

# **Embodiment and Place in Autobiographical Remembering: A Relational-Material Approach**

**Steven D. Brown, The Open University, UK**

**Paula Reavey, London South Bank University, UK**

**Abstract** The relationship between place and remembering has been a longstanding matter of phenomenological concern. The role of the 'lived body' in mediating acts of remembering in context is clearly crucial. In this paper we contribute to an 'expanded view of memory' by describing how remembering difficult or problematic events – 'vital memories' – draws upon inter-subjective and inter-objective relations. We discuss two conceptual tools that provide an analytic framework – the concept of 'life space' drawn from Kurt Lewin (1932) and the idea of the 'setting specificity' of remembering. From this perspective we can see that the 'lived body' does not constitute a singular unity but rather a 'plurality' of potential bodies that have 'operative solidarity' (cf. Simondon, 2009) with the material relations in which they are constituted. Drawing on the work of Eduardo de Viveiros de Castro, we argue that 'body memories' need to be analysed from within the embodied material-relational perspective wherein they are afforded.

**Keywords** Vital memory; life space; body memory; Kurt Lewin; Amerindian perspectivism; Gilbert Simondon

## **Introduction: Place, memory and the body**

Autobiographical remembering is the process of mobilising recollections of personally experienced past episodes within the present, to some purpose. We understand this as a form of social action – an interactional accomplishment that attempts to influence or alter the ongoing flow of events (Brown & Reavey, 2018). As such, the context in which autobiographical remembering is performed is crucial. Whilst it has been recognised for some time that there is a need to analyse specific acts of remembering within the discursively mediated interactions in which they are occasioned (see Middleton & Edwards, 1990; Middleton & Brown, 2005), the contextual features involved are far broader. Remembering occurs in a specific place, which constitutes a locus of embodied relations and feelings. What is recollected in autobiographical memories invokes past places and situated experiences, whose features become expressed as part of the felt present moment. Memory is rendered live through this folding together of past and present material relations and spaces, with the body acting as the fulcrum around which this is accomplished.

The embodied and emplaced aspects of memory have received considerable phenomenological attention. Edward Casey's work (1998; 2000) offers a comprehensive account of the manner in which bodies are both immersed within and enveloped by place. If, as he puts it, the body has 'its own ways of remembering' (Casey, 2000: 147), then inevitably these modalities of body memory will be shaped by place. Thomas Fuchs (2012) has developed an account of how embodied 'situational memories' are stored as intermodal

impressions, which enter into the habitual structure of the lived body. In both cases, the body is presented as a means of preserving and transmitting past experience through the shaping of corporeal dispositions. This renders the body as 'historically formed', a 'carrier of our life history', which enables a 'procedural field of possibilities' shaped by past experience, to be enacted in the present (Fuchs, 2012: 20). The value of such an approach is clear. It allows problematic dualisms between mind and body, and between explicit and implicit memory, to be transcended, and also provides for a more dynamic conception of remembering as entering directly into our embodied engagement with the world, rather than lodged predominantly within a narrowly defined cognitive system. But it also concentrates our focus on the body itself rather than the relational field that it occupies, both in the act of remembering and in the past experiences that are re-articulated. If, as Gilbert Simondon and Gilles Deleuze have claimed, our bodies cannot be adequately understood outside of the networks of relations that constitute our 'milieus' of living, then how can these relations to others, to things, and to place itself, be considered in remembering as more than just 'extracts' that are stored with the lived body?

To briefly illustrate the problem – in a study of how adoptive parents manage the memories of their adoptive children (Brookfield et al, 2008; Brown et al, 2013), a key issue articulated by participants was that of holding together the embodied relations that make up the new family unit. The identity of the adoptive family depends on accomplishing a felt sense of belonging, whilst acknowledging the unique, but often problematic, personal history of the adoptive child. The work of producing identity is enacted through routine negotiation around embodied matters such as food preferences, choice of clothes, the toys and objects the child plays with and so on. Persons and objects together constitute what Simondon (1992) calls a 'living ensemble' engaged in the project of becoming a family. But various components of this ensemble fold in other past relationships. Childhood photographs, for example, can contain visible signs of neglect by biological parents. Toys that have accompanied the child on their journey through the care system are links to previous carers, and reflect their presence along with traces of past places in the new family home. Managing how the child relates to these everyday objects becomes the means by which adoptive parents accommodate the past, with all its associated problems, as well as weave together a collective future. Conversely, in cases where adoption breaks down, adopted children often abandon or get rid of clothes and other 'stuff' brought by their adoptive parents, breaking the material links that mark out their place within the family.

We would say that it is the 'living ensemble' rather than individual family members that does the work of remembering; this would be the unit of analysis. Such work is done through an ongoing co-ordination of bodies and objects, which, whilst primarily grounded in a specific place (i.e. the family home), inevitably spills out and becomes entangled with other relations and places (e.g. former carers, past 'homes'), some of which are temporally remote, but experientially close (e.g. a sense of where the child really comes from/belongs). Our concern is with the relational-material field, which here includes objects and features of place, and how it informs and is informed by remembering. What we wish to develop is an approach that treats the body not as a singular constituted

entity that carries memory forward, but instead as mediating between a plurality of living ensembles that are linked across time and space through embodied inter-subjective and inter-objective relations. In this paper we advance our argument by dwelling on the core conceptual elements that make up a relation-material approach. We begin by summarising the notion of 'vital memory' that is central to the way we consider memories of 'difficult' or 'problematic' events and their place in autobiographical remembering. We will then proceed to map out some of the key terms such as 'life space' and 'setting specificity' which enable an 'expanded view of memory', before turning to focus on the relational aspects of embodiment as they are mediated through inter-subjective and inter-objective bodily extensions. This will bring us towards the critical idea, emanating from contemporary anthropological work of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, that embodiment refers to a plurality rather than a unity of experience.

