

## INDIVIDUAL STUDENT PAPERS

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# Meaning and Memory: A Heideggerian Analysis of Children's First Memories

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In this paper I seek to provide the theoretical basis and empirical evidence for an existential phenomenological understanding of memory. Through an explication of Heidegger's understanding of time as "world time," I offer a critique of memory as it is understood in the current cognitive-constructivist paradigm of psychology which understands memory within the framework of "clock time." Through examples from 51 drawings and descriptions of children's first memories, which I collected from Danish elementary school children, I demonstrate how the framework of "world time" opens up a less reductionistic and more meaningful way of understanding the phenomenon of memory.

In this article I shall attempt to understand the nature of memory by analyzing a variety of drawings made by Danish elementary schoolchildren of their first memories. As a temporal phenomenon, memory already presupposes an understanding of time. How we understand time therefore becomes pivotal for how we are able to understand memory. In this article, I shall attempt to interpret the children's drawings I collected by replacing the mechanistic understanding of memory as something that happens within "clock time" with a phenomenological understanding of memory as something that happens within "world time." My analysis of the children's drawings will thus proceed only after having made the difference between these two interpretations of time explicit.

## CLOCK TIME VS. WORLD TIME

Memory can be conceptualized either within clock time or world time. The difference between these two temporalities is one I take from the oeuvre of Heidegger. Heidegger has written about this difference in works such as *Being and Time* (1996), *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1982), and *The Zollikon Seminars* (2001).

As Heidegger argues in these books, our current understanding of memory is flawed because it is based on an understanding of time that has not been adequately grounded. According to Heidegger, without first working out the question of time in a way that stays faithful to the way time shows itself in our most immediate everyday experience, an adequate foundation for a theory of memory has not been secured.

Our current understanding of time is a mechanistic one. Time is said to consist of a flow of “now points” that succeed each other like pearls on a string. Each new “now point” crowds out the preceding one and is replaced by the one that succeeds it. What happens in the “now” thus always follows from what happened in the now that went before and always leads into the now that will follow. This chronological series of events is then said to be subjective or objective, that is, to consist of either a succession of mental states (shifting experiences) or a succession of physical events (motion).

Cognitive psychologists have taken this mechanistic understanding of time for granted when they define memory as “an information processing system that works constructively to encode, store and retrieve information” (Zimbardo, Johnson, and Weber, 2006, p. 263). In this constructivist version of a mechanistic understanding of memory, the dilemma of whether or not to locate time in the physical succession of events that take place in objective time or the mental succession of experiences that take place in subjective time, has been resolved by arguing that a temporal sequence of bodily acts that occur in objective time (an information processing system) gives rise to a temporal sequence of meaningful experiences that happen in subjective time (encoded information). According to this constructivist model, we do not remember objective events simply as they happened, but store and retrieve information through an active process of selecting and encoding. While time is thus understood as the outcome of both subjective and objective processes, it is nevertheless unclear how the scientist gains access to objective time if she herself is an “encoding” being. Rather than solving the problem of the dualist split between two series of time, the constructivist solution merely seems to lead to new riddles.

According to an existential-phenomenological perspective, the problem of this dualist split is not simply one to be solved by yet more refined arguments, for the underlying foundation of this mechanistic and dualistic way of thinking about memory is itself fundamentally flawed. The problem of how to reunite a subjective

and an objective series of now-points is a pseudo problem, for it is a badly stated problem that has arisen from a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of reality. According to Heidegger, we can never arrive at an adequate understanding of memory by simply adding together a subjective and an objective series of now-points, for the mechanistic concept of time, which the cognitive model of memory borrows, is itself nothing but a conceptual abstraction that lacks a secure ontological foundation. Instead of trying to provide a solution to the problem, we must rather start by working out the proper conditions of the problem. In the case of memory, we cannot simply take over a given conceptualization of time, but must first secure a real or phenomenological basis for such a conceptualization. Only when such a phenomenological basis of time has been secured can the problem of memory be adequately raised.

Phenomenologically speaking, time does not primarily exist in the form of measurable units that succeed each other and stand in a causal relation like one billiard ball to another. Time is never just there like an object to be counted, what Heidegger calls clock-time, but is always already pregnant with meaning, arising from the intelligibility of our everyday living, what Heidegger calls world-time. The mechanistic concept of time misses the latter phenomenological insight because the world Heidegger is referring to is not some totality of things to which time can simply be added as a fourth dimension in which these things happen or change.

