protorepresentation” of the body as specified by the intermodal redundancy accompanying perception and action» (Rochat & Striano, 2000). By employing such capabilities while navigating in their environment, infants gradually become able to develop new kinds of self-awareness, like sense of agency – awareness of being the one who has caused such effects on the surroundings – and an ability of self-discrimination, i.e., to discriminate oneself from other objects and agents. Thus, according to Rochat, body-related experiential stimuli ground further forms of implicit and explicit self-consciousness, via the sensory and proprioceptive presentation of a special experiential object, that is, the body.

Another approach to bodily self-consciousness suggests that pre-reflective self-consciousness might be affected by radical changes, while similarly contends that the appearance of a body, as a key experiential object, contributes to a pre-reflective instance of self-awareness. Thomas Metzinger and Olaf Blanke in fact argue that certain phenomenal contents do carry the sense «of being a distinct, holistic entity capable of global self-control and attention, possessing a body and a location in space and time» (Blanke & Metzinger, 2009). Their aim is to identify minimal requirements for the appearance of phenomenal contents that exhibit the property of selfhood – i.e., what Metzinger and Blanke refer to as minimal phenomenal selfhood, or MPS (Blanke & Metzinger, 2009).

Blanke and Metzinger claim that the MPS is based on the appearance of three constituting factors: a first-person perspective, a globalised identification with the body as a whole and spatiotemporal self-location. These three conditions are considered jointly necessary and sufficient for MPS to occur. MPS, in turn, becomes the necessary condition for developing more complex self-models.

MPS, characterized by self-identification, self-location, and weak 1PP, is the outcome of this process on the level of conscious experience. MPS, the simplest

form of selfhood, is a representation of the entire body, being functionally available for global control: a form of abstract (yet non-propositional) knowledge about oneself and provides information about new causal properties. (Blanke & Metzinger, 2009)

A first-person perspective is of the greatest relevance for developing an egological standpoint towards reality, that is, an experiential engagement that is anchored to an egocentric spatial frame. Metzinger and Blanke distinguish three types of first-person perspective – i.e., weak, strong and cognitive.<sup>25</sup> Strong and cognitive first-person perspective are not necessary for the MPS and are developed in virtue of further enabling conditions. Strong first-person perspective involves the experience of volitional control on the attentional focus, while the cognitive one entails the conceptual ability to refer to oneself. Instead, a weak first-person perspective simply amounts to a geometrical feature, insofar as our perceptual experience and mental imagery perspectively originate from a projection centre (Blanke & Metzinger, 2009). But where is such a centre localised? The answer to this question leads us to the second and the third factors.

According to Metzinger and Blanke, a simple and prior form of self-experience concerns the body, or, more exactly, an «identification with the body as a whole» (Blanke & Metzinger, 2009). This is the second constituting factor of the MPS. Indeed, it is only a global self-identification that makes the body available for movement control, while identification with some body part would be insufficient for gesture monitoring and planning (Blanke & Metzinger, 2009). The experiential feel of the body as a whole, however, is not only determined in terms of global ownership, but

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<sup>25</sup> In *Being No One*, Metzinger respectively distinguishes the phenomena of first-person perspective as phenomenal, attentional, volitional and cognitive. As I read it, phenomenal first-person perspective serves as an overall concept that in which the others types amount to special cases. But whereas the cognitive type is akin to the description provided in the more recent paper, attentional and volitional forms might be understood as different aspects of the strong first-person perspective – the former merely resulting from the integration of an object component, while the latter being related to the agential control in actions (Metzinger, 2003a: 373, 395, 405, 412). In this sense, the notion of weak first-person could be seen as denoting the minimal constituents that enable the development of further forms of egocentric reference.

also as a specific space within a time window. A spatio-temporal self-location is the third constituent of MPS: our body occupies a certain region of space from which the centre of projection of the weak first-person originates (Blanke & Metzinger, 2009). Moreover, in addition to the "here", self-location is defined within a window of presence, the "now" of bodily self-consciousness (Blanke & Metzinger, 2009; see also Metzinger, 2003a: 306-307, 311, 313).

On Metzinger's and Blanke's view, then, the occurrence of MPS is determined by the interplay of such phenomenal conditions. In this sense, changes in self-identification, self-location and the origin of the weak first-person perspective may have remarkable consequences for MPS. Indeed, several studies of autoscopic phenomena reveals how such experiential features could be affected by the experience of an illusory body that duplicates the subject's own (Brugger et al., 1997; Metzinger, 2005; Blanke & Mohr, 2005; Blanke et al., 2008; Anzellotti et al., 2011; Craffert, 2015; Sellers, 2017). Furthermore, these authors has elaborated an experimental design in which a virtual reality device induces a shift in self-location and self-identification (Lenggenhager et al., 2007; other experimental designs can be found in Ehrsson, 2007; Maselli & Slater, 2014; Serino et al., 2016). From these pathological cases and experimental reports, Metzinger and Blanke draw a conclusion that is remarkably significant for any theoretical approach to the problem of self-consciousness. Whereas the phenomenal content of MPS should be considered relatively stable, even in autoscopic cases, the intentional object which the content is referred to might change in certain circumstances (Blanke & Metzinger, 2009).

On the basis of divergent premises, Metzinger and Blanke introduces a notion of MPS that, if compared to Rochat first level of bodily awareness, takes into account developmental and pathological scenarios. In this regard, their understanding of minimal self-consciousness is better suited to capture the dynamic interaction between the different sources of self-consciousness. Although he claims that complex instances of self-consciousness are developed on top of the prior ones, Rochat argues, instead, that basic forms are experientially fixed and accessible by themselves through our lifespan. Yet, either conception relies upon a similar assumption: pre-

reflective self-consciousness has to be considered as the awareness of a (special) object within subjective experience. This suggests that, unlike Zahavi's minimal self, the appearance of a body is merely added to the phenomenal character of experience. A different conception of bodily self-consciousness, nevertheless, might allow to comprehend a more fundamental level of subjective experience, in which the body determines our experiential milieu even if it may not appear as the object of phenomenal consciousness. A pre-reflective, non-objective bodily self-consciousness that could be considered, as such, prior to objective forms.

#### **4.2 Body image and body schema**

To help us understand this non-objective instance of bodily self-consciousness, we have to recall a phenomenal feature that we have seen in the previous section, in order to make a fruitful distinction. Indeed, on Rochat's view, newborns are supposed to show an innate body schema which is based on intermodal perceptual "representation" of the body (Rochat & Striano, 2000). To put it differently, bodily self-consciousness integrates sensory cues from different sources, like proprioception, interoception, vestibular information and sense organs. In such a scenario, then, the body carries an experiential image (i.e., a body image) that allows the subject to access self-referential contents. However, the notions of body schema and body image denote two different facets of how our body appears in and shapes phenomenal consciousness. By introducing this distinction, Shaun Gallagher, who like Rochat considers proprioception a key factor in developing self-awareness, provides a thorough conceptual and phenomenological account of the two concepts (Gallagher, 2005: 18, 24, 37-38). According to Gallagher, the body image works within a broad range of cognitive processing, which spans from the elaboration of multisensory perceptual experience of the body to the deliberate effort of interpreting such data. The body schema, on the other hand, is considered an embedded motor program which guides our movements beneath the threshold of consciousness.

A *body image* consists of a system of perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs pertaining to one's own body. In contrast, a *body schema* is a system of sensory-motor capacities that function without awareness or the necessity of perceptual monitoring. This conceptual distinction between body image and body schema is related respectively to the difference between having a perception of (or belief about) something and having a capacity to move (or an ability to do something). (Gallagher, 2005: 24)

Thus, such different sets of phenomena affect our bodily experience in different ways, and a more accurate grasp of this distinction allows us to better understand how the body emerges within experience. To illustrate this view, Shaun Gallagher suggests considering pathological cases of impaired bodily awareness.

In order to affirm that body schema and body image rely on different capacities and processes, there should be cases in which one is impaired or lacking while the other holds properly. Indeed, some pathologies like neglect and deafferentation are considered to be straightforward cases of this possibility. Subjects who suffer from unilateral neglect, for example, are unable to attend to a part – either the right or the left side – of their body. As a result, the neglected part «is ignored, denied, and sometimes disowned as something that does not belong to the patient» (Gallagher, 2005: 40). For instance, patients with unilateral neglect sometimes do not dress their neglected part. However, their neglected limbs are usually able to perform normal and even acquired movements such as dressing or lacing shoes. This suggests that while these patients manifest the loss of a more or less important aspect of their body image, even up to denying ownership for some parts of their body, the motor schemas remain nonetheless operative.

Divergent symptoms are shown in deafferentation neuropathy. A well-known example of this pathology in the scientific literature is the case of Ian Watermann (Cole, 1995, 2016). After a severe illness – initially diagnosed as mononucleosis – Ian lost proprioception and the sense of touch below his neck, while maintaining muscular “control” and the capacity to discriminate between hot and cold. The early behavioural consequences of the disease were the complete loss of motor control

and coordination: in the first three months after the disease, Ian was unable to perform any movement. By virtue of a demanding rehabilitation period, however, Ian regained some motor control and the ability to perform some basic actions as walking, reaching, grasping, and even driving. Indeed, Ian, who has never re-obtained his sense of proprioception, has based his movements on a sophisticated control which relies on visual attention. As long as Ian is able to see what he is doing, he can attentively control the movement by means of cognitive control of the act that he is performing – a control that he has achieved through a hard training. Thus, Ian has to rely on a conscious (mostly visual) awareness of his body to hold a relatively stable image of it, while he cannot make use of automatic gesture or motor schema which feed on the proprioceptive stimuli in order to operate.

These two divergent cases of neglect and deafferentation corroborate Gallagher's suggestion that we should discriminate between two facets of bodily consciousness. On the one hand, the body image brings into view what might potentially be attended as object of our experiences and thoughts. As such, the body image involves an objective and self-referential form of awareness, which might entail a number of different aspects, such as perceptual experience, conceptual understanding and emotional attitudes toward one's own body. The body image, as Gallagher takes it, is thus considered a multilayered phenomenon that can be further divided into body percept, body concept and body affect (Gallagher, 2005: 25). These should be thought of, however, as mutually dependent. Even though the body percept, which rests on basic sensory and proprioceptive perceptions, might be considered an earlier form of body image, Ian Watermann's case should remind us how conceptual understanding of and emotional relation with our body might affect the way we experience it (Gallagher, 2005: 26).

The body schema, on the other hand, is meant to operate on a pre-conscious or "sub-personal" level of the motor systems (Gallagher, 2005: 26). Like the body image, it could be affected by a further improvement, disruption or loss throughout our lifespan. Nevertheless, it can be addressed as the object of our thoughts only by means of losing its operational efficacy and, hence, preventing its actual realization

(e.g., try to reach a bottle of water while reflecting on every single movement you should perform in order to accomplish your goal properly. Your performance would significantly differ from the automatic gesture that you might carelessly perform while, for instance, typing on your laptop. If we were to reflect on our gestures every time we are performing them, we would be in a situation akin to Ian Waterman's).

Given this description of self-referential aspects of body experience, one could object to Gallagher that since body schemas do not rise to phenomenological level – unless we are attentively reflecting on them, and thereby preventing their real functioning – our conscious access to the body mainly relies on the body image, that is, on taking the body as the object of our experience. As such, body schema would not be necessary to account for pre-reflective self-consciousness. Nevertheless, I think that we have some reasons to dispute this conclusion, which is based on two assumptions: first, the body image occurs only as a transitive form of self-consciousness, that is, as a form of objective consciousness. Second, body image and body schema do not interact with one another. Indeed, both assumptions can be called into questions. Concerning the first consider that, as we have seen, the body image represents a variety of conscious or potentially conscious phenomena. The body percept may consist of the specific proprioceptive perception we can have at any moment. In this sense, the perceptual facets of body image are based on several experiential sources: sensorial stimuli, proprioception, interoception and vestibular sense of equilibrium. But a body image may also be the outcome of an intellectual understanding (e.g., comparing our body with how it used to be, or also judging it as unfitting some social standard), or operate at the level of emotions. These conceptual and emotional images might lead to a somewhat enduring frame, to an implicit understanding of our body that has an impact on subjective experience. In this sense, the body image shapes our bodily self-consciousness even if it does not appear as

the intentional object of the experiential state. Brian O’Shaughnessy has called this experiential modality – this experiential “how” – “long-term body image”<sup>26</sup>.

With respect to the second assumption (i.e., body image and body schema do not interact with one another), we surely have good reasons to conceptually and phenomenologically distinguish the body schema from the body image. It appears that they even rest on different proprioceptive systems. Whereas our conscious access to proprioceptive information is rather restricted in so far as we cannot attend to several aspects at the same time, body schemas are supplied with a holistic integration of vision, vestibular system and somatic proprioception. Thus, body schemas deal with a massive amount of data that are necessary to coordinate movement and are registered at a pre-conscious level. The body image, instead, concerns what we are conscious of. To phrase it differently, according to the GWT I mentioned in Chapter 1, the body image deals with conscious aspects that are made globally accessible to the whole cognitive system, whereas the body schema relies on information that are processed by specialised systems.

In contrast to the notion of proprioceptive *awareness* (PA), in the neurological tradition proprioceptive *information* (PI) is defined as a non-conscious process—the result of physiological stimuli activating certain proprioceptors, but not consciously experienced by the subject. On this view, proprioceptive information, generated at peripheral proprioceptors and registered at strategic sites in the brain, but below the threshold of consciousness, operates as part of the system that constitutes the body schema. This aspect of proprioception is not something we can be directly aware of. (Gallagher, 2005: 46)

Furthermore, given this description, the body image seems to be defined as a percept-like mental state, in as much as it strongly relies on perceptual awareness.

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<sup>26</sup> O’Shaughnessy provides a distinction between short-term body images – i.e., the various proprioceptive modalities through which we experience our body – and the long-term body image – i.e., an enduring and slowly changing experiential framework. This embedded and implicit self-reference differs, though, from Rudd’s implicit narrative since O’Shaughnessy contends a form of body image that is specific natural life, and thus not dependent on person-related abilities (O’Shaughnessy, 1995).

Conversely, body schemas are thought as inner lists of instructions or motor programs that embed the appropriate steps to perform a gesture – which is not the mere motion of single body part, but always requires the postural adjustment of the whole body.

Nevertheless, my claim is that body schemas and body image undergo a mutual influence. Think about the training required to execute a specific movement in some sport, for example, the spin pass in rugby. Arguably children who come in touch with rugby are not innately able to carry out such a move. To acquire this capacity – or, to put it differently, this specific body schema – they must consciously attend to skilful older players. Following the coach's instructions, they come to focus on the single movements that allow them to perform the overall gesture: holding the ball with the fingers, positioning the thumbs, asymmetrically placing the hands with respect to the ball, bending the arms and elbows, correcting the posture of shoulders and feet, and so forth. The early attempts to acquire proficiency in such a skill are thus characterised by a strong cognitive effort – which is similar to Ian Watermann "on-line" motor control, in some respects – and, only after countless trials and errors, rugby players become able to execute a spin pass in an automatic, cognitively effortless way. Furthermore, our body image does not only affect the acquisition of new schemas: how we currently conceive ourselves in terms bodily potential determines the effectiveness of our gestures. To be confident on the capacity of the body can enhance our performances (e.g., to be supported by a mental coach is a usual practice for current professional athletes).

