



# The Sensory Dimension of Episodic Recollection

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## Abstract

Episodic recollection often involves some kind of awareness of the sensory features or properties of what is remembered. Episodically recollecting that sunset last summer on the Greek island of Ios, involves some kind of awareness of how it looked, that is its deep blood-red colour. This is suggestive that for those episodic recollections that possess this sensory phenomenology, it is not a mere accompaniment, that is something those types of experiences could do without and maintain their identity as precisely those types of experiences. Rather their sensory phenomenology is constitutive of there being the type of experiences they are. If such thoughts are along the right lines, then getting clearer about the character of the sensory phenomenology of episodic recollection is essential to better understanding these types of memory experiences. We can frame the pertinent question as follows: in what does the sensory dimension of episodic recollection consist. My goal here is to detail the problems with the existing imagistic-representationalist and Relationalist accounts of the sensory dimension of episodic recollection and develop a positive alternative, the Sensory Absence View. The guiding idea of my positive proposal will be that episodic recollection involves a positive phenomenology of sensory absence, whereby we represent, from our current temporal perspective, the lack or absence of a sensory perception of the relevant object and its properties, such that what is remembered is absent-qua-past, as I will put it.

## 1 Introduction

Episodic recollection often involves awareness of the sensory features or properties of what is remembered. Episodically recollecting that sunset last summer on the Greek island of Ios involves some kind of awareness of how it looked, that is

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its deep blood-red colour. Episodically recollecting hearing the Tristan and Isolde prelude at the Opera involves some kind of awareness of how it sounded, the particular melodies, timbres, pitch, and so on. In cases like these if we were to subtract this sensory dimension – whatever its precise character – we are arguably left with autobiographical semantic memory; I remember *that* I saw a beautiful sunset, *that* I heard a particularly arresting piece of music. This suggests that for episodic recollections that possess this sensory phenomenology it is not a mere accompaniment, that is something those types of experiences could do without and maintain their identity as those types of experiences. Rather, their sensory phenomenology is constitutive of their being the type of experiences they are – here we can talk of *intrinsically sensory* episodic recollections.<sup>1</sup> Whether all episodic recollections are intrinsically sensory won't concern me here – although if one can episodically recollect non-sensory states of mind, say certain thoughts, then there is some pressure to answer in the negative.

One further thought in this context is that the referential particularity of such episodic recollections at least in part turns on their sensory phenomenology. The way my episodic recollection of that distinctive sunset gets to be about (or seems to its subject to be about) that particular past event, and no other, seems importantly connected to the memory experience in some way making manifest to its subject the relevant sensory properties of precisely *that sunset*, and no other. In this respect the distinctively sensory way the object is given in episodic remembering partly serves to secure that my memory makes cognitive contact with that particular past event. At the very least this is how matters seem to the subject, such that the phenomenological particularity of episodic recollection – that what I seem to be remembering is *that sunset I saw on the island of Ios last summer* – turns on its sensory dimension.

If such thoughts are along the right lines, then getting clearer about the sensory phenomenology of episodic recollection is essential to better understanding these types of memory experiences. We can frame the pertinent question as follows: in what does the sensory dimension of episodic recollection consist? On one view, the sensory dimension is understood in terms of sensory properties of temporally present memory images – I call this view *imagistic-representationalism*. *Imagistic-representationalism* faces several problems, and we might prefer a form of *Relationalism*, which appeals to an acquaintance we have with the past. However, *Relationalism* struggles to make sense of the sensory dimension of episodic recall without assimilating it to sensory perception.

My goal here is to detail the central problems with *imagistic-representationalism* and *Relationalism* about the sensory dimension of episodic recollection (Sects. 1 and 2) and develop an alternative (Sect. 3). The guiding idea of my positive proposal is that episodic recollection involves a positive phenomenology of sensory absence, whereby we represent the absence of a sensory perception of the relevant object and its properties, such that what is remembered is given as *absent-qua-past*, as I will put it. The sensory dimension of episodic recollection therefore turns on the representation of a perceptual experience which *had* a sensory phenomenology, under a

<sup>1</sup> For episodic recollections that have a sensory dimension perhaps we find cases where the sensory dimension is indeed a *mere accompaniment* (I'm guardedly sceptical, but nothing here turns on settling such taxonomical issues).

distinctive mode of representation (more on this later). It is argued that this view has the materials to overcome a number of problems faced by the aforementioned views, while being an original proposal.

## 2 Imagistic-Representationalism

There is an intuitive appeal to talk of ‘pictures’ and ‘images’ when we reflect on the sensory dimension of episodic recollection. When episodically recollecting that beautiful sunset, I might describe myself as *picturing* it, where talk of picturing or ‘pictures’ can be translated into the idiom of mental images. In this section I’ll introduce two versions of a view which seek to make good on this idea, which I’ll call imagistic-representationalism. The central claim of imagistic-representationalism is that we should make sense of the sensory dimension of episodic recollection by appealing to *present mental imagery*. Note, one motivation for considering the varieties of imagistic-representationalism I do – which are of a kind of indirect realist sort – is that the appeal to present mental imagery offers a straightforward answer to our question of what the sensory dimension of episodic remembering consists in – it consists in the sensory features of the present mental image. I will also highlight a form of representationalism that seeks to do without present mental images by appeal to imagistic contents.

Let me start by rejecting a view which no one should accept, namely that the intentional object of episodic recollection is a present mental image, and that is all there is to say. We would be claiming that episodic recollection is about a present image, where that present image possesses some relevant set of sensory features. The problem with this view is that episodic recollection, at least as an experiential level state or conscious experience, is constitutively *about the past*.<sup>2</sup> As such it is a necessary condition on a plausible account of episodic recollection (at this level) that it does not temporally mislocate the intentional object of memory. My episodic recollection of that glorious sunset is about a past event – that is what my memory is in some sense directed towards, rather than just a present mental image.

With the above in mind, we can articulate our first imagistic-representationalist view in the following way. The intentionality of episodic recollection is complex insofar as it involves awareness of two objects. Memory experience is directed at the relevant past event, say the glorious sunset I saw last summer, but the way it gets to be directed at that past event – its primary intentional object – is on the basis of a mediating object, namely a present image which is now ‘before the mind’. To avoid temporally mislocating the intentional object of episodic recollection, whilst holding on to present mental images to explain the sensory dimension of episodic recollection, the imagistic-representationalist can say the following. Present mental images serve as mediating objects of awareness, such that we get to be aware of past events on the basis of the relevant present images (where such mental images could not be identical with the past events themselves, not least due to their temporal non-coincidence). Critically, it is not enough merely to have two objects in mind; rather I must

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Michaelian, 2016.

take there to be relevant relations of resemblance (or otherwise, and perhaps less demandingly, similarity) between the sensory properties of what is currently directly present to me ‘in the image’, and the intentional object remembered.

On this view episodic recollection provides us with indirect awareness of something in the past (its primary intentional object) in virtue of the holding of resemblance (or otherwise similarity) relations between (some significant subset of) sensory features of that event in the past, and something that is directly present to us now, namely a temporally present image (the mediating object).<sup>3</sup> Doubtless, there is more to be said here about the precise phenomenological character of such present mental images.<sup>4</sup> But with this broad framing of the view, let me consider some worries.

