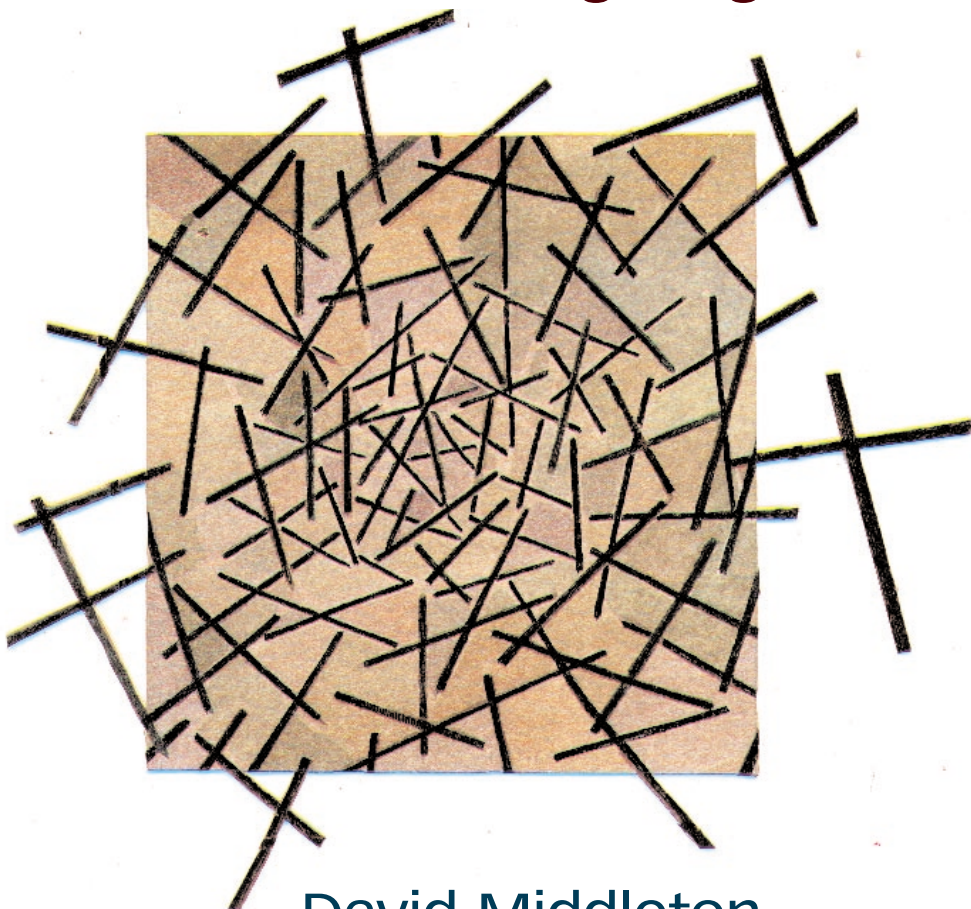# The Social Psychology of Experience

Studies in Remembering and Forgetting

David Middleton
& Steven D. Brown

The Social Psychology of Experience

The Social Psychology of Experience

Studies in Remembering and Forgetting

David Middleton
and
Steven D. Brown

Contents

Preface

In our modern understanding of memory there is an overwhelming tension between preservation and loss. Memory itself often seems to hang by a thread, to be balanced on the cusp between recovery and dissolution. In contrast, we address robust practices of remembering and forgetting at home and work, in public and commercial organisations, involving language and text-based communication, objects and place. Our aim is to overcome the spatial bias at work in both psychological and sociological studies of memory. To achieve this we argue that it is necessary to reconsider some of the basic conceptual tools of memory research and the manner in which they have imposed themselves on the way we relate to the past. Our overall aim is to provide a basis for social psychological enquiry where experience matters.

We ground the matters of remembering and forgetting in the classic works of Frederick Bartlett (on psychological schema as 'socially organised settings'), Maurice Halbwachs (on the sociology of 'collective frameworks' in memory) and Henri Bergson (on the philosophical discussion of 'durations' in experience). We illustrate the significance of their ideas for our arguments concerned with examples drawn from a range of situations where remembering and forgetting are matters of concern. We extend the argument beyond spatial metaphors concerning the passage of time and the consequences this has for the content of experience as finite. We argue that the actualization of experience in spatial terms is never complete and always maintains a relationship to continuous and indivisible experience, what Bergson termed 'the virtual'. This moves us away from experience as lived in some linear unfolding of time where memory is taken as the vehicle for linking past, present and future, whether individual or collective.