### **Vital Memory**

Over the course of roughly fifteen years worth of research with groups who experience difficulties in relation to specific life events, we have developed the term 'vital memory' to refer to remembering difficult or traumatic events (see Brown & Reavey, 2015a, 2015b). Vital memory, as we see it, is a subset of autobiographical memory, being the range of personal episodic memories that inform our current sense of self and future projects (Conway, 2005). A great many approaches to remembering troubling events operate with a 'deficit model', where such memories are seen to be debilitating or corrosive to self. At the extreme end of this sits the 'trauma theory' that was developed following Cathy Caruth's (1996) work, where the unbearable nature past suffering places it beyond representation in such a way that remembering can only proceed indirectly and often analogically. By contrast, the majority of the participants we have worked with are ordinary people doing their best to live with an incredibly difficult past. We have sought to focus on their capacities to act and the strategies they have evolved in the course of doing so, rather than treat traumatic events as an inevitable source of pathology.

A key feature of vital memories is their irreversibility. The past cannot be undone. It becomes a 'chreod' in the flow of experience, a contingent event that lends direction to the life that follows. In this sense, difficult events, such as experiencing sexual or physical violence, become threaded into the life of the person. Whilst memories of such events may not always be relevant to making sense of the person's life, they remain what Frances Cherry (1990), in a very different context, referred to as 'stubborn particulars' – specific details grounded in history and place that refuse erasure. But although irreversible, this does not prevent these events from being continuously revisited in different ways. From a Bergsonian perspective, temporal experience – duration – is indivisible (Bergson, 1991; 1992). There is no break between a nominal present and some aspect of the past. All of our experience can be folded back on itself to form complex topological figures that defy ready chronological structuring. Going upstream in the flow of experience creates different perspectives on the contingencies of what may yet emerge downstream (i.e. our future).

There are nevertheless strong normative constraints involved in recollecting difficult events. These range from cultural expectations around the meaning and significance of 'victimhood' and 'surviving', such as are found around sexual abuse and violence, to norms around how suffering and distress can be narrated. Those who have been caught up in traumatic events can find that there is no audience who wants to hear (and thus act as witness to) their story, or, conversely, in the case of survivors of political violence, that their story is no longer their own, but has been co-constructed and publicized across media and public debates (see Brown et al, 2016 on the survivors of the 2005 London Bombings). Whilst to a certain extent all experience is relationally constituted, in that what we feel and understand about ourselves is shaped through our interactions with others, to lose control over the narrative of one's own distress significantly adds to the difficulty of managing a difficult past.

Vital memories are always about distinct places and are recalled in particular contemporary spaces. This doubling or folding together of past and current places constitutes a unique relationship. As Reavey (2010) shows in the case of autobiographical writing on childhood sexual abuse, the spaces which are remembered seem to 'in-form' – in the literal sense of lending their form to and marking out – the spaces wherein recollection occurs. The spatial organization that is present in difficult memories does more than simply heighten their vivid nature. The features of remembered place, along with the objects contained within them, distribute matters of accountability and agency. For example, one survivor of child sexual abuse recounted a scene where her brother abused her in a locked bedroom (see Reavey & Brown, 2009). The woman struggled with a wish to account for her brother's past actions as immature and irresponsible curiosity. However, in a crucial detail, she described how the brother had deliberately removed the door handle, making it impossible for the door to be opened. For her, the act of locking the door and absent handle rendered the moral order concrete – this could only really be seen as an intentional and considered act. The spatial arrangement of the sister/door/brother defined the relational possibilities present in the experience.

We view memory as inextricably linked to affect. There are many competing definitions and theoretical workings-up of this polyvalent term. Our preferred one is to view affect as a felt engagement with the relational possibilities of the milieu in which we currently act. This can be illustrated most simply by the example Deleuze (1988) attributes to Jakob von Uexhüll<sup>1</sup>. A tick living in a forest has a semiotic milieu or *umwelt* that is effectively defined by three dimensions – locomotion towards light, dropping onto passing animals in response to smell and biting at the warmest part of the body. Deleuze calls each dimension a distinct affect, a mode of engagement that composes 'the world of the tick'. As John Shotter argued some time ago, inasmuch as we can speak of a human *umwelt*, it is infinitely more complex than that of animal worlds studied by von Uexhüll (Shotter and Newsom, 1982). Nevertheless, we may say that feelings have a primary, although obviously not exclusive, role in how we discern the field of possibilities in which we find ourselves at any given moment (for a fully developed argument see Cromby 2015).