First, one might wonder whether talk of specifically resemblance in the case of episodic recollection is appropriate. Contrast the case of pictorial representation, say as it functions in a painting of Napoleon: the blue pigment on a canvas resembles the particular shade of blue of the lapel of Napoleon’s jacket, and it is in virtue of the holding of a relation of resemblance between the pigment on the canvass and the real colour of the object (or part thereof) that the former gets to represent the latter. However, what motivation is there for thinking that there is an analogue to pigment in the case of episodic recollection, as a kind of mental pigment? Connectedly, the view inflates the number of sensory properties in play, to those that are properties of the external objects of perception (e.g., the blood-red of the sunset), and those that qualify mental images (the blood-red of the mental image of sunset). Importantly, this worry holds regardless of whether or not the imagistic-representationalist prefers to talk of mere subjective similarity rather than resemblance relations between the sensory properties of present images and those of the past events being remembered.

A second worry is that there is pressure to resist a conception of the intentionality of episodic recollection as mediated by things which function as imagery, on the basis of its phenomenology. In the case of pictorial representation (or indeed other cases of imagistic representations which are not ‘mental’, such as photographs), there are two objects of awareness in play – the mediating object and the intentional object – the picture and *what it represents* (which are non-identical). But it is less obvious that the phenomenology of episodic recollection is accurately described as involving anything which is manifest to the rememberer (and so is being taken as) as *sign* or *picture* or *representation* for something else which is not temporally present, namely the past event. This is borne out in the following line of thought: One essential feature of imagistic representation, of which pictorial representation is paradigmatic, is that we can switch focus from the intentional object (e.g., Napoleon himself) to properties of the mediating object (e.g., the painting) such as to make the mediating object or

<sup>3</sup> This view has echoes of Hume’s theory of memory (see his [1985] 1739)) as something akin to perceiving a ‘copy’ or ‘image’ of a past perception.

<sup>4</sup> See Nanay, 2023 for a recent exploration of mental imagery which frames it as a specific kind of ‘offline’ perceptual processing. NB: We would also need to know significantly more about whether certain causal conditions have to hold between the generation of ‘present images’ and sensory features of the object remembered, as given on the basis of past perception, in a full-blown theory of episodic memory. For a classic discussion of causal issues in the philosophy of memory see Martin & Deutscher, 1966; more recently see Debus, 2010 (again see Michaelian, 2016 for a ‘constructivist’ rather than ‘archival’ approach).

some of its properties our focus (i.e., no longer taking what is perceptually present to one *as a representation*). In the case of a painting, I can switch attention to the particular quality of the brushstrokes on the canvas. But it is not obvious that anything like this kind of redirection of attention is possible in the case of episodic recollection. Can I really focus on the sensory properties of the mental image *qua* mental image? If episodic recollection involves the mediated intentionality characteristic of more common-garden-variety imagistic representation, then this should be a possibility, but it is not clear that it is. Rather, ‘from the inside’ episodic recollection is intentionally transparent, in that it doesn’t involve awareness of a mediating object as such, of something which is not merely in fact a representation, but something which is *taken as* a representation.<sup>5</sup>

So we have two worries with imagistic-representationalism as we have framed it so far. However, an alternative variety of imagistic-representationalist can get around these problems by opting for a different characterisation of the intentionality of episodic recollection.

On a second version of imagistic-representationalism, episodic recollection need not involve two objects of awareness. Rather, there is only one object and its sensory properties that are given at all, namely the object and its sensory properties as it figures in the mental image. However, to avoid temporal mislocation the subject simply supposes that what is presently given is *of the past*.<sup>6</sup> Let’s return to our stock example. I am episodically recollecting that blood-red sunset, which I witnessed on the island of Ios last summer in Greece. According to the current view this is to be theorised as follows: I am currently enjoying an experience which presents to me now a mental image of a blood-red sunset. In addition, I engage in an act of supposition that the sensory features which are present to me now, and are characteristic of the mental image I have before the mind, are *of the past*.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, talk of meditation, and related issues or resemblance (along with mental pigment) drop out of the picture. There are not two objects of awareness, a mediating object and an intentional object. There is one thing – a present mental image – that is supposed as being ‘of the past’.

However, there is a significant cost to be paid by developing imagistic-representationalism in this direction. There is a decoupling of the past-referring component of episodic recollection from its sensory dimension. First, it bears emphasising that on this view there is nothing intrinsic to the sensory dimension of episodic recollection that concerns the past – quite the contrary, the sensory aspects exclusively concern features of present mental imagery. This is further borne out in the fact that the sensory dimension is not enlisted to secure referential particularity, that is the way the

<sup>5</sup> See Reid (1951 [1785]) Essay III, Chap. 1 for similar considerations. Soteriou 2018 also considers a particularity worry with this kind of view, which turns on the present mental image merely being of a generic sensory-event type, and so not able to secure (even if just seeming) cognitive contact with precisely those particular past events in virtue of the presence of the relevant sensory dimension. See also discussion of memory demonstratives and referential particularity in Campbell, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Soteriou 2018 calls something similar to this kind of view a re-enactment view (although his discussion concerns more specifically the notion of *mental time travel*).

<sup>7</sup> This view has some similarities with the view articulated by Matthen, 2010, although on his view the past operator is something applied to relevant imagery at the subpersonal level, as a bottom-up feature of the memory system.

memory picks out a particular event in the past rather than any other – that is secured, if at all, by the suppositional component. The capacity that a rememberer has, in episodic recollection, to make cognitive contact with a particular past event, is arguably secured, if it is secured at all, by a demonstrative thought, < that past sunset >, which is part of the content of the relevant supposition.

Yet, as was noted in the Introduction, if there is any plausibility to idea that the referential particularity of intrinsically sensory episodic recollections turns on their possessing the sensory phenomenology they do – such that the distinctively sensory way the object is given at least partly serves to secure that my memory makes cognitive contact with that particular past event – then this view must deny this datum. In this respect, it is hard not to think of this view as sliding towards a mere accompaniment view of the sensory dimension of episodic recollection; all the heavy lifting with respect to the past-referring aspects of episodic recollection is done by the suppositional component. And so it is doubtful whether we are still able to think of the relevant memories as *intrinsically sensory memories*.

Finally, I want to provide some remarks on a different variety of representationalism. While the views criticised above might be taken as broadly representationalist in character, I have arguably overlooked the most plausible form of representationalism. Indeed, standard representationalist accounts of episodic memory in the contemporary literature eschew any appeal to the intentional object of awareness being *a present image*. On such representationalist views one is intentionally aware of the relevant past object or event, say the sunset on the Island of Ios last summer, and critically not some temporally present mediating object, though the structure of this awareness is said to be *intentional or representational* rather than relational, where the form of awareness implicated doesn't require the existence of the past object or event. As such, in the good case a remembering subject enjoys a direct, rather than indirect or mediated, awareness of the relevant past event or object. On such varieties of (direct) representationalism talk of imagery merely concerns the *format* of the so-called representational vehicle, that is the format of the content, as imagistic content, and critically *not* some separate intentional object which is itself 'an image'.<sup>8</sup>

Now this appeal to *imagistic* contents is important in our context, since what would not be relevant is a form of representationalism about episodic memory that merely appealed to some informational (or otherwise non-phenomenal representational) content: what is required for our project is a view which explains what the sensory dimension of episodic recollection consists in, as appealing to how things seem sensory-wise to the rememberer, and it is unclear how an appeal to mere informational content really helps; after all, semantic memory carries information, or has informational content, but need not have any manifest sensory dimension (i.e., any way that the subject is being sensorily appeared to).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See discussion in Barkasi and Sant'Anna 2002; ; Hoerl 2018; Martin 2019. See also for example, Campbell, 2002: 177–193; Martin 2015: 34, talks of 'visually imagistic elements' in episodic recollection; Matthen, 2010 conceives of episodic memory as inherently imagistic; Gregory, 2018 talk of the 'recollective images' involved in sensory memory.

