

Parameters of a National Biography: Conceptualising Becoming in Space and Time

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Introduction

In the days of E.H. Carr and Hans Morgenthau, the study of 'International Relations' was concerned with understanding 'Politics among Nations'. Today, it has become a habit in IR scholarship to collapse the 'nation' into the 'state', implicitly assuming that 'the state', understood as government, is able to administer/channel/manipulate the 'idea of the nation'. This paper is an attempt to explore the parameters within which this 'idea' is formulated, assuming that these parameters do guide the choices governments make. To take Max Weber's famous definition of the state as a community holding the monopoly over the legitimate use of force in a certain space what holds this 'community' together? On what basis does it define its 'existence'? This basic question does not have a single answer, of course. Scholars of nationalism have pointed to various factors which oscillate between the primordialism emphasizing intrinsic properties such as ethnicity, and social constructivism, emphasizing things that can be learned, such as language. In this crude distinction, the perspective developed in this paper falls into the latter camp. Reading the question of what makes a community (or nation) as a question of ontology, this paper employs a narrative perspective and seeks inspiration from philosophy, specifically phenomenology and here in particular from Heidegger, to carve out the parameters of a 'national biography'.

In doing so, this paper brackets the view that nations are defined in a relational setting. The problem of an ontology in which 'states' are defined primarily through a relational setting is that it risks turning them into passive beings who merely take on a designated 'role' following a given script. It also presupposes that there is something that can enter a relationship and

diverts attention away from the question of how IR scholars might want to think about this ‘something’.¹ Opening the ‘black box’ of the state is of course a recurring theme, but as I will show in the first section the major theoretical contenders of realism fall short of providing an substantial alternative ontology to the (incomplete) one provided by realism. Taking up hints from within the constructivist camp, the second section introduces the notion of the state as a biographical narrative. The third section then specifies this concept by discussing the spatial dimension of Self from a phenomenological angle, and the final part completes the picture by adding the temporal dimension, offering some basic thoughts on how the Self gain orientation in the past and in the future. While this conceptualisation can be applied to any community, this paper focuses on the nation/state simply because it is (still) deemed the dominant ‘entity’ inhabiting, and thereby constituting, the world of international politics.

Familiar IR Pictures of the State

This section briefly reviews realist, liberal and constructivist attempts at conceptualising the state in IR. The baseline reading is provided, not surprisingly, by **realists** who focus on the state as a sovereign entity, with sovereignty understood synonymously with “autonomy” and “independence” (Waltz 1979: 90, 204; Grieco 1993: 127; Mearsheimer 2001: 31).² Thus, states are prominently pictured as billiard balls situated in an anarchical environment (Morgenthau 1960: 174ff). Although critics have repeatedly pointed out that beyond such a picture realists lack a theory of the state,³ it is worth taking up John Hobson’s suggestion that realism does provide a substantial conceptualisation (Hobson, 2000).

The atomistic ontology of realism rests on the notion of the individual as an autonomous/independent being central to modern Western philosophy since Hobbes (Lukes 2006 [1973]; Doyle 1997: 114). Realists project this ontology onto the ‘Westphalian’ state captured in Max Weber’s famous definition of the state as “that human community which (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a certain space [*Gebiet*]” (Weber, 1999 (1919): 6, my translation). Weber’s conception is echoed by Morgenthau, one of the few realists discussing the meaning of sovereignty, who defines it as ‘supreme authority’ in the realm of law-enforcement and as the ability of making the ‘final decision’ (Morgenthau, 1960: 312ff). Similarly, blending the notion of internal and external sovereignty, for Waltz sovereignty is about “being able to decide for itself how to cope with

¹ This does not mean my conceptualisation of a national biography is ‘asocial’; it includes the social dimension in two obvious ways: (i) the nation/society is a collective and (ii) experiences tend to be made in connection with others. What I am bracketing is a discussion of how the national biography is defined in interaction with or against other actors.

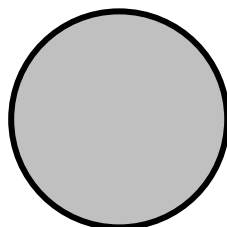
² Sovereignty of course is a contested term with a history of different meaning, see Jackson (1999); James (1999); Biersteker and Weber (1990); Krasner (1999).

³ Cox (1981); Ashley (1986); Ruggie (1986); Wendt (1987); Walker (1993); Buzan et al. (1993: 47ff).

internal and external problems” (Waltz, 1979: 95). As the notion of decision-making autonomy is problematic in the face of interdependence,⁴ realists stress control over a particular territory the central feature of the state (Hobson 2000: 56ff; Ruggie, 1993). Carr, while acknowledging that the “most comprehensive power units” in international politics must not necessarily be territorially organized, notes that the modern state clearly is based on “territorial sovereignty” (Carr 2001: 210). Morgenthau also defines sovereignty as “supreme power over a certain territory” (Morgenthau 1960: 312), echoed by Krasner who, while distinguishing between four different types of sovereignty, focuses primarily on ‘Westphalian sovereignty’ based on “the exclusion of external actors from authority structures within a given territory” (Krasner, 1999: 4, 20). John Herz perhaps most forcefully argued that territoriality forms the “existential basis” for the sovereign state (Herz 1959: 50), echoed in Gilpin’s assertion that “the essence of the state is its territoriality” (Gilpin 1981: 17). The conceptualization of the state as a certain territorial space is also reflected in the realist understanding of survival as maintaining “territorial integrity” (Mearsheimer 2001: 31).

Realists are generally not concerned with how communities are organised within a certain territory, what matters is that their authority to define and enforce their organisational features ends at a physical border. As such, borders are central to such an understanding of the state as an autonomous/independent entity. They are both markers for separating realms of authority and protectors of the same; they divide and compartmentalise the territorial surface of the planet and mark the existence of ‘states’ as exclusive territorial units. Yet because borders are assumed to be fixed and treated quasi-natural, they are not part of realist theorizing. Borders are only mentioned in passing, if at all, and then merely described as “rigidly demarcated frontiers” (Carr 2001: 211) or “natural boundaries” (Liska 1968: 47).

Figure 1 (Realism): The State as a Billiard Ball



⁴ As already pointed out by Morgenthau (1960: 328), no decision-making process is completely autonomous or free from external constraints. So it makes more sense for realists to conceive of the state as a ‘sovereign-in-the-making’ (Waltz 1979: 106; Waltz, 1986: 324).

The realist literature offers two arguments to justify this ontology. The first is the argument put forward by structural realists like Waltz that the sovereign state is a product of interstate relations in the ‘anarchical environment’. It relies on a tacit learning argument to portray the state as what Hobson calls a “passive-adaptive” actor (Hobson 2000). Waltz offers a blend of sociological and microeconomic logic carried forward through two mechanisms, socialization and competitive selection, to suggest that states adjust to ‘the rules of the game’. The basic argument is that the international system “molds agents” and “causes” states to be alike by encouraging “similarities of attributes”, which for realists generally means possessing military capabilities, which reduces the state to a ‘power container’ (Waltz 1979: 74ff., 118).⁵ Only few scholars have attempted to argue that the “demonstration effect” of reward and punishment “will push the range of governmental functions towards sovereignty” (Buzan et al., 1993: 39). The main problem of this structural learning account is that it blends behaviour with ontology which allows it to bypass a twofold tension: First, whereas one may argue that the co-existence of autonomous units creates a condition of anarchy, the argument that anarchy in turn conditions states to be autonomous is caught up in circular reasoning. Second, the static ontology of the state does not correspond with its supposed evolutionary character (Wendt 1987; 1992; 1999; also Ruggie 1986).⁶

The second realist attempt of fixing the spatial configuration of the state as an autonomous territorial entity is to point at the constitutive force of nationalism. As noted at the outset, classical realists like Carr and Morgenthau favoured ‘the nation’ as the relevant political entity. In his study on the evolution of nationalism, Carr notes that the state merely was “a colourless legal word” (Carr, 1945: 1), and Morgenthau argues that the existence of a “national character” and “national morale” are core elements of every state with decisive influence on its vitality (Morgenthau 1960: 269f). The importance of nationalism as a cohesive force is also noted by Waltz, who even comes to suggest that “the centripetal force of nationalism may itself explain why states can be thought of as units” (Ibid., 174ff; also Grieco 1990.). Gilpin (1981: 14f) notes the close link between realist state-centrism and nationalism, as does Buzan in his conceptualization of the state as a “binding idea” (Buzan 1991: 64, 72-82). And Mearsheimer calls nationalism a “second order force in international politics” (1990: 18ff in Brown; see also Posen 1993). Yet as critics have rightly pointed out, the obvious problem with this account is that history is replete with examples of nationalism as a force undermining rather than strengthening the autonomy or territorial integrity of states

⁵ For critical discussions of Waltz’ market analogy, see Walker (1993); Guzzini (1998); Inayatullah and Blaney (2004: Ch. 4).