The world Heidegger has in mind is not a world built of objects, but that network of relations [the way things hang together which Dilthey (1894/1977) calls the *Zusammenhang*], which already must be assumed in order for something to be perceived as an object to begin with. Rather than making up the sum total of the world, objects already presuppose an understanding of world. Only through an understanding of the world as substantial can one notice a thing as an object and start to add these objects together into a totality that can then be said to make up a world. Heidegger's concept of world is thus not reducible to a world that is encountered, but refers to that understanding of world that already must be in place for us to have an encounter with the external world to begin with. Heidegger's world is therefore a world that we live out of rather than within. It always comes before our ability to encounter and make sense of things and predetermines how things first come to appear.

When Heidegger characterizes time as worldly, he therefore does not mean that it is merely part of an object world, as the medium or container in which such a world happens, but rather that it is the "matter" of understanding as such: the very phenomenon through which something becomes intelligible as something in the first place. It is therefore far more original than any reification of it as a now-point. I never stand face to face with it as a positive phenomenon within my world—as a now-point to be counted for example—but can always only live from it. Unlike with clock-time, I only ever know world-time when I live it by losing myself in that

for which I need it. “Taking time for” is therefore the primordial structure of world-time. I can have this time only by spending it, and I can spend it only by making things useful or useless for some or the other purpose.

According to Heidegger, only by recovering the original structure of world-time and dismantling the analytical a priori of clock-time, can we begin to develop our understanding of memory from an adequate phenomenological basis.

## THE WORLDLY STRUCTURE OF TIME

Opposite the mechanistic concept of time, Heidegger describes the structure of world-time as significant (not a thing in itself), dateable (not measurable), stretched (not a “now” point) and public (neither subjective nor objective). In the following we shall describe each of these dimensions in more detail.

### Significance

As a worldly phenomenon, time is always significant or meaningful. This is so because time is always initially useful time. The different tasks for which I can take time are either relevant or irrelevant to what I seek to accomplish and what determines this relevance is the “relational totality of signification” (the significance) that makes up the worldly context in terms of which I understand myself in my endeavors. This relational totality or “world” consists of a total understanding of what I need time to do (the what-for I need time), the reason why I need time to do it (the for-the-sake-of-which I need time), and the activities I need to undertake in order to accomplish the what-for and the for-the-sake-of-which (time in-order-to). For example, I need time to do my studies (what-for) in order to become a successful doctor (for-the-sake-of-which) and I need my pencil in order to write down my notes in order to do my studies (in-order-to’s). The pen as a thing here only makes sense within the totality of references which assigns significance to it. As such, a thing is always temporal for it becomes what it is (achieves meaning) only when I take time for it by seeking to accomplish something. At the same time, time is inextricably worldly. While there would be no world and thus no intelligible things without “time in order to do this or that, time that I need for, time that I can permit myself in order to accomplish this or that, time that I must take for carrying through this or that” (Heidegger, 1982, p. 258), neither would there be time, if there was no work to be accomplished and no things to take time for.

### Datability

Another characteristic of worldly time is that we grasp it not primarily by counting it, but by recounting it or narrating it. When time is brought before us it is always

initially through the narrative structure of “then, when.” We say, “at that time when I visited my sister,” “in the Fall when the leaves fell of the tree,” or “in an hour *when* my mother will be here.” This dating of time, which can occur either implicitly or explicitly (ie., can both be lived or talked about), is never merely the assignation of an objective time measurement to a perceived or physical event, but is always an interpretation of time which attributes meaning to time in terms of the significance it has for me (what I take time for). Hence, in the examples above, “at that time,” “in the Fall,” and “in an hour” are not simply abstract categories, for the “thens” here never stand separate from a conjoint “when so and so happened.” Even when we merely count time as an abstract flow of now-points, we have also already dated it in terms of a “then when so and so happens/ happened or is happening.” The counting of time is always the counting of something for which I have taken time, will take time, or am taking time. Even when I count the minutes it takes me to run a particular stretch on a field, I never merely count an abstract passing away of now-points, but count a stretch of time between “then, when I started my one mile run” and “then, when I will be finished.” As such the counting of calendar time or clock time is always a counting of a time that has been assigned a date in terms of its significance for someone. Time must be dated before it can be counted.