<sup>9</sup> See Byrne 2010 who takes this route of moving from Humean images to informational contents.

However, that being said, what is required is a significantly more detail concerning the claim that episodic recollection trades in *imagistic content*, such as to specifically elucidate the relevant sensory dimension. While on such views it may well be the case that ‘imagery’ serves as the *vehicle* that provides for intentional awareness of the past object or event itself – rather than itself being an object of awareness, as on our two first varieties of imagistic representationalism – the sensory dimension is still tied to such imagistic contents or imagistic representational vehicles, which are spatio-temporally distinct from the object remembered and its properties (as temporally present imagistic contents of experience). And note, the invocation of ‘imagistic contents’ to highlight that what we are dealing with are types of episodic memories with a distinctively sensory character, does nothing to tell us more precisely what the sensory dimension of episodic remembering consists of *qua* those imagistic contents.

Given this, it is fair to think that the appeal to imagistic contents in our context is a placeholder for a more detailed account of the sensory dimension of episodic remembering. In Sect. 3, I return to one such representationalist view – the Dependency View – which takes up the challenge of elucidating the sensory dimension of episodic recollection without reference to present mental images, so I save further discussion of this non-mediated form of representationalism for then.

### 3 Relationalism About the Sensory Dimension

At this point, I introduce a Relationalist view of the sensory dimension of episodic recollection, which runs as follows: the blood-red of the sunset remembered just is, and is no more than, the blood-red of the sunset when I saw it (although that can be remembered more or less accurately).<sup>10</sup> There is no need to posit any present mental image before the mind with its own sensory properties. Rather, in episodic recollection, we stand in a relation of acquaintance to the sensory properties of what is being remembered. As Laird, an early proponent, puts it, ‘memory does not mean the existence of present representatives of past things. It is the mind’s awareness of past things themselves’.<sup>11</sup> In this context, it is worth reminding ourselves of the canonical statement of acquaintance relations from Russell: ‘I say that I am *acquainted* with an object when I have a direct cognitive relation to that object, i.e., when I am directly aware of the object itself.’<sup>12</sup> So Relationalism about the sensory dimension of episodic recollection would have it that in remembering that sunset on the Island of Ios last summer, I stand in a direct cognitive relation to the sunset and its sensory properties.

<sup>10</sup> The classic advocate of this view is Reid (1951 [1785]); Sartre, 2004 also gestures towards it. In the contemporary discussion see Debus, 2008; Sant’Anna and Barkasi 2022. For an early critic see Malcolm, 1977. Note, my interest here is strictly in Relationalism about the *sensory dimension* of episodic recollection, rather than a ‘full-blown’ Relationalist account of episodic recollection per se (see Debus, 2008 for that). There are interesting things to be said about this connection (see in particular discussion in Martin 2015), but for reasons of space I focus squarely on whether Relationalism about the sensory dimension of episodic recollection is plausible.

<sup>11</sup> See Laird, 1920: 56.

<sup>12</sup> Russell 1910-11: 108.

This view can draw support from the phenomenological claims that were made in criticising the first formulation of imagistic-representationalism. We only seem to be aware of one object and its sensory properties in episodic recollection – the remembered object, which we would specify in an answer to the question ‘what are you remembering’ – and what we are aware of is not given to us as a representation of something distinct from it. This form of intentional transparency is respected on a view which claims that in episodic recollection, what is given to me is nothing more than the sensory properties of the event I am remembering, to which I stand in a relation of acquaintance.

The view also enjoys the following benefit: ‘pastness’ is not some additional property which we need to represent or predicate of some object and its properties (as with the second variety of imagistic-representationalism). Rather, pastness is a characteristic of our *relation* to an object and its properties, such that in episodic recollection we stand in the pastness relation to the very same objects and properties to which we previously stood in the perceptual-present relation. We therefore avoid any ontological inflation in terms of the number of objects or sensory properties in play (there is no mental image with *its* sensory properties), and don’t run the risk of temporally misrepresenting the remembered object. Let me explain this second point: the sunset is only given as *past* from the perspective of my present in remembering it. Yet, the sunset when originally experienced was temporally present. However, we invite the charge of temporally misrepresenting the sunset if we think that the sunset and its sensory properties have or need to, in our episodic recollecting it, accrue an extra property of *pastness*. We would be representing the sunset *now* as having a property it did not have at the time when it was originally experienced – the property of pastness – which looks like a misrepresentation of how it was in the past (where it was present).<sup>13</sup> On the Relational view this is avoided insofar as *pastness* is a characteristic of our relation to the sunset when we are engaged in episodic recollection, and not a property we affix to what we are remembering.

However, despite these benefits the view encounters significant difficulties in trying to precisify the way the sensory properties of the past event are given. If we say that the rememberer stands in a relation of acquaintance with the sensory properties of what is remembered, we risk assimilating the sensory dimension of episodic recollection to the sensory dimension of perception. Our central model for thinking of acquaintance with sensory properties is perception, in which the relevant objects and their sensory properties are given to us in the most phenomenologically direct way possible. According to Relationalism about perception, in veridical perception, a subject stands in a relation to a perceived object, such that, as it is often put, they couldn’t be having the experience they are having if the object did not exist. As McDowell puts it, ‘which configurations a mind can get itself into is partly determined by which objects exist in the world.’<sup>14</sup> What however is important for our purposes isn’t the metaphysics of perception or the obtaining of perceptual relations *per se*, but rather perceptual experiences’ spatial-temporal phenomenology of ‘real existence’ or relationality, such that in perceptual experience the perceptual object and its

<sup>13</sup> See Martin 2015: 25–6.

<sup>14</sup> McDowell, 1986: 139. See also Campbell, 2002.

sensory properties are given to me as existing *here and now*, and so are given in the most phenomenologically direct way possible. There is no more fundamental mode of phenomenal acquaintance with sensory properties – say the blood-red of a sunset – than that of being in (seeming) perceptual contact with them. Now, the Relationalist about the sensory dimension of episodic recollection can't say that in standing in an acquaintance relation with the past event and its sensory properties that those properties are given to me in the most direct and originary way they can be, since to be given in that way is the purview of perceptual acquaintance, and episodic recollection needs to be phenomenologically distinguished from perceptual experience.

Given the above, the Relationalist won't claim that in episodically recollecting a past event we are *merely perceiving* it. So perhaps the view will need to be framed as follows: In remembering the sensory properties of a past event, say the particular blood-red of the sunset I saw last summer, we 'rekindle' or 'relive' the relevant perceptual experience with its sensory dimension, and so 'have again' the relevant sensory perception.<sup>15</sup> On this view, memory acquaintance would be understood in terms of 'retained' or 'recollected' perceptual acquaintance.<sup>16</sup>

However, there is a phenomenological difference, and specifically at the level of the relevant sensory dimension, between a *perceiving again* and an episodic recollection.<sup>17</sup> This is brought out in the following extension of our example: If I could travel back in time to that Greek Island, and *see again* the blood-red sunset, this would be 'perception again', but would be an altogether different experience than episodic recollection of the sunset. In the former case, I would be enjoying *perception again*, so enjoying an experience which would involve the presentation to me *hic et nunc* of the relevant object and its sensory properties (so standing in a seeming relation of perceptual acquaintance to those sensory properties, albeit one that reproduces a perceptual acquaintance I have previously enjoyed).<sup>18</sup> But episodic recollection is not like that; it is not perceiving again, as replicated perception, and wouldn't be confused for it; much less is it literally a perception of the past (e.g., observing an explosion from an imploding star 15 million light-years away).<sup>19</sup> Rather episodic recollection, like its close cousin sensory imagining, has a phenomenology which reflects the current *absence to perception* of its object and by dint of this the absence to perception of rel-

<sup>15</sup> Such talk of 'reliving' the past is commonplace in the contemporary memory literature (see e.g., Michaelian, 2016; Debus, 2008; Tulving, 2002; Klein 2015).

