Editorial

Scenic memory: Experience through time-space.

Paula Reavey

Storytelling is at the heart of how we remember, with others as much as in solicitude, via internal imaginings. Narrative is now recognised as a formative ways in which we scaffold acts of remembering into manageable segments of experience, making reconstruction and reconsolidation more reachable; as individuals and collectivities. But the experience of memory pushes beyond narrative alone, and is as much about the scene or setting, as much as it is about time periods or stories. In this volume, authors from a range of disciplines point us to the Memoryscapes and geographies of memories – the material objects occupying space, that interweave with multiple narratives about the past. This interdependency between the scene and narrative, the material and discursive, is what interests a growing number of authors in the field of memory studies.

Within my own discipline of psychology, the importance of the ‘scene’ or what some more broadly refer to as ‘context’ in the encoding and recalling of memories is gaining groun, as a way to explore memorial experience. In recent years, psychologists have claimed to be able to uncover the spatial memory arenas within the brain (i.e. zones of the hippocampus), which provide the “spatial backdrop or context into which the details of our experiences are bound” (Fernyhough, 2016). Though there appears to be a much greater emphasis on the language of time in certain modern discourses of memory, memory in psychology has reignited an interest in its medieval roots, where locations, pictures, spaces are considered vital arterial routes within experience. Of course, abandoning time altogether is fruitless, given its cultural centrality in ‘re-ferring’ and carving up our experiential flow; but perhaps a greater coupling of time-space, as Steve Brown and I have argued elsewhere, is required to fully grasp the scenes and settings of our memorial experiences, that are then temporally appropriated by our narrative activities (Brown & Reavey, 2015). In other words, we may narrate our memories as situated in particular time periods, but we do not necessarily experience them this way, as we recall. As the novelist W.G. Sebald suggests, the fragments of the past are actively constructed and reconstructed within the *world*, and from the perspective of self-hood. Our models of self, informing how we understand memorial experiences then should perhaps be prepared to accept memory as an activity, always emerging from its roots in (physical and anthropological) space.

What is needed then, is a rethinking of time and space together (time-space) when conceptualising memorial experiences (Thrift, 2007). Within this work, a key concern is with time-space as a set of relations, flows and movements. In psychology, whilst attention has turned to the scenes of memory, there has been less engagement with how we might extend discussions around such flows, movements and the feeling of what it is like to experience our memories within this time-space fusion. One of the ways we might think our way through this draws on Steve Brown’s development of Lewin’s work on topology and life-space, my earlier work on space and memory (Reavey, 2009; 2010) and the appropriation of this concept in our joint work on Vital memories (defined as memories that are vital to our sense of self in the present – often troubling). Suffice to say, as psychologists, our turn to time-space as a useful analytic, is put to use in understanding the psychology of experiential memory more fully. Not only do we wish to examine the grander configurations of time-space, as they appear in cultural memory, but perhaps scrutinise more fully what is at stake for individuals, in terms of their agency, sense of responsibility and self-hood – in short, the ethics of remembering. This is a form of communicative memory of sorts, and one that is messy, involving human and non-human participants (objects, spaces), across a variety of settings. Furthermore, we would argue, each setting contains its own version of ethics, which calls for a setting-specific examination. Courts of law and therapy operate with radically different epistemic and ethical criteria; our attention must always turn to the specific practices that then operate within these system, as they provide fundamental clues about the workings of truth and falsity (Brown & Reavey, 2017, forthcoming).

A central concern for us then, is the ongoing relevance of our memories to our present version of self. Work related to ‘Autobiographical Memory’ increasingly looks to the manner in which recollections are shaped by the ongoing needs and projects of our present self/ves and with the cultural communities shaping its emergence and continuation (Conway and Pleydell-Pearce, 2000; Nelson, 2009; Loveday & Conway, 2015). Similarly, discursive work in psychology has acknowledged the need to grasp how continuities and discontinuities in episodes of remembering; attending as it does to the conversational or dialogical nature of our experience (Middleton and Brown, 2005). Both approaches may then be said to concern themselves with the *functional significance of memory*, that is, the role of the past in creating and/or maintaining current versions of self and identity. In order to fully inherit theoretical innovation of this cadre memory studies must now address, what elsewhere Steve Brown and I have called, an *expanded model of memory* (Brown & Reavey, 2014), which connects the past with the present self whilst attending to matters of time-space that are always considered within an experientially apposite zone; that is, where relations, setings, as well as movements and flows are rendered visible. It is an expanded model, prescisely because its extends the mind into the world, expanding the focus of investigation; a position sitting alongside other work in psychology, that sees remembering as a thoroughly extended act within a scene (Sutton, et al, 2010).

*Toward a Life-Space Model of Memory*

If we are to depart from a traditional clock-time model of memory, as Henri Bergson urges us to do, we perhaps require a model of memory that acknowledges experiential flow and movement within particular settings, as much as the narratives that puncture and structure what we know and feel. Not just in theory, but also via the methodologies we use to examine experience (Keightely & Pickering, 2014).

Historically, psychology conceptualized environments as an array of stimuli that produced responses from the person. On this basis, behaviour is seen to be under the control of the environment; it suffices to simply deduce which stimulus is chained to the response to explain its occurrence. The ‘cognitive revolution’, had its origins, in part, in the observation that certain kinds of phenomenon could not be explained in this way. Persons draw on mental resources, not least an active memory of past events, which shape how they perceive and react to present stimuli. Behaviour is the interaction between ‘external’ events and ‘internal’ processes. This sets up a dynamic mental topography where inside and outside are shaping one another.