⁶ For a more sympathetic interpretation, see Hobson (2000: 28ff), Goddard and Nexon (2005: 34ff).

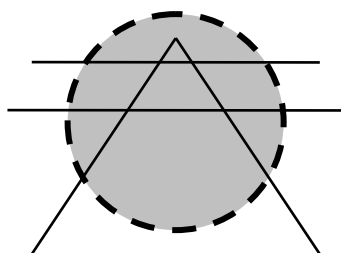
(Lapid and Kratochwil, 1996). The force of nationalism thus does not support a general reading of the state as a geographical unit with fixed borders.

Liberal institutionalism offers a modification of the realist ontology by treating interdependence not merely as an ontological inconvenience but as something that is fundamental to the existence of states. Highlighting issue-specific linkages across state boundaries and, thus, spaces across borders reaching into domestic structures, protagonists presents a picture in which states do not appear like closed units or billiard balls anymore, but as open and multifaceted. As the liberal prefix signifies, these transnational linkages not only show state borders to be more open/permeable but also relies on a more complex picture of its internal composition. By opening the ‘black box’, liberal institutionalists open the door to a more sophisticated reading of the state. One can identify three versions of this argument which gradually increase the complexity of the state and, ultimately, make it disappear.

The first, put forward by Keohane and his followers, keeps the state as a territorial entity with fixed borders and merely points to their permeability and their attempt to manage interdependence through international institutions. While pointing out that international institutions affect state behaviour, this is not accompanied by an attempt to reconceptualise the state, also visible in the acknowledgment that “institutionalism adopt[s] almost all of the hard core of realism” (Keohane and Martin 2003: 73; also Jervis 2003: 280). The second approach takes a closer look at the actors, structures, and processes existing inside the state. While often limited to characterizing states by looking at their domestic political system, leading to familiar binaries such as ‘liberal/democratic’ and ‘illiberal/non-democratic’, scholarship which moves towards foreign policy analysis also focuses on political parties, business elites, interest groups, public opinion, the media, and so on. While this offers arguably the most ‘accurate’ account of the state, as Erik Ringmar notes this pluralist account makes it difficult to actually still find ‘a state’ that can be taken as an entity in international politics (Ringmar 1996). The third is associated with globalization literature, which emphasizes transnational structures and processes which undermine the (realist) state. Their emphasis on the ‘deterritorialisation’ of political space through (mainly economic) structures or networks emerging above and beyond ‘states’ rarely involves rethinking the ontology of ‘states’ themselves (Ferguson and Jones, 2002).⁷

⁷ An exception is Michael Mann, whose reading of ‘globalisation’ suggests that states are intertwined with those ‘new’ political spaces (Mann 1997; Weiss 2005). This is close to (in his case not coincidentally) the spatial thinking one finds in the literature on ‘empire’.

Figure 2 (Liberal Institutionalism): The Pluralist State



Constructivists offer an alternative angle by focusing on state, or national, identity – and the terminological confusion here is telling. Relying on insights from social psychology, constructivists acknowledge that this identity has an ‘internal’ (or personal) and an ‘external’ (or social) dimension traceable to the famous distinction between ‘I’ and ‘Me’ made by George Herbert Mead (1934).⁸ This dual nature is difficult to grasp and has led to incoherent if not contradictory arguments about the causes and effects of ‘identity’ (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). IR scholars tend to focus on the ‘Me’ while leaving the ‘I’ undertheorized. In part, this may be because defining the ‘I’ appears close to suggesting some sort of essence, which is shunned by the anti-foundationalism of the postmodern *Zeitgeist*. Yet the main reason is the strong influence of neo-Durkheimian structural reasoning which assumes that all construction must be ‘social’ and occurs through interaction, which IR scholars understanding social to mean international, and which pushes any consideration of the ‘internal’ dimension into the background. Mead’s argument, often referred to by constructivists discussing phenomena of identity formation, is exemplary in noting that self-fulfilment takes place through an evolutionary process in which the Self comes to internalize the “attitude of the whole community”. In Mead’s account the ‘I’ is reduced to ‘intuition’ and ‘instinct’, the substantive constitutive process lies in how the sense of ‘Me’ is gained by adapting to a social group (Mead 1934).⁹

This focus on the social dimension is not satisfactory analytically, as a sense of Self must to some degree be internally generated to account for agency and choice. One prominent constructivist IR scholar who recognises the importance of theorising the ‘personal’ dimension is Wendt. Although his attempt of carving out the sources of what Giddens calls ‘self-identity’ (Giddens 1991: 52) ultimately does not provide a substantial alternative to realist ontology, it contains some useful pointers. In contrast to the common understanding of

⁸ For an overview of the use of identity in IR scholarship, see Berenskoetter (2010).

⁹ This neglect of the ‘internal’ or ‘personal’ dimension in Meadian theorizing is noted by Giddens (1991: 52) and by Cedermann and Daase (2003: fn. 5). I am not aware of a sophisticated discussion about intuition or instinct in IR scholarship.

identity as involving a Self-Other relationship, he suggests that the Self's understanding of its uniqueness, or distinctiveness, is not rooted in a social setting. In his conception "an actor's self understanding" does not assume that the Self is necessarily defined in relation to an 'Other' (Wendt 1999: 224), thereby maintaining a 'personal' element in the ontology of the Self, an 'essential state'.¹⁰ It is worth taking a closer look at this.

For Wendt, state identity is constituted through ideas which in turn are embedded in 'culture' defined as 'shared knowledge' (Wendt 1999: 113ff, 141, 157ff).¹¹ It is hence this 'knowledge' which is most relevant for constituting state identity; indeed different kinds of knowledge generate different kinds of identities, covering the spectrum from social to non-social, indeed, *pre*-social. The latter contains the essence of 'the state', which Wendt labels 'corporate' identity, and which forms the base on which everything else is built (Wendt 1999: 224-231).¹² As the 'corporate' label implies, he uses the body metaphor of the body to make his point: "the state is pre-social relative to other states in the same way the human body is pre-social. Both are constituted by self-organizing internal structures" (Wendt 1999: 198). More precisely, according to Wendt the 'body' of a state is made of five essential properties which, taken together, echo realist ontology (Wendt 1999, Ch. 5, 197).¹³ While he reserves the term 'state' for legal-institutional structures of authority, Wendt suggests that these structures necessarily rest on society and territory, and it is these two properties which form the base of his essential state.

Wendt loosely defines society as "people with shared knowledge" with the crucial qualification that this knowledge is "private" and "self organizing" (Wendt 1999: 209). According to Wendt, this self-organizing structure of private knowledge tends to be "codified by law" and holds society together. As such, it is a central constitutive factor of the 'corporate state'. Unfortunately, Wendt does not specify what this knowledge is about, where it comes from and what makes it private. He only vaguely suggests that it is created both 'top-down' and 'bottom-up', that is, both an effect of state policy and "well[ed] up from...human

¹⁰ For a good summary of Wendt's argument, see Guzzini and Leander (2006). Wendt's insistence that he is not concerned with "state identity formation" (Wendt 1999: 11) nor with offering a "theory of the state" (Wendt 2006: 208) looks odd alongside an entire chapter on the state, including an extensive conceptualisation of state identities (Ch. 5) and lengthy discussion of identity formation (317ff.).

¹¹ Wendt's understanding of identity as "a property of [states]" (Wendt 1999: 224) is a bit confusing as it suggests that identity is something a state can possess, logically giving the latter an ontological status independent from 'identity'.

¹² In his earlier writings he relied on Giddens' structuration theory which puts forward the notion of mutual constitution in a 'moment of structuration' (Giddens 1984).

¹³ Wendt (1999: 201-214) discusses the following properties: (i) an institutional-legal order (ii) an organization claiming a monopoly on the legitimate use of organized violence, (iii) an organization with sovereignty, (iv) a society and (v) territory. He even notes that together they provide the "rationale for the familiar 'billiard ball' model" (Wendt 1999: 202).