Finally, remembering is at every point shadowed by forgetting. Bergson's notion of the indivisibility of duration is once again helpful. As he states in *The Perception of Change*, if we accept that in some sense the past is never really abolished, but has a continuous, uninterrupted relation to the present then 'we no longer have to explain the preservation of the past, but rather its apparent abolition. We shall no longer have to account for remembering, but for forgetting' (1992: 153). The phrase 'apparent abolition' is important. If we are unable to ever properly excise past events from our duration, then forgetting must take the form of rendering that aspect of the past as not-relevant or as remote from current concerns. The paradoxes involved in such willful attempt at semiotic erasure is the subject of a playful consideration by Umberto Eco (1988), who concludes that hiding or re-signifying meanings within broader frames is required. He compares this to the practice of 'steganography', the practice of hiding information 'in plain sight' (see Poe's *The Purloined Letter* for a famous literary example). What this suggests is that forgetting often takes the form of complexifying the accessibility of memory rather than abolishing its availability (Brown and Reavey, 2015a). In the case of vital memory, this is accomplished through a collective, relational process of managing past difficulties in a given setting.

## **Life Space**

Having outlined the various features of vital memory, we now wish to turn to the conceptual tools that we draw upon to study the remembering of difficult events across various contexts. The body stands at the very centre of this set of concepts. However, as we shall come on to discuss, it is a body lacking in self-sufficient unity and continuity over time. It is a body viewed through the lens of process rather than substance metaphysics.

A key analytic for us is Kurt Lewin's concept of 'life space', which he defines as 'the totality of facts which determine the behaviour of the individual at a certain moment' (1936: 12). A 'fact' can be understood here as a 'sign' that marks out a behavioural option or 'possibility for action'. Such signs are arranged as a field, the limits of which constitute the psychological horizon of a milieu or *umwelt*. As is well known, Lewin's advocacy of field approaches is of a piece with the Gestalt School's promotion of holism and non-reductionist accounts of perception (Heft, 2001), and prefigures the interest in dynamical systems theory within human development (Oyama, 2000). As early as 1936, Lewin was arguing that psychological processes need to be modelled as vectors through a mathematical space which is progressively defined through a successive number of dimensions. In other words, that such processes could not be dissociated from the dynamic field in which they occurred. The notion of the field is then simultaneously a mathematical tool and a means of providing a description of psychological life space.

Life space is, Lewin asserts, topologically rather than topographically organised. In topographical space, distance is key to understanding relations. Proximal relations have greater weight than more distant relations. However, topological space displays the property of invariance through transformation, where the two

points within the boundary of the space as it undergoes structural changes (e.g. twisting, pleating, folding) are less important than the maintenance of their connection. Life space is then defined by the possibilities of movement and connectedness within a continuous shifting space or 'region' that undergoes transformations in its overall structural form. Relations that remain within the boundaries of a given region have a form of continuity. However, movements across the boundary represent qualitative changes that alter not only the possibility of movement, but also the nature of the relation itself. In psychological terms, a key question is discerning where the boundary of life space lies, on any particular occasion, and how relations and possibilities for action are distributed within the topologically organised space.

This may initially appear as a material-reductionist account of the psychological. Lewin does indeed offer many examples that are based around what he calls 'physical locomotion', where physical relations are what is crucial, such as the disapproving glance thrown by a mother at a child. Although note that since distance is of less concern than the nature of connectedness, we can update Lewin's example by saying there is little structural difference between direct presence and a disapproving text or social media update from parent to child. What matters in both cases are the possibilities for action that emerge. But here Lewin also speaks of 'psychological locomotion' or a 'quasi-conceptual' movement of thought within a bounded region. Since Lewin defines 'reality' as 'what has effects' (Lewin, 1936: 19), then it is the capacity to be affected through a relationship to some other person or thing that is of central relevance to life space. Affect, defined as the felt sense of the possibilities afforded within a relationship, then becomes another key analytic concern.

For example, in our work in medium-secure forensic psychiatric units, an important question has been where the limit of the life space of a patient is to be found (Brown and Reavey, 2016). In purely physical terms, we may be led to think that this is with the imposing walls and security measures that prevent patients from leaving the hospital wards. These physical limits are important, and patients often prefer to be located in wards and bedrooms where it is possible to see over the wall, particularly if there is a view that takes in natural features such as trees, or better yet extends beyond the immediate hospital grounds. Yet, in relational terms, walls and locked doors clearly do not define the capacity to be affected by others. Maintaining contact with a broader world through watching television or listening to the radio or recorded music are important aspects of life on the unit. Patients often try to retreat from the daily sounds and noise of the unit by creating their own 'soundscapes' of music in their bedrooms, which is typically described as being 'transported' elsewhere (Brown et al, forthcoming). Music then allows for an expansion of life space far beyond the physical limits of the built environment.

The feeling of being elsewhere clearly involves memory. Whilst the description so far of life space seems focused on the current nature of relationships, Lewin clearly states that life space has a temporal structure:

It is important to realize that the psychological past and the psychological future are simultaneous parts of the psychological field existing at given time  $t$ . The time perspective is continually changing. According to field theory, any type of behaviour depends upon the total field, including the time perspective at that time (Lewin, 1997: 207)

Life space extends into the past, as well as marking out the directions of the possible. We see remembering as accomplishing an expansion of life space. Insofar as it is possible to connect with past persons, objects or places, then they, in effect, part of what counts are current life space. And since all relations are defined by Lewin as 'what has effects', then the mobilisation of the past intertwines it within contemporaneous relations. We saw this earlier in the example of adoptive families, where past carers, mediated through photographs or objects, maintain a spectral, yet real presence – i.e. having effects – within the relationship between child and adoptive parents. The expansion of life space through memory complicates the topological structuring of relations through a folding in past places, such as with the example of the survivor who has to negotiate the significance of the locked door for how she views her brother and accounts for his past actions. We view the expansion and contraction of life space through memory as analagous to diastolic and systolic movements which open up and then actualise possibilities for action. This gives us a working definition of what is meant by 'agency' – the capacity to expand our feelings across a broad range of relations along with the ability to act upon them.