<sup>16</sup> See Debus's (2008: 409) talk of the *recollective relation*.

<sup>17</sup> See discussion in Reid 1951 Essay III, Chap. 1.

<sup>18</sup> See Matthen, 2010: 10 for a similar thought (see also Byrne, 2010: 25). This is a worry with taking talk of 'mental time travel' too literally when it comes to theorising about episodic recollection.

<sup>19</sup> See Martin 2015: 23, for a similar point (cf. Taylor, 1938). The idea of memory as perception of the past has found more recent expression in Aranyosi, 2020, which offers a relationalist view of memory as *past-perception*. On Aranyosi's view episodic recollection instantiates a *perceptual relation*, albeit a specific 'memorial' mode of it. One problem with this view is that we typically distinguish at the experiential level between perceptual modalities on the basis of their representing, or otherwise relating us to, different kinds of sensible properties (as proper sensibles); but it seems odd to suggest that memory should serve as an additional mode of perception, and in virtue of this have the ability to instantiate a perceptual relation, since the properties that it represents, or otherwise relates us to, are not some set of *proprietary memory sensibles or properties*, but plausibly those *same sensory properties* of the object remembered that were once perceived (in whatever specific perceptual modality).

evant sensory properties – such that I am aware that the relevant event is *not* happening now, that I am not now in the perceptual presence, even reproduced perceptual presence, of the relevant object and its sensory properties. But if this is right then it becomes puzzling how I can stand in a relation of acquaintance to the sensory properties of what is being remembered. How, after all, can I be (sensorily) acquainted with something which is in an important way sensorily absent?<sup>20</sup> We would need to know significantly more about how this is supposed to work.

This line of thought represents a significant difficulty for Relationalism: Modelling memory acquaintance too closely to perceptual acquaintance leads to a misdescription of the way the sensory properties of the remembered event are given in episodic recollection, and it is not immediately obvious how to maintain claims of acquaintance (or at least acquaintance with the relevant sensory properties of the object remembered) in the face of the phenomenology of sensory absence (I return in more detail to this idea in Sect. 4).

At this point, in seeking to avoid going the ‘reproduced perception’ route the Relationalist could say the following: in episodic recollection we are acquainted with the sensory properties of the remembered event, but these they are given in a non-perceptual *modified way*, and it is in this way that we should understand the proprietary relation of pastness we bear to the relevant object and its sensory properties. Emphasising the difference from the first variety of imagistic-representationalism, it would be said that I don’t treat what I am aware of in episodic recollection as a *representation* of a past event. Rather, I simply remember the sunset, such that I am acquainted with the sunset and its sensory properties, but it is not given in an ordinary way, which is the proprietary way of perception, but in a modified non-perceptual way, in the ‘way of memory’. The problem, however, comes in trying to provide more substantive detail on what this modified non-perceptual form of memory acquaintance amounts to.<sup>21</sup>

This is not to provide an argument for the claim that the Relationalist about the sensory dimension of episodic recollection could not go onto develop an account of the relevantly modified mode of (non-perceptual) acquaintance with the past, but just to suggest that there are significant hurdles to overcome in doing so – principally as we saw above, respecting the phenomenology of sensory absence while maintaining that what we have here is an acquaintance relation. To my knowledge, there is no extant Relationalist account that does just this.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Taking leave of phenomenological considerations a similar but importantly different worry can be framed in terms of the impossibility of a two-place metaphysical relation obtaining between a subject *in the present* and an object and its properties *in the past* (where the thought is that the obtaining of a present relation requires the temporal coincidence of both relata *in the present*). For responses to this kind worry see Debus, 2008: 409–12; Bernecker, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Note: the imagistic representationalist has a readymade account of the modified way the sensory properties of the past event are given. In episodic recollection tokens of the relevant types of sensory properties (e.g., colours) are given in the form of sensory properties of present mental images. Sensory properties therefore have two possible modes of presentation, either perceptual or imagistic. Accordingly, the distinctive ‘modified’ sensory dimension of episodic recollection turns on the fact that the relevant sensory properties are given imagistically, so as *absent to perception*, but nonetheless as properties of present images ‘before the mind’.

<sup>22</sup> NB: another problem for Relationalist views, which carries over from the perceptual case, is how to theorise so-called bad cases of *mere seeming* (e.g., hallucination) in which it is not the case that one stands

Before proceeding to consider a different view, let me note that there is an alternative austere Relationalist view, that somewhat mirrors the second variety of imagistic representationalism discussed in Sect. 2. It might be said that the relation to the past enjoyed by episodic memory is something more like the relation of demonstrative or singular thought, and so is not intrinsically sensory in character. The view would be that my current memory makes cognitive contact with, and so relates me to, the past object and its properties in virtue of some episodic singular thought, which doesn't require any sensory dimension. This form of Relationalism ultimately must deny any constitutive role for sensory phenomenology in episodic recollection. However, for our purposes, such a view has little to recommend it, since it is no longer providing us with an account of intrinsically sensory episodic recollections, or indeed explaining what the sensory dimension of such episodic recollections consists in.<sup>23</sup>

## 4 A Positive Alternative

### 4.1 An Initial Clarification of the Phenomenology of Sensory Absence

To articulate a view which can do better than either imagistic-representationalism or Relationalism, I want to focus in detail on the phenomenology of sensory absence. So my positive work in this section will consist of three things: (3.1) an initial clarification of the phenomenology of sensory absence (mostly *via negativa*), (3.2) a discussion of presence-in-absence and the Dependency View, and (3.3) the explicit development of what I will call the Sensory-Absence view, which can elucidate and the phenomenology of sensory absence.

A first point to note is that if the notion of sensory absence is going to do any work in an account of the sensory dimension of episodic recollection, we need to distinguish between *absence phenomenology* on the one hand and the *absence of phenomenology* on the other. What will be a non-starter in an explanation of the sensory dimension of episodic recollection is the claim that there is just a lack of any sensory phenomenology whatsoever; that would serve less as an explanation and more of a denial of our explanandum. Here we can remind ourselves that semantic memory can occur whilst lacking any sensory phenomenology, but that in the case of intrinsically sensory episodic recollection there looks to be some form of sensory phenomenology that needs elucidating.

In this context, it is also worth noting that the positive phenomenology of sensory absence in episodic recollection can't fruitfully be modelled after two more or less familiar forms of absence phenomenology from the literature on the way perceptual experience can represent absences. Let's first consider so-called perceptions of absence whereby I have a palpable sense of something being missing from a cur-

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in a relation to the relevant object and its properties, insofar as no such object exists, but which might well be phenomenologically indistinguishable from their veridical counterparts (see extended discussion of this for memory in Debus, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> Arguably this is close to Russell's early view (see his 1912: 114–15; 1992 9–10), with the experiential dimension of episodic recollection being understood in terms of present mental imagery. See Martin 2015 for discussion. Arguably this is also close to aspects of Campbell's, 2002 view.

rent visual scene. Here is how Anna Farennikova frames them: ‘absence experiences explicitly reveal to the viewer what is incomplete or lacking from the scene’ [e.g., the laptop that was previously on the table is no longer there; the individual who was sitting next to you has got up and left while you were talking to someone else]. They are fundamentally impressions of absence...<sup>24</sup> Whatever (sensory) absence phenomenology is involved in episodic recollection, it is not equivalent to this: it is not to be characterised in terms of impressions of some object being missing from a perceived scene. After all, I might remember some such ‘impression of absence’: I might episodically recollect that occasion where the laptop that was previously on the table was no longer there after I returned from the restroom; but the phenomenology of doing so isn’t somehow of a piece with the absence phenomenology which characterises the original perceptual episode (whatever the precise character of the latter).