At the same time, the automatic execution of certain movements bears a significant influence on our phenomenal consciousness. Even though I am not attending to each muscular contraction or extension, or to every postural change, I am nonetheless experiencing my body moving. Thus, each movement carries some degree of proprioceptive feedback that reaches the conscious level, and so largely contributes to the current experience of my body. Throughout everyday activities, we are absorbed in our practices, but this does not mean that we are utterly unconscious while performing them. Rather, we are continuously updated about the movements

of our body by different sources (proprioception, vision, vestibular systems, and so forth). This allows us to potentially intervene whenever our gesture goes wrong in virtue of external or internal reasons. This form of awareness, however, is not observational. For example, consider typing on a laptop: while pressing the keys, my hands and fingers do not represent the object of my subjective experience as though I attentively focus on them – some might say that my intentional object is, rather, the sentence I am trying to write. In this sense, the bodily awareness that is involved is meant to be performative: a form of awareness that «is not like the perceptual awareness that I have of an object, but an awareness that comes along with knowing that I can do certain things» (Gallagher, 2005: 74). Thus, performative awareness concerns what we can physically do, given a specific scenario. Furthermore, the persistence of such experiential dimension informs our long-term body image: as long as I am able/unable to physically act in a certain way, I might come up with specific expectations about my body.

This last point is of the utmost importance to understand bodily self-consciousness within the conception of pre-reflective self-consciousness. Let me thus briefly recapitulate the previous steps. In this previous section, I have touched upon different forms of objective bodily self-consciousness. Whereas Blanke and Metzinger argue for the integration of several aspects that bring about self-conscious phenomena, according to Rochat proprioception seems to represent a good candidate within the attempt to define an essential form of body-awareness. As such, Rochat contends, proprioceptive perception lays the foundation for the self/non-self discrimination: from birth, newborns should be held to distinguish from self- and non-self-generated stimuli (Rochat & Hespos, 1997). Nevertheless, proprioception appears to be a puzzling issue that need further specifications. We can indeed detail two different proprioceptive functions. First, proprioception updates the motor control system at a pre-conscious level and in accord with body schemas. Second, it makes us conscious about the position of our body parts when it reaches a level of globally accessibility, in order to support our conscious behaviour. In addition to its divergent purposes, proprioception does not work in isolation, but rather it is

integrated with several sources of information, such as vision, touch, interoception and postural balance. Moreover, the most part of these stimuli does not reach the consciousness threshold. Thus, if we are to define a minimal form of bodily self-consciousness that is essential to subjective experience and non-observational but still experienced, what should we opt for? I do think that Gallagher's distinction between body image and body schema can help us to account for the pre-reflective presence of the body within subjective experience. As adult human beings, we develop short and long term body images, which might be affected by previous experience, expectations, beliefs and emotional bonds toward our body – and also by others' perspective. These body images have a profound impact on our conscious life, but they could affect further acquisitions of body schemas as well. For most of our everyday activity, however, the body does not count as the object of our thoughts. Rather than consciously attending to body parts while they are performing some specific movement, our bodily awareness is determined by the performance that the body is currently carrying on. In this sense, minimal body awareness depends on the body schema: even if my intentional object could be the bottle of water that I want to grab or the proposition I would like to write on my laptop, I am constantly aware of what my body parts have done, are doing and are potentially able to do. In this case, bodily consciousness is not meant to be a form of "object-consciousness", but rather a performative consciousness that takes place on the basis of a movement guided by a body schema.

To be proprioceptively aware of one's body does not involve making one's body an object of perception, although this might happen in the case of an involuted, reflective use of proprioception. Proprioceptive-kinaesthetic awareness is usually a pre-reflective (non-observational) awareness that allows the body to remain experientially transparent to the agent who is acting. It provides a sense that one is moving or doing something, not in terms that are explicitly about body parts, but in terms closer to the goal of the action. (Gallagher, 2005: 73)

Thus, the underlying assumption is that when it comes to self-consciousness, the body does not only provide another object that consciousness can be directed towards. To be conscious of the body is not just a matter of being conscious *of* something – we might think about being conscious of my right hand because we are paying focal attention to the texture of the skin, but this should be considered a higher-order form of consciousness. My body operates, instead, as the centre for self-generated actions. In this regard, I agree with Gallagher that while my attentional focus is directed towards the goal of the action, and thereby turning my body into an experientially transparent object, the constant feedback I receive in performing the gesture allows me to be pre-reflectively conscious that I am the one who is acting. Moreover, the intermodal feedback that I consciously attend to opens up further possibilities for action, as well as for interrupting the movement in the very moment my expectations are not satisfied.

#### **4.3 Performative awareness**

As we have seen, Gallagher's distinction between body image and body schema allows to account for a form of performative awareness that represents a non-objective instance of self-consciousness. Rather than being a peripheral feature of subjective experience, this basic bodily awareness guides – and, to some extent, constraints – our activity, thus shaping the “what” of subjective experience. This reinforces the previous consideration about the different levels of bodily awareness, that is, about the differences between performative awareness of the body and body image. While skilfully interacting with the environment, our body does not count as another object towards which we draw our attention. The experiential feel related to the body is strictly intertwined with the execution of a certain movement that is required to accomplish a given task. Thus, rather than disclosing another experiential object, the body supplies the experiential sense of ownership and sense of agency. The former is the pre-reflective awareness that it is my body that is moving, whereas the latter amounts to the sense of being the one who has caused the movement and

its consequences. Gallagher suggests that the sense of ownership and the sense of agency are usually synchronous: when I feel a movement and the pertaining experience as belonging to me, I am normally aware that I was the one who wanted to perform such a gesture (Gallagher, 2005: 56). The sense of agency, however, can be absent in some particular cases, such as reflex movement (e.g., when we touch an extremely hot surface and suddenly our body moves as though to avoid the contact, or when to stimulate the knee causes the leg to stir) and pathological conditions (e.g., thought insertion in schizophrenic patients and the anarchic hand syndrome).<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, in normal circumstances, a basic bodily awareness carries gives us a sense of being the one who is acting and is doing so in a certain way. This experiential sense, furthermore, does not add another object into the subject's experience, it rather simply determines how the object of experience is perceived by the subject.

Thus, I suggest that Gallagher is right when insists that while attending to our activities, the body provides us with an experiential feedback which is crucial in focussing on the goal of our movements and actions. Imagine, indeed, to perform that aforementioned gesture, namely the spin pass in rugby, within a match-like scenario. To be effective in such circumstances, where a short reaction time is required, the attentional focus must be directed toward the game and not towards the body parts that are executing the gesture. To switch attention to the body likely brings about a loss of responsiveness, and thereby an inaccurate performance. But if I

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<sup>27</sup> The case of thought insertion occurs in patients who still conceive some thought as theirs, that is, as belonging to their stream of consciousness, while affirming that their source is external. To the extent they do not recognise the "authorship" of part of their mental life, and thus lacking sense of agency, they start believing that someone or something else is sneaking in their mind and bringing about such thoughts (Frith, 1992; Gallagher, 2015; for an understanding of thought insertion without appealing the distinction between sense of ownership and agency, see Ratcliffe & Wilkinson, 2015). The anarchic hand syndrome, instead, pertains to the movement execution: who is affected by this pathology continues to experience the anarchic hand as his own, that is, the experiential feedback concerning the hand movement seems to hold. The anarchic hand, however, is "able" to perform some unwilled intentional movement, such as grasping, against the owner's will (Marchetti & Della Sala, 1998; Pacherie, 2007; Moro et al., 2015).

properly focus on the relevant aspects of the game, my body nonetheless allows me to be performatively aware of my current position within the field: to “know” where my hands are located, which postural balance I am maintaining and at what speed I am moving, which makes the correct timing, the extension and the power of the pass possible. On this view, therefore, the pre-reflective and non-observational feedback provided by our body establishes the set of potential movements I might perform at certain time-space (Gallagher, 2005: 57). In such cases, the body as an object is experientially transparent: what accompanies and, to some extent, determines our subjective experience is the sense of performing the movement in a certain way, thereby opening up new possibilities for intentional action.

In other circumstances, however, we should note that the body appears to be less transparent, and so becomes the object of our experience, even though we are not deliberately reflecting on it. Consider, for example, the occurrence of an unexpected pain, where the specific body part suddenly stands out at the centre of our attention. In this moment, we can maintain an observational standpoint without appealing to a more cognitive attitude toward the body. This suggests, again, that the body plays different role within subjective experience, or, to put it differently, it obtains different levels of experiential transparency: at a basic experiential level, as suggested by Gallagher, the body contributes to the experiential field by giving a set of movement potentialities (Gallagher, 2005: 64). Within this phenomenological dimension, the body as an object is experientially transparent (Gallagher, 2005: 72). A subsequent stage is achieved when the body suddenly emerges as the object of our attention in unexpected circumstances (e.g., a visually peculiar pigment on the skin or an annoying itch on the neck). In such cases, at least in the first place, our observational point of view does not amount to a reflective stance (I am not recalling, judging or believing that specific subjective experience) – nor does the experiential transparency of other body parts holds still. The overall body thus remains below the threshold of being objectified, while nonetheless carrying out a performative role (e.g., adapting the head posture to better look at the skin pigment or guiding my fingers to the itching spot). A further step is body exploration. By means of various

sensory sources, we can willingly draw the attention to our body parts. In these circumstances, the specific part of the body ceases to provide support for movement – or, at least, the gestural capacity is impaired – and becomes the object of subjective experience. This experiential dimension opens up other cognitive achievements since we can think about these experiences at a later time, by employing a reflective form of self-consciousness. Eventually, the recollection of such personal traits allows for the development of a conceptual image of the whole body which could be employed in intellectual reasoning.

In conclusion, Gallagher argues for a performative, kinaesthetic form of bodily consciousness that is meant to be antecedent, though not unrelated, to more mature outcomes. However, this notion of performative awareness mainly relies onto an internalist account of the experiential structuring provided by the body schema. A different position suggests, instead, that other “external” factor affect the execution of body schemas. Indeed, an intriguing definition of bodily self-consciousness as the locus for action potential has been elaborated by Vittorio Gallese and Corrado Sinigaglia (Gallese & Sinigaglia, 2010, 2011, 2014). Our body, they contend, «is not only something that is always already given to us, but it is primarily given to us as “source” or “power” for action, i.e., as the variety of motor potentialities that defines the horizon of the world in which we live» (Gallese & Sinigaglia, 2010). Gallese and Sinigaglia in fact argue that a minimal form of bodily consciousness is not provided by means of experiencing one’s body as another and special object within the stream of consciousness. Rather than being an object of experience, the body occurs as subject of experience. That is to say, instead of an experienced body, it is more arguably to affirm that a minimal form of body awareness should be construed as an «experiencing body» (Gallese and Sinigaglia, 2010). The notion of body schema they work with, however, does not fully coincide with Gallagher’s. Moreover, they also consider the phenomenon of performative awareness antecedent of experiential ownership and sense of agency.

According to these two authors, the body schema does not merely interact with internal sources of information for situation-independent gestures. It is also meant to

be situation-dependent. Rather than being only tied with the sensory-motor execution of movement, the body schema thus appears to be goal-oriented.

This is not to deny that the body schema plays a critical role in monitoring various body parts, thus enabling action and perception. Rather, the point is that the relationship between body schema and action is way much stronger and deeper than that. It is not exclusively confined to the kinematical constraints enabling action execution, but it encompasses the level of motor goal-relatedness characterizing each basic action as such and as being different from every other basic action. (Gallese & Sinigaglia, 2010)

Thus, there are three factors whose complex interaction determines the actual realisation of the body schema: the peri-personal space, the intentional aspect of movement and the recognition of other beings' gestures. Looking at the first, Gallese and Sinigaglia argue that our peripheral space does not appear as a static collection of shapes, colours, sounds, smells and surfaces. In contrast, we experience our surrounding space as the locus of our intentional activity: objects are perceived as more or less reachable, sounds allow us to know whether or not we are getting closer to the source of the noise, surfaces give us support in controlling postural balance, and so forth. The body schema, then, operates in accordance to this action-oriented spatial configuration (Gallese & Sinigaglia, 2010). Gallese and Sinigaglia explicitly acknowledge that these considerations have been influenced by the work of Merleau-Ponty on the spatiality of bodily action, wherein our surrounding space has been considered «as a collection of possible points upon which this bodily action may operate» (Merleau-Ponty, 2002: 121).

On Gallese's and Sinigaglia's conception, the second key factor of motor control is "motor intentionality". By employing this term, they do not mean to suggest that when it comes to the execution of movement we deliberately choose between a number of motor options. Rather, they are committed to the more modest claim that a primitive form of intentionality is already in place when the body schema monitors the movement execution. This intentionality, which is directed toward a specific

movement, works at a sub-personal level: when we form the intention of grasping a glass of water, the body schema operates on specific motor programs that are not explicitly taken into account in the prior intention (e.g., controlling muscles contraction and extension to grab the object in virtue of the appropriate position of the arm, the hand and each single finger). Even though it is meant to be pre-conscious, this motor intentionality nevertheless yields significant phenomenological consequences. According to Gallese and Sinigaglia, empirical evidence indicates that motor intentionality plays a key role in determining the experiential signature of self-generated movements (Gallese & Sinigaglia, 2010). This view is supported by research that show that we feel more in control when the same gesture is self-produced, if compared to externally generated or induced movement (Haggard, 2008). Likewise, the perception of the effects of a self-generated movement and the movement realisation are consciously experienced as closer in time with respect to the involuntary cases (Haggard et al., 2002; Moore & Haggard, 2008).

Finally, Gallese and Sinigaglia claim that the motor control also embeds a third crucial factor, that is, a mirror mechanism (Gallese and Sinigaglia, 2010, 2011). In the early 90's, neurological research on macaques pinpointed a neuron population within the motor cortex – i.e., a brain area in between the frontal and the parietal cortex, which was simply considered the locus of motor control – that not only activated when a certain movement was performed, but also when the same movement was shown in other individuals (Pellegrino et al., 1992; Gallese et al., 1996. For a more recent review on the mirror mechanism, see Cook et al., 2014; Rizzolatti et al., 2014. For a critical objection to the mirror neuron theory, see Hickok, 2009, 2014). These findings have supported several hypotheses upon the realisation of motor control. For Gallese's and Sinigaglia's view, for example, two general assumption are based on the mirror mechanism theory: (i) the motor cortex does not merely provide instructions for the execution of motor programs and (ii) performing a movement of some sort might have an intrinsic social character, in so far as «the mirror neuron matching mechanism enables a direct comprehension of the actions of others» (Gallese et al., 2009). The first claim is consistent with what we have already seen

about the plasticity of the body schema: rather than being detached from the elaboration of sensory stimuli, and thus simply monitoring the execution of motor programs, the very same system that controls the movement is also sensitive to the sensory feedback and the goal of the gesture. This assumption, thus, challenges the modular view of the cognitive system, which details different neural processors as working on restricted and specific input domains.

The second assumption also entails remarkable consequences for how we might understand motor execution. It emphasises the social character of movement. In fact, by affirming that movement recognition is already built upon the neural system, we may argue that the mirror mechanism represents the bedrock of social behaviour (to paraphrase Vilayanur Ramachandran's assertion in a 2009 TED talk). However, Gallese and Sinigaglia are committed to a more modest claim. As long as body schemas show a high plasticity about the sensory facet of movement performance, the development of certain gestures arguably comes along with consistent observational capacities. To become able to perform certain complex movements is intertwined with the recognition of the same ones in others' behaviour.