This topographic description of psychological life establishes some clear boundaries. Mind is ‘within’ us, as persons, in the same way that our bodies are ‘in’ space. However, contemporary work in both cognitive and discursive psychology has troubled the ‘container’ model. Mind seems to overflow the boundaries of the brain, drawing upon resources beyond the skin and folding them into extended or distributed actions (Clarke and Chalmers 1998). What is happening ‘in the head’ is but one part of an activity that is not just ‘in’ space, but seems to be threaded entirely into the spatial distribution of activities. It is this kind of interaction that appears to undo commonsense boundaries between person and world that was important to Lewin (1936). He proposed studying it as ‘life space’.

What kind of a space is ‘life space’? It is fundamentally a space that is defined by relations rather than metric properties. These relations appear to overspill divisions between mind and body, persons and things, and space and time. Lewin suggests that we need to gradually expand our focus such that any psychological event is always already connected to; they are ‘quasi-social’ causes that lend form to what happens. Life space is the set of connections that links the immediate scene to other spaces and actors, which are crucial to understanding any given psychological event. Life space is the set of connections that links the immediate scene to other spaces and actors, which are crucial to understanding any given psychological event.

In the case of an individual experience, we might say that past relations, are in a sense, ongoing. Our choices and agency, and sense of self are ceded in complex ways into the actions, events, settings and relations that have come before.

Events that are spatially remote thus have a direct effect on what is happening right now, according to Lewin. In terms of understanding individual experiences, the space itself must be read into their actions, *as must time*. What is happening now, for example, must be ceded into events that have occurred in the recent, as well as distant past, in order to fully read and interpret *experience.* Things that are spatially remote might also be temporally remote (happened in the past), but they still *act* in the ongoing flow of experience, according to this perspective.

Lewin refers to this kind of action-at-a-distance as ‘quasi-physical’ causes. Things that are not immediately present nevertheless contribute their force to shaping matters at hand. Just as spatial remoteness is less important than relationships, so temporal distance is less important than the ongoing degree of connectedness between past and present events. His point is that current action needs to be inserted into a sequence of events, which have an ongoing relevance to understanding the present moment. This expanded model of time and memory allows us to situate the person in a multitude of time-space relational networks (Lewin, 1936).

The last sense in which life space is primarily a space of relations is with respect to the future significance of our actions. Again, a commonsense view would be to say that since, by definition, the future is what is yet-to-happen, it has no influence over the present. But, once more, separating action from its consequences may be premature (Brown & Reavey, 2015). Our actions do not simply bring about states of affairs in the present, they also realize or ‘make actual’ future possibilities.

We may be more or less aware of these possibilities in the course of our acts, but they are nevertheless active in shaping what we do. Lewin uses the term ‘quasi-conceptual’ to refer to this anticipation of the future (or self-relevant prospective memory) in the constitution of life space. Of course, as much as we might thing of this as involving memory, we could equally apply this to what we might *forget* in considering our future, as Bergson is quick to remind us.

But what of the feeling of remembering that flows through these relational fields? One of the challenges for memory studies is forging an interdisciplinary dialogue on how collective memories and commemorative spaces occupy the life-space of individuals (and how in turn individual life-spaces might alter and disrupt such broader cultural activity).

If we are to understand the feeling of remembering (and forgetting) with a life-space model in mind, we must create a way of thinking about memory that draws together a notion of experience as emerging from particular settings that *afford* us to think and feel about our pasts in particular ways. In attending to the settings (including the physical geography of the scene) to make sense of memory means attending to the relations that flow through them.

I will close by stating some ambitions that a life-space model of memory holds for the field through addressing our memorial experiences in a way that is embedded in time-space. The first suggestion is to extend the boundaries of our methodologies. Empirical work in memory studies should work alongside our theoretical labour, to shine light on the messy work that is human meaning making via remembering activities broadly defined. And to some extent, we have been a little unimaginative in the way we have approached this – either by relying far too heavily on textual analysis and interview methods (and thus an over-reliance on narrative) or experimentation. Narrative and experience are not the same, but we tend to treat them as such when we start our empirical investigations, using approaches far too reliant on the former. In the social sciences, memory investigations are beginning to recognise the uses of more multi-modal methods to understand better the manner in which people remember, which perhaps more accurately reflects what we do in everyday life – i.e. use a variety of text-ures, including visual, sonic, verbal and physical movement to engage in the act of remembering. In terms of visual methods, this has included photography, Sensecams, video diaries and other recording techniques to bring scene as well as narrative together - time-space, in other words. As is customary, a call for interdisciplinary dialogue is an obvious suggestion to follow from the first. Experience is richly weaved from our neuroanatomical and chemical matter (which of course is subject to change), our histories, our sense of self, as well as the complex variety of cultural, social and physical relations that make up our life-spaces. My call then is for memory studies to embrace experience and memory in time-space, to examine the rich textures and mess of how we feel our memories, the settings that constitute and subsequently shape how and what we recall, and the colourful narratives from the past and present, the collective and the individual that weave in and out of our felt experience. What a challenge we face, but how exciting and nervous we might feel embracing that challenge.

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Biography

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