However, we still place memory at the centre of lived experience – not as the storehouse of that experience, but, instead, as a relational process at the intersection of different durations of living. As we endure in time, our rhythm of living is slowed or quickened in relation to the durations of others. To approach remembering and forgetting in this way is to deliberately blur the boundaries between the individual and the collective, between what is held in common and what is most intensely personal. If remembering and forgetting are to matter for a psychology of experience, we conclude

that we must view selfhood not as a 'thing', but as a movement that is continuously refracted back through the stabilities it creates. In other words, we seek to demonstrate selfhood as the shifting intersection of experiences of which our present consciousness is only the leading edge. This also leads us to a view of remembering and forgetting as interdependent ways of actualising and virtualising experience rather than its presence or absence. We aim to arrive back at an account of a psychology of experience that encompasses the issues raised in contemporary discussions of social memory while accommodating experience that is not tied to spatialised views of time. We therefore offer an approach to the psychology of experience that is neither individually nor socially determined and where the dynamics of remembering and forgetting do not limit experience.

This work represents the intersection of our shared and individual interests in memory. We both have academic backgrounds in psychology – one in developmental and sociocultural psychology, the other in social psychology and social theory. We also share interests in the analysis of communicative action and the discursive turn in psychological studies. Our preference is for gathering data from within contexts of human practice. In other words, from within settings where the stake and interests of those involved is self-evidently theirs rather than an arbitrary or simulated concern of the psychologist. However, neither of us would claim that this work is thoroughly ethnographically informed, although we do hope that it will be of interest to those who pursue detailed anthropologies, geographies and sociologies of remembering and forgetting. While we have forsaken the tools of the psychological laboratory, we have aimed to make the work and ideas discussed here informative for those with interests in the experimental psychology of memory.

Acknowledgements

We owe an immense debt of gratitude to many people who have assisted us in completing this work for publication. Our publishers Sage Publications deserve special mention. Ziyad Marar and Michael Carmichael have been steadfast in their encouragement and support. Also our grateful thanks to Rachel Burrows for the production editing of the published volume.

Individually and jointly we have also benefited from exceptionally generous colleagues and supportive academic groups. Throughout the whole development and conduct of the reported studies the Loughborough University Discourse and Rhetoric Group has provided a wealth of academic and collegial assistance. Many people have passed through the Wednesday lunchtime meetings and we owe them thanks for their generosity in sharing with us their ideas, data and analytical insights. Charles Antaki, Malcolm Ashmore, Mick Billig, John Cromby, Derek Edwards, Alexa Hepburn, Jonathan Potter and many others have continuously engaged us in constructive and lively analytical debate. We are also appreciative of the assistance and support of other colleagues at Loughborough, including Charles Crook, Harriet Gross and Mark Lansdale.

The Human Sciences SCAR group has also been of invaluable assistance and we very much appreciate the discussion with Johanna Motzkau, Darren Ellis, Jeanette Rasmussen, Sally Sargeant, Ian Tucker and Jonathan Woodrow.

We have also been very fortunate in having access to other settings where social remembering and forgetting are of interest. Roger Säljö and Karin Aronsson generously assisted in facilitating contact with research and debate at Linköping University in Sweden. This resulted in access to a whole range of scholars with cognate interests associated with the Departments of Communication and Child Studies, including Viveka Adelsward, Jan Anward, Bodil Axelsson, Kerstin Bergqvist, Elisabet Cedersund, Jakob Cromdal, Kosta Econonou, Ann-Carita Evaldsson, Per Anders Forstorp, Michèle Grossen, Lars-Christer Hydén, Per Linnell, Claes Nilholm, Karin Osvaldsson, Ullabeth Sätterlund-Larsson, Anna Sparman, Michael Tholander, Cecilia Wajdensjö and many others. Ullabeth's friendship and enthusiastic interest in this work is sadly missed.

We gratefully acknowledge permission to use the following material:

Transcript conventions

The following conventions are used in the presentation of conversational data. They are derived from those developed by Gail Jefferson for the purposes of conversation analysis (see Sacks, 1992). They are used as a way of presenting the talk as a social activity rather than, for example, as an expression of ideas, phonetics, or grammar (Edwards, 1997). We have kept their use to the minimum required for the purposes of the discussions presented here.