What is critical in the mirror mechanism is the fact that it capitalizes upon the same motor potentialities for action that constitute the minimal sense of self as bodily self. The more these motor potentialities for action diversify and refine, the more the pre-reflective bodily awareness of self-diversify and refine together with the interaction modalities with other self-modeling bodies. (Gallese & Sinigaglia, 2010)

Performative awareness, as Gallese and Sinigaglia conceive it, results therefore from the interplay of multi-modal sensory stimuli, a basic intentionality and the development of movement potentialities within a social context. On the phenomenological level, then, the movement execution conveys a form of goal-oriented awareness through the attunement with the surrounding situation. While performing a movement, the motor program is determined by means of the specific situation I am in, but also by the motor potentialities I have fostered throughout my

lifespan. The body schema singles out a specific movement – built on several micro-gestures – the realisation and failing of which are phenomenologically salient. Thus, while making our body-as-object experientially transparent, performative awareness carries out a sense of body-as-subject: an ongoing awareness of motor potentialities that are either accomplished or unfulfilled. According to the two authors, such a form of awareness amounts to a basic form of self-consciousness, insofar as it constitutes experiential ownership – the feel that certain movements and experiences belong to me or my body – and a sense of agency – the experience of being the one who deliberately performs the movement. Consider, for example, the case of patients suffering from utilisation behaviour (this definition was first coined by Lhermitte, 1983). These individuals, who are affected by a brain lesion in a specific area of the frontal cortex, usually perform flawless goal-oriented gestures that we could describe as inappropriate given the context in which they act (e.g., using a toothbrush while sitting in front of the doctor or grabbing and wearing someone else shoes). Nonetheless, patients with utilisation behaviour do not report any divergence between their will and the movements they perform, and thereby they continue to experience a sense of ownership and agency that pertain to their acts. Accordingly, Gallese and Sinigaglia conclude that the experience of success in such goal-oriented movements «enables the experience of ownership they evoke in these patients» (Gallese and Sinigaglia, 2010). Following this line of thought, they affirm that to be aware of the body in terms of motor potentialities amounts to a basic form of self-reference, and thus to a basic form of self-consciousness.

Gallese and Sinigaglia's understanding of the occurrence of the body within subjective experience therefore suggests that the body in action provides a minimal level of self-awareness. This position, however, rests on a notion of "goal" that could allow for some ambiguities. In fact, the notion of "goal" can be both applied to the prior intention to act and to motor intentionality. But the goal of a willed action does not correspond to the goal of the body schema. For example, if I am thirsty and there is a bottle of water on the desk I am working on, I might form the intention of drinking from it. This should count as my prior intention to act. Motor intentionality,

instead, operates on the level of specific motor mechanisms, that is, it entails the precise muscular activation patterns that allow me to perform the overall action. According to Gallese and Sinigaglia, a minimal form of bodily self-consciousness is related to the latter case, and thereby already takes place throughout the execution of the required gestures (e.g., balancing the posture, tensing the triceps while relaxing the biceps, and so forth). In this sense, patients with utilisation behaviour who do not form a prior intention can nonetheless develop a sense of ownership and agency.

In summary, the notion of minimal bodily self-consciousness that is supported by Gallese and Sinigaglia – and, to some extent, by Gallagher as well – is meant to grasp a form of self-consciousness that arises even if we are deeply immersed in our activities. This bodily consciousness is thus performative and non-objective. Rather than representing another experiential object, the body determines the egocentric phenomenological coordinates through which we can experience ownership for what we have done, and the pertaining sense of success or failure. Thus, in short, motor execution comes with an inner sense that makes us conscious of being the one who is performing a certain gesture, and also of the performance success or failure.

#### **4.4 Experiential transparency**

The phenomenological salience of the body, as we have seen above, can be addressed from different standpoints, depending on whether we intend to construe it as an object of experience. However, we do not need subtle theoretical reflections to note that, through our ordinary experience, the experiential presence of the body continuously changes. Sometimes our body constitutes the object of our experiences and thoughts, whereas in other circumstances the body only provides the experiential structuring while we are focused on our tasks. This striking phenomenon of bodily transparency suggests us to examine in depth such an experiential shifting, in order to refine our understanding of the phenomenal character of bodily self-consciousness.

#### *4.4.1 Ambiguities in bodily transparency*

Shaun Gallagher contends that we cannot be aware of the whole body through subjective experience. To put it differently, the body «is in excess of that of which I am conscious» (Gallagher, 2005: 34). Thus, while attentively performing a movement, the body-as-object seems to disappear from our experiential engagement. Nevertheless, this transparency seems easy to elude, even though sometimes it could be really painful. An unusual pain in the abdomen or a strange mark on the skin, for example, can be so experientially relevant to make us step back from our activities and thereby take an observational attitude toward the body. This does not mean, though, that a reflective stance is required. The body often reveals itself in unexpected ways, while making itself noted within our subjective experience in different degrees. The sudden appearance of pain can be easily thought of as a pre-reflective form of experience: at least initially, it simply stands out against the stream of consciousness. But also visual, interoceptive and tactile perceptions carry experiential cues about the body in terms of an object of experience. Once the body makes its appearance, we can in fact hold this phenomenological facet within our contemplative thinking. We might, for example, assess whether a certain pain resembles the one we felt a couple of days ago, or what could be its cause. We might as well compare it with other ones on a ten-point scale. In this sense, Gallagher's use of the eyestrain case points to a progressive loss of phenomenological transparency (Gallagher, 2005: 33-34). Our awareness of eyestrain usually begins with the discovery of some perceptual (visual) alterations within the experiential landscape. A further step is to acknowledge that, at the same time, we are feeling some sort of headache close to the eyes. At this point, the eyes lose their usual transparency, that is, their anonymity within subjective experience – we normally see through our eyes, whereas we do not experience them through vision – thereby becoming the object of our observational attitude.

In the previous sections, we focused on a notion of performative awareness that seems to elude the possibility of objectification. How could we "objectify" the movement execution? To focus on the current gesture that we are executing entails a

decreasing performance. Performative awareness results, indeed, from the accomplishment of a body schema that works at a pre-conscious, sub-personal level. Nevertheless, skilful athletes put a lot of conscious effort in sharpening their gestures and movements to reach the level of perfect execution. Consider the case of Olympic divers. Throughout an athlete's career, to re-examine a movement execution that is not properly performed is an ordinary process that can have a number of different reasons (e.g., a serious injury, aging, coach replacement, coordinating with a partner for synchronised diving, etc.). Both the acknowledgement of execution flaws and the development of the new style – types of dives are determined by international standards, what might change is their interpretation – require a deliberate reflection on the visual, tactile and proprioceptive feedback that are felt during the execution. That is why athletes are exhorted to recall their perceptions of the performance and to review their dives via video support. This means that the athlete's reflection can impact the body schema and consequently the pertaining performative awareness, although in an indirect way. Eventually, the automatic execution of the new movement is acquired through the integration of such observations with physical practice.

Both the diver example and the eyestrain case show that body occurrence fluctuates back and forth from the background modality to the central stage of our experiential field. The notion of bodily transparency therefore becomes crucial to better understand the broad set of phenomena that we refer to as bodily self-consciousness. Nevertheless, the term "transparency" comes with certain conceptual ambiguities, and thereby requires theoretical precautions. Indeed, in the context of subjective experience, the notion of "transparency" is usually construed in terms of unavailability to introspection (Harman, 1990; Tye, 1995, 2002; Crane, 2003, 2006, 2009). When we attend to a certain experiential scenario, some phenomenological features are not available to our attentional focus, whereas others appear as phenomenologically salient and thereby accessible to further conscious investigations. According to Tye, for example, «introspection of your perceptual experiences seems to reveal only aspects of what you experience, further aspects of

the scenes, as represented. Why? The answer, I suggest, is that your perceptual experiences have no introspectible features over and above those implicated in their intentional contents» (Tye, 1995: 135-136). In this respect, Tye points to a specific definition of transparency that has been presented by Gilbert Harman. On Harman's view, in fact, phenomenal transparency should be considered as unavailability of experiential feature above the phenomenal content.

When Eloise sees a tree before her, the colors she experiences are all experienced as features of the tree and its surroundings. None of them are experienced as intrinsic features of her experience. Nor does she experience any features of anything as intrinsic features of her experience. And that is true of you too.  
(Harman, 1990)

It should be noted, then, that this definition of transparency cannot be applied to every case that we mentioned earlier. Indeed, according to Harman's notion, phenomenal transparency is a phenomenal feature that exclusively applies to the vehicle of subjective experience, that is, to the structures of our experiential engagement. As a consequence, contents of experience cannot be either transparent or opaque. Contents are simply experienced or not. In this sense, the notion of bodily transparency of which I made use in the previous pages reveals a certain ambiguity. Indeed, following Gallagher's conception, I considered the body as exceeding what we can be conscious of at a given moment (Gallagher, 2005: 34). And, in doing so, I intended bodily awareness as shifting within subjective experience in virtue of being more or less phenomenally accessible. Furthermore, I suggested that the transparency of the body is the result of different processes. On one side, I alluded to vehicle transparency while describing performative awareness. Throughout movement execution, a sub-personal information processing works below the consciousness threshold. Therefore, the body schema remains unavailable for introspection and thus can be considered experientially transparent.

However – and here is where the ambiguity rests – I also conceived a form of content transparency. We saw that since attentional resources appear somewhat

limited, subjects can only be fully conscious of some parts of their body at a given time. Only by means of further observations they might focus on different aspects of the body that, initially, went unnoticed – and thereby having different phenomenal content (e.g., we took into account the eyestrain case). In this particular sense, degrees of bodily consciousness are determined by phenomenal contents that come back and forth from the experiential background. In this way, these contents are thereby potentially accessible to phenomenal consciousness and to introspection.

Thus, if compared with the Harman's notion, the body transparency that I appealed to lacks any discrimination between vehicle and content transparency. What authors like Harman and Tye agree on is in fact a notion of phenomenal transparency that exclusively applies to vehicles and carriers of subjective experience. However, different accounts of vehicle and carriers of subjective experience have been developed in the contemporary debate. The most notorious positions consider them either intrinsic features of experience that we have no phenomenal access to (as Tye and Harman suggest) or the informational processing that underlies phenomenal consciousness (as contended, for example, by Thomas Metzinger, 2003a). Moreover, within the debate, some deny that vehicle properties are completely unavailable to introspection (see, among others, Block, 2010). Nevertheless, experiential transparency is usually thought of only in terms of vehicle transparency. This understanding of the notion requires us to reconsider the two forms of bodily transparency as capturing two divergent phenomena. The body as a potential perceptual object is not as phenomenally unavailable as the body shaping the experiential scenario in performative awareness. Indeed, the way in which we can experientially access these two levels radically varies. The former appears to require a simple shift in our attentional focus: we need to pay our attention to experiential aspects that were merely unnoticed. A direct experiential access to the latter, instead, appears to be rather puzzling. As seen above, I suggested that a strong cognitive effort embedded with constant practice may impact how our body determines movement execution and thus the specific phenomenal character. But it seems likely

to affirm that we cannot directly access the informational processing which yields the sense of ownership and agency.

#### *4.4.2 Opacity and transparency*

The previous conclusion has been drawn on the basis of Harman's and Tye's understanding of experiential transparency. A divergent account might, instead, suggest us that the experiential structuring of body schemas could be phenomenally salient in specific contexts. Metzinger, as we have briefly seen in Chapter 2, has in fact developed a gradual conception of phenomenal transparency (Metzinger, 2003a, but other noteworthy contributions can be found in Metzinger, 2003b; Blanke & Metzinger, 2009). On this view, what we actually experience results from a sub-personal elaboration: as such, rather than carrying the objective scene before us, subjective experience occurs as a representational phenomenal state (Metzinger, 2003a: 1, 107-108). Yet, what distinguishes Metzinger's view from other representationalists like Tye is that, although it is usually unnoticed, the representational structure can nonetheless be experienced in particular cases.

Metzinger contends as well that to be experientially transparent should be understood as being unavailable to introspection. Furthermore, he agrees that transparency applies to vehicle and carriers. Nevertheless, Metzinger's conception entails two specific characteristics. First, vehicle and carriers of subjective experience are thought of as earlier processing stages, that is, the «medium» throughout which phenomenal states come about (Metzinger, 2003b). These mechanisms are, according to Metzinger, the informational flow and the structuring of sensory feedback through the neural system that normally take place at the sub-personal level. For such an early processing being phenomenally transparent, our experiential engagement seems immediate and directed towards the very object of experience. In a nutshell, «the phenomenology of transparency, therefore, is the phenomenology of naive realism» (Metzinger, 2003a: 170). It should be noted, however, that on Metzinger's view phenomenal content is not construed in abstraction from these vehicles. Rather, the

content of the phenomenal state is embodied in an ongoing processing which is physically realised. He therefore argues for a denial of the traditional vehicle-content distinction (Metzinger, 2003a: 166).

The second intriguing feature of Metzinger's notion is that phenomenal transparency and opacity are meant to be gradual properties.

For any phenomenal state, the degree of phenomenal transparency is inversely proportional to the introspective degree of attentional availability of earlier processing stages. (Metzinger, 2003a: 165)

Transparency, then, comes in different degrees. Indeed, Metzinger reports several cases in which we become attentionally aware of the structuring of our experience, such as multistable visual phenomena, in which the subject notices a perceptual shift between two different mode of seeing the same object (a well-known example is Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit), and pseudohallucinations, when the subject knows that what he is perceiving results from an hallucinatory state (Metzinger, 2003a: 171). The relation between phenomenal transparency and opacity determines the phenomenal balance of reality and appearance or, to phrase it differently, between a form of experience in which we do not question the existence of reality and another form in which we also take into account that something may have gone wrong (Metzinger, 2003a: 171).

In this regard, transparency and opacity serve different functions. On the one hand, the emergence of mental opacity is a fundamental step in light of the development of cognitive capacities, and thereby for the growth of full-blown cognitive agents (Metzinger, 2003a: 176). It should be noted, however, that Metzinger distinguishes between cognitive and attentional opacity (Metzinger, 2003a: 463). Cognitive opacity denotes the ability to step back from, reflect on or doubt about our experiences. It then allows us to question the reality of what is happening before us. But, in itself, cognitive opacity does not permit us to have a direct experiential access to the structures of phenomenal consciousness. If we had knowledge, e.g., of the complex physical relation that make vision possible, however, we could not, in most

cases, avoid the transparency of visual perception. Attentional opacity, instead, amounts to a form of pre-reflective access to phenomenal properties. It might provide us with an experiential feel of the mechanisms that make transparent experience possible. Nevertheless, it sometimes simply emerges within our subjective experience, like when we find ourselves feeling an inappropriate emotion in a certain context or experiencing the current situation as unreal after undergoing an extreme stress (Metzinger, 2003a: 172).

Metzinger points out that this concealing of experiential structuring plays the functional role in allocating cognitive resources (Metzinger, 2003a: 175). We could think about transparency and the sense of realism that it carries as a form of self-concealing, since most of what is captured by sense organs does not reach the threshold of consciousness. In a seemingly immediate way, the neural system makes phenomenally available to conscious attention only a small part of the informational flow it processes. This allows the subject to deal only with the information which is “considered” relevant for the present purpose. Such economic use of attentional resources has the advantage of decreasing the cognitive load, as well as of operating in a more restricted time window. It thereby makes our motor performance more effective in dynamic scenarios.<sup>28</sup> These considerations, in this sense, are crucial to the understanding of performative awareness at stake here.

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<sup>28</sup> As illustrated in Chapter 2, this discussion shows as well that phenomenal transparency is of great importance when it comes to Metzinger’s conception of experiential selfhood – and, I would add, especially to the understanding of a self as the object of experience. Metzinger argues that while normally performing our everyday tasks, the sub-personal processing monitored by the neural system is not available to attentional focus – i.e., it is phenomenally transparent. Indeed, rather than disclosing the functioning of a number of different, domain-specific processors that elaborate certain types of information, our experiential engagement is characterised by a sense of immediate touch with reality. The same immediacy, then, is felt when we deal with self-directed aspects of subjective experience. On Metzinger’s view, the naive realism that accompanies the phenomenal character of experience also defines the experiential presence of a self within conscious life (Metzinger, 2003a: 285). What is carried through experience is the immediate presence of a unique subject. To put it differently, a transparent phenomenal self-model (PSM) determines the presence of a subject of experience.