From the description so far, the interpretation we have made of Lewin's life space draws out considerable 'family resemblance' to von Uexhüll's *umwelt*. However, Lewin has a paired concept of 'psychological ecology' that supplements life space:

Any type of group life occurs in a setting of certain limitations to what is and what is not possible, what might or might not happen. The nonpsychological factors of climate, of the law of the country or the organization are a frequent part of these 'outside limitations'. The first analysis of the field is done from the point of view of 'psychological ecology': the psychologist studies 'nonpsychological' data to find the boundary conditions of the life of the individual or group. Only after these data are known can the psychological study itself be begun to investigate the factors which determine the actions of the group or the individual in those situations which have been shown to be significant (Lewin, 1997: 289)

Psychological ecology refers to the broader social, economic and environmental forces at play, which serve as the grounds upon which life space emerges. For Lewin, this ground is ultimately a 'constellation of forces' which act together to create 'quasi-stationary' psychological and cultural patterns, such as 'habits' or 'preferences'. Whilst this distinction has the virtue of demonstrating that there is a contextual relationship, where broader forces impinge upon and shape the psychological, it does create an awkward dualism between two levels of analysis

– the personal psychological world of life space and the impersonal non-psychological world of the socio-material environment.

We propose to replace this distinction in Lewin with one drawn instead from Simondon (1992). The central concept in Simondon's work is 'individuation'. From a process perspective, Simondon argues that we cannot understand the emergence of an individual – whether that be a person, an organism, a collective or a technical device – outside of the specific processes of its constitution, since the constituted 'individual' usually does not resemble the materials involved in its constitution. Moreover, Simondon argues, we must not fall into the trap of imagining that the form the individual takes is somehow impressed upon matter (a position he disparages as Aristotelian hylomorphic theory), since this merely raises the further problem of how these forms emerge. Simondon speaks instead of individuation as an ongoing process whereby elements affect and modulate one another such that new forms emerge - a process of 'in-formation'.

One of Simondon's key examples is that of the development of crystals. These initially exist as an array of elements in a 'supersaturated' milieu of materials. On the basis of an initial energetic push, the crystal develops – or becomes – by exploiting the potentials of this milieu to propagate new forms throughout the milieu, a process that Simondon (1992) calls 'transduction'. The resultant constituted crystal is then individualised from this initial milieu. We can see the dynamics of life space described by Lewin in a similar way. The person acts through being affected by and affecting (or 'modulating') the relationships in the psychological milieu in which they dwell. This reciprocal action propagates and transforms the person as part of a continuous process of individuation or becoming. But the same also holds for the relationships that make up Lewin's 'psychological ecology'. Simondon speaks of a 'preindividual' milieu as the metastable 'psychosocial' environment out of which human individuation occurs. The preindividual milieu is never exhausted, it remains immanent to the development or lifecourse of the person. We may then say that for analytic purposes, life space is already a part of a broader psychosocial plane of transductive relationships that is carried forward into our actions.

In the forensic psychiatric unit, for example, the movements and activities of patients are subject to monitoring designed to reduce 'risk to self, others and environment' (Barker, 2012). The idea of 'risk' belongs to a broader political discourse and set of social policy decisions that have a long history. These constitute the preindividual, psychosocial milieu, in that they operate beyond the lives of any given patient. By this milieu is not somewhere else – it is part of the daily lives of patients. It is written into the design of the building, it 'in-forms' the designs of chairs, toilets and seclusion rooms. It works its way into how patients feel about themselves and what they are prepared to say about their personal history to staff and fellow patients. Risk becomes an omnipresent transductive movement that propagates throughout the unit and the broader care and justice systems within which it sits. The psychosocial milieu is, therefore, immanent to rather than outside of lifespace, without being reducible to it. Or put slightly differently, through remembering we articulate a broader socio-historical milieu through the complex ways in which it has 'in-formed' our experiences.



## Setting Specificity

The second major analytic tool that we draw upon is ‘setting specificity’. What we mean by this is the claim that remembering – what we can do with our memories – is dependent on the spaces where they are articulated, and, to a lesser extent, on the places entwined in the remembered experience. It is relatively well established that autobiographical remembering is not a ‘hard-wired’ capacity, but rather a developmental skill that emerges through ongoing tutoring and scaffolding by care-givers (see Fivush et al, 2011). Indeed, the very idea that our memories ‘belong’ in some sense uniquely to us, and constitute the basis of our identity, has its own specific cultural and historical formation (Danziger, 2008). This would make autobiographical remembering one of the many ‘higher order’ cognitive properties described by Vygotsky (1978), which begin as publically rehearsed interactional processes before being ‘owned’ as seemingly private mental processes.

From the perspective of phenomenologically informed variants of enactive cognition, this privatization of remembering is problematic. The others with whom we interact are not merely the means by which cognitive properties are acquired, they remain fundamental to their ongoing constitution and exercise, to the point where we can speak of autobiographical remembering as depending on intertwining of embodied subjects through inter-bodily resonance – i.e. an ‘extended body’ (Froese & Fuchs, 2012). We are entirely in agreement with the thrust of this argument, with the caveat that we treat the resonances that tie bodies to one another as topologically distributed across life space, such that spatial (and even temporal) proximity is not necessarily required. But we also see other features of the environment as constituting ‘embodied extensions’. For example, photographs and diaries, formal records and even specific objects, such as the door handle in the previous example. Rather than treat these ‘things’ as external resources within a distributed cognition framework, we view them instead as part of a relational field that encompasses the persons who interact with them. Taken together, inter-subjective and inter-objective relations constitute a setting that has specific higher-order memorial properties.