### Duration

When we date significant time, we do not designate a mere point in time, but open up the temporal dimensions of the past, the present, and the future into a unified stretch or duration. The past did not simply come before the present and the future not simply after. Rather, in dating time, each of these temporal dimensions simultaneously extend into the others, forming at each instant the horizon of a “meanwhile.” I cannot say, “Yesterday, when I was doing garden work” without simultaneously opening up a stretch of time from yesterday to today when I am not doing garden work and tomorrow when I will be doing it again. Rather than thinking of time in terms of three separate temporalities, we must therefore rather think of it as ever-changing stretches or horizons—small or large—in which the past, present, and future mutually condition each other. The past is never just past, but is always present as past in light of a particular future. I receive the past from the future, since it always only becomes relevant and significant in relation to that for which I take time. Similarly, the future for which I take time always unfolds the potentiality of something retained as past. I never merely move towards the future as a blank slate, but have always already found myself thrown into a world of definite possibilities. I am thus simultaneously indebted to a past that already was and entrusted to a future that is always in the process of coming towards me. As such, I exist not in the present, but in the stretch of time that makes up a horizon which both retains a particular past and

brings a particular future. Each moment is therefore not a now-point but a transitional space created by what will have been given what is in the process of becoming. As a result, “No now and no time-moment can be punctualized. Every time-moment is spanned intrinsically, the span’s breadth being variable. It varies, among other things, with what in each case dates the now” (Heidegger, 1982, p. 264).

### Publicness

The way we date significant time and stretch out its horizons is neither subjective nor objective, but public or intersubjective. Every interpretation of time in terms of a “then, when, so and so happened,” discloses a “so and so” that is understandable by others. This is not because I as a pre-existing individual have learned to speak a common tongue, but because initially I understand myself as other. As Heidegger (1996) writes, “Initially, ‘I’ ‘am’ not in the sense of my own self, but I am the others in the mode of the they” (p. 121). What Heidegger means by this is that the way time becomes significant, dated and stretched initially always arises from the ready-made public intelligibility of a shared understanding of world (a with-world). Since I am not separate from the world but receive my identity from the way the world helps me encounter myself, the public nature of the world means that I receive myself primarily as everybody else does and understand myself primarily as “we” in this culture, this family, this political party, etc. understand ourselves. As such, my time does not exclusively belong to “me,” for the way I understand it and date it is always already indebted to an average everyday understanding in terms of which “everyone,” and “no one in particular,” understand themselves. Hence, I am able to experience myself in time only through the way we as a community are able to live it and date it. The discussion of whether time is subjective or objective thus misses the point completely, for subjective and objective are themselves expressions sustained through a particular public intelligibility, not in and of themselves a set of a priori categories.

## TOWARDS A WORLDLY UNDERSTANDING OF CHILDREN’S FIRST MEMORIES.

Having excavated the four dimensions of world-time, through a reading of the work of Martin Heidegger, and thus established a phenomenologically secure foundation for understanding the phenomenon of memory, I shall attempt, in what follows, to demonstrate how such a phenomenological foundation of time will lead to an understanding of memory that is different from the typical cognitive-constructivist account of memory.

According to Heidegger, remembering is the act of making what *has-been* present (2001, p. 170). Within our new understanding of time, this making present of the memory of the has-been, however, must no longer be understood mechanistically as the retrieval of a past objective event (stored information) in a later present (now-point) by a perceiving evaluative entity (subject) who encodes, selects, and retrieves objective events according to subjective values. Rather, memory must be understood as a making present of a has-been that is initially always significant, dateable, spanned, and public.

In the following, I shall attempt to show what this entails concretely, by using the four dimensions of world-time to make sense of the first memories of 51 children from a Danish elementary school. In the spring of 2006, these children were asked to draw a picture of their first memory and to write on the back of their picture, a description of the picture they had drawn. 18 drawings and descriptions were collected from first graders (ages 7–8), 17 from third graders (ages 9–10) and 16 from fifth graders (ages 11–12). In the following I shall discuss some of these drawings, using pseudonyms for the children who drew them and indicating their age in brackets next to the pseudonyms.