#### **4.5 Performative awareness and phenomenal transparency**

To sum up, immediacy and the interplay with phenomenal opacity with are two key characteristics of Metzinger's perspective on phenomenal transparency. On this view, phenomenal transparency is meant to efficiently distribute cognitive resources. In order to reduce the cognitive load, the sub-personal processing that is required to perform certain movements remains below the threshold of consciousness. Transparency therefore comes with a sense of immediacy and reality, which pre-reflectively ensures the identification with the object of subjective experience in an efficient way: the structure of the neural system provides us with a sense of direct connection with reality, insofar as the neural processing of sensory information is not usually perceived through subjective experience. Furthermore, the gradual relation of transparency and opacity might allow, in specific circumstances, to experience certain aspects of experiential structuring or motor control.

In light of these considerations on phenomenal transparency, as well as the previous discussion on the experiential appearance of a body, we can now draw some crucial conclusions for the account of pre-reflective bodily self-consciousness that is at stake here. The notion of bodily transparency, in fact, cannot be applied to body images. As such, "body image" denotes some perceptions or thoughts that are related to one's body. In this sense, they can only be experienced or not, but they cannot be transparent according to both Metzinger's and Harman's notion of transparency. To affirm that the body might transparent should be referred, therefore, to another set of phenomena – i.e., the body schema. Thus, body schemas are to be considered phenomenally transparent. Even though we might endorse Metzinger's use of "phenomenal opacity", to experience the structuring of motor control and monitoring is a rare circumstance, in which we might not be able to succeed in our performative task as well. Moreover, a cognitive effort is usually insufficient to increase the level of phenomenal opacity. In fact, to deliberately attend our conscious thought certainly discloses the formation of thoughts as long as they unfold within the stream of consciousness, but it does not permit us to directly access the sub-personal processing of experience.

Following this line of reasoning, I suggest that while performative awareness and body image can be considered part of subjective experience, body schemas belong to a sub-personal level of experiential structuring, despite some exceptional cases. In this sense, a body image (that is generally construed as a conscious state in which the body amounts to the object which consciousness is directed towards) cannot be transparent. Instead, the body schema represents the phenomenally transparent processing which guides the motor execution and, as such, determines the structure of the experiential scenario in which we are performing.

To this I should add, nevertheless, two vital considerations. First, by affirming that body schemas are phenomenally transparent it does not follow that, while being fully absorbed in executing some movement, subjective experience is merely determined by the object that we are focussing on. As we have seen, Metzinger argues for the interplay of content and vehicle: the phenomenal aspect is not something we are conscious of as abstracted from the experiential structuring (Metzinger, 2003a: 166). From a different standpoint, Gallagher similarly suggests that although we might be not conscious of our body as we would if we were paying attention to it, the execution of a body schema nevertheless carries an experiential sense of being the one who is currently performing some movement. And I agree with Gallagher that this basic performative awareness represents a form of pre-reflective experiential ownership. A straightforward example of this phenomenon can be found in sports activity. The philosophical literature is rarely concerned with such dimension of human life, but I think that looking at it can provide valuable insights on different issues. Consider, for instance, team sports (like football, rugby, baseball, etc.). When I find myself on the pitch, I might be conscious of the countless facets of my surroundings, as well as some aspects of my body. I might indeed focus on the acute pain in my left knee right after I tried to make a long pass, or on the particular shade of burgundy red of the opponents' jersey. While experiencing such aspects, however, I am not merely standing, but I am moving in accordance to the circumstances of the match. Moreover, the execution of complex gestures requires to pay close attention to certain elements (e.g., the ball's speed, the position of my

teammates and opponents, expected outcomes of the present situation, and so forth). My body, in this circumstance, is almost phenomenally absent – and not, as I previously suggested, transparent – insofar as my attentional resources, in order to succeed, have to be directed towards significant environmental features. The experience of such aspects is nevertheless accompanied by a sense of moving and acting in a certain way: I do not need to step back and deliberately draw the attention to the speed, the position and the overall balance of my body, in order to figure out that I should act accordingly. In this sense, a performative awareness carries a set of motor potentialities that allow me to efficiently cope with the present challenges.<sup>29</sup>

Second, even though body images and body schemas should be conceptually distinguished, I consider them as having a mutual influence. The body schema, as we have seen, is a phenomenally transparent structuring of subjective experience. As long as it determines and controls the motor execution, it also provides our experiential standpoint and that form of performative awareness I have been examining here. It might therefore affect how we are used to consider our body. However, we can arguably claim that our dispositions – such as long-term body images – could impair or enhance the execution of certain gestures. A related question would be, then, how such an influence could take place. Gallese's and Sinigaglia's notion of body schema supports, in this regard, a more externalist understanding if compared to Gallagher's. Indeed, on their view, the implementation of a body schema is sensitive to goal-oriented factors and to a social dimension (Gallese & Sinigaglia, 2010). Even though I think that the notion of goal at stake should be distinguished from the term "goal" as referred to actions, as well as the use of "social" is meant to define a level of social recognition that is prior to more mature forms, I suggest that this conception of body schemas shows the importance of environmental aspects. As such, the related emergence of performative awareness can be thought of as undergoing a developmental process of attunement. Thus, in

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<sup>29</sup> As also Gallagher suggests (see Gallagher, 2005: 64).

the next chapter, I will investigate how this plasticity ensures a specific interplay between performative awareness and other forms of self-consciousness.

#### **4.5 Conclusion: pre-reflective self-consciousness between phenomenology and ontogeny**

The aim of this chapter has been to provide a conception of pre-reflective self-consciousness that could investigate the essential, non-objective aspects of subjective experience and, at the same time, lay the foundation for further insights into the relation between prior and more complex forms of self-consciousness. I have thus introduced the notion of bodily self-consciousness through two different standpoints: on one side, we have examined Rochat's understanding of bodily awareness, whereas on the other we have also taken into account Metzinger's and Blanke's approach. While the latter argues for a dynamic interaction between different bodily aspects, the former suggests that a prior form of self-awareness remains accessible through our lifespan.

Both these conceptions rely, however, upon an objective account of the experiential appearance of bodily self-consciousness. I have therefore suggested to look at a more fundamental instance of bodily self-consciousness, which operates as an experiential structure. In this regard, I have argued that Gallagher's distinction between body image (i.e., an experience of the body as an object that might come in various degrees, such as short- and long-term body images, body percepts, body concept, body affect, and so on) and body schema (i.e., a motor program that subconsciously guides our movements and, as such, determines our experiential perspective) can allow us to identify a non-objective notion of bodily self-consciousness. I think that we have good reasons to agree with Gallagher that a performative awareness, provided by our body's motor execution, carries a self-referential feature without adding another experiential object. When I am performing some kind of movement, indeed, I do not need to reflect on my motor potentialities.

That is, performative awareness makes me pre-reflectively conscious whether I could execute a certain gesture or not.

On a different basis, Gallese and Sinigaglia argue for a form of performative awareness. They nevertheless provide a more externalist conception of body schema with respect to Gallagher's, insofar as they conceive it sensitive to intentional and social aspects. I have affirmed, yet, that we should thoughtfully consider the implications of their proposal, as long as "goal", in this context, identify a factor that might be radically different from the actual goal of an action. Similarly, when it comes to body schemas, to appeal to a social dimension might just amount to describe a form of recognition of others' movement that already takes place at the level of subpersonal motor control. This understanding, however, shows an implicit feature of Gallagher's account of body schemas, that is, the motor control can be described as affected by environmental aspects. The resulting performative awareness might be thought of, therefore, as undergoing a developmental process.

Before moving on I have proposed further refinements of this understanding of performative awareness, though. To affirm that, through performative awareness, the body as an object is phenomenally transparent can in fact lead to some misunderstandings. Indeed, according to the interpretation of phenomenal transparency provided by different authors (i.e., Harman, Tye and Metzinger), body schemas can be described as experientially transparent, while the notion of transparency cannot be applied to body images (body images could be experienced or not, since they cannot be phenomenally transparent). Moreover, on Metzinger's view, the transparency of experiential structuring and motor control processes is meant to allocate attentional and cognitive resource, in order to be more effective in pursuing our tasks. In light of these considerations, I have thus underlined the distinction between body images and performative awareness. The former should be considered a form of transitive self-consciousness – in accordance with Kriegel's definition that we saw in Chapter – that might be achieved at different levels of complexity. On the other hand, performative awareness amounts to a useful function of subjective experience, which allows us to focus on crucial aspects while it pre-

reflectively provides an experiential sense of what we could do in such a circumstance.

Furthermore, as we have seen above, this experiential structuring appears to show a certain plasticity. In this sense, we might ask what kind of relation performative awareness establishes with other forms of self-consciousness. In the next chapters I will therefore examine this relation from a developmental perspective, while considering the phenomenological and epistemological implications of the conception of pre-reflective self-consciousness that I am accounting for.

## **PART III: A Developmental Perspective**

## 5 IMPLICIT SELVES

This third part of the present text aims at discussing the implications about the notion of performative awareness that I elaborated in the previous chapter. In Chapter 4 I indeed suggested that bodily self-consciousness can be considered a complex phenomenon that is brought about by several factors. Whereas some notions of bodily awareness rely onto the assumption of temporal continuity, I endorsed a divergent understanding of bodily awareness that might disclose how our pre-reflective self-consciousness undergoes a certain development that unveils different self-referential aspects within subjective experience. In this chapter, I will draw attention to this developmental process from a phenomenological dimension. As such, I will consider some positions that argue for the presence of peculiar phenomenal aspects within pre-reflective subjective experience. In fact, from different standpoints, Schechtman and Rudd contend that pre-reflective self-consciousness embeds an implicit narrative sense, while Strawson suggests an episodic experiential self also bears a certain reference to the past. I will argue that whereas Strawson's account requires further investigations into this temporal dimension, the application of the term "narrative" invites for an understanding of pre-reflective self-consciousness that does not fit with the properties of a basic experiential engagement. I will thus claim that narrative and reflective attitudes indirectly shape pre-reflective self-consciousness. As we saw in Chapter 4, body schemas are sensitive to environmental aspects that, if we consider human beings, are determined by our reflections and stories. Performative awareness, in this regard, can be thought of as

constantly developed through narrative scenarios, thereby providing the experience of new motor potentialities.

### **5.1 Alterations of pre-reflective self-consciousness**

In the previous chapters, we focused on several accounts of basic self-consciousness. Some of them agree that, at least on the onset, self-consciousness appears to rely on capacities that are developed independently of the context in which one grows up. These accounts invite for an individualist conception, since pre-reflective self-consciousness can be found in species that do not engage in complex behaviour, thereby suggesting that this experiential form merely results from inherited characteristics. As we have seen in Chapter 3 and 4, both Zahavi and Rochat suggests that a basic form of self-consciousness lays the foundation of more complex ones (Zahavi, 2014: 90-91, 2017; Rochat, 2003, 2015). On the basis of different premises, they contend that a prior instance of self-consciousness remains constant and experientially accessible through our lifespan. Rochat, for example, put forward a "onion" or "layer building" model that does not appeal to a radical transformation of our experiential engagement: subsequent modalities of self-consciousness are simply built on the top of the previous ones (Rochat, 2003, 2015). Thus, our basic forms of experiential engagement remain potentially available on a phenomenal level.

However, and this is at the crux of the model, the achieved level of co-conscious awareness does not eliminate the possibility of experiencing all ontogenetically anterior mind states. One can oscillate from being aware, co-aware, conscious to being co-conscious depending on context and circumstances. (Rochat, 2015)

Among the other supporters of the pre-reflective self-consciousness hypothesis that we discussed in Chapter 4, we can observe, however, different understandings on the developmental trajectory of self-awareness. For example, in *How the Body shapes the Mind*, Shaun Gallagher similarly affirms that early self-consciousness is primarily embodied (Gallagher, 2005: 59). Yet, he contends that the various phenomenological

modalities of experiencing one's own body are determined by body images and body schemas, and, through divergent paths, both body images and schemas are constantly attuned with our motor needs and external stimuli (Gallagher, 2005: 26, 35, 47). In the previous chapter I suggested that, on such a premise, it seems difficult to contend that our bodily-shaped experience may not change along with our physical body. And once this developmental process is set in motion, it might be challenging to maintain the prior experiential engagement through our body. The conclusion that I drew from Gallagher's and others' views, nevertheless, does not merely rest on the assumption that the body appearance – i.e., the body image – might change over time. Indeed, one could object that such alterations in experiencing one's own body only amount to the content of bodily experience or, to quote Zahavi, to the "what" of subjective experience. This suggests that whereas some aspects might seem more or less relevant in accordance with our ever-changing purposes, the experiential modality – that is, "how" we experience – endures the phenomenological changes of the experiential milieu. Nevertheless, I think that Gallagher's and my proposals rest on the underlying premise that "how" we experience ourselves and our surroundings is intimately entangled with our disposition to move (Gallagher, 2005: 26, 64). Accordingly, the motor program singled out by the body schema determines how subjective experience occurs in different environments or, to put it differently, «conscious experience is itself constrained and shaped by my prenoetic motility» (Gallagher, 2005: 64). This should allow us to affirm, as I did in Chapter 4, that since body schemas are affected by further developments our pre-reflective self-experience appears to undergo ontogenetic processes, and thereby it does not retain its primitive experiential modalities.

Like Gallagher, Gallese and Sinigaglia stress the role the body and motion play in shaping subjective experience. Their enactive perspective, indeed, shares some interesting observation with Gallagher's view on motor schemas. However, the Italian authors also suggests that the experience of bodily potential – that is, the pre-reflective sense of being the one who is able to perform a certain act – is further attuned through the engagement in social interactions (Gallese & Sinigaglia, 2010).

Rather than being simply employed in the execution of motor programs, several studies have in fact suggested that our cerebral motor cortex is also sensitive to the perception of the movement of others. As we saw in the preceding chapter, those groups of neurons that activate in movement recognition have been called mirror neurons (Pellegrino et al., 1992; Gallese et al., 1996). The mirror-neuron system introduces a social – or, as I would rather say, relational<sup>30</sup> – dimension at the core of the notion of body schema. Indeed, as Gallese and Sinigaglia argue, a minimal form of self-awareness relies on our disposition to act, which in turn is co-determined by the relation with other individuals (Gallese & Sinigaglia, 2010).