Consider, for instance, Ed Hutchin’s (1995) classic study of navigation aboard the naval ship *Palau*. Hutchins describes the entrainment of sailors with the charts and devices that structure their environment with exquisite detail. Insofar as one can speak of navigation as a matter of cognitive skill then it is one, he observes, where:

a good deal of the expertise in the system is in the artifacts (both the external implements and the internal strategies) – not in the sense that the artifacts are themselves intelligent or expert agents, or because the act of getting into coordination with the artifacts constitutes an expert performance by the person; rather, the system of person-in-interaction-with-technology exhibits expertise. These tools permit the people using

them to do the tasks that need to be done while doing the kinds of things the people are good at: recognizing patterns, modeling simple dynamics of the world, and manipulating objects in the environment. (Hutchins, 1995: 155)

Hutchins claims here that tools enable the relatively low-level embodied cognitive skills of the sailors to become embedded in a broader system which has navigation as a supervenient higher order cognitive property. It is the system which has the expertise, rather than any of its individual parts. However, Hutchins remains within a traditional cognitive framework when he asserts that the basis of this system is the 'propagation of representational states'. Here, we would side with the enactive cognition position that representation is not the central issue. What is at stake instead is how the system – the Palau – brings forth a 'navigable world' through its reciprocal interaction with the environment (e.g. waves, wind, landmass). When Hutchins describes an astrolabe, for instance, he sees this mechanical device for plotting movement in relation to astral positions as an 'analog computer' which serves as 'externalised memory', thereby reducing cognitive load on the user (who does not have to remember the position of planets and stars). But we may instead treat this device as the relational means by which otherwise remote features of the environment become part of the relational nexus formed around the Palau. The astrolabe does not 'represent' stars and planets, it mediates a relationship to them in such a way that despite their immense distance, they are relationally entwined within its navigational field. As Michel Serres (1995) once described in a discussion of the origins of this kind of technology in the early *gnomon* (e.g. a basic sundial) what the tool does is not to produce descriptions *about the world*, but rather *translates* properties of the world such that they become tractable features of the experiential world. John Law draws upon this insight in his study of Portuguese 15<sup>th</sup> century imperial navigation by proposing that new technical arrangements enabled the Portuguese fleet to create navigational field which 'include[d] the very heavens, heavens that stayed with the navigator wherever he might go' (Law, 1986). The stars became part of the 'network' built by Portuguese expansion, not mere representations.

Turning back to autobiographical remembering, we see inter-objective relations between persons and things as critical to the capacity to mobilise past events in the present. In a study of a reminiscence museum based in a care home for elderly clients in the Netherlands (Bendien, 2010; Bendien et al, 2010), we observed numerous instances where elderly persons were able to engage in recollections of difficult events from their childhood and early adulthood in course of interacting with very specific objects. A certain room in particular in the museum, which had been made over to resemble a Dutch kitchen from the first half of the twentieth century, seemed to invoke such memories regularly. One woman told a complex narrative, which weaved between her early experiences as a mother caring for her son and his more recent death as an adult, centred around a rather unsafe looking washing device, and its exposed machinery. Other woman told stories of childhood hardship and resilience focused on large bath tubs, originally used for hand transporting boiling water from the ground floor pump up the stairs of pre-war apartment blocks. These are

'body memories' in the sense that they refer to long ingrained bodily comportments and feelings (see Fuchs, 2012), but they require the relationship to these specific objects in order to be properly articulated. These 'setting specific' instances of autobiographical remembering are then, properly speaking, emergent properties of the combination of persons who share a communicative memorial relationship to a specific place (i.e. Rotterdam in immediate pre- and post-war era) with a very particular range of objects. It is the setting, or the 'memorial field', of persons, place and objects that does the remembering.

Treating objects not as mere stimuli, but as relational parts of the setting which affords remembering offers some challenges. Memory feels like it ought to belong on the human side of a subject-object distinction. However, Simondon is once again instructive on this point. He argues that the distinction between human and 'technical objects' masks a deeper intimacy between persons and tools. Invention – the capacity to realise potentials in the organism's relationship to the environment – is of the essence of technicity (Simondon, 2012). In this sense, the inventive power of tools to realise new relationships to the environment defines humanness every bit as well as any other candidate attribute. Given this intertwining of the human and the technical object, Simondon suggests that an adequate analysis of human actions (such as remembering) needs to 'tend toward a phenomenology of regimes of activity, without an ontological presupposition that is relative to the nature of that which enters into the activity' (2009: 18). In other words, much as with Gregory Bateson's (1973) parable of the blind man's stick, we should proceed through a description of what is experienced at the level of system that is engaged in the activity rather than concern ourselves with prior and premature demarcations about the ontological status of what affords that activity.

A setting might then be also described as a 'world' – a set of entangled relations that have their own affordances and constraints, and which is endowed with its particular historicity and potentials. It makes no sense to understand autobiographical remembering as the abstract act of recollecting past events since, as Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2012: 212) puts it 'nothing comes without its world, we do not encounter single individuals, a meeting produces a world, changes the colour of things, it diffracts more than reflects'. We remember from within a world, or, more properly, *with* and *through* a world that makes that remembering possible.