Secondly, we also won’t be able to make much progress by modelling the distinctively mnemonic phenomenology of sensory absence as akin to the way we can perceptually represent parts or sides of three-dimensional objects that are currently occluded. Take the case of a visual experience of a cube. Whatever perspective you occupy you can see at most three sides of a cube at any given moment. But cubes or cuboids (more generally) are six-sided three-dimensional objects. And critically there is an intuitive pull to say that what I see, what my visual experience presents me with, is the *cube itself*, that is the complete or whole six-sided three-dimensional object, and not something that somehow falls short of that, even though from my perspective I can’t have all six sides in view at the same time. One plausible thought here is that I am in some way able to perceptually represent those sides of the cube that are currently out of view, that are currently ‘absent’, given my perspectival location – as it is often put, I amodally complete the three-dimensional object, such as to generate a sense of its currently occluded parts. But again, whatever the precise details of this kind of absence phenomenology, this is strikingly different from the phenomenology of sensory absence in episodic recollection. To run the same contrast as above, I can episodically remember seeing a self-occluding three-dimensional object, but the phenomenology of doing that isn’t somehow of a piece with the absence phenomenology characteristic of the original perceptual experience.

Now, what is arguably distinctive of both the cases considered above is that they are, in different ways, what we can label *absences-in-presence*, in that their absence phenomenology trades off the perceptual presence of some scene or object, relative to which something, or a part thereof, is experienced as more or less absent. As such, the relevant absence phenomenology turns on a sense of things being ‘missing’ or ‘occluded’ relative to a way things are currently perceptually given as being. They concern *what is or is not being perceptually presented*, given that things are more generally being perceptually presented or experienced. But as we put it previously, episodic recollection has an absence phenomenology, such that I am aware that the relevant event is *not* happening now, that I am not now in the perceptual presence of the relevant perceptual scene, including the relevant object and its sensory properties – it therefore concerns the absence phenomenology attendant to the *wholesale*

<sup>24</sup> See Farennikova, 2013: 431 (my italics). See also Gow 2021 for some scepticism that *perceptions of absences* in Farennikova’s sense are genuinely perceptual phenomena.

*absence of current perceptual presentation* (a point we will return to below). What is therefore required is an account of this positive phenomenology of sensory absence in episodic recollection, whereby there is *something-it-is-like* for the subject to *not now* be in the sensory presence of the sunset, say, and its distinctive colours – what is required is an explication of a distinctively mnemonic *presence-in-absence*.

But critically, we need to find a way of saying something more substantive about what this mnemonic presence-in-absence consists in without defaulting to imagistic-representationalism. The imagistic-representationalist wants to replace perceptual sensory presence, with imagistic sensory presence, so one form of sensory presence with another. In this respect, when it comes to making sense of the phenomenology of sensory absence the imagistic-representationalist is no better placed than the Relationalist who opts for reproduced or retained perceptual acquaintance. Given this, we need a view which resists both moves, but critically one which doesn't immediately go from absence to sensory perception, to present in sensory images, and so doesn't replace one form of sensory presence with another, so to speak – we need a view which sticks with sensory absence.<sup>25</sup>

## 4.2 Presence-in-Absence and the Dependency View

Let's start by drawing on some passages in Sartre that gesture in the direction of a phenomenology of sensory absence, in terms of a distinctive presence-in-absence:

It is only on the ground of sensory intuition that the words 'absent', 'far from me' can have a sense, on the ground of a sensory intuition that gives itself as not being able to take place. (Sartre, 2004: 13)

Only, the Pierre that I could touch I posit at present as not being touched by me. My image of him is a certain manner of not touching him, not seeing him, a way he has of not being at such a distance, in such a position. The belief, in the image, posits the intuition, but does not posit Pierre. The characteristic of Pierre is not to be non-intuitive, as one might be tempted to believe, but to be 'intuitive-absent', given as absent to intuition... (Sartre, 2004: 14)

We need not try to make sense of all that Sartre is attempting to articulate here, and we can also pass over the fact that his discussion concerns sensory imagination rather than sensory memory (although see below), but nonetheless there is an interesting line of thought we can develop for the case of episodic recollection, which will allow me to begin to develop my positive account.

Let's start by restating that the way in which the sunset is given to me, in episodic recollection, is as fundamentally absent to 'sensory intuition', that is as absent to sense-perception. What does this more concretely mean? First, I want to try to capture this idea of a distinctive mnemonic presence-in-absence by reference to a par-

<sup>25</sup> While not framed in these terms I take it something like this idea is implicit in the following suggestion by Martin (2015: 42): 'we need to find a way of recognising the way in which memory experience should not purely be a relation, without simply falling back on a representational account.'

ticular representationalist view of episodic recollection, the Dependency View. After explaining why I don't think this view can quite get into view the positive phenomenology of sensory absence particular to episodic recollection, I'll then turn to my own positive view, which takes on board an insight from the Dependency View.

On the Dependency View, as framed by Mike Martin: 'an episode of recall has as its *object* the initial experience which was the apprehending of the event'.<sup>26</sup> Martin goes on to clarify that 'although an episode of recall has as its object the initial experience which was the apprehending of the event, it has thereby as a proper part of its content what was then apprehended'.<sup>27</sup> The idea here is that the content of episodic recollection includes a *past perceptual experience*, such that episodic recollection represents a past perceptual experience. Now, we might think that such a view is well-placed to explain the sensory dimension of episodic recall, since by representing a past perceptual experience which itself had a sensory dimension – the past perception of the blood-red of the sunset – episodic recollection inherits some of the sensory flavour which is part and parcel of the past perception it represents. Put otherwise, the sensory phenomenology of episodic recollection is to be explained in terms of the fact that it represents a state which itself had a sensory phenomenology.<sup>28</sup>

Within our context, though, and at first glance, it is hard to see how such a view does any better than imagistic-representationalism or Relationalism with respect to the phenomenology of sensory absence, as capturing and elucidating a supposed mnemonic presence-in-absence. How, after all, does the representation of a past perceptual experience, a perceptual experience where the relevant sensory properties were perceptually present to me, do justice to the idea that in episodic recollection there is a positive phenomenology of *current absence to sensory perception*? Doesn't the Dependency view just replace 'sensory presence' with the *representation* of sensory presence? And further to this, do we want to say that the phenomenological difference in terms of the relevant sensory dimension between sense-perception and episodic recollection is that in the perceptual case we are in the direct presence of the relevant object and its sensory properties, whereas in episodic recollection we have the *representation* of being in the direct presence of the relevant object and its sensory properties, as a sensory presence we previously directly enjoyed?

Martin has a response to this worry. Arguably, the representation, as opposed to the having, of a perceptual experience can account for the relevant sense of absence, as a presence-in-absence. Here is how Martin puts it most recently:

The example of memorial experience explains why we must treat some experience as representational in nature, and more specifically, as the representation of other experience. Experience which manifests the aspect of presence in absence, which manifests a representational character, thereby provides an experiential ground for one's grasp of the contrast between the past and present

<sup>26</sup> Martin, 2001: 269; 278, my emphasis (see also Martin, 2002; Peacocke, 1985).