As we shall see, without the traditional bias of clock-time blocking our view, these drawings open up to us in new ways and concretely reveal the nature of a memory that is always significant, dateable, stretched, and public. Let us go through each of the four dimensions in turn.

## Significance

The kind of research project that asks people to remember for the sake of remembering, already steps out of the primary significance of time by detaching the act of memorizing from the highly individualized what-for of memorizing. To ask children to draw a picture of their first memory is to situate them within a particular “what for” (to help a researcher do his research project on memory), which replaces the dynamic significance structure of time as it is lived with an objective significance structure, predetermined by the researcher. How often, we must ask, do we really need to remember as far back as we can to accomplish our average everyday tasks? And, subsequently, what sort of information can such an artificial assignment give us about the way memory functions in our average everyday living?

However, even in the most artificial of situations, memory never becomes the abstract act of a detached mind which “encodes, stores, and retrieves information.” It remains fundamentally worldly, even if in a privative mode. Any past can only become present in the mode of taking time for something. Things that *were* can only achieve significance in the present moment when they become relevant to a future what-for. Only a future what-for can gather a world that was. Hence a memory is never just a recollection of discrete sensory impressions or things

themselves, but is always a recollection of an entire world of references from which we direct ourselves towards the future.

When Sofie (11) draws the memory of her green silk dress, she also draws the yellow ring with a red stone, which goes together with the dress, and she also evokes the memory of her aunt from England from whom she received the dress. In short, she gathers a world through the way she opens up a future possibility of relating to the past. Why did she remember her first memory as she did? Because in projecting herself towards a particular future for which she takes time (her upcoming birthday on which she will receive gifts just like the green silk dress; her desire to feel loved or cared for, which the green silk dress stands as a past example of; or perhaps her desire to be admired by her classmates for receiving gifts from an exotic aunt), she opens up the past as significant or relevant to a particular future. The memory of the has-been is thus never just an objective recollection, but is always the retention of a has-been that is significant or relevant to the projects we take time for in the moment.

We see another demonstration of the significant character of memory in the drawing by Melanie (11). When Melanie draws her first bunny, Benjamin, she also draws the cage in which he lived, the carrots which he ate, the sky under which he dwelled, and the ground on which he crawled, ultimately tying the entire weave of references to the memory of his death. Melanie does not need to draw herself in the picture, for she is already there, included as the for-the-sake-of-which Benjamin was drawn near, placed into a world, and made present in his absence. Melanie does not here exist as a bystander to her own drawing. She is not a subject who remembers, but a future made possible by the memory itself. Melanie comes into being by remembering, not vice versa, for in the memory she opens up towards a future which at that moment defines who she is. Her essence is not to be found by opening up her skull and examining the information processes in her brain, but is to be located in her existence itself, defined by the way she makes the past relevant to a particular future for which she takes time. The essence of Melanie *is* her existence.

Sometimes, however, memory can become more or less abstracted from its significance structure, more or less irrelevant to the goals we are moving towards. In such cases, the act of memorizing may increasingly resemble a mere detached, mechanical information processing in which the “for the sake of which” we remember is not clearly present.

However, even when Cecilie (7) simply draws a house, a car and a fence, without including any people or using much coloration, or when Nico (11) simply draws a house and a garage that belongs to no-one, they still gather a world by claiming a particular existential possibility or future. It may, however, be a world that supports a future possibility that seems meaningless or artificial, such as drawing a memory simply for the sake of drawing a memory or doing so simply because the teacher says to do so.



Cecilie and Nico did perhaps not want to take time to recollect their pasts. Perhaps, their distant past did not really seem as relevant and significant to the things they were interested in taking time for at the moment as did their more immediate pasts. However, even Nico and Natascha, despite their minimalist artistry, never escape the imperative that they confront their past by taking time for some particular future, which, however world-poor, nevertheless remains significant. We simply cannot avoid retaining the past when we take time for our immediate or distant goals.

The significance structure of memories shows itself not only in terms of the way we make the has-been of a particular network of references present, but also in terms of the nearness and farness of the remembered things to which these references assign meaning.