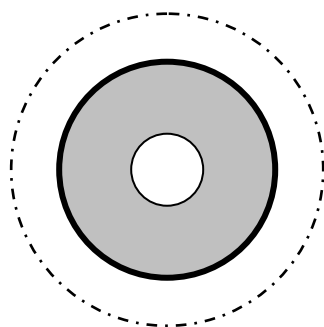
experience". Vague claims about how "group identities...are based first and foremost on things like language, culture, religion, and ethnicity" sit alongside the equally vague notion of an 'idea of the state' rooted in collective memory, myths and traditions which allows society to "acquire continuity through time" (Wendt 1999: 209; 218, 163; see also Wendt 2004). This vagueness about the content of that shared knowledge consequently leads Wendt to bypass the question of what defines the boundaries of society. Although he stresses that having boundaries is a "requirement" for society and suggests that they do not necessarily coincide with the boundaries of the state, he does not conceptualise their nature.

The same goes for his discussion of the relevance of territory. In line with his critique of Waltz' ontology as static, Wendt very much tries to dispel the idea that states need to be constituted by fixed territorial borders. Instead, as with empires, the territorial base can have "fuzzy" boundaries. Moreover, he notes that even if borders are clear they are not necessarily exclusive, which means that states may include others "cognitively" (Ibid, 212). Again, although noting that the meaning borders take on can vary and that a sense of Self is not restricted by territorial boundaries but may, as in the case of friendship, extended to Others, Wendt does not elaborate on the nature of the 'fuzzy' borders or those 'cognitive' boundaries which can transcend territorial borders. Instead, he defends the idea of a 'corporate' state by falling back on the metaphor of the body as self-organising and naturally distinct from other bodies (Wendt 1999: 225). Revealingly, Wendt on the same page acknowledges that this line of reasoning hits a dead end: He concedes that the metaphor of a human 'body' as a self-organizing biological organism cannot be reasonably applied to the state and that what really matters is consciousness (Wendt 1999: 225).

Here, however, Wendt stops. Apart from implying that a states' self-consciousness rests within society, which thus turns out to be more basic than territory, there is no discussion of how to study society's private 'structure of knowledge', how it is generated, what its parameters are and how its boundaries are drawn. Lacking a theory of consciousness, the 'self-organizing structure' of the state remains opaque, and with it Wendts ontology of the state remains within the confines of realist territory.¹⁴

¹⁴ Wendt (2006) recognised this as being the central problem of his theory and is working on a new one that focuses on consciousness through Quantum theory.

Figure 3 (Constructivism): Corporate State Identity



To be sure, Wendt's ontology has been subject to criticism and been modified from within the constructivist camp. Maja Zehfuss (2001) shows that Wendt's notion of a corporate identity - a fixed understanding of Selfhood based on stable 'properties' - fails to pay sufficient attention to identity politics. She persuasively shows that identity claims are contested and manipulated within society and that, therefore, an analysis seeking to understand how 'identity' influences state interests/policy must take into account the domestic political struggle over claims/representation of a certain Self and its relations with Others (see also Campbell 1998; Hopf 2002). Even more importantly in the context of this paper, the emphasis on the political contestation of conceptions of Self (and Other) gives more weight to the view the state-identity is not unitary or stable but something always "in the process of becoming" through the constant (re)construction of its boundaries (Campbell 1998: 12). While these scholars thus emphasize the evolutionary nature of the Self, which does not find entry in Wendt's ontology, they do not offer an understanding of the spatial features of the state significantly different from realist ontology. To be sure, in discussing Self-Other relations as dynamic, scholars from Campbell to Wendt deal with processes of 'bordering', or boundary-drawing, often critically, and in that context do offer new insights in the spatial dimension in the process of identity formation (Albert et al. 2001). However, exceptions aside, by conceiving of the Self only through the Other their work reduces the spatial dimension of the Self to a process of differentiation, thus conflating it with the social (international) dimension.

Janice Bially Mattern offers some further thoughts on the nature of 'subjectivity' or 'self-consciousness' of states. Her study of the breakdown and subsequent reconstruction of collective (meaning international) identities lead her to assume that there must be "something like a settled Self...irrespective of Others" (Bially Mattern 2005: 60) which makes agency during the moment of break-down possible. Aware of the problem of smuggling in a "primordial nugget", Bially-Mattern does not quite succeed in conceptualising this 'settled Self' independent from the intersubjective context, yet she offers to important pointers (Ibid.,

96ff.). First, there is her emphasis on narrative as a representation of ‘reality’ of the Self and the world, not only acknowledging the messiness and often disputed nature of such a narrative also noting the need for coherence and the ability of certain authors to construct a ‘well rounded’ narrative, in her case political leaders of the US and the UK. Second, she notes that the state narratives revolved around images of the ‘eagle’ and the ‘lion’, respectively, and embedded in a claim to be a ‘freedom-loving leader of the West’, which connected the “indispensable” American and British narratives of Self to the broader narrative of the “reality of the West” (Ibid., 129f.; 194). Unfortunately, Bially-Mattern does not unpack these ontological parameters conceptually and their connection and, instead, focuses on the dynamic between British and American images of Self and notes the overarching “reality” of the East-West conflict and, thus, the familiar process of differentiation (Ibid., 196). Drawing on Giddens, Brent Steele most recently entertained the notion of a biographical narrative in his account of state agency (Steele 2008: 10f.). While Steele does so without offering a substantial theoretical discussion of either the relevance or the nature of ‘narrative’, let alone of the parameters which make it ‘biographical’, he adds to Bially Mattern’s account by emphasizing the emotional and the moral component of self identity.

The Self as (biographical) Narrative

Taking up the hints dropped by Bially Mattern and Steele, the conceptualisation of the state developed in what follows is inspired by an earlier and quite important, yet often overlooked, article by Erik Ringmar (1996). In it, Ringmar calls for taking a hermeneutic perspective which focuses on how abstract entities like ‘the state’ are made meaningful. He points out that humans have always used familiar metaphors to give meaning to those things that could not be seen or touched in their entirety. Thus, IR scholars commonly speak about “the world [as] a stage and the state [as] an actor who act[s] upon it” (Ringmar 1996: 446) and, as in the case of Wendt, resort to the image of the person its body as metaphors for the state. For Ringmar, it would be a mistake to dismiss these metaphors as mere shorthands. Instead, he suggests that “metaphor is rock-bottom. To ask for something more fundamental is to ask for too much, but also to ask for more than we need”. Yet Ringmar immediately qualifies this insight by noting that “metaphor alone does not suffice” because it is static: “a metaphor provides a single picture of life – a *Still-leben* – but it cannot deal with life as it unfolds over time” (Ibid., 451). This is a crucial point which corresponds with the earlier noted evolutionary reading of ‘identity/the Self’. Thus, Ringmar enriches the metaphor with the suggestion of reading the Self as a narrative. He illustrates the plausibility for such a reading by taking the popular metaphor of the state as a person and pointing out that a person exist not least through the stories told about by (and about) itself (Ibid., 452).

The understanding of 'the Self' as a story, or narrative is not new. It has been pointed out by students of philosophy, social psychology and political theory and also underpins studies on the discursive construction of identity and security advanced in IR (Ricoeur, White 1987; Somers 1994; Taylor 1989, Giddens 1991; Whitebrook 2008; Campbell 1998; Bially Mattern 2005; Hansen 2006). They rest on the view that narratives are a quasi natural instrument humans use to make sense of their existence in time and space. One well-known theorist of narrative, Hayden White, remarks that humans have a "natural impulse to narrate" and calls the narrative a "meta code" arising between our experience of the world and our efforts to describe that experience and bestow it with meaning (White 1987: 1). As such, the relevance of narrative lies its basic ontological and epistemological function of making the world, and ourselves within it, knowable.

The narrative gained attraction as a concept in the wake of the postmodern *Zeitgeist*, particularly in epistemological debates about historiography, because it emphasised subjectivity, perspective and open-endedness. Thus, the concept was initially adopted in a critical vein to expose scientific 'truths' as mere well-crafted stories, thus not simply navigating but questioning the divide between imagination and truthful representation of reality. Writing in the field of psychoanalysis, Donald Spence famously coined the term of 'narrative truth' (Spence 1982). Scholars seeking deeper hermeneutical understanding of the role and, indeed, power of narratives inevitably also tried to understand and discern the parameters forming a good narrative. One way to pay attention to the basic features of storytelling, including the creation of convincing characters, plots, a dramatic structure, beginnings and (open) endings. One intriguing feature about successful narratives is their ability to combine coherence with complexity, that is, their ability to incorporate multiple storylines without losing the plot (Whitebrook 2008). As one group of scholars reminds, narratives are necessarily selective in what they contain and how material is organised and, as such, can be seen as devising a structure of (in)attention: "as with 'frames' in social and political analysis, events can be 'organised in' or 'organised out' of the narrative" (Antoniades et al. 2010). Yet although they are never finished, or complete, there seems to be an intuitive agreement that a narrative must give a sense of coherence, or continuity, even if this can take various forms.