[yes]	short simultaneous talk of another speaker
soun-	cut off of preceding sound
start of [simultaneous talk 　　　　[simultaneous talk	simultaneous talk
remember= it seems to me	'equals' marks the immediate 'latching' of successive talk with no interval
(&) speaker	talk continues across the talk of another
(…)	unclear
(….)	talk omitted form the transcript at this point
(memory)	sound like
((laughs))	additional comment
?	rising intonation
HELP	louder than preceding talk
>quieter<	quieter than preceding talk
(.)	micro pause
(1)	pause in seconds
Oi ko	(*italicised*) Japanese words
<u>do</u>	emphasis
par:k	elongation of prior sounds

ONE

Introducing remembering and forgetting in the social psychology of experience

Figure 1.1   Cornelia Parker's 'Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View'

In 1991 the British artist Cornelia Parker arranged for a small garden shed to be blown up with high explosives in a field in Warwickshire. The 'garden shed' – a small outhouse structure commonly found outside many British homes – is rich in symbolism. It is traditionally the place where residents will store a curious selection of objects, including tools, broken electrical items, knick-knacks and other oddments that currently serve no great purpose but may 'one day' prove to be useful (see Thorburn, 2002, for further illustration). Parker had filled this particular shed with a heterogeneous range of objects, including household items such as cutlery, garden tools, an old briefcase, a hardback copy of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* and a small plastic model of a dinosaur. Prior to its destruction, the shed – including the objects – had been displayed as an installation piece in a London gallery. After the explosion, Parker collected the remaining pieces and placed them in the same gallery space, suspended on near invisible wires. A light bulb was hung in the middle of the fragments, creating a dramatic play of shadows on the gallery walls. A similar light bulb had previously illuminated the intact shed; the plastic explosive used to destroy the structure had been moulded into an identical shape and suspended in the same position. Parker named her installation 'Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View'.

Viewing 'Cold Dark Matter' in its current home at the Tate Modern gallery in London, one is struck by the fragility of the piece. The objects appear to hang precariously in mid-air, at any moment threatening to collapse in a heap on one another. The fragmented wood of the shed exterior dominates and bears the marks of the explosion, as do a half-burnt satchel and innumerable bent spoons and forks. However, other objects appear intact and curiously untouched, looking for all the world like the contents of a lost luggage office.

The changes to the piece brought about by the explosion are then ambiguous. On the one hand, everything has changed – the shed has been literally destroyed and reduced to fragments, many objects damaged beyond all hope of recovery – but, on the other, many elements survive more or less in their entirety. The viewer is then required to make some sense of this juxtaposition beyond what appears to be preserved intact and what has been irrevocably altered or perhaps permanently lost.

Parker's work serves as a good metaphor for our modern understanding of memory. Here, too, the overwhelming tension is between preservation and loss, the reduction of the everyday flow of our lives to a series of fragments. Brief passing moments and images remain completely intact, unaltered, we feel, despite the passage of time, but the overall framework appears destined to disappear, to be worn away by ageing, the passage of time that levels all, or else by some sudden and fateful intervention.

We tend then to think of memory as a form of conflict, where the desire to retain the past as it was runs up against the inevitability of change or, worse still, a set of counter desires that seek to erase memory, to irrevocably have done with some aspect of the past. Here, Parker's work is fully resonant as memory itself often seems to hang by a thread, to be balanced on the cusp between recovery and dissolution.

To approach memory in this way is to deliberately blur the boundaries between the individual and the collective, between what is held in common and what is most intensely personal. If we do so, that is because in recent years there has been a shift in terms. 'Memory' has come to stand alongside 'history' in both popular and scholarly discourse. As Klein (2000) points out, this supplementing of the traditional vocabulary of historiography and historical consciousness often borders on outright replacement. We speak less of the power of historical processes and change and more of the fragile resistance of memory and its attempts to preserve what is no longer. Indeed, in the classic statement of this position, Pierre Nora (1989) mournfully states that 'we speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left'.

So little of what, though? What is the nature of this thing 'memory' that Nora claims is so threatened? Here we must work through a process of negative definition. Nora cannot be referring to the individual's powers and capacities to recall their own experiences. The memory that is disappearing is something that is shared between people. Yet, this sharing or common orientation to the past is different to 'history'. Typically viewed, history is singular. There is a privileged overview of the past that is granted to the historian by virtue of unrivalled access to documents, evidence and matters of record. Nora's point, which is by no means unfamiliar, is that, beneath the singularity of 'official' history, there is pluralism in our relationships to the past. That is, there is a variety of ways in which the past might be understood and made relevant in the present. This pluralism is threatened by historical discourse, giving rise to a contested field of interpretations that struggle to defend themselves and the forms of collectivity with which they become associated. It is this contestation that Nora calls 'memory'.