In light of these reflections, I have thus contended that pre-reflective self-consciousness is best understood in ontogenetic and relational terms. That is to say, how we pre-reflectively access a form of self-consciousness does not endure through the lifespan. Rather, there is an interdependence between pre-reflective self-consciousness and (social) aspects of the environment. This revision of the monolithic picture of Rochat's first level of self-awareness – as well as Zahavi's minimal self – allows to raise some questions about what kind of phenomenological approach we should endorse. Should we in fact abandon a perpetual and individualistic notion of minimal self-consciousness? If subjective experience is a dynamic phenomenon that undergoes relevant alterations, are its fundamental structures susceptible to some modifications as well? Zahavi's answer to this issue insists on the unavoidable

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<sup>30</sup> The term "relational" is introduced in a recent article by Daniel Hutto and Jesús Ilundáin-Agurruza to distinguish between individualistic and non-individualistic account of the emergence of minimal self-consciousness (Hutto & Ilundáin-Agurruza, 2018). Although one might object that this amounts to a mere terminological choice, I do think that "relational" better captures, if compared to term "social" the variety of views that consider the self-consciousness as the product of intersubjective interaction. Several accounts, indeed, contend that a minimal form of self-consciousness is by no means prior to early kinds of relation, such as the ones that are expressed in skin-to-skin interactions between newborn and caregiver (Ciaunica & Fotopoulou, 2017) or even in intra-uterus forms of coordination (Castiello et al., 2010; Lymer, 2011; Ciaunica, 2017). Thus, I suggest that such interactions may not be evaluated as genuinely social, like linguistic communications, rule-following and other more mature practices. The term "relational", then, is meant to include various forms of intersubjective interaction within a broad cluster, wherein some forms may display peculiar (social) structures.

character of being-for-me-ness of the stream of consciousness (Zahavi, 2014: 19). In Chapter 3 I have already argued, however, that by stripping away some phenomenological feature we might end up elaborating a too formal notion, which lacks the explanatory power to account for humans' specific forms of pre-reflective self-consciousness. The point, here, is that experiential ownership is embedded within an experiential engagement that is subjected to a developmental process. In the following pages, I will therefore argue that a basic form of self-consciousness (i.e., performative awareness) establishes a certain relation with other instances, and thereby shows an ontogenetic trajectory.

## **5.2 The richness of pre-reflective self-consciousness**

When it comes to the relation between reflective forms of self-consciousness and our basic experiential engagement, a number of positions have argued that pre-reflective self-consciousness embeds more than mere experiential ownership (see, for example, Schechtman, 2007, 2014; Rudd, 2012; and, as I read it, Strawson, 1999, 2004). They suggest that, in this regard, some reflections on ourselves might be integrated in our subjective experience. These authors therefore agree that a self-referential character of experience should be considered, at least at some point in humans' life, more complex than a mere being-for-me-ness. Consider, for example, episodic and diachronic accounts of self-constitution. A diachronic understanding implies that the emergence of a self within subjective experience is a process that extends through time. On this view, one identifies one's "self" in virtue of relating a number of happenings that one has witnessed or has been told. Episodic accounts, instead, affirm that the self is constituted in the present moment and has a relatively short duration. Following the latter line of reasoning, countless selves are meant to unfold in our conscious life. Obviously, diachronic and episodic perspectives contend divergent takes on the development of a genuine self-consciousness. Whereas diachronics affirm that a full-blown self-consciousness emerges when a subject is able to step back from, reflect on and relate life events, episodics argue that the

phenomenological presence of a subject of experience takes place in the very moment of the living experience.

I'll call the subject that must remain when everything but experience has been stripped away the 'minimal' subject. The fact that I'm calling it 'minimal' doesn't mean that there's any respect in which it isn't a genuine subject, a whole subject of experience. In a fully articulated metaphysics of mind, the minimal subject may turn out to be the best candidate for being called 'the subject' tout court: it is arguable that the propriety of calling organisms like human beings 'subjects of experience' is wholly grounded in. (Strawson, 2011: 254)

Galen Strawson is certainly the most resolute advocate of the episodic view on the self (Strawson, 1999, 2004, 2011). In light of the issue that I am dealing with in these pages, however, his position appears to be consistent with some diachronic views if we take a closer look at his understanding of the “living moment”.

In the 1999 article *The Self and the SESMET*, Strawson distinguishes between selves and human beings, and furthermore affirms that the kind of self-understanding that concerns the former does not necessarily take either a diachronic or a narrative form (Strawson, 1999, but see also Strawson, 2004, 2011). According to Strawson, the self is experientially anchored in the present moment: there is no need to appeal to a sort of temporal continuity between earlier happenings and expectations regarding the future – this would be the case for entities like human beings. However, how we experience such short-lived selves is not only constituted by the experiential feel of being present at a given moment and in a given space. Past experiences and expectations are in fact implicitly embodied within this self-experience.

The past is not alive in memory, as Diachronics may find, but it is alive — Episodics might say more truly alive — in the form of the present: in so far as it has shaped the way one is in the present. There is no reason to think that the present is less informed by or responsible to the past in the Episodic life than in the Diachronic life. (Strawson, 1999)

The past can be alive – arguably more genuinely alive – in the present simply in so far as it has helped to shape the way one is in the present, just as musicians' playing can incorporate and body forth their past practice without being mediated by any explicit memory of it. (Strawson, 2004)

Interestingly, a similar description of pre-reflective self-consciousness can be found within diachronic accounts. Among them, the mainstream understanding of how diachronic self-consciousness occurs – and, in some cases, should occur – is the narrative perspective (Taylor, 1989; Ricoeur, 1992; Dennett, 1991, 1992; Nelson, 2003; Schechtman, 1996, 2007, 2012; Rudd, 2012). As Strawson properly points out, a diachronic self-understanding does not necessary entail a narrative form: one might be conscious of being a unique subject who has to deal with manifold autobiographical events that have no relation at all. Thus, Strawson insists, a narrative perspective adds another layer to a diachronic standpoint, since narrativity is essentially «form-finding» (Strawson, 2004). In this sense, we should note that narrative positions argue for specific – and, some might claim, narrower – instance of diachronic self-understanding. However, as I already stated earlier, what is at stake here is the comprehension of certain experiential features of pre-reflective self-consciousness as they are similarly described by both episodic and diachronic accounts.

### *5.2.1 The narrative understanding of pre-reflective self-consciousness*

“Narrative” is a key term within the philosophical debate on self-consciousness. Yet, there is no general agreement on how we should identify the essential features of narrative self-consciousness. Indeed, Marya Schechtman argues that we can found three different understandings within the range of philosophical positions on «what it is to have a narrative» (Schechtman, 2007: 159). A first view is what we may call a weak notion of narrative self-consciousness, that is, in order to be self-conscious in a narrative form, one «must be able to organize her life according to a fundamental implicit knowledge of the events in her history» (Schechtman, 2007: 160). This implicit

narrative is meant to allow the subject to perform her basic functioning. A middle-range view would instead affirm that, at least sometimes, one must make her narrative understanding explicit and thereby be conscious of them. Finally, a strong reading of narrative self-consciousness would contend that this form of self-consciousness is necessary to live a meaningful life. As such, a person «must actively and consciously undertake to live and understand her life as a story in the strong sense – with a unified theme and little or no extraneous material» (Schechtman, 2007: 161).

These different positions are usually elaborated in virtue of moral and/or normative assumptions. In fact, the first also refers to a proper way of employing human functions, whereas the strong view identifies explicit narrative understanding as an extrinsic value in the process of grasping our life *telos*. However, another distinction should be considered vital for the present investigation into the relation between pre-reflective and reflective self-consciousness. What I am trying to draw the attention to, here, is the acknowledgement of implicit and explicit narrative forms self-consciousness. That is to say, whether or not we are committed to a strong narrative view, we could nonetheless think about an implicit narrative consciousness, which takes place in our conscious life even if we are not explicitly reflecting on it. This shed, in this sense, an interesting light on the relation between narrative and subjective experience, insofar as narrative might be thought of as implicitly affecting pre-reflective consciousness.

The emergence of narrative self-consciousness in subjective experience has been a relevant topic not only within the philosophical debate, but also in empirical research (see, for example, Nelson, 2003; Nelson & Fivush, 2004; Habermas & Reese, 2015; Delafield-Butt & Trevarthen, 2015). Among others, the developmental psychologist Katherine Nelson has studied how social relations shape the infants' world. One of her research topics concerns the acquisition of language and linguistic practices. In a 2003 article, she argued for an understanding of the influence of higher forms of self-consciousness that is consistent with the notion of implicit narrative seen above. Indeed, on her view, the development of new levels of self-awareness has

both vertical implications – i.e., the achievement of higher forms of understanding – and horizontal consequences on the cognitive system as a whole.

The image is not so much of bootstrapping as of ratcheting up; each new level of understanding reached reveals new sources of knowledge and evokes a new effort at organization within and across domains. An analogy can be invoked with the acquisition of succeeding levels of visual perspective made possible with the achievement of new levels of locomotion, with first sitting up, then crawling (new vistas appear), then cruising (again, new perspectives on old scenes and newly viewed objects), then walking freely (no longer tied to secure supports). (Nelson, 2003: 19)

According to Nelson, narrative self-consciousness goes beyond the experience of a «self-in-the-now world» and provides us with the ability to disclose meaningful aspects for ourselves (Nelson, 2003: 30). Nelson affirms that, in virtue of the development of different levels of awareness, our experiential engagement appears somewhat «hybrid» (Nelson, 2003: 24). Different levels of awareness unfold in our conscious life, but we might only appeal to one of them while navigating in our environment. Furthermore, the occurrence of some levels can be thought of as earlier and independent from other ones. The phenomenal persistence of these levels might change, however, «in function and form as they interact with other levels and as each succeeding level takes on some of the functions previously served by a preceding one» (Nelson, 2003: 30). Thus, a related issue would be how to construe the phenomenological consequences of developing a form of explicit narrative self-consciousness.

In Chapter 2 we already saw a specific conception of how narrative practices affect pre-reflective self-consciousness. Specifically, we looked at Rudd's view on implicit narrative and evaluations.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Rudd argues that narrative impacts our life in different modalities and, as such, we should recognise four layers of narrative

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<sup>31</sup> Given Schechtman's distinction between weak, intermediate and strong narrative views, Rudd's position could be described as a strong form of narrative standpoint. Yet, as I read it, he also stresses an implicit narrative sense within subjective experience.

characterisation (Rudd, 2012: 181). The first is the proto-narrative structure (Rudd, 2012: 180-181). As I read it, here Rudd suggests that events that unfold in our conscious life already match a potential narrative about them, even if we are not aware of it. Implicit narrative represents the second layer: we consciously act while implicitly retaining some experiential expectations. Our «past history has established the *meaning* of my present situation» (Rudd, 2012: 190). As such, certain phenomenal aspects appear as more or less meaningful to us, as well as emotionally relevant. (Rudd, 2012: 167, 181). But this implicit sense may eventually be articulated through an explicit narrative – i.e., the third layer of narrative structure. Indeed, we might step back from our actions and memories, trying to find a certain relation among them and thus making some predictions about our future (Rudd, 2012: 181-182). What allows us, then, to avoid self-deception while making such narratives is an «ideally truthful narrative» (fourth layer), «the one that really does (or would) correspond to the (proto-)narrative structure of my life, whether or not this ideal narrative is ever actually told» (Rudd, 2012: 181).

The second level of narrative structure described by Rudd is the most relevant for the purpose of the present investigation. Rudd, in fact, develops this notion of implicit narrative in contrast with Zahavi's minimal self.

I understand what I am doing, or what is happening to me, in narrative terms without having to stop and think about it. I see this cafe as the place I need to get to because I agreed to meet you there, because we had decided that we wanted to see the play together, because... I don't have to spell all this out to myself in order to experience it in that way. Similarly, I don't need to explicitly say to myself, "that is a tree", "that is a chair", in order to see things around me *as* trees, chairs and so on. (Rudd, 2012: 180)

By claiming that pre-reflective experience carries self-referential aspects, Rudd contends that subjective experience can be affected by further aspects, other than by a sense of experiential ownership. On this view, this sense is enriched by personal attitudes, volitions and habits that result from our ability to narrate about our life. At

least in adulthood there is no impersonal self that is carried by an everlasting experiential feature. (Rudd, 2012: 194). Thus, Rudd concludes, if such a thing as Zahavi's minimal self is to be individuated as a truly experienced feature in conscious life, we should look at it as a primitive step that we might be able to identify in newborns, but which nonetheless radically changes in adulthood by means of narrative practices. Otherwise, Rudd insists, we would describe the phenomenal continuity of the minimal self as a form of timeless or eternal persistence – a «maximal» self (Rudd, 2012: 200).

Although she contends a middle-range view on narrative self-consciousness<sup>32</sup>, Schechtman agrees with Rudd when it comes to describe pre-reflective subjective experience as not merely object-presenting (Schechtman, 2007: 162, 2014: 100, 102). As Schechtman argues, the experiential scenario is constrained by «the lens through which we experience the world. Persons experience their present as flowing from a particular past and flowing toward a particular future, and this way of relating to the present changes the character of experience altogether» (Schechtman, 2014: 100). On this view, then, certain objects enter our subjective experience in virtue of a particular flavour or significance. My car is not only another red element within my field of vision. Rather, to experience it carries an implicit connection with past events that have been relevant in my life (at the beginning, they were joyful memories, such as the first road trips without my parents, whereas the last year they have been unpleasant recollections of expensive fixing up), as well as tacit expectations. Thus, according to Schechtman, pre-reflective consciousness does not only disclose a world we are experientially engaging with, but also reveal some aspects that are deeply related to ourselves – at least at a certain stage in our life. Implicit narrative consciousness, thereby, might be considered a basic form of pre-reflective self-consciousness that expands minimal self-consciousness.

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<sup>32</sup> Schechtman initially elaborated her proposal by means of the Narrative Self-Constitution View (Schechtman, 1996). Over the years, she has refined this view by expanding her insights on narrative and practical constitution with literal understandings of personal identity. Eventually, she has brought together those considerations in *Staying Alive. Personal Identity, Practical Concerns, and the Unity of Life* (Schechtman, 2014).

### 5.2.2 *Embedding narratives*

Schechtman's and Rudd's claim is that life narratives are embodied in our pre-reflective behaviour. I think that this understanding of the influence between different forms of self-consciousness is better equipped than Zahavi's in capturing the developmental process that pre-reflective awareness is subjected to. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter 3, Zahavi puts forward a notion of minimal self-consciousness that is meant to be non-objective and also essential to all conscious phenomena. This conception, however, falls short when it comes to account for the development of humans' specific forms of self-consciousness. Instead, I suggest that Schechtman's and Rudd's proposals make room for a developmental perspective within the study of pre-reflective self-consciousness, insofar as they maintain that our prior experiential engagement embeds some significant aspects from reflective attitudes. Still, it does not follow that that we should stop seeking for some basic and prior features of pre-reflective self-consciousness. These subjects are in fact of the utmost importance for evolutionary, neuroscientific and medical research. But we should not overlook how such an enterprise might eventually turn into a phenomenological abstraction. And, therefore, it might prevent us from defining phenomena that are relevant at the personal level.

My claim is that self-consciousness is to be considered an ongoing process that undergoes a certain development and expansion. For we might isolate some basic features of subjective experience, but we should also construe them within the developmental scenario that characterises our life. In chapter 4, indeed, I contended that a basic form of self-consciousness such as performative awareness cannot be abstracted from the relation with environmental and ontogenetic aspects. From a similar standpoint, Thomas Fuchs in fact suggests that our lived body integrates an implicit memory of «established habits and skills» (Fuchs, 2016: 306).

Bodily existence would give us just an abstract identity or sameness, namely the diachronic coherence of a basic bodily self, but no qualitative identity – being the sort of persons that we are. However, this would mean to neglect the history of

the lived body that increasingly becomes the medium of our individual existence during the course of a biography. For all enactments of life are integrated into the memory of the body, and here they remain preserved as experiences, dispositions, inclinations and skills. (Fuchs, 2016: 305-306)

This leads to challenging task of accounting for the influence of higher forms of self-consciousness on pre-reflective instances. In this chapter, I have introduced two different interpretations of the embodiment of some phenomenal aspects within subjective experience. On one hand, Schechtman and Rudd suggest that our experiential engagement embeds the reflective and narratives practices that we employ towards the meaningful characteristics of our life. To consider events deeply relevant – which also takes into account how others describe events as meaningful for us – leads to an implicit, self-referred, understanding of subjective experience. Strawson's conception, on the other hand, seems to refer to the improvement of some practical skills. On this view, phenomenal consciousness is pre-reflectively informed by previous experiences, and thereby makes us able to cope with certain circumstances in a specific manner. But whereas Strawson's standpoint appears to be somewhat vague since it merely appeals to the past as being «alive – arguably more genuinely alive – in the present» (Strawson, 2004: 432), the narrative account identifies a particular reflective attitude to be the at the basis of this experiential development.