To summarise briefly: our argument began with the claim that we need to examine how embodied relations to others, things and features of place are implicated in remembering. Having qualified our interest in remembering difficult or problematic events ('vital memory'), we then turned towards the field theory of Kurt Lewin to build upon his idea of the topological organization of experience, extending across time and space. Here remembering can be treated as an expansion or contraction of life space, and attendant possibilities for action. We have now added the notion that remembering is itself an emergent property of situated inter-subjective and inter-objective relations, that constitute the world in which memories are enacted. Thus equipped, we now in a position to

turn to our central point – that the body does not constitute a singular unity that carries memory.

### **The Plurality of Body Memory**

Froese and Fuchs (2012) describe how the ‘extended body’ is constituted through a ‘resonance’ between individual bodies. This is a process that involves the expression of bodily feelings that impress themselves upon another in such a way that they give rise to a new reciprocal expression. In this way, two bodies become ‘parts of a dynamic sensori-motor and inter-affective system that connects both bodies by reciprocal movements and reactions’ resulting in ‘inter-bodily resonance’ (2012: 213). This definition of resonance limits relations between bodies to organic beings that can respond to one another. However, if we take seriously Simondon’s injunction to begin phenomenological description of ‘regimes of activity’ without apportioning ontological distinctions, we can see that a reciprocal shaping or in-forming, where differences in one part of the field result in differences in another, occurs between people and things. Simondon (1992) uses the term ‘modulation’ to refer to the form-giving loop where ‘differences make a difference’ (cf. Bateson, 1972). Some examples of modulation in a memorial field might include the following: *processes of modification or wearing down*, such as the stretching or tearing of clothing, which acts as a sign of particular experiences; *processes of reframing and reconfiguration*, such as the circulation of images in social media, which attract tagging and commenting, transforming the memorial potentials of the initial image; *processes of modification and restructuring of operations*, such as the adjustments made a car seat or the layout of computer desktop, which ‘act back’ to reorganize routines and activities and become emblematic of a personal history; *processes of disconnection and reconnection*, such as the loss felt over the disappearance of particular object and the restoration of a past world that is felt when a once-familiar object is re-encountered.

Resonance may then be seen as a particular instance of the more general category of modulation, or reciprocal form-giving, that characterizes the activity of any given field. From this it follows that relationships to objects and tools are not merely ‘additions’ to the body in such a way as to simply augment some existing bodily capacity, but tend to either restructure those capacities or actualize potentials that were not otherwise apparent. For example, the ability to feel that one is emotionally affected and transported elsewhere through the experience of listening to music is not clearly grounded in any particular pre-existing embodied skill. Rather, the experience recruits a range of personal abilities and dispositions in tandem with the qualities of music to constitute a novel affective movement. Yet the experience of being taken elsewhere that arises through such listening is no more ‘in’ the body than it is ‘in’ the music. The listener and the sound form what Simondon (2009) calls an ‘operative solidarity’ – a unity arising through participation in realization of a potential that emerges through their relationship. Once realized, this potential (i.e. for being transported) will come to seem as though it is always pre-existed its emergence – a tendency that A.N. Whitehead once termed rendering ‘the future as anterior

to the present' (1933). In this way, bodily extensions or inter-objective relations within the extended body, come to appear as naturalized.

If the extended body forms an 'operative solidarity' with relational-material extensions, then to what extent can we say, with Fuchs, that 'our entire personality is based on the memory of the body' (2012: 15)? Fuchs' argument is premised on the view of a continuity of lived experience grounded in a 'historically formed body whose experiences have left their traces in its invisible dispositions' which 'permeate the environment like an invisible net that spreads out from its senses and limbs, connects us with the world and render it familiar to us (2012: 20). However, these dispositions also emerge, in part, within what Fuchs calls 'intercorporeal' or 'inter-bodily' memory, which is grounded in turn on the 'pre-reflective lived inter-bodily reciprocity' manifest in the extended body (Froese & Fuchs, 2012: 214). Whilst the individual body may bear traces of such memories, in an important sense they do not subsume all of the memory, because it is constituted *within the relation itself*. Indeed, several of the examples that Fuchs gives, such as the experience of recovering prior ways of comporting ourselves when returning to places we have known, the pianist directing herself to the music as she strikes the keys, or Proust's narrator famously feeling Combray unfold origami-like from sipped madeleine-infused tea, all suggest that there is a reciprocal 'in-forming' of memory through the relationship to objects and place.

How might we instead see 'body memory' not as grounded solely in an individual body but as instead within its inter-subjective and inter-objective relations? The work of the anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro provides some guidance. Viveiros de Castro, whose ethnographic work has been in Brazil with Amerindian communities, is best known for his advocacy of 'multinaturalism' as means of avoiding cultural relativism (2016). As a discipline, anthropology has made a shift from treating the practice and beliefs systems on non-Western peoples as exceptional and exotic in comparison to the supposed cognitive norms of the West, toward the reversed position of treating 'animist' and 'totemist' culture as superior in their ecological concerns with Nature in comparison with the destructive metaphysical dualisms of the Occident. In this sense, contemporary anthropological work is often cited in support of phenomenological and critical psychological critiques of overly 'brain-bound' versions of cognitive science (e.g. Cromby, 2015). But Viveiros de Castro argues that cultural relativism remains committed to a representationalist dogma, where what is stake is how different cultures view the same natural world through different lenses. Here nature is a stable given, with culture varying its representational content.