The roots of Nora's claims lie with the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. It is within his two texts – translated in to English as *The Collective Memory* (1950/1980) and *On Collective Memory* (1925/1992) – that we see a full account of memory as a social process, in which groups collectively participate in order to create frameworks for the preservation of their common identity. Halbwachs viewed memory as an intrinsically social process. Not only is the form remembering takes shaped by the collective, but the very content of any given memory is also, Halbwachs argued, a social product. We may then see that Halbwachs' texts mark a

point at which the question of 'memory' becomes thoroughly entangled with other kinds of cognate issues, such as the preservation of tradition (Shils, 1981), the shaping of mind by culture (Cole, 1991; 1996) and the tension between historical consciousness and group identity (Tschuggnall & Welzer, 2002). Klein (2000) sees this entanglement as problematic and, ultimately, as leading to a situation where memory becomes treated in quasi-mystical terms. More moderate positions, such as James Wertsch (2002), also consider Halbwachs' apparent conflation of the cultural and the social with the individual and the personal to stand in need of some clarification.

That clarification might be provided, in part, by looking towards what Halbwachs is writing against – namely, the emergence of distinctive modern representation of the past, where tradition is superseded by rationalisation and a drive to systematise and standardise. Matsuda (1996) argues that this gives rise to a form of memory that is peculiar to modernity. One might say that its chief characteristic is its 'forensic' nature. Memory is seen as an activity that involves the bringing together of fragmentary pieces of information into a whole from which technical decisions can be made. Thus, Matsuda points to a range of cognate practices that emerge at the end of the nineteenth century – from the centralisation of criminal data and 'profiling' to the mapping of clinical findings on to the brain and the embedding of colonial histories in anthropological studies. However, arguably the most important practice is that of modern cinematography. Here, the past is literally captured as a series of fragments – the still images rapidly shot by the cinecamera – that are then rapidly reassembled to create the eerie illusion of a past come back to life.

Henri Bergson (1908/1991; 1911/1998), whose philosophical work spanned the turn of the nineteenth century, is perhaps the thinker who has done most to understand the nature of this 'illusion'. Bergson saw these kinds of practices – where the past is treated as a set of discrete images that are drawn together to create the impression of 'life' – as corrosive of a proper appreciation of not only memory, but also the very nature of time. For Bergson, time is not divisible in this way without substantial loss of what is particular to our human experience of existing as living, acting beings. Nevertheless, he was also able to diagnose precisely why such 'pulverised' views of time and memory had arisen. Modernity fosters and elaborates a form of thought – the 'cinematographical mechanism' – that is essentially spatial and orientated entirely towards the immediate demands of the present moment. It is this spatial thought that gives rise to both the forensic approach to memory (where memory consists of a spatially organised set of traces or data) and the overall rationalisation of social affairs that dominates modernity.

It is within this historical context that psychology takes hold of and claims expertise over the scientific study of 'memory'. As Danziger (2002) has shown, the experimental psychology of memory that developed in the late nineteenth century inherited a rich stock of metaphors for thinking about its subject matter. However, it chose from these spatial terms – mostly based on container metaphors – that are entirely of a piece with Bergson's 'cinematographical mechanism'. The result is that the subsequent psychology of memory that came to full fruition in early 1970s, following the 'cognitive revolution', not merely tends towards, but is in some cases entirely infused by, a spatial understanding of time. To take a recent example, Martin Conway's well-known work on autobiographical memory (see, for example, Conway, 1997; Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000), has recently been the subject of an artistic interpretation by Shona Illingworth. One aspect of that work is a set of beautifully drawn sketches of Conway's formal theories. These sketches depict the key terms and relationships of Conway's modelling of autobiographical memory, which is transformed into a set of abstract forms and lines, along with handwritten labels and brief explication in spidery penmanship. The viewer is struck by the spatial form of the work – everything is given at once, distributed across the elegantly mounted series of drawings. One can see what autobiographical memory consists of in a glance (or two).

One might then argue that the psychology of memory is so profoundly shaped by the spatialised, rational impulse of modern thought that it is unable to allow its subject matter to exceed that framework. That point has been made at length in a number of critiques, which have focused in particular on the tendency to refer all processes involved in remembering back to the inner workings of the individual, more or less rational, psychological subject (see, for example, Casey, 1987; Shotter, 1990; Wittgenstein, 1953). Worse still, this is a 'subject' who is, in order to fulfil the technical demands of psychological experimentation, systematically cut off from the everyday social ecology in which remembering occurs (Neisser, 1976, 1982; Neisser & Winograd, 1988). These are telling critiques, which bear some repeating. However, at the same time, we should not ignore the push from within the psychology of memory to reach beyond its own conceptual limits. For example, Neisser's own work in recent years has attempted to contextualise a cognitive approach to information retrieval in a broader account of the environment as a system in which selfhood emerges (Neisser & Fivush, 1996). Similarly, Hirst and Manier (1996) have treated the information retrieval aspects of memory as one part of a communicative process between conversational partners. Finally, Conway (1997, 2003) himself has made clear a dissatisfaction with purely spatial accounts of memory.