The notion of "implicit narrative", or "implicit narrative self-consciousness", allow for a specific interpretation of such a pre-reflective phenomenal aspect, in which a number of other concepts such as "character", "author", "narrator", "story", acquire a noteworthy relevance. The narrative understanding carries, therefore, a certain perspective within the discussion of pre-reflective self-consciousness. This is not unproblematic, though. Indeed, given these different meanings that are integrated within the notion of narrative, could we properly define pre-reflective self-consciousness as "narrative"? Consider, for example, the concept of "author". Narratives are in general elaborated through someone's point of view, but they might also come by means of a pluralistic perspective. Even though modern literature offers

several instances of narrator concealment, life narratives are the outcomes of one's – and one's acquaintances – telling stories about oneself. Instead, I contend that the development of performative awareness has no "author", and rather results from the interplay of several self-referred and environmental aspects. In consequence, such an implicit self-experience comes to bear self-referred aspects in virtue of embedding different cues from manifold sources: recurring physical practices, processes of hetero-determination (e.g., how our society might see the social group we are a part of) and phenomenological training (the ability to recognise certain environmental cues; e.g., certain species of mushrooms in the woods), besides narrative attitudes.

The notion of pre-reflective self-consciousness that emerges from this perspective is therefore thought of as the outcome of an ongoing experiential settling, which differs from the creation of narratives. Indeed, while this experiential sense of self appears to embody the stories we narrate, it is not as responsive to self-shaping practices as the explicit narratives we create in accord with others. To illustrate this point, we might think about the difference between autobiographical and episodic memories. Autobiographical memories usually carry both episodic and semantic aspects. They are explicit and require a certain cognitive effort. Episodic memories, on the other hand, can simply emerge from our stream consciousness when we are faced with certain particulars of the environment. Thus, while a re-interpretation of autobiographical memories can be easily achieved by means of deliberate reflection, episodic memories are more difficult to be affected by reflective practices.

Moreover, narratives have particular structures and follow specific rules, especially when applied to tell someone's life.<sup>33</sup> Schechtman in fact affirms that, in

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<sup>33</sup> Dennett instead argues for a broad and more relaxed conception of self-narrative (Dennett, 1991, 1992). As he suggests, «our tales are spun, but for the most part we don't spin them; they spin us. Our human consciousness, and our narrative selfhood, is their product, not their source» (Dennett, 1991: 418). This position, however, risks to widen too much the notion of narrative and makes it trivial. In fact, if we are to conceive narrative as pervasive in conscious life, we should still define how "narrative" can be easily applied to both higher forms of conscious behaviour and basic conscious phenomena.

order to properly allow us to constitute our identities, narratives must meet the reality and the articulation constrains (Schechtman, 2007: 162-163, 2012: 336, 2014: 101). According to the reality constraint, narratives must be consistent with our general understanding of actual events of this world – i.e., self-related narrative should not include unrealistic scenarios, such as people flying or breathing through water. The articulation constraint instead insists on the necessity of our being able to recognise a certain pattern in our lives' events and, potentially, to make it explicit. In this sense, narrative appears to be deliberate attitudes that involve knowledge and explicit linguistic expression. As such, implicit narratives appear as derivative forms of a full-fledged narrative self-consciousness.

The notion of narrative self-consciousness, in sum, seem to be rather demanding when it comes to account a form of pre-reflective self-consciousness. In face of this critique one could still hold on to this notion and suggest that narratives are gradual phenomena. This understanding of narrative structures would allow us to affirm that although explicit narratives rely on certain features – e.g., they have a certain point of view and follow specific rules – these characteristics simply belong to a specific form of narratives, which have to be construed within a broader concept of narrative.<sup>34</sup> We might then conceive several instances of narrative as possessing different properties that may or not be present. However, I think that the relation between pre-reflective self-consciousness and explicit narratives does not rest on the presence of certain common properties. Instead of suggesting that pre-reflective self-consciousness pertains to a gradual or derivative form of narrative consciousness, I rather contend that the relation between them results from a reciprocal influence. Explicit narratives are, indeed, elaborated on the basis of an implicit understanding of our reality which carries relevant self-referred aspects. At the same time, the

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<sup>34</sup> Rather than defending a gradational view of narratives, I think that both Schechtman and Rudd argue for a derivative conception of implicit narratives. On this view, implicit narrative understanding is defined on the basis of either an explicit or an ideal form of narrative self-consciousness.

persistence of certain explicit narrative attitudes has an impact on our basic experiential engagement.

### **5.3 Narrative contexts and performative awareness**

In light of the previous discussion, I have suggested that a more compelling position on pre-reflective self-consciousness should take into account this mutual relation between pre-reflective awareness and explicit narrative, while affirming that they pertain to a different range of personal attitudes. Daniel Hutto suggests, for example, that we cannot consider our basic experiential engagement as properly narrative, even though, from folk-psychological standpoint, to deal with narrative practices has in fact a deep impact onto our understanding of certain events (Hutto, 2007, 2014: 25-26).

Sustained experience with folk psychological narratives primes us for this richer practical understanding by giving us an initial sense of: which kinds of background factors can matter, why they do so, and how they do so in particular cases. Stories can do this because they are not bare descriptions of current beliefs and desires of idealised rational agents—they are snapshots of the adventures of situated persons, presented in the kinds of settings in which all of the important factors needed for understanding reasons are described; those that are relevant to making sense of what is done and why. (Hutto, 2007: 63)

On this view, if we are to adopt this interpretation of narrative influence on experiential life, the claim that pre-reflective self-consciousness is to be understood as narrative at a certain stage of personal development would amount to a further conclusion – which both Rudd and Schechtman would endorse. This, as Hutto argues, would require a substantial explanation of why we should conceive of a certain form of pre-reflective self-consciousness as genuinely narrative (Hutto, 2014: 37-38). But, as I have already suggested, we should not understand the relation between implicit and explicit narratives as a gradual occurrence of some properties. Moreover, the

appearance of an implicit sense of self might simply rely on the embodiment of certain habits and practices within a specific form of experiential engagement that differs from explicit narrating.

Thus, to insist that pre-reflective self-consciousness obtains a narrative form would either leave us wanting or add an unnecessary label to a more basic understanding. In fact, although I still consider narrative practices as significant for the ontogenesis of pre-reflective self-consciousness, I defend a different account of the diachronicity and the development of experiential selves. In accordance with the discussion provided in Chapter 4, bodily self-consciousness has been meant to denote an experiential phenomenon that is sensitive to an environmental attunement. Our motor potential, and the related experiential feel, is thus developed through a constant practice in certain scenarios. In fact, I have endorsed an externalist understanding of body schema on the basis of Gallese and Sinigaglia's studies on the plasticity of motor control (Gallese & Sinigaglia, 2010, 2011, 2014). On this view, since the body schemas are sensitive to environmental facets, as well as to the movement execution of other individuals, motor programs can be developed by means of dealing with new tasks and challenges. As a result, I argue that we can create new motor gestures and habits and, furthermore, pre-reflectively experience new motor potentialities through a performative awareness. Thus, the way we experience ourselves while performing our everyday activities arguably «has its basis in embodied habits, routines and repertoires for engaging with the world formed early in our development and in later life» (Hutto, 2014: 38; see also Fuchs, 2016: 312).

In this scenario of performative attunement, narrative still plays a key role. But rather than affirming that a narrative self-consciousness is embodied in pre-reflective subjective experience, I suggest that our activities usually take place in contexts that are defined by linguistic interactions and, furthermore, conceived in narrative terms. Think about how our reflection shapes the environment in which we improve our motor potentialities. Rewriting history, for example, is a well-known technique that allows athletes to improve their training sessions and thereby their gestures. It consists in recalling the decision that had been made in regard to a specific problem.

Imagine a child who approaches a new sport, such as rugby. Initially, while carrying the ball, children usually have some difficulties in moving forward to score a try while evading their opponents and without crossing the field's edges. In order to correct this behaviour narrative and reflective attitudes are required: first, it is important to ask the child about the decision she took, and whether other possibilities were worth to try. Then, on the basis of some considerations on what happened, a coach should modify the characteristics of the game (rules, field, number of the opponents, etc; we could also think about self-made training sessions for more mature athletes) to help the child to put in practice what she reflected on. Once she becomes constantly able to execute that movement, the coach can also increase the difficulty to improve her skill. Nevertheless, this suggest that the child has developed new motor potentialities, which she could only think about earlier. Reflection and narrative, in this regard, have indirectly shaped her performative awareness through an alteration of the practical context. On a similar line of reasoning, Kim Atkins contends that our skilful movements are not merely developed within an unstructured environment.

However, the possibilities for action that the world presents one with are not simply a function of a radically individualised body but are also functions of the interpersonal and social cultures in which we live out our incarnate existence and within which human movement is already signified. In this sense, the spatiality of the world is a space modulated by human culture. My body is never reducible to its materiality because it is always already a socially, culturally situated being. (Atkins, 2008: 44)

As such, the practices that shape pre-reflective self-consciousness can be determined by means of narrative attitudes. In this sense, although the understanding of performative awareness that I endorse avoids a conceptual blurring between narratives and pre-reflective awareness, the development of our basic experiential engagement also relies on reflective practices. Indeed, on one side, the self-experience of motor potentialities is meant to undergo a developmental trajectory in virtue of the plasticity of the motor control; on the other, this plasticity makes the

motor execution sensitive to environmental aspects that, for human beings, are shaped by reflective and narrative attitudes.

#### **5.4 Conclusion: a complex phenomenology**

In this chapter, I have addressed the phenomenological implications of the notion of performative awareness developed in Chapter 4. At the end of the previous chapter, indeed, I contended that the externalist conception of body schemas can make room for a developmental perspective of performative awareness. If we consider bodily self-consciousness from an enactive standpoint – which invites us to conceive bodily awareness not only as a mere proprioceptive perception but as a form of performative awareness – we might in fact understand how the experiential presence of the body is attuned with our environment and through constant practice. In this sense, a developmental conception of bodily self-consciousness discloses the potentialities and the adaptability of the motor system.

Following this line of reasoning, Chapter 5 has aimed at investigating into the relation between performative awareness and further forms of self-consciousness. As we have seen, other accounts of pre-reflective self-consciousness hint towards potential modifications of our basic experiential engagement. Galen Strawson, on the one hand, argues that selves are short-lived (episodic) phenomena. He also suggests, nevertheless, that such an experiential appearance embeds past experiences and practices, thus making this sense of selfhood more than experiential ownership. Some narrative conceptions of self-consciousness – i.e., Rudd's and Schechtman's – state, on the other hand, that implicit narratives are embodied within subjective experience. As a result, we do not need to reflect upon some experiential aspects in order to perceive them as meaningful, insofar as our life narratives operate at a pre-reflective level.

Both these episodic and diachronic understandings of selfhood support, therefore, a certain developmental perspective on pre-reflective self-consciousness. On this view, experiential facets are presented as more or less familiar: their

phenomenal appearance is held as significant and meaningful for us. Unlike Strawson, Rudd and Schechtman explicitly point out the source of this experiential richness: pre-reflective experiences retain an implicit sense of the stories that we narrate along with others. How we are used to narrate some relevant objects and events has remarkable consequences on how we perceive them. I have argued, nevertheless, for a more frugal understanding of this ontogenetic process that does not commit us to a trivial use of the term "narrative". Indeed, I have considered narrative an explicit attitude determined by certain constraints, which do not apply to the pre-reflective dimension of subjective experience. As I see it, pre-reflective self-consciousness does not appeal to some sort of author, but rather results from several environmental and internal sources. Moreover, it appears as less receptive to our reflective attitudes than some other narrative forms.

Our narratives still contribute, however, to the developmental trajectory of pre-reflective self-consciousness, insofar as they shape the context in which we improve our performative awareness through a constant practice. Indeed, while body schemas are informed by some basic aspects of our environment, narratives and reflections determines how we live it. Thus, our narrative attitudes indirectly affect the experiential sense of motor potentialities that is brought by performative awareness.

This understanding might allow us to pose some question about cross-cultural features or the actual timeline of the ontogenesis of pre-reflective self-consciousness. Moreover, a relevant issue would be the investigation into the acquisition of a normative dimension: given a specific circumstance, do our motor potentialities discriminate between right and wrong movements? Is this the prior step into the development of rule-following behaviours? The answer to these questions is far beyond the purpose of the present research. Nevertheless, I do hope that my phenomenological analyses could represent the bedrock of future studies on the experiential self.

Another relevant question concerns the epistemological implications of this approach. On the basis of the discussion provided in these pages, how should we construe the concept of self-consciousness at stake here? In the next chapter, I will

therefore focus on some approaches that define self-consciousness as a cluster term, and examine how my approach could be compared with them.

## 6 ONTOGENETIC STEPS

The previous chapter focussed on the phenomenological implications of endorsing a developmental notion of pre-reflective self-consciousness. I argued that, indeed, performative awareness is subjected to a specific influence from more complex forms of self-consciousness. Such a claim bears crucial consequences on the epistemological framework of the present research. In this chapter, I will therefore define the concept of self-consciousness at stake here. Through the present text, I have illustrated several notions of self-consciousness. In this regard, I have considered "self-consciousness" a cluster concept. To show the relations that occur among the different instance of the cluster, I will compare my proposal with Gallagher's pattern theory of self. In virtue of this comparison, I will argue that the conception developed here relies upon a relational understanding of the different instances of self-consciousness. This view shows, moreover, some similarities with Schechtman's Person Life View. Indeed, my understanding of the concept of self-consciousness rests on a mutual reinforcement of the instances. Finally, I will thus consider whether Schechtman's homeostatic model could be applied to the notion of performative awareness at different level of analysis.

### 6.1 The dimensions of self-consciousness

In everyday life, self-consciousness takes place in several ways and different contexts. We may consider ourselves bodies that need healing procedure. Likewise, we could represent ourselves as animal organisms which possess natural instincts. However, we

may also come up with more intellectual concerns and affirm that as persons we must be able to control these tendencies. We may be concerned with the continuity through time of the self, whereas in other circumstances we could think of ourselves as members of a social community. In Chapter 1, I identified these instances as various forms of reflective self-consciousness. In short, a reflective attitude upon the self rests on the ability to introspect our experiences and to identify some sort of connection between them. The self, for example, might be construed as a certain entity to which those experiences belong. In contrast, pre-reflective self-consciousness can be understood as the experiential presence of certain phenomenal aspects that refer to the subject of experience. The latter notion therefore suggests that phenomenal consciousness already embeds a form of «self-givenness», even when we do not explicitly reflect on our conscious life (Zahavi, 2014: 11).

As I pointed out in Chapter 1, the phenomenon of pre-reflective self-consciousness has been the main target of the present investigation. Rather than defining the nature and the characteristics of some sort of entity, I have focused on how human beings become able to pre-reflectively relate their experience and thoughts to themselves. Hence, on the one hand, my proposal has not appealed to a specific ontological commitment about the self. The principal objective here has been to define the phenomenal appearance of a certain experiential features which, furthermore, allows us to discern some relevant aspects of our experience and to organise them through a self-referential perspective.