When Louise (7) draws herself sitting in a stroller on her family's patio, she draws a big butterfly, bigger than her dog, and portrays the sun as a miniscule dot in the far right corner, while when Hans (9) draws the sun in a drawing of himself and another person walking in front of his house, he draws it bigger than his house and places it in the very center of the drawing. The sun, in these examples, obviously varies in its nearness. While it is relevant to the recall of both memories, it plays a peripheral role in the former and a central role in the latter. One can only speculate as to the reason for the difference: Perhaps Louise was not really concerned with the sun that day on the patio. It was not the warmth or brightness of that day that was significant to that for which she was taking time, but rather the connection to other living beings in the beautiful garden surroundings. Hans, however, might have felt the sweltering sun baking on him while he went on his walk with his friend, giving the sun a more prominent role in the world that was. What this goes to show is that a memory is not pieced together by independently existing objects, but consists of a world of references that first determine the significance and relevance of these objects. The sun is a very different sun in each of these drawings, not simply the same sun perceived differently.

The question of the nearness and farness of things is also illustrated in the drawing by Mike (10) who drew a picture of himself pushing his brother down from a bed. Here Mike's hand is drawn more than twice as big as his feet, indicating the nearness of "pushing" as a central gathering place of the memory. Similarly, when Natascha (10) draws a picture of herself having lost a tooth or when Daniel draws a picture of locking himself into the restroom of his house, both the tooth and the key become central gathering points of the memories evoked. Thus, while things always gather other things into a totality of references without which they would have no meaning, the nearness or farness of these things vary according to their relevance to that for which we take time.

What these examples illustrate is that the making present of what has been always entails a making present of a world of references that conditions the realization of a particular future. We never merely recollect stored information, but

reenact the past in light of that for which we take time. A memory is therefore never a detached image (a past in-itself that has been made present), but is always significant or relevant to a particular purpose or goal for the sake of which we exist.

### Datability

The dateable character of time is clearly corroborated by the fact that children of different ages seem to have different types of first memories. This would go to show that having a first memory is not a matter of recalling something that took place at the earliest recorded time in any objective sense, but that the dating of the earliest memory happens as a function of the particular for-the-sake-of which we need time right now. Another way to say this is that we date our past, not in terms of clock measurements, but in terms of meanings. The past is not primarily a fixed series of chronological events that took place in clock-time, but a dynamic ground that changes its meaning according to the way we interpret it as being relevant to the futures we are pursuing.

In comparing the dating of first memories across different ages, this dateable character of memories is clearly visible, for it seems to be the case that different pasts become memorable according to the specific developmental tasks of the person doing the remembering. Hence, the first memories of the first graders tend to revolve around the world of the family, while the first memories of the third graders and fifth graders show an increasing tendency towards peer-related situations and personal ownership or “love objects.”

In 1st grade, Cecilie (7) dated her first memory as “then, when” she watched TV with her grandmother, Casper (7) dated it as “then, when” he played with his dad in the garden, and Simon (7) dated it as “then, when” he was at his big brother’s birthday. Even sometimes when the memory is dated as an event taking place outside of a family context, such as when Amanda (7) dates her memory as “then, when” she started in kindergarten, her mother is still there as the person escorting her, and when Trine (7) draws herself as “then, when,” she played in kindergarten, an adult supervisor is also present. Hence, it might tentatively be hypothesized that children’s memories in or around first grade tend to revolve around the world of the adult and, more often than not, around the world of the family.

As the world of the child changes through schooling, however, the dating of the past also changes. Now we see more memories involving playmates and relationships with the child’s peers. Hence, Mikkel (9), Rasmus (10), Ida (9), Hans (9), Trine (10), Lisette (9), and Mads (9) all drew pictures of first memories that took place in school or involved non-adult relations, indicating an increasing separation from the world of the family and an increasing individuation of the child’s world.

Another notable change in the datability of first memories happens in fifth grade when some of the drawings start to revolve around ownership of things or attachments to “objects” other than parents and peers. Dennis (12), for example, draws his first bird, Peter (11) his first dog and Melanie (11) her first rabbit. Sofie (11) remembers her green silk dress and Stine (12) her first bathing suit. These examples illustrate the development of an even more differentiated sense of self in that the child now demonstrates an ability to have him or herself reflected back not from a family situation or a relationship to a playmate, but from an object that is exclusively his or her own, indicating the rise of a sense of being a private autonomous self.