The psychology of memory, then, is by no means untouched by the concerns arising from the broader social sciences, but how might it reach out to meet those concerns without subsuming them within its pre-existing 'spatialised' framework? It is our argument in this book that simply turning towards the social – while a necessary first step – does not solve the problem. For example, it is possible to make the case, following Halbwachs, that all occasions of remembering are essentially social matters. From this it follows that the collective rather than the individual is the most appropriate level of analysis. However, in making this gesture, we depart from one form of hypothesised spatial configuration – that of cognitive architecture – to that of another, such as, say, intergroup dynamics (see, for example, Bangerter, 2000, 2002). In so doing, we transpose all that was problematic about the former to the latter. Admittedly this 'higher-level' spatial configuration is initially somewhat easier to approach, as here memory can only be a public matter – something that is accomplished socially. However, then we encounter the equally intractable problem of understanding how members of a group commit themselves to or invest in this process. We end up back where we started, except with all of the terms inverted.

Our project is to work towards a social psychology of experience that overcomes the spatial bias at work in both experimental approaches and more sociologically orientated approaches to memory. What we seek is a way of addressing remembering and forgetting as social practices yet also as an intensely personal committing of oneself to the past as recalled. We argue that, in order to reach that understanding, it is necessary to reconsider some of the basic conceptual tools – the very 'grammar' – of memory research and the manner in which they have imposed themselves on how we relate to the past. As Ian Hacking (1995) argues, psychology, as the principal 'science of memory', has a profound effect on our personal abilities to understand ourselves. The categories of psychological research – 'storage', 'retrieval', 'processing' – shape the ways in which we think about remembering, such that we can find it difficult to think in any other way. We must find a way of overcoming this tendency.

We think that reintroducing the term 'experience' to mark the ambiguous and potentially indeterminate relationship we maintain with our own pasts is one way forward, but, already, we are in danger of running ahead of ourselves. As we will see later on, Bergson argues that, if we take the idea of change seriously, what becomes apparent is that not everything can be given at once. Indeed, the attempt to fully systematise – to lock down all the possible options in advance – is usually a doomed attempt to 'tame' change. In this book, by contrast, we want to avoid that error by thinking and working through the problems slowly. Our starting point is with collective

approaches to memory, as outlined by the contributors to Middleton and Edwards' (1990a) edited volume *Collective Remembering*. Where we want to arrive, however, is back at an account of individual remembering that encompasses the issues raised in that volume and subsequent discussions of social memory (see, for example, Fentress & Wickham, 1992; Wertsch, 2002; Mistzal, 2003), while accommodating experience that is not tied to spatialised views of time. In order to get between these most unlikely points, we will have to pass through a series of problems and concerns, the importance of which will only become fully clear as we move between them. These we will have to 'fix up' as we go along.

The work of Maurice Halbwachs and of Henri Bergson is at the very core of this book. These two make for an unlikely couple. Halbwachs is typically seen as having committed the error of sociological reductionism, having envisaged something as strange as a 'group mind' (see, for example, Bartlett's 1932 early presentation of his work). Bergson, for his part, if he is recalled at all, is seen to have produced a philosophy of memory that is so subjective, so grounded in the particularities of personal experience, that it is inherently unworkable. Moreover, in the published work and in their crossed private lives, these two thinkers are held to be at odds. It is said that Halbwachs' entire career constitutes an attempt to reject Bergson, his former mentor (Douglas, 1980), while Bergson responded to the Durkheimian tradition of sociology that Halbwachs came to embody by writing of the biological origins of morality and religion. These two, then, appear to push in completely different directions.

At one level, this is why both are so vital to our project. No one has pushed further than Halbwachs in the 'socialising' of memory and no one has ever dared more than Bergson in a rethinking of what memory is for us, as individual living beings. As our argument unfolds, we will turn back and forth between these two thinkers, at times taking direction from one, then from the other. This does not mean that we will end up right back where we started. It is one of the basic principles of sailing that charting a straight course in turbulent waters requires the boat to be steered back and forth, to 'tack', rather than stick rigidly to the same direction. Halbwachs and Bergson allow us to tack through the difficulties of social remembering, yet, at the same time, we feel that the opposition between these two is somewhat overstated. We would even go far as to say that if one returns to their work, one finds that there a strong resonance, even to the extent that it might be said that their individual projects complement or even 'complete' one another. That contentious point will have to await the final chapters.