On the other hand, to draw the attention on an experiential form of self-givenness has disclosed divergent understandings of how this phenomenon may occur. Indeed, several positions of pre-reflective self-consciousness are concerned with different features of subjective experience. For example, Zahavi contends that “being-for-me-ness” is a basic modality of subjective experience, which rests on the essential structure of time-consciousness (Zahavi, 2014: 64-65). Other authors instead insist that the sense of ownership is carried by the phenomenal presence of the body. On this view, the body is meant to be the prior source of sensory information, as long as it gives an experiential point of view and guides our movement performance – and

thereby affects the experiential feedback we receive. Others suggest that a basic form of self-experience does not endure through one's development. In this regard, it has been argued that attending to social practices enhances our sense of experiencing through a specific intentional act (Ratcliffe, 2017). Finally, narrativists as Schechtman and Rudd contend that even life stories are embedded in the experiential engagement with ourselves and the environment (Schechtman, 2007; Rudd, 2012).

From a phenomenological point of view, I have argued that a specific notion of pre-reflective self-consciousness can lay the foundation for further forms, and also make room for a developmental understanding of this phenomenon. As such, in Chapter 4, I have suggested that we have good reasons to affirm that the body carries a prior form of awareness. The early emergence suggests that bodily experience plays a foundational role. But although our body could be thought of as determining the experiential milieu, it also provides a performative awareness while executing movements. Our motor skills, moreover, are constantly shaped through the engagement with environmental stimuli. For example, our body is experienced from the moment of birth within a phenomenal space, which determines the range of our gestures (e.g., what can I grab, where can I get to, and the like) that we can perform in a restricted time (e.g., what can I do in a given period, thus understanding the difficulty of executing two complex gestures at the same time). This allows to develop diachronic dimension of the body, since our gestures retain certain executions and the experiential feel that they generate (see Chapter 4 and 5, and also Hutto, 2014: 37-38; Fuchs, 2016: 312). Furthermore, our gestures are usually acquired in intersubjective practices. At the beginning, they might be very basic. Consider, for instance, the bodily interaction between a mother and her child (Feldman et al., 2013). Throughout lifespan, however, social interactions become more complex and are often conceived via linguistic and narrative understanding. As such, our motor potentialities also embody habits and patterns that are indirectly influenced by higher-level social behaviours. Thus, the analyses elaborated in the preceding chapters have revealed the importance of considering different phenomenal facets of pre-reflective self-consciousness within an ontogenetic trajectory.

The present understanding of the development of self-consciousness diverges, in this regard, from those views that are supposed to highlight specific features that do not enter an ontogenetic process (e.g., Zahavi's minimal self and Rochat's conception of proprioceptive awareness). My proposal in fact aims at posing the conceptual basis for a relational account of self-consciousness, and rests on the underlying assumption that the concept of "self-consciousness" denotes a multiplicity of phenomena. In the following pages, I will show the epistemological background of such a multifaceted notion.

## **6.2 Self as a meta-pattern**

Within the philosophical and cognitive science debate on self-consciousness and self, Shaun Gallagher's pattern theory represents a well-known attempt to define an overall epistemological framework for several notions. As Gallagher puts it, the pattern theory conceives the "self" as a cluster concept that is thought to include a number of patterns.<sup>35</sup> On this view, then, divergent notions are considered as discerning specific patterns. At the same time, every pattern is referred to as emerging from the organisation of certain elements (Gallagher, 2013). As such, this theory is not meant to determine once and for all what we should call "the self". Interestingly, it does not even discriminate between reflective and pre-reflective dispositions towards the self. Rather, Gallagher's proposal remains pluralistic on these definitional issues and attempts to establish the epistemological relations among divergent patterns – as well as among the factors they consist of.

The pattern theory of self is thought to work at three level of analysis. The first one concerns a theoretical meta-level, that is, the definition of the connections among single patterns.

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<sup>35</sup> Gallagher explicitly refers to a pattern theory of the "self". However, as we have seen in the previous chapters, Gallagher argues for an experiential understanding of the self. As such, some of the notions that appear within his pattern theory can be considered as forms of self-consciousness. This should not prevent us, nevertheless, from considering Gallagher's theory as a model thought to capture the complexity of certain concepts.

First, one can think of the pattern theory of self as operating like a meta-theory that defines a schema of possible theories of self, each of which would itself be a pattern theory. For example, the meta-theory can claim that elements *a* through *g* are all possible aspects that can be included in any particular pattern theory of self. Such a meta-theory would aim to provide a complete list of such elements and to map out all possible pattern theories of self. (Gallagher, 2013)

The second level of application refers to the possibility that every pattern might single out a specific self or selfhood, since each of the patterns points to a certain configuration of constituting elements. Finally, the third level concerns the understanding of individual selves through the pattern's structure. In this sense, a certain self might be considered as such, even though it could lack the specific features that a certain pattern identifies.

It goes without saying that, following this line of reasoning, conditions of necessity and sufficiency are differently applied throughout the levels of the pattern theory. Indeed, the meta-level does not presuppose any relations, neither necessary ones, nor others, among the single patterns (i.e., notions). A meta-pattern theory does not establish, therefore, any hierarchical order. From this it follows that «a particular theory of self may exclude some of these conditions, and a particular self may lack a particular characteristic feature as defined here and still be considered a self» (Gallagher, 2013). Thus, each of the patterns could be utterly sufficient in determining a specific instance of self. At the second level, we can instead identify necessary or sufficient components among the different elements that constitute a single pattern. In this sense, certain variations of the pattern's structure might lead to the disruption of a specific instance of self.

If we take this pattern model to classify the position that I have developed in the preceding chapters, we could not locate the notion of performative awareness at a meta-level of analysis. Given Gallagher's theory, we can rather think about performative awareness as a specific pattern. Indeed, I also pinpointed some prior condition for performative awareness to take place (e.g., the experiential presence of a lived body that allows for the integration of multimodal feedback), and I contended

that some variations of the components bring about relevant alterations on how this form of self-consciousness is experienced. As such, I thus defined the elements that constitute the “pattern” of performative awareness. Similarly, both the reflective and pre-reflective instances of self-consciousness identified in Chapter 1 can be considered patterns as well. The developmental perspective that underlies my account should remind us that, however, alterations of the pattern’s structure can be brought about by other patterns. Different forms of self-consciousness, on this view, are not mere independent facets. This differs from a key assumption of Gallagher’s view, that is, at a meta-level of analysis «there would be no claims made about necessary or sufficient conditions for constituting a self» (Gallagher, 2013). It follows that every pattern is thought of as an autonomous configuration with respect to other ones, whereas a certain pattern might be thought of as dependent on one or more of its constituents. The notion of performative awareness at stake here would hold the latter statement: some elements are ontogenetically prior to get the process started and, at some point of personal development, further aspects impact on the pre-reflective structure of self-consciousness. Nevertheless, my proposal also rests on the relation among patterns. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter 5, to partake in social practices allows performative awareness to embed further motor potentialities by means of environmental stimuli. Since such environments are determined by our reflective and narrative attitudes, it seems arguably to affirm that a certain relation between different pattern of self-consciousness should be acknowledged.

I already argued that explicit reflections on ourselves do not directly affect our pre-reflective awareness of the body. In fact, if we conceive bodily self-consciousness in terms of performative awareness, it should be unsurprising that a mere reflection cannot improve our motor execution. Deliberations on self-referred aspects do however determine the scenarios in which we usually act. This could easily be noticed in athletes’ training: how they reflect on themselves and their previous performances is at the basis of their planning for workout sessions. Likewise, persons who explicitly deceive themselves develop a certain tendency to act – and thereby to experience themselves in such situations. Consider depressive-spectrum cases: persons who

suffer from depressive disorders usually think little of themselves. As a result, experiential cues often remind them how they failed or were unable to succeed in certain situations. These recurring explicit reflections thus undermine their confidence to act and therefore indirectly impact on their motor potentialities. In brief, then, our explicit attitudes do relate with our performative awareness, at least in adult human beings. In the first chapter, I indeed specified that even though to discriminate between the reflective and pre-reflective self-consciousness could allow us to pinpoint a certain set of phenomena, the influence of the former on the latter could not be overlooked. In this sense, if we stick with an understanding of the self-consciousness as a cluster concept, I contend that, in contrast to Gallagher's 2013 article, we should opt for a relational understanding of the different notions.

Several empirical studies support this hypothesis about the connection of different forms of self-consciousness. For example, interoceptive awareness has been considered sensitive to other self-related aspects. Throughout a research program focussed on the alterations of interoception, Manos Tsakiris and his colleagues have tried to manipulate interoceptive awareness by means of providing the subjects with significant stimuli. In one experimental set-up, they observed heartbeat self-detection when participants were looking at their face in a mirror (Ainley et al., 2012; for another study on the connection between facial recognition and bodily awareness, see Panagiotopoulou et al., 2017), whereas in another experiment adults were shown some relevant autobiographical words they had chosen before (Ainley et al., 2013). In both cases, the experimenter recorded an accuracy improvement in detecting the heartbeat with respect to the control tests. According to the authors, the latter case especially «demonstrates that aspect of the bodily and narrative self are unlikely to be independent» (Ainley et al. 2013). Interestingly, other researchers have linked interoceptive capacities to behavioural and psychological traits, «showing that heartbeat-evoked potentials were significantly reduced in depressed patients» (Terhaar et al., 2012; for another study on the relation among interoception, behaviour and social self-understanding, see also Ambrosecchia et al., 2017).

In light of the vast scientific literature that supports a relational account of self-consciousness, Gallagher has recently revised his position on the meta-pattern level of analysis. In fact, with his colleague Anya Daly, he now affirms that the self amounts to «an ongoing production which brings a real but contingent coherence to an evolving (or in some cases, devolving) stream of sensations, thoughts, emotions, desires, memories, and anticipations» (Gallagher & Daly, 2018). Single patterns of the self, on this view, are therefore considered mutually dependent configurations within an overall understanding of subjective experience.

This means that an intervention that affects one factor will involve modulations in the other factors. Adjustments in one aspect, above a certain threshold, will lead via dynamical interactions to changes in others. For example, very basic aspects of self-experience, such as the sense of agency, can be modulated by more complex, relational aspects, such as social normative factors that involve culture, gender, race, health, etc., and by specific intersubjective factors that can either diminish or enhance one's autonomy and sense of agency. (Gallagher & Daly, 2018)

By appealing to a relational account, Gallagher and Daly thereby apply certain properties – which were previously identified at the level of a single pattern – at the level of the meta-pattern.<sup>36</sup>

By means of such considerations upon the concept of self-consciousness, I can now draw some epistemological conclusions. First, the concept of self-consciousness I have been dealing with can be acknowledged as a cluster term, in which different notions represents various patterns. Second, on this view, the notion of performative awareness elaborated here amounts to a specific pattern as well. In this regard, I have identified some elements that are necessary for this pattern to come into play. Finally, the development of this performative instance ensures that certain relations take place among different patterns. Thus, patterns should not be taken as independent or autonomous with respect to other ones. Rather, we should make room for a relational

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<sup>36</sup> The three levels of analysis that were stressed in the 2013 article are nevertheless dismissed in the more recent paper.

conception at the meta-level – or, to put it differently, at the cluster level – of this pattern model.

Further questions would concern, then, which forms of relation we might recognise, and whether the same relations hold for both the meta-pattern and the pattern level. A compelling reply to these issues can be found in a slightly different approach to cluster concepts, that is, Schechtman's view on person lives.

### **6.3 A relational perspective**

The preceding conclusions challenge the idea that different instances of self-consciousness should be regarded as relatively autonomous. In this last respect, the position that has been developed in these pages could be compared to Schechtman's view on the notion of person. In her recent works, Schechtman has elaborated an understanding of the narrative self that slightly differs from her early conception (Schechtman, 2007, 2011, 2014). Indeed, as she has argued, the creation of autobiographical narratives amounts to a practical form of identity constitution (Schechtman, 2014: 99). As such, narrative self-consciousness is one way among others to determine personal identity. We might in fact apply the notion of person to some cases in which individuals «do not self-narrate», such as infants or patients with dementia (Schechtman, 2014: 103). The implicit assumption here is that even though someone might not be able to deliberately constitute her identity, it does not follow that we should give up the definition of some sort of personal identity. Thus, on Schechtman's view, we should at least conceptually distinguish between literal and practical concerns: there might be a basic sense of identity according to which we could seek to define the continuity of an individual, besides a certain practical understanding (e.g., a narrative perspective, biological description, social hierarchy, and the like) (Schechtman, 2014: 4).

A related question, nevertheless, could be raised on whether some sort of dependence between literal and practical identity would take place. To shed some light on this issue, Schechtman has developed a cluster notion of personhood «in

which facts about our literal identity are inherently connected to practical concerns» (Schechtman, 2014: 5). The Person Life View (PLV), indeed, considers several aspects that refer to a person («biological and psychological capacities and attributes typical of enculturated humans»; «standard activities and interactions» which acculturated persons attend to; «the social infrastructure» that establishes the scenario where those activities occur) within the encompassing unity of a person life (Schechtman, 2014: 137-138). The life of a person therefore determines the literal definition of personal identity, on the basis of the interplay of such different personal traits.

Schechtman, in this sense, aims at a different target if compared to the present text, since she is concerned with the definitional issue of personal identity. Her position on the mutual dependence of literal and practical identity has much to offer, however, in providing a fruitful model to account for the relations that take place among the different personal traits. In this last respect, Schechtman contends that the various aspects of one's life are to be considered in terms of homeostatic properties (Schechtman, 2014: 145-146).<sup>37</sup> On this model, each of the various components is described as neither necessary nor sufficient to determine the literal definition of personal identity – or, to put it differently, to establish the continuity of one's identity. This allows us to rethink some puzzling cases from a holistic perspective (consider, for example, permanent vegetative states or some sci-fi technologies, such as teletransportation or head transplant). Insofar as the lack of a single characteristic would not necessarily determine the collapse of personal identity, the continuity of an individual could be contended on the basis of several factors and their relations (Schechtman, 2014: 150).

Another significant characteristic of the homeostatic model is that each of the personal aspects is developed through a fundamental interplay with the other ones.

Our psychological and social lives are thus infused everywhere with our biology.

Importantly, however, the direction of influence is not all one way, and it is crucial

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<sup>37</sup> Schechtman adopts the notion of homeostatic property cluster from research on natural kinds and biological death (respectively, Boyd, 1999; Chiong, 2005).

to appreciate that our biological lives and functioning are impacted in a host of ways by our psychological functioning and social context. It is not, after all, as if we have on the one hand immune response and on the other practices concerning vaccination, pharmaceuticals, and healthcare professions. Practices of immunization, sanitation, and medical treatment influence the functioning of our immune systems in a very direct way. (Schechtman, 2014: 148)

On Schechtman's view, then, biological, psychological and social aspects are thought as mutually dependent. In this sense, the developmental understanding that I have illustrated here presents a noteworthy consistency with Schechtman's model. As seen above in the previous section, I do agree with her that, at a cluster level of analysis, we should rule out the assumption that every trait can be unquestionably construed as an independent aspect. Our conscious life does not merely skip from certain higher-order attitudes to a more basic experiential dimension without retaining any sort of alteration. The idea of mutual reinforcement, which is implicit in the homeostatic model supported by Schechtman, is therefore a useful tool to account for the reciprocal influence between reflective and pre-reflective self-consciousness. In sum, pre-reflective, narrative, metaphysical moral and agentive forms interplay to constitute the cluster concept of self-consciousness together.