Beyond these 'technical' features, the relevance of narrative for constituting a sense of Self lies in its ability to create and sustain meaning. In most basic terms, we can conceive of the narrative as a particular structure of meaning; and to improve our analytical grasp on its content we must then ask what the basic parameters of this structure are. As noted above, a central constitutive feature of the narrative is to situate ourselves in the world, specifically to give meaning to our place in/over time. In the Ringmar's words "when we wonder what

something is we tell a story of how this something came to be; when we wonder who we are ourselves, we tell a story which locates us in the context of a past, a present and a future” (Ringmar 1996: 451). Scholars have suggested that knowledge about one’s temporal situatedness is a basic need of self-conscious/reflexive humans. Horkheimer and Adorno (1988) trace this need in ancient Greece, when the conviction that time and space were cosmic creations ordered by the Gods was replaced by an understanding of human existence as a historical one and as humans being masters of their own future/fate. This newfound self-consciousness may have been liberating but also generated a feeling of anxiety, prompting strategies to re-inscribe the Self into larger and lasting spatio-temporal structures to give meaning to one’s contingent existence. Thus, Horkheimer and Adorno suggest, the enlightened individual created structures not dissimilar from those myths it sought to replace (Horkheimer and Adorno 1988: 33, 50ff; also Gunnell, 1987).

That narratives provide temporal orientation not only for individuals but also for collectives is the main claim of Ringmar’s article. His remark that “a nation does leave its trace in time” (Ringmar 1996: 454) echoes Ernest Renan’s view “what constitutes a nation is not speaking the same tongue or belonging to the same ethnic group, but having accomplished great things in common in the past and the wish to accomplish them in the future” (in Lebow 1996: 197). Similarly, Kenneth Boulding (1959: 122) speaks of a ‘national image’ which “extends through time backwards into a supposedly recorded or perhaps mythological past and forward into an imagined future” (also Coker 1989). Another astute observer of American society, Alexis de Tocqueville, noted that

“[The state] is identified with the soil; with the right to property and the domestic affections; with the recollections of the past, the labours of the present, and the hopes for the future” (cited in Bishai 2004: 15).

The temporal narrative also is central to Benedikt Anderson’s conception of the nation as an ‘imagined community’, popular among IR constructivists because it conveys an anti-essentialist reading of community. Yet few actually take a closer look at Anderson’s argument on how collective consciousness is created. Underlying his argument that individuals come to imagine the community by reading the same text, spurred by the publishing industry and their capitalistic search for new markets, is informed by another, deeper argument, which suggests that the impact of print capitalism was due to a transformed conception of time (Anderson 1999: 24f). Echoing the above point by Horkheimer and Adorno for a different historical epoch, Anderson emphasizes that the decline of religious belief systems and monarchical rule was intertwined with the decline in cosmological or

‘Messianic time’ which the rulers had propagated, and which had organised the temporal orientation of their subjects. According to Anderson, the replacement of this Messianic time with the secular/scientific notion of ‘homogenous, empty time’ and made it possible for humans to forge a new collective consciousness and regain temporal orientation by ‘thinking’ the nation “conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history” (26). In other words, ‘print capitalism’ succeeded in forging a new sense of community on the back of the ‘scientific’ mastering of the temporal experience.¹⁵ At the very end of his discussion, Anderson refers to this new narrative as a ‘biography of nations’ which connects members of a community in their ‘temporal’ existence.

While neither Anderson nor other literature on nationalism I have come across conceptually unpack the notion of a national biography, philosophers and social theorists of Self have offered some insights into the concept. The notion of a biographical narrative plays a central role in Anthony Giddens conceptualisation of self-identity, where he emphasises “the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography”. Giddens stresses that the narrative, if it is to satisfy the need for stable orientation across time and space, must give provide the Self with “a feeling of biographical continuity” and that, as such “a person’s identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though it is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going” (Giddens 1991: 53). As such, Giddens argues, the act of ‘writing’ an autobiography (not literally) is “at the core of self identity” (Ibid., 76). To be sure, the emphasis on continuity, or coherence, does not mean the narrative always depicts the same Self, without change. As noted earlier and discussed further below, this paper applies an evolutionary ontology, where even radical change can very well be part of a coherent narrative as long as the link from ‘before’ to ‘after’ is maintained. For instance, to give an example on the collective level, the shift of sense of Self before and after 1945 was quite radical for the majority of German society, yet the image of pre-45 (‘Nazi’) Germany remains very present in the German biographical narrative as an image against which the dominant contemporary self-understanding of Germans is contrasted. Thus, narratives may well include change, again, what matters for keeping the narrative going is the Self’s ability to creatively adjust the story. As Giddens writes, the biography “must continually integrate events...and sort them into the ongoing story about the self”; it is “something that has to be worked at, and calls for creative input”(Giddens 1991: 54, 76).

Similar thoughts are expressed by Charles Taylor (1989) in his important discussion of the sources of the Self. Even more so than Giddens, Taylor draw on insights from hermeneutic

¹⁵ Anderson also notes the importance of census data, mapping, and museums in forging this collective consciousness (172ff).

philosophy, and in particular from Heidegger, who thus occupies a prominent place in the following discussion of the parameters of a national biography. Before proceeding to do so, the reader may have noticed that the discussion thus far shifted from reviewing the ontological features of the state primarily in spatial terms towards situating it on a temporal plane. Both are obviously key features of human existence and, hence, a biographical narrative will give accounts of the Self's orientation in both space and time. Thus, the following discussion focuses on discussing the parameters which illuminate the situatedness of the narrated Self in both space and time.

Unfolding in Space and Time

The function of a national biography is to allow for meaningful orientation in space and time ('the world') and, thus, to generate a stable understanding of what Martin Heidegger calls 'being-in-the-world'. To be sure, in line with the above a Heideggerian perspective emphasises an evolutionary ontology, and so this stability is not absolute but, rather, an aim which is constantly worked on. Indeed, how a Self in motion is trying to achieve and sustain a stable self-understanding is a matter of 'identity politics'. This will be taken up at the end of this essay, once the parameters by which this stability is gained have been discussed. These parameters will take shape by applying a phenomenological lens. Phenomenology is a philosophical strand advanced by Heidegger which, broadly speaking, is concerned with the study of phenomena through structures of experience.¹⁶ Criticizing any kind of scientific 'naturalism', phenomenologists start from the premise that one cannot come to know 'things' other than through experience. In Husserl's words, "the world is an experience which we live before is becomes an object which we know" (cited in Odysseos 2002a: 376). Importantly, such 'knowledge' gained through experience is not knowledge in the sense of accumulated information but as having generated structures of meaning (understood as *Bedeutung*) which lend significance to the world. In short, phenomenology involves the study of how 'things', including Selfhood, obtain meaning through experience.

Heidegger's magnum opus *Being and Time* starts with the deceptively trivial note that being 'takes place' in a time-span between birth and death; and because until it is dead there is always something the Self is not-yet, 'being' is always incomplete (Heidegger 1953: 233, 236, 242f.). This incompleteness lends the Self an evolutionary character in which neither the Self nor 'its' world can ever be solidified. Being-in-the-world is constituted in a continuous process in which the Self *discloses* [*erschliessen*] 'the world' (Heidegger 1953: 133). The

¹⁶ On Heidegger's approach to phenomenology, see Dostal (1993); Carman (2006). On phenomenology more generally, see Cerbone (2006) and the entry in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, available at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>.

process of disclosure of ‘the Self’ and ‘the world’ can be conceptualised as a mutually constitutive process of ‘coming into being’ together. The Self and its world are intertwined in a permanent process of becoming or *unfolding*, what Heidegger at one point calls *Aufgehen* (Heidegger 1953: 54, 110).¹⁷ Because ‘the world’ is made in mutual constitution with the Self, the process of disclosing is not simply about gathering information from a pre-existing world located outside the Self. Unfolding encompasses all kinds of seeing ‘the world’, including forgetting (Heidegger 1953: 62) and is a *creative* process.

This unfolding of the Self in ‘the world’ is not reducible to a mental process, that is, it is not mere spiritual fulfilment arrived at through internal reflection but occurs through activity. Heidegger notes repeatedly that things only obtain meaning through their usage and are organised or ‘placed’ accordingly. As Henri Bergson notes, conscious beings “do not find themselves in a world but make themselves...and make the world...through their activity, their engagement” (Grosz, 2005: 121).¹⁸ At the same time, it is not the act *as such* that captures the ontological structure of being but the perspective from which it is done. Consequently, acts need to be understood in the context of this perspective. Analysts who seek to understand the narrative structure of ‘being-in-the-world’ and its supporting practices thus need to employ a hermeneutic methodology.