<sup>27</sup> Martin, 2001: 278.

<sup>28</sup> For broader criticism of this Dependency View (as it applies to both episodic recollection and imaginative experience) see, for example, Hopkins, 1998: 187–193; Teroni, 2017; Noordhof, 2002; Soteriou, 2013: 161–63; Openshaw, 2022: Sect. 5; Fernandez, 2008.

as different locations of objects and qualities. Moreover, memorial experience is experience of one's past encounter with what one remembers: past experience, what one underwent, is present in current recall...to make sense of the contrast between memorial experience and sensory experience of the present, we need to recognise ways in which some of our experience is manifestly representational (Martin 2019: 120).<sup>29</sup>

So, according to Dependency View, as articulated, it is in virtue of the structure of specifically *representational awareness*, rather than say the *relational or presentational awareness* characteristic of perceptual experience, that we find the relevant sense of presence-in-absence. It is precisely the purview of manifestly *experiential representations*, as opposed to perceptual relations or presentations, that they can provide us with *present* awareness of things that are currently *absent* (or indeed which might not exist, or no longer exist).

However, this still is arguably not enough to secure the positive phenomenology of sensory absence we have been trying to get into focus. First, in general, 'the representation of other experience', say the *representation* of a 'sensory presence', doesn't necessitate a contemporaneous 'sensory absence' or sense of absence. I might entertain an episodic thought concerning a perceptual experience, for example, that I am currently enjoying a visual experience of a red and round ball, without any sensory absence, and certainly not the absence of the red and round ball. Rather, in such a case we have a co-present representation of a perceptual experience whose content is drawn from a current and ongoing sensory perceptual presence. So the *mere representation* of a perceptual experience per se, doesn't necessitate that the perceptual experience so represented is not currently being enjoyed.

And even in a case in which we represent a perceptual experience we are not currently enjoying, so one we are not currently 'having', it is hard to see such a state being a present representation of a perceptual experience which is not currently taking place will secure, in and of itself, the positive phenomenology of sensory absence. After all, to again draw on the example of episodic thought, I might entertain a thought about a perceptual experience I am not currently enjoying, say a semantic memory with the content <that perceptual experience of the red and round ball I enjoyed yesterday>. While there is certainly the *absence of perceptual phenomenology* here insofar as no perceptual experience is being enjoyed, and so the power of representations or 'representational character' to provide us with present awarenesses of things to which we are not currently (perceptually) related, is on display, this is surely just a case of a *lack of any sensory phenomenology whatsoever*, rather than any distinctive mnemonic presence-in-absence. It is a case in which what was previously perceptually present is given merely non-intuitively, rather than as intuitive-absent, to use Sartre's terms. So, a state being a representation of a perceptual experience,

<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, in his (2015: 38), Martin specifically references Sartre, again using the Presence-in-absence terminology in an attempt to provide an account of episodic recollection: 'memory is not mere imagination, but Sartre's talk of presence in absence fits certain paradigms of memory experience as well as it does visualising'.

rather than the having of one, doesn't suffice for the presence of the relevant mnemonic sense of sensory absence.

Given these points, it is hard to see how the distinctively mnemonic phenomenology of sensory absence can be made to turn exclusively on, or arise in virtue of, its merely being or involving a representation of a perceptual experience one once had – more is needed to secure that. Martin's stated equivalence between, or entailment from, *manifests a representational character* to *manifests the aspect of presence-in-absence* doesn't obviously hold. Nonetheless, there is something right about the idea that presence-in-absence is connected to our *present representation* of a perceptual experience, but this idea needs to be developed in a somewhat different direction.

### 4.3 The Sensory-Absence View of Episodic Recollection

With the above in mind, let me return to the thought from the beginning of Sect. 3.2, that the way in which the sunset is given to me, in episodic recollection, is as fundamentally absent to 'sensory intuition', that is as absent to sense-perception, and Sartre's talk of a 'sensory intuition that gives itself as not being able to take place'.<sup>30</sup>

We can get some traction on these ideas by noting that it must be right that I can't strictly speaking have given to me, from my temporal perspective in the present as the rememberer, the sunset as it was *originally given*, since to have it given in that way would be to enjoy a sense-perception of it now. This is what is misleading about talk of 'reliving', 'revisiting', 'seeing again' or 'reproduced perception', when it comes to attempting to clarify the phenomenology of episodic recollection – such talk obscures the need to recognise the phenomenology of sensory absence.<sup>31</sup>

Building this insight into the phenomenology, then, the positive phenomenology of sensory absence would take the form of an awareness of precisely a *lack* of the possibility of sensory perception of the remembered object or event, such that from my current temporal perspective a sense-perception of the relevant object or event (the sunset) *can't be had* – as Sartre puts it, 'it gives itself as not being able to take place'. There is therefore, we might think, a particular kind of *modal awareness* characteristic of the distinctively mnemonic phenomenology of sensory absence: My memory of the sunset is 'a certain manner' of *not seeing it* – to put it in Sartre's evocative terms – a manner which, on the positive account I am drawing out, is to be explicated in terms of an awareness of the *impossibility* from my current temporal perspective of enjoying the sensory perception of it I once had.

Now, interestingly, to further draw out this feature we can make a contrast with sensory imagination along modal lines. When I imagine a blood-red sunset that is also, on this kind of view, given as fundamentally absent to 'sensory intuition', as absent to sense perception, such that I am not *now* in the direct presence of the sunset

<sup>30</sup> Sartre, 2004: 13.

<sup>31</sup> As Martin (2015: 38) notes, perhaps there are certain kinds of 'flashbacks', particularly those associated with PTSD, which are reported as having the 'character of current experience', however even if these experiences are to count as episodic recollections, they are very rare (certainly not the usual fare for those enjoying sensory memories). And given the emotional trauma associated with the relevant remembered events, we should also be careful with respect to taking the reports of their phenomenal character at face value.

– my imagining of the sunset is also a ‘certain manner’ of *not seeing it*, a presence-in-absence, to use Sartre’s phrase again. But there is no sense, in my imagining the sunset, of the kind of restricted modal awareness as is implicated in the mnemonic case. With respect to sensory imagination it remains a *live possibility* that I could, say in some future perceptual experience, enjoy a sensory perception of what I am now imagining. Contrastingly, in the mnemonic case, possible perception is modally foreclosed, in that the objects and events remembered can no longer be perceptually presented, such that I can’t have given to me, from my temporal perspective in the present as the rememberer, the sunset as it was *originally given*.

As such, the way in which the sunset and its blood-red colour are given in episodic recollection is by way of a specific ‘absence-based mode of presentation’, a distinctively mnemonic way of *not having it given to me perceptually, here and now*. The sunset and its sensory properties are, as we might put it, *absent-qua-past*: in episodic recollection I enjoy a *present awareness* of a particular sensory perception as *not now being able to take place* insofar as the relevant object(s) and its properties are of the past. On this view the sensory dimension of episodic recollection, along with its object (the event), belong in the past, and I don’t ‘make contact’ with them by trying to ‘make them present’ or ‘reproduce them’, or become re-acquainted with them somehow, but by directing my consciousness towards them under this distinctive mode of presentation, as being currently *absent to sensory perception qua past*. This can serve as a first pass at what I will call the Sensory-Absence view of episodic recollection.