Drawing on a large body of ethnographic work conducted across North and South America, Viveiros de Castro (2016) describes how the category of 'human' is applied to all living creatures in the majority of Amerindian cosmologies. Although plants and animals have different physical forms to people, they are, in their essence 'human'. This means that the lives of living creatures are taken to have a similar form of social organization, based around kinship networks, homes and hunting and gathering practices etc. Culture is then a static given shared by humans, animals and even plants in pretty much the same way. But

what differs radically is the natural world, which is entirely a matter of the perspective that is relative from the physical form 'humanness' takes:

in normal conditions, humans see humans as humans and animals as animals; as to spirits, to see these usually invisible beings is a sure sign that the "conditions" are not normal. Animals (predators) and spirits, however, see humans as animals (as prey), to the same extent that animals (as prey) see humans as spirits or as animals (predators). By the same token, animals and spirits see themselves as humans: they perceive themselves as (or become) anthropomorphic beings when they are in their own houses or villages and they experience their own habits and characteristics in the form of culture—they see their food as human food (jaguars see blood as manioc beer, vultures see the maggots in rotting meat as grilled fish etc.), they see their bodily attributes (fur, feathers, claws, beaks) as body decorations or cultural instruments, they see their social system as organised in the same way as human institutions are (with chiefs, shamans, ceremonies, exogamous moieties etc.) (Viveiros de Castro, 2016: 47-48)

Perspective – the way that we are disposed toward the world, the possibilities for thinking, feeling and acting that are disclosed by that world – is entirely a matter of 'nature' rather than 'culture' in Amerindian cosmologies. If people and animals are different, it is not because they think or live differently, but instead because their bodies, their physical form, affords them a perspective on the world that distributes humanness into different orders from each other. In this way, Viveiros de Castro claims, the Amerindian world has but one culture and many natures. Shifting perspectives requires a transformation in physical form. Hence, shamans and other venerated persons are able to alter themselves into animals or objects in order to gain knowledge that would not be otherwise available from the 'human' perspective (e.g. a shaman becomes a rope because this offers a useful perspective on a person's sickness that would not be possible when in human form). Crucially, Viveiros de Castro argues that such shifts in perspective are not simply different ways of seeing the world. Moving between 'natures' means taking up a position in a set of terms are defined in relation to one another. We typically find such relations in closed structures such as kinship networks, where a term such a 'nephew' has a definite deictic function in association with the term 'uncle', such that one term acts as a 'relational pointer' to the other. By contrast, a term such as 'fish' or 'snake' refers to the substantive characteristics of some entity beyond any relations they might enter into. But because culture is static in Amerindian cosmology, all substantive terms are actually relative – a 'fish' is only a 'fish' for someone (or something). There are no static 'substances', only relationally defined physical beings:

[I]f saying that crickets are the fish of the dead or that mud is the hammock of tapirs is like saying that Isabel's son Michael is my nephew, then there is no "relativism" involved. Isabel is not a mother "for" Michael, from Michael's "point of view" in the usual, relativist-subjectivist sense of the expression: she is the mother of Michael, she's really and objectively Michael's mother, and I am really Michael's uncle. This is a genitive,

internal relation—my sister is the mother of someone, our cricket the fish of someone—not a representational, external connection of the type “X is fish for someone,” which implies that X is “represented” as fish, whatever X is “in itself.” (Viveiros de Castro, 2016: 110)

To move between perspectives is to take a different embodied standpoint. Mud is not ‘seen as’ or ‘thought as’ a hammock by tapirs; it has instead a ‘real’ relational standing as such within their embodied perspective in much the same way that the terms ‘tomorrow’ and ‘today’ are not subjectively defined but rather change their deictic status according to temporal standpoint. That is to say that a ‘standpoint is not an opinion or a construction; there is nothing “subjective,” in the usual sense of the term, in the concepts of “yesterday” and “tomorrow,” or of “my mother” and “your brother”—they are objectively relative or relational concepts. The actual world of other species depends on their specific standpoint’ (Viveiros de Castro, 2016: 110).

Returning now to ‘body memory’, we can offer the following provocation. The idea that the body is a repository for traces of specific social experiences and culturally derived preferences, styles and ways of being depends on the view that the body can act as a substance that is continuous over time and which can bear the impress of a variable and relative culture that is the source of our individual unique personality and life history. But what if this were reversed? It is the modulations and transformations of the body as it enters into ‘objectively relative’ relational standpoints with persons, things and places that constitute the warp and weft of experience. We do not have a single ‘living body’, but rather a plurality of relationally defined embodied experiences as we pass into different kinds of ‘operative solidarity’ with other persons and things. The living body is continuously becoming pluralized as it shifts between different relational configurations. Our past would not then be a settled series of memorial traces or a subjective record of things that have occurred, but rather a dynamically shifting set of relationships to the past that are operant within particular kinds of inter-subjective and inter-objective arrangement. The body memory of the pianist or the dancer, for example, is not preserved as such within the person concerned, but rather as a relational potential that is actualized when the living body is coupled with and extended by a piano or a dance partner. There is no such thing as a ‘great pianist’ or a ‘talented dancer’ – only persons who are capable of forming operative solidarities with things and people that will allow them to jointly constitute an extended living musical or rhythmic body in a world where such activities have meaning.