Unfolding in Space

The fact that IR scholars have been slow in offering a spatial re-reading of identity formation which is radically different from realist ontology is not surprising. While few would disagree with the view that “spatial orientation lies very deep in the human psyche” (Taylor 1989: 28),¹⁹ the role of space in the formation of self-understanding has been neglected among philosophers. As one scholar puts it “the exclusive focus on the *who*-question (“who am I?”) has often made philosophy forget the correlate *where*-question. All the answers given to the first question describe a [Self] which is essentially nowhere” (Manoussakis, 2007: 674). Giddens makes a similar observation when noting that the separation of time from space – as captured in the notion of ‘empty’ time mentioned earlier – is one of the features of modernity. Moreover, in the spatial imaginary laid out by hyperglobalists, space also has become empty of place. As Giddens puts it, space was pulled away from place as the latter became seemingly unimportant in an ever shrinking and interconnected world (Giddens 1991: 16f).

¹⁷ The evolutionary perspective was of course prominent at the time, see Guerlac (2006: 26f). On Kierkegaard’s analysis of becoming as an influence on Heidegger, see Westphal (1996).

¹⁸ For an introduction to Bergson, see Guerlac (2005). For Bergson’s influence on Heidegger, see Collins-Cavanaugh (2005).

¹⁹ Simmel (1922); Bollnow (1963); Lefebvre (1991).

It fits in this picture that theorists have only recently noted that Heidegger's existential analysis also deals with being in space, or place, in an illuminating way.²⁰ That the spatial dimension is central to his ontology becomes apparent when noting that for Heidegger a sense of being-there (*Da-sein*) is generated by disclosing 'the world' and, thus, by gaining a sense of 'being in' (Heidegger 1953, §23 and §24). He formulates his take on the human conception of and relation to 'space' in contrast to the mathematical/geometrical Cartesian one. Heidegger rejects the Cartesian notion of space as a *res extensa* which is external to the human and which can be measured objectively. In accordance with his phenomenological approach, 'being-in-the-world' can *not* be understood analogue to our understanding of the 'water in the glass' or the 'dress in the closet'. If this was so, then 'the world' would logically be independent from and thus prior to 'being' - a possibility ruled out by the ontologically foundational nature of 'being' (Heidegger 1953: 54). Rather, for Heidegger the two are inseparable; in his words, "the ontologically properly understood 'subject', the *Dasein*, is in an original sense [*in einem urspruenglichen Sinn*] spatial" (Heidegger 1953: 111).²¹ As such, Heidegger's conceptualisation of the relationship between Self and space fits neither with environmental determinism, nor with the notion of a Self 'dreaming up' its world (Heidegger 1953: 106, 110). That is, just as the Self is not simply formed by stuff (events, people, etc) populating its spatial surroundings, the world is not a neutral vacuum into which the individual projects its ideas, i.e. as something 'empty' that is gradually 'filled'. Instead, the space is a dynamic 'living' mass, something that provides stimulus and opportunities for the creation of meaning structures and, thus, for 'self-realization'. At the same time, because the Self cannot be established 'without' a world, as knowing the Self is interwoven with knowing the world, it cannot *choose* to make a connection or relate to the world (or not) and, thus, it cannot choose to 'reach out' or 'withdraw from' the world.

Heidegger uses the notion of the 'surrounding' space (*Umraum*) or 'environment' (*Umfeld/Umwelt*). This directs attention to the idea that the space the Self discloses and thereby comes to 'know' becomes a space that is 'around' or 'close to' the Self, with closeness not understood in terms of physical proximity but in terms of knowledge and evaluation. (Heidegger 1953: 63, 66, 102f.). It is the space the Self 'knows' and, hence, that matters to the Self. Loosely following Otto Friedrich Bollnow (1963), a student of Heidegger, the spatial features of being-in.-the-world can be analytically captured through the notions of centre (place), order and horizon.²²

²⁰Malpas (2006); see also Sloterfijk (1998: 336); Elden (2001a).

²¹ Even a seemingly objective notion like 'nature' must be seen as part of the Self's conceptualization of 'the world' (Heidegger 1953: 64).

²² This is different from Henri Lefebvre's attempt to combine physical/natural, mental, and social dimensions into a 'universal' theory of "produced space" (Lefebvre 1991; Elden 2001).

To begin with, the very notion of the ‘surrounding’ space suggests that there must be something like a centre. From a phenomenological angle the centre is not to be understood in geographical/metric terms but, rather, as capturing the particular place from which the Self unfolds and which it ‘knows best’. It is a place characterised by great familiarity and to which the Self feels a strong emotional connection and which has “a character of trustworthiness” (Bollnow 1963, 55ff.).²³ The relevance of such a place is evident in Heidegger’s emphasis on the notion of ‘dwelling’, generally associated with living in the specific place that is ‘home’ (Ibid., 148).²⁴ A related term capturing the significance of such a place yet where familiarity is attributed in a more abstract way is the German concept of *Heimat*, which is applicable to different spaces and can represent the local, the region, and the nation (Confino 1997: 9). A place considered *Heimat* is primarily associated with an emotional state, designating a place rising out of a feeling, a *Heimatgefuehl*, which could be translated as feeling at ‘home’ (see also Applegate 1990). For Gaston Bachelard, on whom Bollnow also draws, the notion of the home contains “one of the greatest powers of integration” without which a human would be a “dispersed being”. Bachelard links the home to the ‘soul’ as the place of emotional being, which he explicitly differentiates from the cognitive function of the mind. While he sees mind and soul inseparable for the overall experience of ‘being’, it is the soul where the world ‘reverberates’ (Bachelard, 1994: 7).²⁵

Whether grasped in terms of home, *Heimat*, or soul, the centre is that place in and through which the Self organises its unfolding. It is not merely the place is where the Self ‘knows’ itself best, the centre of familiarity and source of comfort, but also a place of creativity (Bollnow 1963: 132). This notion of a creative place is captured in Iris Marion Young’s description of the home as “the site of the construction and reconstruction of the Self” (Young 2001: 286). Similarly, for Bachelard, the soul is the site of an “inner light” which does not reflect the world but, rather, where ‘intimate meanings’ are created and where worlds are inaugurated (Bachelard 1994: 10). As such, narratives attributing importance to such places (home, *Heimat*, soul) should not be read as a regression into romanticism, or as generating an exclusionary and essentializing reading of Selfhood. As Malpas reminds, “the real question...is just how place should be understood”, which he rightly suggests is “a pressing

²³ For comprehensive discussions of the philosophy of place, with particular focus on Heidegger, see Malpas (1999, 2006), also Casey (1997).

²⁴ On Heidegger’s notion of dwelling, see Malpas (2006: 74ff). It is no coincidence that ‘dwelling’ is often used synonymous to ‘living’.

²⁵ It is worth pointing out that in ancient Greek thought having a soul was understood to be the indicator of being alive and where, correspondingly, the departure thereof was taken as the evidence of death. The soul was not only a harbour of emotions, feelings, and perceptions, a ‘strong’ soul was also an indicator for acts of courage and determination and for morally significant behaviour (Lorenz 2003).

question because of the way in which place, and notions associated with place [such as authenticity] are indeed given powerful political employment” (Malpas 2006: 26f.).

Second, the process of gaining orientation in and understanding of space is a process of creating order (Bollnow 1963: 36). The argument that the Self is formed through identification with an ‘order’ is well-established in social theory and has been central to Western thought since Plato (Strong 1992: 8; Baumann 1991). Perhaps just as long-standing is the debate whether order rests on norms or values.²⁶ This distinction, frequently brushed over by IR scholars,²⁷ is important because it is about what makes a space qualitatively significant. The emphasis on norms is heavily influenced by social contract thinking and the advocacy of specific but potentially universally valid rules of behaviour to organize social life. Norms are seen as necessary for regulating interaction through understandings of what is the ‘right’ thing to do, guiding the Self’s activities along a ‘logic of appropriateness’. Norms thus provide orientation and are important for ordering space. Yet they can be ‘neutral’ and, as such, ‘soulless’, that is, they do not necessarily inscribe a space with significant structures of meaning to which the Self is emotionally attached. This is done by values, which allows for moral judgments guided by an understanding of the ‘good’ (Joas 2000: 21). For Charles Taylor, having a sense of Self means knowing an answer to the question ‘what kind of life is worth living’ and to make what he calls ‘strong evaluations’. Consequently, human beings aspire to be connected to what they consider good or of fundamental value (Taylor 1989: 42).