While there is certainly something to be said for this view, and its implication of a distinctive kind of modal awareness in episodic recollection, it requires further articulation and defense. To further develop it, I want to draw on a central idea from the Dependency View criticised above, namely that memory experience involves the representation of a past perceptual experience – that it involves, as Martin puts it, the ‘representation of other experience’. However, by the lights of the Sensory-Absence view, it does so in a distinctive way, or under a distinctive mode of presentation, which implicates the modal awareness discussed above (indeed, one distinguishing feature of *representations*, as opposed to *relations*, at least as usually conceived, is that they represent their objects under distinctive aspects, or *modes of presentation*).<sup>32</sup> Episodic recollection involves the present representation of a sensory perception of the relevant event and its properties, but with a specific aspectual qualifier of *absent-qua-past*, or under the distinctively mnemonic absence-based mode of presentation, and in virtue of this, as *modally foreclosed* to current perception.

Critically, this development of the Sensory-Absence view goes beyond the Dependency View. Intrinsically sensory episodic recollections, on this picture, involve an implicit awareness that the relevant sensory perception once enjoyed is now *modally foreclosed* to (current) perception – so implicating the distinctively mnemonic modal awareness – such that sensory perception of *that very* sunset and its distinctive blood-red colour is no longer a ‘live option’ for me from my temporal perspective in the present. In that sense the distinctively mnemonic mode of presentation of *absent-qua-past*, goes beyond a sense of absence pertaining to the relevant sensory presence not

<sup>32</sup> On the ‘aspectual shape’ dimension of intentional or representational states see Searle 1992: 131.

in fact being instantiated, such that I am not in the perceptual presence of the relevant object and its properties *here and now* (which may be equally true of sensory imagination), but as not *being able* to take place here and now *qua* being past.<sup>33</sup>

On this Sensory-Absence view, the distinctive sensory character of episodic recollection is therefore made sense of in terms of a phenomenology of sensory absence attendant to the present representation of the *absence-qua-past* of a particular sensory perception. Importantly, what we have in our Sensory-Absence view of episodic recollection is a particular kind of representationalist account which does not just *stick with* sensory absence, so to speak, but can elucidate what the relevant phenomenology of sensory absence consists in.<sup>34</sup>

Let me now draw out some further features of this positive account. The Sensory Absence view has the benefit that it provides us with a neat explanation of why the sensory dimension of episodic recollection is always apt to seem phenomenologically modified when compared with the sensory dimension of perception. Since to enjoy a perceptual experience as of the blood-red of the sunset is to be in the (seeming) direct presence of the relevant sensory properties, whereas when we represent the particular past perception of the blood-red of the sunset under the mode of presentation of *absent-qua-past* (and in virtue of this as modally foreclosed to current perception) we stand in fundamentally different relation of awareness to those sensory properties; not one of (seeming) acquaintance, much less retained (seeming) acquaintance, but the awareness of (or representation of) the *current absence and foreclosing* of that very (seeming) perceptual acquaintance with those sensory properties.<sup>35</sup>

In this respect, the view does significantly better than the form of Relationalism we considered in Sect. 3, which struggles to make sense of this ‘modified’ sensory phenomenology without opening the door to imagistic-representationalism. But critically, there is no gesture towards any form of sensory presence in the form of present mental images; there is no room or need on this view for present mental images with their own sensory properties. The only sensory properties ‘in play’ in episodic recollection are those of the remembered event – there is only the *blood-red* of the sunset (a data point which the Relationalist is right to emphasise) – but they are given in the relevant modified way detailed above. The Sensory-Absence view therefore steers a middle ground between imagistic-representationalism on the one hand and Relationalism on the other.

Now at this stage, it might be further questioned why the Sensory-Absence view needs to be articulated by way of the *modal claim*, such that in representing a per-

<sup>33</sup> This might explain why much remembering has a melancholic flavour to it, or at least precipitates melancholic feeling – it involves awareness of something (one’s past perceptual access to the event and its properties) as *foreclosed* to one, given one’s current temporal perspective.

<sup>34</sup> For a view which develops some of these ideas of presence-in-absence in a somewhat different direction see Soteriou 2018, who relies more on the notion of the representation of a temporal perspective. I save detailed comparison of the view here with Soteriou’s (reasonably brief proposal) for a separate occasion.

<sup>35</sup> On this view ‘memory acquaintance’ is not some *sui-generis* form of acquaintance, or indeed a different non-perceptual mnemonic way of having a direct cognitive relation that the relevant object and its sensory properties, but rather an awareness of the conversion into ‘non-being’ (better parsed as: *no longer being the case*) of perceptual acquaintance, to use some of the Sartrean jargon. Notice here something interesting: the remembered object itself is not converted into ‘non-being’; the remembered object remains *real-but-past*, but what is converted into ‘non-being’ is my perceptual acquaintance with it.

ceptual experience as *absent-qua-past*, this does not merely indicate that the sensory qualities are presently ‘absent’, but implicates a modal awareness, such that the perception of the blood-red of the sunset, say, is *modally foreclosed*, as putatively indicative of an impossibility (as it was put above). Consider the following extension of our running case of remembering a sunset: I am looking at a sunset now, and as I am enjoying this perceptual experience, this reminds me of a different sunset, from the previous evening, that looked strikingly similar. Is it really plausible to think that the sensory content of memory experience is such as to indicate that such a perception is *impossible* or ‘modally foreclosed’ to perception? After all, I am currently perceiving a sunset am I not? Indeed, it’s my doing so that, in this case, triggers my remembering of last night’s sunset.<sup>36</sup>

However, this example arguably doesn’t get straight what it is precisely that is being suggested is given as modally foreclosed by the Sensory-Absence View. The idea isn’t that the relevant sensory content of an instance of episodic memory implicates a generic modal awareness that *sensory perceptions of a particular kind of object*, say sunsets and their sensory properties, are foreclosed – our modified example shows how that surely couldn’t be right. Rather, what is foreclosed is specifically *yesterday’s sunset, as it was given originally then*. Regardless of how similar tonight’s sunset may be to last night’s one, I *can’t* have specifically *last night’s sunset* – that *token* event and its sensory properties – once again given to me how it originally was, namely sense-perceptually. In this sense the relevant modal awareness has a fine-grained particularity to it, that doesn’t concern the putative instantiation of generic shareable sensory properties (‘resemblances’) across instances of similar or even the same *types* of object or events (e.g., strikingly similar looking sunsets). From my temporal perspective in the present as the rememberer I can’t have *that particular sunset, last night’s sunset, as it was originally given*, since to have it given in that way would be to enjoy a sense-perception of it now. It is that kind of *particular foreclosing* of perception that is implicated, which is compatible with my enjoying a whole range of actual (and indeed possible) sense-perceptions of various sunsets that in relevant sensory respects may be similar to the sunset I am remembering.

Nonetheless we might still have a certain lingering unease with the posited modal awareness. After all, we might think that modal claims are typically very strong, with talk of ‘impossibility’, such as to set a very high bar for them to be met. Given this, we need to be careful about how we treat the relevant modal constraint in terms of what it is plausible to ascribe to the remembering subject themselves. Let me explain. There is no suggestion, on the Sensory-Absence view, that the relevant modal constraint, and all that follows from it, is manifest to the remembering subject *as such*, that is precisely in terms of the philosophical explication of it that has been given here, namely of a *modal constraint as a modal constraint*. After all, it is right to think that such modal constraints themselves are significantly theoretical and philosophical. Nonetheless, on the picture I am developing, there is reason to ascribe to the remembering subject a more minimal *modal awareness*, which on the view being considered, takes the form of a sense of (im)possibility. This modal awareness is being posited as a *conscious level phenomenal feature* that concerns a sensory rep-

<sup>36</sup> I thank an anonymous referee for raising this worry.

resentation, a past perception. Nonetheless, as experienced by the remember, this modal awareness won't be articulated or explicit, but rather is more plausibly something in the background, albeit something that gives memory experience its distinctive 'flavour'.