What these examples demonstrate is that the past always requires a present context and a future possibility from which to become relevant and memorable. It is in this sense that the dating of children’s first memories may tell us far less about their past than about their present and future, for their past is always retroactively determined. The dating of our memories is therefore not tantamount to the retrieval of events that took place in objective time and can be assigned an objective date, but is tantamount to a veritable interpretation of the past as it matters to our present concerns. We know the past first in terms of a particular meaning, which reveals itself as meaningful to the lives we live. Only subsequently does the opportunity for an objective ordering of events present itself.

### Duration

The interpretation or counting of the past in terms of an “at that time when” always gives the past an extension by articulating it in relation to a present and a future from which it sets itself off as past. The past we remember is therefore never a point in time, but always a stretch of time. We see this testified to in the children’s drawings by the fact that the narrating that accompanies most of the drawings tend to include a storyline indicating a time-span rather than a description of a mere objective point in time.

Lykke (11) separated her drawing into a sequence 1 and 2 and used talk bubbles to tell the story of that time “when” she was 5 and she burned her finger on the ironing board. Nicolai (10) also used talk bubbles. In his drawing of himself lying in the sickbed at a hospital, he described and depicted his conversation with the nurse, which revolved around the nurse offering him something to eat and him accepting it.

The stretched character of a memory is also illustrated well by Rasmus (10) who drew a picture of himself and a friend playing in a sandbox with a metal car. In the accompanying description, he wrote, “I drew a picture of when I was 4 years. I found a metal car and gave it to Tim. Tim and I played with it often and now it is just a piece of junk.” Here we see clearly how the past is never just separated from

the present, but that the interpretation of the past always tells us something about the present as it is made present through a particular future. The has-been of the car is here interpreted in light of the understanding that life changes and things fall apart. This, in turn, already prefigures an understanding of the future as flux and impermanence, a departure from the understanding of the future as routine or the eternal return of the same.

Another skillful strategy deployed to depict a memory as a duration rather than a snapshot was deployed by Ascha (11) who layered her picture, drawing a burning cabin in the front and three children playing on the beach in the rear. In her description she wrote, "My drawing depicts me and some other children. We have gone with the nursery to the beach. I was 3 years old. We slept in a cabin. When we were done playing on the beach we walked to the cabin and it was burned down." Here, again, the memory is stretched into a series of events, which while seemingly contained in the past, still inscribe themselves in terms of the meanings of the present and offers a range of possible futures. What will it mean, for example, to go to the beach tomorrow or to rent a cabin in the forest, when these futures are lived as possibilities out of this past?

The duration of memory is least visible in the drawings that are significantly poor, such as the drawing by Nico (11) of a garage and a house, which is not further elaborated descriptively, or the drawing by Tobias (11) of a birthday table without people, followed by the simple description "this is my three-year birthday." Here the dating seems to be calendrical in the objective sense of clock-time: Something happened at this or that objective point of time, which is no longer of any relevance to the present and the future.

However, even the dating of a past garage and house must necessarily include a distance to that garage and house as they look today or will look tomorrow. Similarly, a three-year-old's birthday, drawn by an 11-year-old boy, necessarily includes the entire span of birthdays from that time until now as well as the meaning of birthdays to come. The events we remember are thus never just snapshots of the past, but always ways of stretching ourselves out in time and living it in a "meanwhile" that already includes a past and a future. As such, the objective "present" is a myth, for we never stand within an objective present from which we remember a past present; rather we are always living in the moment of a time-span that already includes a memory and a future. Therefore, we do not need to take time to remember, for in taking time for things at hand we necessarily already remember. No future is without memory.

## Publicness

Heidegger's fourth characteristic of world-time questions the privacy of personal memories, for while it might seem that it is "I" who memorize and that the memory

that draws things together, dates the past, and stretches the past into a future is highly subjective, the discourse that allows me to express time is ultimately public and therefore never merely “mine.”