The structure of the book is as follows. In Chapter 2, we explore the 'social turn' in the study of remembering across the social sciences. We

begin by discussing the classic work of Frederic Bartlett, where the conduct of remembering is situated within 'organised settings' (Bartlett's preferred definition of 'schemas'). We then turn to a number of approaches that follow in the wake of Bartlett's discursive agenda, such as Fentress and Wickam's historical studies, Jennifer Cole's ethnographic work, the communication and historical sociological programmes of Michael Schudson and Barry Schwartz, Paul Connerton's sociological re-evaluation of commemoration, the phenomenology of Edward Casey and the sociocultural work of James Wertsch. Our aim is to situate our own unfolding arguments in the context of the agendas set by these works, which span a variety of disciplines.

In the following two chapters, we introduce the two major figures to whom we refer throughout the book. Maurice Halbwachs is discussed at length in Chapter 3. By means of a close reading of his two major texts, we argue that Halbwachs' thought is not guilty of the charge of sociological reductionism. Rather, it is the case that Halbwachs' work maps out how a form of thought that is always and already social in character becomes embedded in a collective infrastructure. We describe at some length Halbwachs' notion of a 'collective framework' and how such frameworks 'territorialise' memory.

Chapter 4 introduces the thought of Henri Bergson – notably his attempt to defend a 'living' version of time – or 'duration' – against the reduction of time to space in which time is treated as a series of instants. Focusing in particular on his key work *Matter and Memory*, we describe how Bergson's location of memory within duration leads to a wholesale rejection of the common psychological doxa found within the cognitive–neurological paradigm in favour of an approach grounded in the 'unlimited' nature of experience.

The chapters that follow are then built on a discussion of research studies that we have conducted singly, together and in collaboration with a series of other researchers, including Derek Edwards, Kevin Buchanan, Charles Crook, David Curnock, Helen Hewitt, Geoff Lightfoot, Kyoko Murakami and Jonathan Woodrow. Each successive chapter features a series of empirical examples, around which we will elaborate our arguments.

Chapter 5 outlines our point of departure with a discursive approach to remembering and forgetting. Using conversational data recorded in families and conversational remembering in group settings (Edwards & Middleton, 1986a, 1988) and care groups for older people (Buchanan, 1993; Gibson, 1989), we display how treating practices of remembering as instances of communicative action allows us to understand how recollection is collectively accomplished in varied settings. In particular, we point to the use of memory to accomplish membership and the co-option

of speakers into particular versions of events. However, we also point to the limitations of this approach – notably the sense that occasions of remembering can appear disconnected from one another, as though the past had to be rhetorically put together anew each time.

This point is pushed forward in Chapter 6, where we argue that issues of succession and change are threaded through practices of remembering. In this way, something of the past is always already 'inbuilt' in a given act of recollection. We show how participants in the variety of domestic and care situations discussed in Chapter 5 and workplaces are inevitably led towards the production of continuity in discursive action in order to manage live concerns with succession and change. This is typically handled by managing the boundaries between what can be presented as incidental and what as intentional, and between what is of relevance to the individual and to the collective.

Does this revised approach allow for us to understand how remembering becomes embedded in broader social and historical dynamics? Not quite. In Chapter 7, drawing on further data recorded in reminiscence groups by Kevin Buchanan (1993) and Faith Gibson (1989), in addition to work on remembering and reconciliation by Kyoko Murakami (2001a), we argue for a broader conception of the frameworks in which recollection is performed. Using Halbwachs' distinction between the 'discursive' and 'physiognomic' aspects of collective frameworks, we show that participants unfold 'zones of personal relations' in their recollection that serve to 'incorporate' other speakers. These zones of personal relations occupy an intermediate ground between personal memory and history. Most importantly, incorporation occurs not merely at the level of rhetoric, but by acting on the body. A link to Bergson's notion of 'habit memory' is then made.