Here we can connect the Sensory-Absence view to a broader and recurrent line of thought in the philosophy of memory, namely one that appeals to *feelings of pastness*. Indeed, in a classic discussion of memory, Tulving introduces this idea under the heading of autonoetic consciousness: 'It is autonoetic consciousness that confers the special phenomenal flavour to the remembering of past events, the flavour that distinguishes remembering from other kinds of awareness, such as those characterising perceiving, thinking, imagining or dreaming'.<sup>37</sup> Russell also appeals to some such phenomenological marker, speculating that 'there may be a specific feeling which could be called the feeling of 'pastness', and later referring to those feelings under the rubric of the 'sense of pastness'.<sup>38</sup> More recently, Mohan Matthen suggests that with respect to sensory memory, 'the feeling of pastness is immediately felt: it is phenomenologically apparent'.<sup>39</sup> The Sensory-Absence view provides us with a new way of thinking about what precisely these 'feelings of pastness' more substantially consist in, in terms of the representation of a perceptual experience as *absent-qua-past*, and in virtue of this as implicating the relevant modal awareness, such that the perception of the blood-red of the sunset is given as *modally foreclosed*, no longer a 'live option'. As such, on the Sensory-Absence View, so-called feelings of pastness are fundamentally thought of as *modal feelings* of the relevant kind. The subtleties of the philosopher's explication of them, of course won't be given to the remembering subject as such, but we can accept this and still posit them as an essential part of what is distinctive to being in the mnemonic mode.

One possible way of further theorising such feelings of pastness as 'modal feelings' could be in meta-cognitive terms. On recent proposals, memory experiences have a two-tiered structure: a first-order representation of an event and a second-order metacognitive feeling, characterised in terms of a feeling of pastness. On such views, the metacognitive state is a feeling, so, unlike beliefs, it is experiential and non-inferential in character. Second, it is not sensitive to the content of first-order states, but rather to the procedural features of recall processes.<sup>40</sup>

However, insofar as meta-cognitive feelings are *not* supposed to be sensitive to the content of the first-order states, then arguably these aren't of the right character given how we have framed matters. The relevant modal awareness or 'modal feelings' – such that the perception of the blood-red of the sunset is given as *modally foreclosed*, as no longer a 'live option' from my current temporal perspective – clearly concerns and is sensitive to precisely what is being experientially represented; that is the repre-

<sup>37</sup> (See Tulving 1985: 3). Note, Tulving is more or less explicitly drawing on the work of William James (see James 1890; Chapter XV: 605) who talks of a 'constant feeling *sui generis* of pastness, to which every one of our experiences in turn falls a prey'.

<sup>38</sup> Russell 1921: 134-5.

<sup>39</sup> Matthen, 2010: 13; Fernandez, 2008: 336; 2019; Ch.4 on the psychological side see also Klein 2015. Cf Bynre 2010 and Teroni, 2017 for scepticism.

<sup>40</sup> See Perrin and Sant'Anna 2022; Dokic 2014.

sentation of a perceptual experience as *absent-qua-past*. Indeed such ‘modal feelings’ are supposedly implicated by this aspectual representation. In this sense they are *phenomenal*, and fundamentally concern a sensory representation being represented *in a particular way*, rather than being some ‘free floating’ or ineffable phenomenal feeling of pastness that merely emerge in consciousness from non-conscious or sub-personal recall processes. Put otherwise, such ‘modal feelings’ are part and parcel of the phenomenology of being in a state which represents a perceptual experience as *absent-qua-past*. Here we also have a clear difference from a representationalist or Dependency-style view whereby there are *two* aspects in view, the representation of a sensory state and a ‘feeling of pastness’, whereby it is the latter aspect that is doing the philosophical work is distinguishing episodic mnemonic states as being *about the past*, with the representation of the sensory state itself being more or less ‘neutral’.

Finally on this issue we should again note that the Sensory-Absence view, with its positing of a distinctive kind of modal awareness – as implicated by the representation of a sensory-perceptual experience as *absent-qua-past* – provides us with something (the relevant ‘modal feelings’ as it were) that allows us to distinguish a case of episodic recollection from that of sensory imagining (remember, both sensory imagination and sensory memory may involve so-called ‘presence-in-absence’). While working out further details of this implication of the view is beyond the remit of this paper, it is a promising feature of the Sensory-Absence view that it has this kind of explanatory payoff, and connects to a longstanding issue in the philosophy of memory concerning supposed ‘feelings of pastness’ proprietary to memory experience. No doubt there is more to be said in defence of the modal dimension of the Sensory-Absence view, but I hope that what I have said here at least can serve as an explanation and first-pass defence of that aspect of the view.

Now, (Hume, 1985) focusing on a different potential worry with the account, it might be questioned whether, by drawing on the Dependency View, such that episodic recollection involves the *representation of a perceptual experience*, the Sensory-Absence view inherits the following problem. Remember that there is significant plausibility to the thought, as a phenomenological datum, that episodic recollection is intentionally transparent: as we previously formulated this idea, we only seem to be aware of one object and its sensory properties in episodic recollection – the remembered object, which we would specify in an answer to the question ‘what are you remembering’. But on the Dependency View, as classically formulated, ‘an episode of recall has as its *object* the initial experience which was the apprehending of the event’.<sup>41</sup> Are there not therefore *two objects* in play, the original perceptual experience (however that is precisely represented) and the object ‘internal’ to that perceptual experience, say the blood-red sunset? As such, shouldn’t we expect that somehow or other the original, now past, perceptual experience somehow ‘appears’ in episodic recollection, as some peculiar kind of *mediating* object (albeit not as ‘mental image’). But – true to intentional transparency – it just doesn’t seem faithful to a description of an ordinary instance of episodic recollection that our phenomenal field is populated by *past experiences*, as (past) objects or events of a similar experientially manifest standing to the event in the past that is being remembered.

<sup>41</sup> Martin, 2001: 269; 278.

However, what is critical to recognise is that there is no suggestion on the Sensory-Absence view (or indeed the Dependency View for that matter) that the past perceptual experience functions as an object of present *sensory awareness*; the past perception isn't something which is supposed to have some kind of 'sensory presence'. Indeed, to think in that way is to fall back into a Humean-style view of perceiving 'copies' of (past) perceptions. Rather, what we are dealing with is, as detailed in this subsection and the previous one, a *presence-in-absence*; a present representation of a sensory perception of the relevant event and its properties, but with a specific aspectual qualifier of *absent-qua-past*, and in virtue of this as modally foreclosed to current perception, such that the represented past sense-perception is represented under the distinctively mnemonic absence-based mode of presentation. Given this, it is not clear that the Sensory-Absence view violates the intentional transparency of memory, since the relevant past perceptual experience is precisely *not* given as something which is *occurring now*, and so constituting an instance of a sensory presence, but is characterised by a positive phenomenology of sensory absence.

In closing let me note that while there is doubtless more to be said, the Sensory-Absence view provides an attractive and distinctive way of answering our original question of what the sensory dimension of episodic recollection consists in. In this context it is important to note that I have not offered the Sensory-Absence view as a *fully-fledged* account of episodic recollection per se, or indeed one that is supposed to be able to capture or exhaustively explain all aspects of memory phenomenology, but rather one that is centrally focused on making sense of the evasive *sensory character* of episodic recollection – indeed of making sense of the distinctive kind of sensory presence-in-absence that seems essential to accurately accounting for intrinsically sensory episodic recollections.

## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** There are no conflicts of interest to be declared.

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