The thin boundary between what is public and what is private is demonstrated well by those children who drew their first memories of an experience that had been told to them and not experienced first-hand. Hence, Ester (7), Dennis (7), and Jonas (9) drew pictures of just having been born; Christian (11), Simon (12), Simon (7), and Lasse (7) drew their first step; and Simon (8) drew himself drinking from a beer can when he was 1. Such examples would seem ludicrous to the adult who knows that such early stages of one’s life could not possibly have been remembered by the children in question. But maybe these recollections demonstrate something very profound about the nature of memory, indicating that memory is always already permeated with the other’s discourse. Maybe the drawings of such impossible first-hand experiences precisely show us what remains covered over when we presuppose memory as ultimately subjective rather than public or intersubjective. Maybe what they show is that what we consider to be our most private and interior moments are never our own but are always already alienated in the discourse of the other in which they find the means of their expression. This conclusion finds support in the fact that some students sitting next to each other in class or who had conversations about their first memory before drawing them, ended up recalling and drawing similar memories. Trine (10) and Linette (9) recalled different memories that took place in the same location (on a carpet in the same summer house), Matthias (7), Rebekka (7), and Louise (7) all drew pictures of themselves sitting in a stroller on the patio of their family houses, and Lasse (7) and Simon (7) both drew their first step.

As another example demonstrating the public nature of memory, Mikkel (9), Ida (9), and Mads (9) all remembered themselves hitting a piñata, which is no surprise given that the assignment to draw their first memory was given to them right at the time of a national holiday on which people customarily hit piñatas.

What these examples may illustrate is that the recall of a memory never merely originates from an autonomous psychological subject, but that this subject itself always already understands itself and expresses itself the way everybody does and hence always recalls memories from within a social context.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In this article, I have attempted to corroborate a phenomenological understanding of memory based on a collection of drawings and descriptions made by elementary school children of their first memories. Heidegger’s understanding of world-time served as our compass for analyzing the drawings. A case was subsequently made

for the following understanding of memory: Memory is always rooted in a worldly situation, it is always dated in terms of its meaning; it is always interpreted in light of a particular future, and it is always indebted to a shared public understanding. This understanding of memory subverts the mechanistic understanding of memory which underlies the cognitive-constructivist understanding of memory as a type of “information-processing.” The cognitive-constructivist understanding of memory bases itself on the assumption that memory consists of the processing of sensory data (not the retention of a world), that memory is encoded, stored, and retrieved in a linear fashion (not retroactively determined from the future), that memory is a memory of a moment in time (not a continuously revised duration), and that the recall of a memory is both the result of an objective process and a subjective experience (not an intersubjective phenomenon).

The most fundamental problem with the mechanistic model of memory is that it takes its starting point not in significant time (the time we live out of) but in the abstraction of an independently existing flow of nows, understood, in this case, as a flow of bits of information. This information is taken in by a machine-like being (information processing system) who transforms the temporal flow of information by attributing significance to it, then stores it as one stores money in a bank, and retrieves it at a later “point in time.” This whole process, of course, takes place in objective time (the succession of physical events) to which the cognitive scientist has privileged access, but in the “information processing system” itself which makes up the subjects studied, information about the past is experienced according to the subjective values involved in the encoding of the information. A process of memorizing, which is located in the objective time of causal relations, is thus severed from the experience of the memory, which this process brings forth in subjective time (the time experienced by the subject). In this view, the mental act of memorizing takes place in time, but the experience of what is in time is at the same time said to be a product of the subjective encoding involved in this act. It is clear that there are some serious philosophical inconsistencies in this view, for how can the scientist study the objective process of the act of memorizing, without necessarily doing so from the position of the subjective experience which is the product of this act? How can the scientist suspend the subjective encoding which she objectively postulates as fundamental to all recollection?

The understanding of memory as rooted in world-time avoids this dualistic conundrum, not by resolving it, but by bypassing it altogether as an intellectual pseudo-problem which has no ontological grounding in reality. If we accept the argument that clock-time is founded on the more original world-time and feel convinced by the examples given from the children’s drawings to demonstrate this, we will have to accept the conclusion that there is no ontological basis for a mechanistic, cognitive, or constructivist model memory. Memory then can no longer be understood as a mere retrieval of sensory data (a synthetic a posteriori phenomenon),

but must be understood as one of the basic dimensions of the worldly context of living and as an existential condition for the possibility of human experience as such (a synthetic a priori condition).

Memory can then no longer be understood as a mere faculty of the mind, for as retention, it is one of the basic dimensions of the worldly context of living and thus an existential condition for the possibility of human experience as such.

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