As such, values rank the importance, or quality of something, including a norm, and thereby organise space by making some things more meaningful than others. As Heidegger puts it, a meaningful space is one in which ‘things have their place’ and where their distance is not measured in physical proximity but according to their value, that is, where the character of being near or distant to the Self depends on the value attributed to ‘things’ (*wertbehaftet*) (Heidegger 1953: 63, 66, 102f.). Similarly, for Georg Simmel space obtains significance through the classification of its ‘parts’ carried out by the soul (Simmel 1922: 461). Taylor suggests that the process of ‘value-orientation’ is one of Self-positioning in a “moral space”, which he defines as “a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary” (Taylor, 1989: 28).²⁸ Thus, as understood here, for gaining orientation in space “‘value-ceiving’ (*Wertnehmen*) always precedes ‘perceiving’ (*Wahrnehmen*)” (Scheler cited

²⁶ The interplay between values and norms, between the ‘good’ and the ‘right’, and how they (should) relate is subject to much debate among social theorists (Joas 2000: 161f).

²⁷ Most notably, Bull (2002) mixes norms and values as elements of order. Kratochwil uses norms interchangeably with ‘rules’ and ‘principles’ (Kratochwil, 1989: 10), CHECK

²⁸ See also Campbell, 1998; Reus-Smit, 1998.

in Joas 2000: 88), which again emphasises that ordering space occurs on an emotional and not merely a cognitive plane (Bollnow 1963, Unger 1990).

The third feature takes up that central to spatial orientation is some sort of boundary, or border (Simmel 1922: 465f). Bollnow points out that space always features both gradual transitions and sharp borders, and so that a world is ordered through clearly delineated and recognizable features and at the same time is infinite and open for exploration and discovery. Sharp borders could be seen as those cognitive-regulative railings which help the Self to stay on a certain path in the everyday. Yet from an unfolding perspective the path comes from and leads to some place which are not clearly defined and part of the creative process of being-in-the-world (see below). It is here where boundaries understood as transitional markers come in; indeed are of primary importance for the Self's orientation in space. These are best understood as horizons (Bollnow 1963: 74-80; Gadamer 2004 [1975]).

To borrow Reinhart Koselleck's definition, the horizon is "that line behind which a new space...will open, but which cannot yet be seen" (Koselleck 2004 [1979]: 260f.). As a line that can never be reached, or surpassed, the horizon has the peculiar character of both making clear that there always limit of seeing, or knowing, and simultaneously allowing the Self to move it and invite exploration. The 'horizon' thus is an existential border which delineates the realm of ones unfolding existence. Yet in line with the evolutionary understanding of being, it is not a boundary that constrains but one that invites or, at least, holds the possibility to explore and change/open new perspectives. In correspondence with the discussion so far, the horizon is understood here in terms of value-creating experience, making it a 'value horizon', which may expand and contract, characterizing the Self through a 'wide' or 'narrow' horizon (Bollnow, 1963: 74-80). From this perspective, and quite importantly, the horizon is not delineating space *against* something, or someone, but is simply marking the realm of the familiar and the possible. It is a boundary that both fixes and fosters spatial imagination and invites the Self for devising a project that has no definite ending.²⁹

Some Conceptual Affinities in IR

Before introducing the temporal dimension into the narrative, it is worth to briefly step back from the abstract discussion and consider whether there are any conceptual affinities in IR. As noted in the first section of this paper, thinking the state beyond Westphalia is rarely done. Yet there are three areas of scholarship which provide, to varying degree, useful entry points,

²⁹ While Koselleck uses the horizon with reference to the future only, below I suggest that it can just as well be used for how the Self gains orientation vis-à-vis the past.

namely those dealing with phenomena of empire, milieu and regionalism, specifically Europeanization.

The notion of 'empire' most obviously invites a rethinking of spatial boundaries beyond the state, perhaps even denoting a special kind of 'state'. The 'frontier', often associated with imperial conquest, shows some affinities with the notion of horizon in that it is a movable boundary delineating the known world, behind which lies a terra incognita. That said, the conceptualisation of empire and its frontier, while much debated, tends to be preoccupied with the nature of control outside the 'core' state rather than the ontological configuration of the same. The distinction between territorial or non-territorial manifestation, as in the traditional distinctions of land (e.g., Russia) and maritime empires (e.g., Britain), has grown more complex in the question over the nature of American hegemony, with scholars emphasizing US global military reach/presence, control of international markets, and the spread of consumer/popular culture. While Gramscian and Foucauldian frameworks offer new ways of mapping empires, its spatial configuration, more precisely the spatial situatedness of states within it, is overshadowed by questions of (how to measure) power.

Closely linked to the phenomenon of 'empire' are the spatial readings put forward by political geographers in Britain and Germany in the late 19th and early 20th century. Speaking to the imperial ambitions of their governments they developed concepts used for mapping spatial spheres of influence and areas of strategic ('vital') importance, from *Lebensraum*, or living space, to *Grossraum*. Raymond Aron points out that once disconnected from Nazi ideology, Carl Schmitt's notion of *Raumsinn* or 'sense of space' captured something important, namely "the image which man [sic] have made for themselves of their habitat" (Aron, 1966: 207). Whatever the character of this habitat, it highlights that communities perceive/sense their existence as bound up with a broader environment that means something to them. It captures how states identify with an environment beyond their designated territorial borders, whether it is the US claiming the Western Hemisphere as its 'backyard' under the Monroe doctrine or, more recently, Russia declaring the former Soviet states as forming a space which is neither foreign nor domestic but 'Near Abroad'. This notion of being situated in a cultural *Grossraum* also echoes in the suggestion, that states may be part of a 'civilization', which continues to be around (Huntington 1993; Jackson 2006).

A more useful concept which re-imagines the spatial situatedness of the state untainted by the politics of imperial domination is the 'milieu', put forward by Harold and Margaret Sprout (1965). The Sprouts make the distinction between subjective and objective worlds and suggest that the milieu can be understood either as a "psychological image", which they call

the ‘psycho milieu’, or as something that exists independently from perception, the ‘milieu as is’ (Sprout and Sprout, 1965: 28f). While from a phenomenological perspective this distinction breaks down, the subjective character of the ‘psycho milieu’ comes close to the notion of the ‘experienced space’, except that it is a purely cognitive construct lacking the emotional dimension and the emphasis on values. The Sprouts extensive discussion of the “man-milieu relationship” (Sprout and Sprout, 1965: 47ff) deals with the interplay of how the state forms and is formed by the space it is situated in. It is echoed in Arnold Wolfers’ suggestion that states hold “milieu goals” aimed at shaping conditions “beyond national boundaries”. With the notion of milieu goals Wolfers seeks to capture that states “have reason to concern themselves with things other than their own possessions”, namely creating “peace and order” and making a difference in “happiness, in future opportunities, and perhaps in moral satisfaction” (Wolfers, 1962: 73ff).

Although these authors do not offer an alternative ontology of the state – they do not question its composition as a territorial unit – their attempt to think about a symbiotic relationship with ‘the environment’ goes some way towards rethinking spatial situatedness. From recognizing complex interactions between the state and its ‘milieu’ it is only a short step to conceptualise this relationship as a process of mutual constitution. Still missing, however, is an understanding that ‘the state’ is not ontologically separate from its surrounding space, that the two unfold together and that in this process meaning is inscribed into both.

The third concept which goes some way in this direction is regionalism.³⁰ Leaving aside scholarship approaching the study of regions from a level of analysis angle,³¹ more fruitful is Andrew Hurrell’s point that notions of ‘regional awareness’, ‘regional identity’ and ‘regional consciousness’ are central to the analysis of regionalism (see also Lake and Morgan 1997). Hurrell makes an explicit connection between nationalism and regionalism when noting that “as with nationalism, there is a good deal of historical rediscovery, myth-making, and invented traditions” within regions (Hurrell 1995: 41). In the same vein, Emanuel Adler suggests that understanding of how people create security requires examining the link between their images of reality and “the places and regions that people feel comfortable

³⁰ For overviews of the conceptualisation of ‘regions’ in IR, see Hurrell (1995); Lake and Morgan (1997, ch. 1); Buzan and Waever (2003: 77-82); Katzenstein (2005, ch. 1).