Nevertheless, while I suggest that the homeostatic model can be applied to the meta-pattern (cluster), one might question whether this model could fit the pattern level as well – i.e., in the present text, the notion of performative awareness. As we have seen, this form of pre-reflective self-consciousness has been construed here within a developmental scenario. It follows, then, that the development of this experiential feature may result in divergent outcomes. Indeed, individuals may be raised through social practices in which narrative or normative aspects play a different role. To focus on a developmental trajectory implies, then, that certain variations in the structure of pre-reflective self-consciousness are likely to occur. Thus, in this last respect, the developmental understanding of a single pattern bears a significant similarity with Schechtman's view on clusters, since the resulting pattern of pre-reflective self-consciousness depends on the connections of its components. The

homeostatic model, however, also adds that each of the components is neither necessary nor sufficient for the cluster to be in place. This further requirement asks us to raise the question of whether the developmental pattern of pre-reflective self-consciousness elaborated here presents any sort of hierarchy among its constituents. Indeed, a developmental perspective should take into account that infants' pre-reflective self-consciousness differs from adults', and, moreover, the capacity to perceive self-related experiential cues might be also shared with other animals.

In Chapters 3 and 4 we already focussed on positions that consider some forms of self-consciousness prior to further ones. Although the aim of these sections was to stress the possibility of a developmental trajectory, this allowed us to affirm that some basic instances are already in place to get the process started – e.g., the bodily experiential feedback that generates from the integration of multisensory stimuli appears to be a good candidate to lay the foundation of additional achievements. I think that performative awareness is primarily an experiential tool that allows us to be more effective in our activities. As such, a developmental perspective should acknowledge the biological and phenomenological basis on which this phenomenon of pre-reflective self-consciousness relies. In this sense, I suggest that we should identify two different hierarchies. On the one hand, the developmental pattern of performative awareness at stake here entails a form of ontogenetic hierarchy: if we think about the trajectory of a certain pattern, some developmental outcomes are ontogenetically prior. The child's clumsy reaching for some interesting object can be thought of, on this view, as a precursor of skilful athletes' gestures. One might speculate that, moreover, performative awareness embeds normative aspects at a certain point of human beings' upbringing. But even though newborns' performative awareness has just begun its process of experiential attunement, it still represents the bedrock of further variations of the pattern.<sup>38</sup> Thus, a concept of temporal necessity can be applied to the various instances of the same developmental pattern.

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<sup>38</sup> It should be noted that what we are addressing here is the developmental trajectory of a single pattern. On this view, a basic form of self-consciousness might be ontogenetically prior

On the other hand, whereas we can find an ontogenetic hierarchy for different instance of the same pattern, we still have to explain whether some form of hierarchy occurs also among the elements that constitute it. In order to show this relation, we should nevertheless discriminate between two different perspectives: a third-person, scientific and physiological conception of such constitutive elements, and a first-person, phenomenological account of the experiential appearance of performative awareness. From a third-person perspective, in fact, the process of performative awareness results from three basic factors: global accessibility, by means of which a phenomenal content is made accessible to whole cognitive system for behavioural purposes; the sensitivity of motor schemas to both internal and external stimuli, which allows it to adapt to environmental aspects and also to bear an experiential sense of motor potentialities; phenomenal transparency, which conceals the experiential structuring and motor control, thereby providing an experiential sense of being immediately in touch with the phenomenal content. The interplay of this factors, which ensures the experiential presence of both self-generated and external stimuli, starts in the early moments of life.<sup>39</sup> Thus, from a phenomenological standpoint, the experiential appearance of performative awareness is determined by the interaction of internal and environmental aspects. Our body is experienced from birth within a phenomenal space that determines the range of our movements (e.g., what can I grab, where can I get to, and the like) that we can perform in a restricted time (e.g., what can I do in a given period, that is, understanding the difficulty of executing two complex gestures at the same time). The experiential dimension of performative awareness therefore evolves in accordance with anatomical and neuronal changes while, at the same time, we become sensitive to our environmental niches that are enriched by social and linguistic aspects. This mutual phenomenal

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to a more mature at a different level of analysis. This last statement, then, appeals to a meta-pattern level of analysis.

<sup>39</sup> An example of this process is the skin-to-skin interactions of newborns and their mothers (Feldman et al., 2013; Ciaunica & Fotopoulou, 2017). Moreover, different authors suggest that the occurrence of external sources of sensory information can be traced back to intra-uterus life (Castiello et al., 2010; Lymer, 2011; Ciaunica, 2017).

reinforcement supports the idea that a strict hierarchy could be missing. Consider, for example, the progress of clinical disorders. As suggested by Ratcliffe, experiential features do not have a «re-wind button – capacities that enter into developmental processes become hostages to fortune, and there is no going back» (Ratcliffe, 2017). Schizophrenic patients who suffer from thought insertion do not simply lose their sense of agency while retaining experiential ownership. Their peculiar experience does not count as a regression to a minimal self. In this sense, there are no basic features that we might experientially reach again by stripping away some unnecessary achievements. Rather, pre-reflective self-consciousness represents an experiential whole in which a variation in one of its constituents has an impact on the overall phenomenon.

A consistent understanding of the development of pre-reflective self-consciousness has been elaborated through the predictive processing theory. But whereas the position described here mainly focuses on a phenomenological dimension, the predictive processing account rests on the analysis of sub-personal mechanisms. Indeed, this perspective is meant to capture the alterations within the self patterns through a neuroscientific standpoint (Apps & Tsakiris, 2014; Tsakiris, 2017; Gallagher & Daly, 2018). On such a view, the brain or the organism are considered as «perceiving or coping with the world by predicting what it will encounter, and then minimizing prediction errors generated in processing sensory input» (Gallagher & Daly, 2018). To minimize error, then, allows the cognitive system to efficiently allocate its resources. The more the system is able to cope with its environment, the less energy will be employed in supporting the subject activities.

The embodied system predicts and integrates both exteroceptive and interoceptive multisensory variations in a probabilistic way as we perceive and move and experience ourselves moving. The integrated sensory experience is not about the self (in the sense of taking the self as an intentional object); it's about the world and at the same time (in an ecological fashion) it registers bodily states and self-movement. (Gallagher & Daly, 2018)

This suggests that social and cultural aspects do not only affect higher forms of conscious life. Predictions made by the system are in fact thought of as sensitive to normative facets (Apps & Tsakiris, 2014).

This compelling approach, nevertheless, demands a complex interdisciplinary investigation in order to identify those sub-personal processes that bring about phenomenal changes within subject experience. The current state of the debate suggests, moreover, that we have just started to disclose the potential of such a theory. The key hypothesis at stake here – which I endorse as well – is nevertheless that the experiential appearance of self is not permanently fixed, but rather it is carried through an ongoing process of adjustment with the world in which individuals act. In this respect, while the predictive processing approach is thought of as establishing the neuroscientific background for empirical research on the development of self-consciousness, the phenomenological perspective elaborated here is meant to provide the conceptual basis for first-person enquiries into the ontogenesis of pre-reflective self-consciousness.

#### **6.4 Conclusion: a complex concept**

Chapter 5 aimed at capturing the phenomenological and ontogenetic outcomes concerning the notion of performative awareness. In this chapter, instead, I have drawn some epistemological conclusion by looking at what we have done so far. Through the present text, indeed, the concept of self-consciousness has been conceived of as a cluster term, since I have identified several specific instances. Being a cluster term, here I have tried to define the relational structure among the different notions that constitute it and, in doing so, I have compared my proposal to Gallagher's pattern theory of the self. If we consider "self" a cluster concept, Gallagher suggests that we should identify three different level of analysis: the meta-level concerns the definition of the cluster; the pattern level points to the individuation of the single instances or pattern (e.g., the minimal self, the metaphysical self, the narrative self, the moral self, and so forth); the intra-pattern level involves the relation

among the elements that compose a single pattern. On Gallagher's view, some constituting elements might be thought of as necessary for a pattern, but these patterns are nevertheless considered autonomous from the other ones. On the basis of the notion of performative awareness, by contrast, I have argued that different instances of self-consciousness do relate, since a basic pre-reflective self-consciousness can be affected by further forms. In this sense, by means of developmental standpoint endorsed here, I have provided a relational understanding of the specific patterns that constitute the meta-pattern.

From a different point of view, Marya Schechtman has also developed a fruitful model on the relational structure that takes place among the traits of a person life. Thus, I have suggested that my proposal would be consistent with Schechtman's homeostatic model, since the notion of performative awareness relies on the mutual reinforcement among various instances of self-consciousness. Moreover, I have questioned whether this homeostatic model could be also applied at the pattern and intra-pattern level. With respect to the former, I have contended that the different instances of a single pattern can be classified in virtue of a hierarchical order. Some achievements are in fact ontogenetically prior to further ones (e.g., a newborn performative awareness can thought of as a precursor of the pre-reflective self-consciousness of a skilful athlete). The homeostatic model, however, seems to capture the relation among the different intra-pattern elements – at least from a phenomenological standpoint. Whereas an empirical analysis might suggest that performative self-consciousness requires certain constitutive factors (i.e., global accessibility, phenomenal transparency and body schemas' sensitivity to both internal and external stimuli), the experience appearance of performative awareness is determined by the interplay of self-generated phenomenal character and environmental aspects. Thus, this mutual interaction does not establish a strict hierarchy among the phenomenal elements.

## CONCLUSION

Human beings are rarely self-conscious in an explicit way. For most of our day, we engage as «active copers» with a manifold of different tasks (Dreyfuss, 2007: 362). An explicit investigation of our selves comes into play only when we step back from or try to precisely plan our activities. In these circumstances, questions like “Who am I?” or “Did I make that decision in accordance with my true personality?” may be posed by means of deliberate reflections. In the present text I have tried to show, however, that some forms of self-reference are already at stake when we are simply immersed in the world. In this respect, the aim of my proposal has been twofold. First, I have examined those experiential features that are meant to determine a form of pre-reflective self-consciousness. Second, I have questioned whether this self-givenness endures through our lifespan or has to be thought of as sensitive to ontogenetic and environmental aspects.

In pursuing these goals, like the understanding of the notion of performative awareness I accounted for in Chapter 6, I have initially focussed on some prior steps. The first move has been to distinguish an explicit attitude of reflecting on that sort of thing that is the self and a more experiential, implicit, way of being self-conscious. Although each of these dimensions belongs to our mental life, so that we might reasonably argue for a reciprocal influence, I suggested that some self-referential aspects are carried through subjective experience even before any explicit reflection.

This discussion has revealed, however, the need for a further conceptual analysis. Thus, I have outlined the experiential dimension in which pre-reflective self-consciousness is meant to come into play. Such an investigation of subjective

experience and consciousness has brought some noteworthy outcomes into the picture I was illustrating. For one thing, from a methodological point of view, it has allowed to take into account the risks but also the advantages of a phenomenological approach informed by cognitive science. Moreover, it has introduced two key notions that have been crucial in the following discussion (i.e., reflexivity, as distinguished from reflectivity, and global accessibility, a central characteristic that allows the organism to control its acts).

In virtue of the previous analyses, in the second part of the text I have drawn attention to the phenomenon of pre-reflective self-consciousness. A number of different positions have been developed in the current debate to account for this experiential aspect. A notorious instance that relies on the phenomenal feature of reflexivity is the minimal self. Advocates of the minimal self hypothesis claim that a basic form of reflexivity characterises our conscious life. A well-known and influential position is, in this respect, Dan Zahavi's. As Zahavi suggests, the pre-reflective awareness of temporal extension determines a basic form of self-consciousness that accompanies our mental life (Zahavi, 2014: 65-67). Even though I have not objected the presence of this phenomenological feature, I have nonetheless suggested that Zahavi's notion lacks the explanatory power to account for humans' specific form of pre-reflective self-consciousness. In sum, its formal understanding of subjective experience has appeared to be too formal. I have therefore considered another form of pre-reflective awareness that is meant to be non-objective and to underlie our experiential engagement (i.e., bodily self-consciousness).

There are several understandings of the phenomenal relevance of one's body within phenomenal consciousness. Among others, a compelling view describes the lived body as a form of performative awareness, that is, the specific experiential structure that our body determines by shaping our disposition to act. In this sense, our body does not merely amount to another (special) object that we may perceive. Rather, our body supports motor execution and planning by giving a constant experiential feedback. Thus, by means of the notion of phenomenon transparency, I have further refined the notion of performative awareness. Body schemas, as motor

control processes that determine our experiential standpoint, are to be conceived as experientially transparent: while we are immersed in our activities, subjective experiences appear as immediately directed toward its objects, thereby allowing us to effectively deal with our tasks. Moreover, I have endorsed an externalist conception of body schemas, which considers them sensitive to both self-generated and environmental stimuli. As such, the resulting performative awareness can be thought of as being subjected to a developmental process. In fact, as long as performative awareness results from the interplay of self-generated and environmental (and also social) stimuli, it undergoes a process of attunement in virtue of partaking to recurrent practices. Bodily awareness thus integrates habits and dispositions and embeds a diachronic dimension into pre-reflective self-consciousness. This developmental aspect allows therefore to adopt an ontogenetic perspective on the phenomenon of pre-reflective self-consciousness.

In the third part of the text, the further step has been to focus on the phenomenological and epistemological implications of this developmental turn. On the one hand, I have examined in what terms pre-reflective self-consciousness discloses a certain form of diachronicity. Both episodic and narrative accounts seem in fact to rely on the embodiment of past experiences. The latter suggests that a form of implicit narration bears on to the experiential engagement with the world. On this view, pre-reflective self-consciousness implicitly refers to a life story that is developed by the subject in accordance with others. The use of the term "narrative", however, appears to be rather demanding. To appeal to "narrative" implies the presence of an author and certain constitutive rules. In this sense, pre-reflective self-consciousness cannot easily be included in a broad concept of narrative. Rather than contending that pre-reflective self-consciousness represents an implicit form of narration, we should point out that pre-reflective self-consciousness and self-narratives are mutually dependent. As well as how we skilfully deal with our everyday practices affects the way in which we narrate stories about ourselves, the constant practice in certain scenarios that are shaped through our stories has a significant impact in our disposition to act. This suggests that the notion of performative awareness developed

here shows a certain explanatory power and, as such, can establish the theoretical basis for further investigations on the development of different forms of self-consciousness.

On the other hand, the developmental perspective that I have endorsed here bears relevant consequences on the epistemological level. Adopting the conceptual structure of Shaun Gallagher's pattern theory, in Chapter 6 I have examined whether certain relations are at stake among different notions of self-consciousness. At a meta-pattern level (i.e., at the level of self-consciousness as conceived in terms of a cluster concept) it seems reasonable to affirm that different instances of self-consciousness affect one another, as we have seen with respect to the relation between self-narratives and pre-reflective self-consciousness. At the level of a single pattern, instead, we can identify a form of hierarchical among the various instances of performative awareness. Indeed, some variations of the pattern are ontogenetically prior to more mature achievements (a long process of attunement is what distinguishes the pre-reflective self-consciousness of infants from that of adults). Finally, from a phenomenological perspective, the constituents of the pattern show a mutual influence. Similarly, Marya Schechtman's homeostatic model accounts for the cluster concept of person's life (Schechtman, 2014: 145-146). On this view, one's identity results from the reciprocal interaction of constituting factors, each one of them is neither prior nor sufficient for the continuity of identity. The developmental account of performative awareness described here rests in fact on the interaction of self-originated and hetero-determined characteristics, which mutually shape the experiential appearance of this phenomenological feature.

In light of the present study, there are other points that require additional analyses. Whereas the recent predictive processing theory seems a good candidate to establish a theoretical framework for empirical research, an important aspect of the development of performative awareness is the responsiveness to normative scenarios. If we were to accept that pre-reflective self-consciousness embeds habits and disposition, would we also conclude that our pre-reflective engagement with the environment is affected by rules that we implicitly follow? Does performative enter a

normative dimension, at least at some point in our life? The answer to these questions bears profound implications on a wide range of topics, among which we can find linguistic acquisition, moral sensibility, emotional development and educational programs. I do hope that the considerations made in the present text might support further investigations into such issues.

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