Bergson then takes us forward to Chapter 8, where we discuss his notion of a 'pure past'. Using the famous example of Marcel's 'leap' into the past drawn from Proust, we display how objects provide a means for dividing up the past in the present. Objects then act to mediate practices of recollection. We demonstrate, with reference to both reminiscence data (Buchanan, 1993; Gibson, 1989) and life story work with profoundly learning disabled people, their families and carers (Hewitt, 1997), that this occurs in a variety of ways, from opening a 'network of translations' to acting to 'slow down' and mark out social relations. Indeed, so critical is the mediation of objects in this way that we need to think of social relationships as themselves interdependent with the organised setting in which they are performed and as entangled with mediating artefacts. Such a description of sociality is already to be found in Halbwachs' work, we argue.

In Chapter 9, we extend our discussion of object-mediated social relationships by exploring what happens when large-scale organised settings 'take charge' of remembering. Drawing on Bowker and Star's (1999) notion of infrastructures as interlocking arrangements of categories and standards, and using data concerning the organisational use of e-mail (Brown & Lightfoot, 2002; Brown, Middleton & Lightfoot, 2001) and studies of teamwork in neonatal intensive care (Middleton & Curnock, 1995), we discuss studies of organisations where remembering is obliged to pass through complex infrastructural arrangements involving the use of information communication technologies – in particular, the archival use of e-mail. We argue that, under such conditions, the work of disposal – of forgetting – takes on additional importance. Members then create spaces of liberty by managing their 'attachment' to the infrastructure by means of which they are obliged to remember.

Having tacked towards large-scale forms of social organisation, we take forward into Chapter 10 the problem of 'mass' as central to understanding remembering. Returning to Bergson, we contrast the common-sense account of remembering as synthesis and retrieval of experience with his account of the 'gnawing of the past into the present'. Here, what is at stake is how selfhood is constituted around a management of the 'burden' of the past. We show, via a discussion of family websites, how the past is tamed by a spatialisation of experience. However, this spatialisation is never complete and always maintains a relationship to continuous, indivisible forms of experience that Bergson calls 'virtual'. We argue that the relationship Bergson posits between 'virtualisation' and 'actualisation' allows us to understand the objectification of experience in relation to the inexhaustible character of our duration.

The relationship between 'virtualisation' and 'actualisation' and, in particular, the reflexive turning around on duration that Bergson identifies with the elaboration of selfhood serves as the basis for Chapter 11. Returning to the work of Kyoko Murakami (2001a) on remembering and reconciliation, we argue that the collective experience of singular durations is the point of contact between the personal and the collective. We show how chains of translation hold together singular, irreducible durations. However, by virtue of the mediation of 'blank' objects, a cutting out of experience is possible where the juxtaposition of durations enables a turning around on one's own 'unlimited' experience. At this point, the relationship between Bergson and Halbwachs becomes somewhat clearer.

The final chapter, Chapter 12, argues that a 'social psychology of experience' is the term for the evolving accounts of remembering, forgetting and selfhood that we have presented. This would constitute a way of doing psychology that was grounded in the tension between what Bergson calls

the 'virtual' and the 'actual' or, more simply, between the demands for action, which are inevitably spatial in character, and our experience of ourselves as living, unlimited changing beings. This is precisely what, we argue, is typically excluded from the psychology of memory and yet is exactly what is demanded of psychology by social science.

TWO

Making experience matter: memory in the social sciences

Our concern in this book is to examine how we can approach the social psychology of experience in the study of the remembering and forgetting. This will involve approaching remembering and forgetting as public, social activities where individual experience is necessarily mediated by collective experience. Now we are by no means the first to have envisaged a social turn in the psychological study of memory. There have been numerous contributions by sociocultural researchers, such as Brockmeier (2002); Bruner and Feldman (1996); Cole (1996); Hirst and Manier (1996); and Wertsch (2002), along with ecologically orientated psychology, notably Neisser (1982), Neisser and Winograd (1988), Barclay (1994); social psychology such as Bangerter (2000, 2002); Wegner (1986) and Weldon (2001); Weldon and Bellinger (1997); and discourse analysis such as Norrick (2000). In addition, within psychology there is Bartlett's (1932) classic work on remembering, in which he aimed to put the study of memory on a properly social footing. We will discuss some of this work in more detail in a moment, but we should also note at this point that memory has been a fertile field for debate about the social basis of psychological functioning for as long as psychology has been established as a discipline.

William James (1890/1950), for instance, devotes considerable space in his *The Principles of Psychology* to discussing the basis whereby our consciousness becomes endowed with a form of continuity. For James, the question of memory is caught up in his distinctive and well-known account of human self-awareness as a 'stream of consciousness'. Memory is, then, to be approached in terms of the ability to connect together aspects of our experience as they appear in the ongoing flow of awareness. This implies some form of selectivity, we must exercise choice in relation to the nature of the connections to be made in order that our recollections can be best fitted to our current concerns and activities. Hence 'in the practical

use of our intellect, forgetting is as important a function as recollecting' (James, 1950: 679).