³¹ Most scholarship on regionalism involves analyzing interaction/interdependence on a level between ‘the state’ and ‘the global’. For instance, Barry Buzan and Ole Waever’s ‘Regional Security Complexes’ are described as objectively identifiable ‘subsystems’ in a neorealist world of anarchy, rooted in territoriality and defined by (perceived) security interdependence amongst its entities (states). This approach does not deal with how regional spaces are constructed from the perspective of the state and the meaning given to them, let alone how the state sees itself situated within a region. Less ‘objective’ yet also focused on state-state interaction is Katzenstein (2005).

calling ‘home’” (Adler 1997a: 249). For Adler such places are defined not primarily on the basis of territory but values and in what echoes the Sprouts’ psycho-milieu he describes processes of identification with what he calls “regional systems of meanings” or “cognitive regions” (Ibid., 252-254). Adler sees these regions as an extension of what Ruggie called “social epistemes”, namely webs of meaning and signification emerging out of “the process by which a society first comes to imagine itself” (Ruggie 1993: 157).

The final and most fruitful area of research is that on the ‘European’ region, in particular on the phenomenon of ‘Europeanisation’, where attempts to come to terms with Ruggie’s (1993: 140) assessment that the spatial complexes associated with the EU “may constitute nothing less than the emergence of the truly postmodern international political form” provide fertile ground for rethinking ‘the state’ in space. If one looks beyond the debate between ‘supranationalist’ and ‘intergovernmentalist’ designs, and if one leaves aside complex attempts to conceptualise Europe as forming some sort of neo-medieval system, valuable ontological insights on how ‘Europe’ features in the spatial configuration of the state emerge in the debate around a ‘European identity’ (Smith 1997; Strath 2002). When research on whether ‘Europe’ had *replaced* the ‘nation’ as the primary point of identification among the population of EU member states produced inconclusive results, scholars came to realise that there is no trade-off in the interplay between national and European identities. Instead of replacing the state, ‘Europe’ was *inscribed into* the conception of ‘the state’, suggesting that “the states/nations themselves have been transformed and the European level integrated into the meaning of the state/nation” (Weaver 1998: 94; also Wallace 1997).

This process has been captured in the literature under the notion of ‘Europeanisation’, encompassing both ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down’ movements of how either ‘state’ representatives have transformed the ‘European’ landscape of governance (most visible in terms of law) through EU institutions or how the latter have shaped the Member States’ understanding of themselves as ‘European’ (captured on the individual level in the notion of ‘going native in Brussels’). In contrast to Adler’s notion of cognitive regions as purely intersubjective constructs, studies of ‘Europeanisation’ have demonstrated that the European space takes on a genuine national outlook and, thus, that states have different (subjective) conceptions of ‘Europe’ (Marcussen et al. 1999; Herzfeld 2002; Delanty and Rumford 2005).

The ‘Europeanisation’ phenomenon comes closest to offering a conception of the state unfolding in a broader experienced space whose meaning is incorporated in the national narrative. Its weakness is that it is a progressive argument, content with the Westphalian state as the starting point. The ‘European’ dimension is conceived of as something new, product of

a socialisation process member states undergo through participation in European integration. Yet from a national biography perspective this spatial conception is not ‘new’. While it arguably is the case that the EC (now EU) process has advanced a certain idea of Europe, states which are geographically located on the European continent have *always* contained a some conception of ‘Europe’ in their national narrative. This latter point on the historical depth of the spatial imagination leads back to the missing dimension in the biographical narrative, namely how spatial orientation is situated in time by exploring how ‘past’ and ‘future’ become meaningful places, or spaces. I do this through conceptualizing the space as ‘experienced’ and ‘envisioned’, delineated through horizons of experience and of expectations, respectively.

Past: Delineating the Experienced Space

The spatial manifestation of experience is central for lending meaning to (generating knowledge about) the Self as a historical being. As such, situating the Self in an ‘experienced space’ covers an important part of a biographical narrative, namely the place where one is coming from. It brings out the past as a category for orientation. One way to do so is via memories. Whereas historians have long ignored memory as a credible source precisely because of its subjective bias, memories have long been recognized as a force of orientation central to the acquisition of Self-consciousness. Scholars of memory echo the dominant view found amongst scholars of nationalism that a sense of Self is defined primarily by engaging with the past: “an understanding of the past...tells us who we are” (Lebow 2006: 3).³² While this assessment will need to be qualified later on, it can be said that it is through memories or “frames of remembrance” (Irwin-Zarecka 1994) that the Self is linked to its past. As such we could talk about a “memory space” (Assmann 1999).

The notion of memory space enriches the conceptualisation of the experienced space by taking a closer look at how meaning is extracted from (or, rather, attributed to) experience, and how it becomes part of the ontological structure of being. It does so through what Iwona Irwin-Zarecka (1994) calls the “household” or “infrastructure” of memory, where experiences are transmitted and ‘held alive’ through various media, including rituals or other practices (Connerton 1989). In contrast to the conservative bias of the ‘tradition’, unfolding through a memory space requires a reflective Self as the very act of ‘remembering’ involves an evaluation of centre and horizon of experience rather than passively/ritually following a habit. As Irwin-Zarecka emphasizes, when people articulate the sense they make of their past “it is

³² Halbwachs, 1952; Assmann, 1999; Irwin-Zarecka, 1994; Fentress and Wickham, 1992.

their experience, in all its emotional complexity, that serves as the key reference point” (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994: 17).

The question is, then, how experience and memory relate, and how they find their way into a biographical narrative. There is no doubt that memory is ‘selective’ and that the process of remembering is intertwined with that of forgetting, indeed that the latter is a necessary element of the former (Assmann 1999: 30; Bleiker, 1997).³³ Yet scholars are also divided over what is ‘remembered’, whether memories should be regarded as ‘knowledge containers’ which store and recall ‘facts’ on demand, or whether they should be seen as an unsystematic source of sensations (Fentress and Wickham 1992; Assmann 1999). The latter view echoes Bergson’s notion of ‘inner time’ constituted by the idiosyncratic fusion of various experiences. While for Bergson these provide a crucial source of self consciousness, the question arises whether sensations can always be expressed in narrative form. As Fentress and Wickham argue, some memories can be and are translated into language and made accessible in the social domain, others are not and thus form a ‘personal memory’. The question of how experiences are represented is an important one and taken up again below; here it suffices to say that it is problematic to speak of personal, or idiosyncratic experiences in the case of society, or nation, which is held together by what Halbwachs calls collective memory.³⁴ The position taken here thus adopts Irwin-Zarecka’s suggestion that experiences can be more or less ‘adequately represented’ depending on “the fit with the individuals’ emotional reality” (Irwin-Zarecka 1994: 17). While ‘adequacy’ is impossible to discuss further in the abstract (and is usually contested in practice), we should be a bit more specific about *which* experiences matter and *how* meaning is generated from them.

Not all experiences leave an imprint in the biographical narrative and are constitutive; those that do are termed here *significant* experiences. A significant experience turns the past into a significant place by leaving a deep emotional impression on the Self. It becomes a source for meaning for being-in-the-world. In the taxonomy used here, the significant experience alters the configuration of the space in which the Self unfolds, by adding new places and redrawing horizon of experience, possibly even shifting the centre. A significant experience is not necessarily negative, although they often are perceived as such. Amongst them, war can be seen as forming a crucial if not the most important experience leaving a mark in a national biography as the experience of violence, suffering and loss it entails leaves a deep impression amongst all involved. As one scholar notes, “no single act of politics interferes so radically

³³ According to Heidegger, remembering takes place on the basis of forgetting (SZ, 339).

³⁴ Here the notion of social memory, the “collective memory”, or the “social frameworks of memory”, as Maurice Halbwachs originally termed it, arises (Halbwachs, 1992/1952).

and so profoundly in the lives of people...as war” (Krippendorf). Although the degree of ‘interference’ varies, war affects and leaves traces in all segments of society and shapes collective memory. It thus cannot be forgotten, it is a ‘trauma’ which the Self has to live with it in what Saul Friedlander has termed “deep memory”. This is captured in one definition of trauma as an “event that leaves indelible marks upon...consciousness, will mark...memories forever, and will change (the) future in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander 2004: 1). Similar to a shock, it designates an extraordinary experience which brings about a rupture with what has been there before. It is foundational by way of unsettling the Self’s understanding of the world and, hence, its position in it. It disturbs the meaning structure of the world the Self has disclosed for itself and comes from beyond the horizon of experience, beyond the familiar. Such experiences can be seen as turning points in the biography of the Self by both ‘breaking’ ground and providing opportunities for ‘(re)making’ ground.³⁵

Corresponding to the view that memory is not a simple storage of facts, the significant experience cannot be re-produced or re-collected but only represented. Indeed, as scholars investigating (the effects of) ‘trauma’, or ‘shock’ point out, a significant experience such as war is ambiguous and difficult to represent. This underpins the concept of ‘trauma’ since it was introduced by Freud to describe the psychological effects witnessed among soldiers in the First World War whose experiences in the trenches defied description of what exactly happened in this place ‘out there’. This phenomenon has since been witnessed among participants of every war, or survivors of other ‘unimaginable’ experiences, whether this the genocide known as the Holocaust, the detonation of atomic bombs in Japan, or the American defeat in Vietnam (Edkins 2003). While such experiences cannot be forgotten, they also do not hold the Self ‘hostage’ in the sense of determining what follows from it, that is, they do not lay out a clear path on which the Self moves forward. As pointed out by the likes of Henri Bergson, Walter Benjamin, or Hannah Arendt, by intervening in the Self’s understanding/knowledge of the world, the shock opens up the view for possibilities of being which the Self had not been aware of previously. Meaning must be projected into the event (or whatever generated the significant experience); and this meaning cannot be exhausted. Thus, the significant experience remains a constant source of creativity, in particular when fused with other experiences. This poses a permanent challenge and opportunity to, as Arendt put it, “*think* experience” and use this thinking as a guide for activity (Althaus, 2001).