As we have argued throughout, autobiographical memories are similarly ‘objectively relative’ to the kinds of material relations in which we are placed. We do not remember particular events through being subjectively disposed to see the world in certain ways. Rather, we remember through the relationally defined positions that we are placed into through our encounters with others and things. To return again to an earlier example, the adult survivor does not struggle with issues of agency because of the subjective trauma of childhood sexual abuse. Her issue is instead that she is ‘dis-posed’ – i.e. relationally placed – to articulate what happened from the perspective of the locked door. It is the relationship to

the door that establishes the meaning of the abuse. No injunction to 'think about it differently' by finding other interpretations of the situation will erase the difficulty of the memory. Instead, we would tentatively suggest, that shifting the physical standpoint is required to change the meaning. If perspective comes from a relational configuration that constitutes a very particular lived body, then changing perspective a displacement into different set of inter-objective relations. Perhaps, as with Eco's (1988) idea of 'steganography', the material shift of perspective might subsume or occlude aspects of the autobiographical memory – the locked door becomes embedded within the remembered architecture of the house – in ways that allow for a reformulation of the past. But in any case meaning is constituted within these extended material relations rather than a subjective impression we form of them.

### **A 100% Relational Psychology**

Throughout this paper we have restated the claim that autobiographical remembering must be analysed with respect to the relationally constituted field in and through which it occurs. Remembering past events involves a topological reorganization, or folding together, of past and present relational-material space, which 'individuates' the lived body with respect to an emergent field of possibility. Yet if, following Clarke & Chalmers (1998), we find it difficult to say where exactly mind stops and the world begins, so we are similarly unable to state in advance exactly where the boundaries lie of the lived, extended body. In this respect we are pursuing an approach to the psychological that is, as Viveiros de Castro puts it, '100% relational' (2016: 111).

Our initial move has been to return to the notion of the lived field of experience – or 'life space' – theorized by Lewin (1936). Here persons are defined with respect to patterns of actual and psychological movement that are afforded within a topological structured series of relations. The lived body is, in this sense, co-extensive with a portion or region of life space, whose overall boundaries constitute the immediate psychological horizon. These boundaries, and the form of the space itself, are continually being reformulated through the work of remembering. Life space incorporates past and future in the form of 'possibilities for action', whose expansion or contraction grants a sense of agency.

Lewin placed life space as one term in a dualism, along with the contrast term psychological ecology, this latter being the non-psychological material forces that shape and deform lived experience. Like all dualisms, this raises considerable difficulties as to how to think categorical relations between the terms – Is life space 'contained within' psychological ecology? How does a non-psychological force express itself in psychological terms? At what point can we speak of one term stopping and the other starting? To avoid such difficulties, we have pursued the monist path marked out by Simondon of positing a broader, pre-individual psychosocial milieu that is immanent to life space. Put simply, for analytic purposes we treat social or political forces as having a real existence beyond life space, but one that we encounter as constituted within the inter-subjective and inter-objective relations that become configured as life space. The



sociopolitical is not outside of our relationships – it is precisely the qualities and actions that emerge within them.

The second term we have repeatedly used – setting specificity – is a device for describing practices and particular kinds of organized relations. Once again, we want to avoid placing this form of life as some kind of external context. We think of settings in terms of the affordances and constraints that emerge within life space, or the combinatorial possibilities for relations that can enter into ‘operative solidarities’. There is, of course, a real building with walls, gates and wards, peopled with clinicians and patients, which makes up a psychiatric hospital. But it is experienced as a relational space of thinking, feeling and acting, and our phenomenological description of it as a ‘regime of activity’ needs to proceed through a relational mapping of what has effects, of the affective and practical possibilities that may be realized in this space. As a consequence, place itself, whether it be a hospital, a ship or a stretch of coastline, is not a site that contains persons, but rather a manifest set of relationships that together enact a world of very particular kind of experiences.

We then arrive at a view of ‘body memory’ from a different direction to that of Fuchs (2012). The lived body is not merely extended to include the other persons with whom we interact, it is instead a shifting relational configuration – a smearing of affects and actions across life space. The body is not a singular constituted unity that travels through time and space, but rather a plurality of combinatorial relational possibilities that we actualize through the folding and unfolding of life space. In this sense, we do not think of body memory as assembling stored action-patterns that enable sense-making, but rather as a series of material-relational perspectives that are constituted through different operative solidarities. These perspectives may well involve contradictions – in fact our empirical work suggests that ambiguity and conflict arising from shifting relationally defined perspectives is the norm rather than the exception in remembering difficult events. The challenge then is to understand how we extract a sense of continuity out of this plurality of embodied experiences.

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<sup>1</sup> Deleuze is here offering a very particular interpretation of von Uexhüll that bears more detailed consideration than we can offer here. It should be noted that Deleuze's semiotics are mixture of Hjelmslev's linguistics and Pierce's triadic model and, as such, do not readily map onto a biosemiotic framework. In fact, Deleuze's (1988) remarks about von Uexhüll appear within his reading of Spinoza's ethics, where 'expression' has an ontological rather than analytical status. Thus questions of sense and meaning in Deleuze's work are typically indexed to a broader concern with how 'bodies' and 'language' are co-assembled within a milieu. Sense, in particular, is treated as arising from the ordering of relations between bodies (where 'body' refers to a Spinozist basic ontological category of a composition of parts which have the capacity to be affected by other bodies). We thank one anonymous reviewer for pointing out the need for further qualification.