We can turn back yet further than this to John Locke's (1690/1975) description of a 'forensic self' defined by memory, which some authors (for example, Douglas, 1992: Hacking, 1995) see as laying the foundations for the modern concept of selfhood. Locke argued – contrary to the dominant tradition of English idealism – that memory was every bit as powerful as perception, and that chains of memories and responsibilities linking the present into the depths of the past were the precondition of selfhood. Without such a 'forensic' link, the idea of justice or merely holding some person accountable for their past deeds has no meaning.

In this philosophical tradition inherited by psychology, there is, then, a series of deep conceptual links between persistence of the past into the present, the idea of selfhood, the possibility of judgement and social responsibility. What this all suggests is that 'memory' should not be regarded as a psychological function like any other. Rather, it is a key site where questions of personal identity and social order are negotiated. Witness, for example, the often fraught legal and scientific arguments fought around the issue of recovered memories (see Ashmore, MacMillan & Brown, 2004). What is at stake in these 'memory wars' ranges from particular concerns with justice for the abuse and trauma suffered by individuals to far broader concerns with the nature of the modern family, the status and standing of therapy, authentic versions of selfhood and so on (Pezdek & Banks, 1996).

In saying that we wish to approach memory as a social phenomenon, we are essentially 'knocking at an open door'. Public debate about the apparently flexible and contingent manner in which governments and official bodies construct past 'truths' rages in most Western nations (for instance, the debate at the time of writing about what was or was not known by the Bush and Blair administrations concerning the actual existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq during the preparations for war in 2003). At the same time, a routine engagement with commemorative activities, be they purely nostalgic (such as the recycling of popular culture from the 1970s and 1980s) or highly sensitive (Ronald Reagan's laying a wreath at they Bitburg cemetery where Nazi SS soldiers are buried during his presidential state visit to the then West Germany in 1985, for example) is part of the fabric of much daily life. In each case, the thoroughly social character of memory is a pure truism for a great many people, whether or not they are immediately touched by controversies such as the memory wars.

Barbara Misztal's 2003 book *Theories of Social Remembering* argues that what is required to understand this social landscape of everyday remembering

is an approach that eschews both psychological and sociological reductionism. As with other sociological arguments (such as Schudson, 1992; Zerubavel, 1996, 1997), Misztal begins by attempting to clarify *who* is remembering *what* version of the past and to *which end*. The importance of such sociological concerns is its emphasis on the social organisation and mediation of individual memory. Although it is the individual who is seen as the agent of remembering, the nature of what is remembered is profoundly shaped by 'what has been shared with others', such that what is remembered is always a 'memory of an intersubjective past, of past time lived in relation to other people' (Misztal, 2003: 6). This shared intersubjective memory is forged, Misztal states, by means of social processes such as language, rituals and other commemorative practices and in relation to common memorial sites.

The insights provided by this intersubjective turn within sociological studies of memory are clear. They allow us to see that the work of remembering – and, hence, producing ourselves as people who have a past, a personal history – necessarily intersects with, and is shaped by, the groups and cultural forms we inhabit. However, at the same time, we need to grasp why it is that, despite the obvious influence of these social dimensions, for most of us the act of remembering still feels like a highly personal act. We feel that we 'own' our personal memories and speak them of our free will without undue influence from others. Ian Hacking (1995) argues that the modern experience of remembering takes this form because our self-understandings have been so profoundly shaped by psychology as a 'science of memory' that we find it difficult to grasp memory in any other way. This is to say that everyday practices of remembering have been recruited into psychologists' versions of what it means to remember and forget.

Doubtless it is the case that psychology in its myriad forms has acquired tremendous cultural authority over matters of self-knowledge, at least in North America and Europe (for a detailed account of this rise of the 'psy complex', see the work of Nikolas Rose, 1989, 1996). It is doubtless also the case that, as Danziger (2002) points out, this authority has led to a narrowing and constriction of the common stock of metaphors and cultural models by means of which memory has traditionally been understood. However, rather than simply dismiss psychology as being guilty of brute reductionism, we need instead to focus more clearly on this central paradox: why it is that an activity that is so thoroughly public and social feels so intensely private and personal. We need, in other words, to get a handle on the complex and often ambiguous forms of experience that are central to how remembering is performed.

In this chapter, we will begin this project by doing some groundwork. Here we look to a range of approaches to remembering that have been