In more general terms, as expressed in the popular imperative to ‘learn from history’, significant experiences become a source of energy through which lessons are derived and

³⁵ On trauma, see Caruth, 1996; Edkins, 2003; Fierke, 2003; Bell, 2003.

integrated into the biographical narrative. Traumatic experiences often appear in narratives merely via signifiers such as Verdun, Auschwitz, Hiroshima, or Vietnam. Understanding what exactly these places mean, how the experiences associated with these places are ‘made sense’ of, how lessons are derived from them poses a challenge for analysts. Not surprisingly, scholars rigorously examining the use of ‘history’ among foreign policy makers have noted that ‘learning’ is a hopelessly ambiguous concept which does not lend itself to prediction.³⁶ The reason is not merely that significant experiences are a source of ambiguity and the lessons ‘learned’ from them are never definite and subject to ‘manipulation’. Rather, analysts need to understand what role they play in the entire biographical narrative. In other words, for ‘thinking experience’ the past is not enough. While memory provides a source of meaning, this source is used with an eye towards the future.

Future: Envisioning the Place to Be

To complete the picture it is necessary to connect the ‘historical being’ with the ‘future being’ by thinking about how the future becomes a meaningful place which can be, if not ever known, at least imagined. Analytical attention must be turned to those meaning structures of the biographical narrative which allow the Self to be future-oriented. In other words, we need to consider the ‘envisioned space’. Here, again, it is useful to take some pointers from Heidegger, who highlights the importance of the future in the fact that ‘being’ is always incomplete, always something the Self is not-yet. Indeed, because being is about becoming, for Heidegger the orientation towards the future and the desire to understand ‘it’ is the most significant element of ‘being’ (Heidegger 1953, §65, 327ff.). A key element of being, then, is an understanding of what the Self can-be. As Heidegger puts it, being is not a present thing [*ein Vorhandenes*] but is “primarily possible-being [*Möglichsein*]. Being is always that which it can be and how it is its possibility”. This possibility is not “empty” or contingent, where one is randomly expecting that this or that may happen (Ibid., 143). Rather, the possible-being Heidegger speaks about is that being which has understood what it can become, which has formulated a possibility in an *Entwurf*, or design (plan, blueprint, outline), which delineates “the room of manoeuvre [*Spielraum*]” of its becoming (Ibid., 145).

This design envisioning the future being-in-the-world may be conservative or progressive, and it may picture a better world, a utopia, or an undesirable one, a dystopia. Utopias have always played a central role in social life, intertwined with aspiration and hope. While the term is said to have entered the world with the publication of Thomas More’s book of the same title in 1516, this publication can be placed in the line with political writings

³⁶ May (1973); May and Neustadt (1986); Jervis (1976); Khong (1992); Levy (1994).

envisioning order initiated by Plato (Logan and Adams, 1989). As Reinhart Koselleck points out, communities always had their prophets whose visions captured (if not controlled) the imagination of individuals and guided their behaviour. And, of course, formulations of utopias can be found in all philosophies promising progress in human affairs, whether Kant's idea of a perpetual peace, Hobbes' formulation of the Leviathan, or Marx' promise of a classless society (Ruesen et al. 2005; Hutchings 2008). Karl Mannheim describes utopias as "methods of thought by means of which we arrive at our most crucial decisions, and through which we seek to diagnose and guide our political and social destiny" (Mannheim 1936: 1f) and an often used quote by Oscar Wilde holds that "a map of the world that does not include utopia is not worth even glancing at" (Tower Sargent 2005: 4).³⁷

Yet forward-looking narratives may also contain a *dystopia*, that is, they may include visions not only of 'better worlds' (characterized by the good/desirable order) but also of undesirable ones (characterized by the bad/undesirable order). Dystopian visions are also projected into the familiar space and paint the picture of an unpleasant future which also is considered 'possible'. In manifesting an image of a 'worse world' dystopias also envision what the Self and its world could become, although it is a being-in-the-world to be averted. As such, it could be employed in deliberate contrast to the utopia, to reinforce the contours of the latter. However, while a utopia is likely to be strengthened through the parallel formulation of a powerful dystopia – a prominent pairing being that of heaven and hell – they do not require each other to make the future meaningful.

In IR, the influence of visions has most obviously been recognized by realists, who since Carr keep warning policymakers of following the wrong utopias rather than realist worst-case scenarios. The importance of ideas/cognitive belief systems has been systematically discussed even by positivist minded scholars (Jervis 1976; Goldstein and Keohane 1993; Yee 1996; Checkel 1997; Parsons 2002). Yet none of these – not even Wendt who most strongly emphasizes the "constitutive effect" of ideas on the self-conception of states and suggest that they operate as "self-fulfilling prophecies" (Wendt 1999: Ch. 3 and 184ff.) – conceives of ideas as operating on the level of ontology in the way suggested here. Whether utopias or dystopias, visions feature in the biographical narrative as particular places in the future and, thus, offer a design of what being-in-the-world might be. They allow the Self to envision the space it may unfold into and draw its horizon of expectations around it. By doing so, both

³⁷ In that sense, the place attributed to utopias here contradicts the original meaning of the term, a fusion of the Greek words 'ou' (not) and 'topos' (place), hence literally 'no-place'. Also, utopia don't have to picture paradise but merely a *better* world. This follows Lyman Tower Sargent's (2005) point that envisioning the 'good life' does not necessarily mean envisioning a *perfect* world.

utopias and dystopias provide the Self with possibilities of becoming. Moreover, one could argue with Heidegger that by imagining this space, and itself within, and making it part of its narrative, the Self already *is* this possibility and, to that extent, already is in this space (Heidegger 1953: 145). In Jeff Malpas' words, being is "always 'on the way'...but that which it is on the way toward is the place in which it already begins" (Malpas 2006: 17). As such, the future design becomes a productive imagination, a source of energy which provides an opportunity to move ahead on a certain 'course and lends what Heidegger calls *Entschlossenheit*, or resolve.

Of course, visions of order are not invented in a vacuum. To be imagined as a possibility it must have a reference somewhere; the envisioned space cannot be radically 'new'. Following scholars like Mannheim and Carr, known for their critical stance on utopias, envisioning the future must go through the past, through the experienced space. This does mean a return of past, as the realist cyclical view of history would have it. As noted earlier, significant experiences are ambiguous/indeterminate. Exactly *what* is remembered and exactly *which* lessons are extracted from the past emerges only in the process of sorting future possibilities of being, embedded in a vision of what being-in-the-world can (should) look like. As such, the formulation of the vision – the future design of being-in-the-world – can be seen as a transformation of the experienced space and, as such, is a *project* in which the biographical narrative is constituted as a coherent whole.³⁸

This project constructed in the interstices of past and future is both intimate and sufficiently vague to accommodate changing interpretations and allowing the project's endurance. Yet generating and sustaining a biographical narrative is more than an act of transmitting signals, of putting together some loose ends. Turning the experienced space into an envisioned space and formulating a coherent narrative which connects horizons of experience and expectation is a creative act and, hence, requires agency. This agency is similar to what Emirbayer and Mische have described as a temporally embedded process where decisions are informed (1) by the past, stimulating an element of iteration based on past patterns of thought and action (here: 'learning'), (2) by the future, stimulating an element of projection based on the capacity to imagine alternative possibilities, and (3) by the present, stimulating an element of practical evaluation. In its reflexive capacity to synthesize spatio-temporal orientations this way, the Self becomes an agent in the form of a "relational pragmatic" (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 970). As this interpretative act is open to debate and contestation, it is political. Scholars have captured this under the notion of 'identity politics', which mostly focuses on the 'politics of

³⁸ On the state as a project, see also Jackson and Nexon (1999).

