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Michael Larkin, Virginia Eatough and Mike Osborn

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What is This?

Interpretative phenomenological analysis and embodied, active, situated cognition

Michael Larkin
University of Birmingham

Virginia Eatough
Birkbeck, University of London

Mike Osborn
Royal United Hospital, Bath

Abstract
We describe here some of the developing conversations between "third phase" cognitive science and phenomenological philosophy. Contributors to these conversations treat cognition as an embodied, active, and situated phenomenon. We argue that, despite much promise, proper engagement with the foundational phenomenological concept of a situated, meaning-making person has yet to be fully reflected in these conversations. We note that the outcomes of this dialogue have important implications for the field of phenomenological psychology. In particular, we demonstrate that one qualitative method, interpretative phenomenological analysis, can make a useful contribution to the ongoing developments in this field. We suggest that it can provide a valuable hermeneutic counterpoint to the primacy of empiricist methods. Through reference to sustained examples from research participants' accounts of chronic pain, we show how qualitative phenomenological approaches, such as interpretative phenomenological analysis, can illuminate the importance of situating embodied personal experience in the context of meaning, relationships, and the lived world.

Corresponding author:
Michael Larkin, University of Birmingham, School of Psychology, Edgbaston Park Road,
Birmingham, B15 2TT, UK.
Email: m.larkin@bham.ac.uk

This paper deals with the confluence occurring between various philosophical and scientific streams of thought in the area of phenomenology and cognition. Van Gelder (1999) has argued that an ethos of mutuality and pluralism will best nurture developments here, and it is in this spirit that we offer the argument that at least one potentially important tributary has been left off the map.

We begin with an outline of the converging approaches and argue that proper engagement with the foundational concept of a situated, meaning-making person has yet to be fully reflected in the field of embodied active situated cognition (EASC). We argue further that methods from phenomenological psychology (notably, interpretative phenomenological analysis) can make a useful contribution to the development of EASC. As the paper develops, and particularly in the final section, we discuss some examples (drawing on first-person interview extracts) from a series of studies carried out by the third author, which explore the experience of chronic lower back pain (Osborn & Smith, 1998, 2006; J.A. Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Pain is an especially good example because the apparent primacy of its embodied nature is nevertheless inextricable from social and cultural context (e.g., Derbyshire, 2004; Showalter, 1997). That is, pain is *situated*. For qualitative psychologists, "situated" carries the connotation of situated "in meaning," as much as it does "in personal and social relationships," and "in a physical world of objects."

Embodied, [en]active, situated cognition

The emergence of a "third phase" in the so-called "cognitive revolution" has now been well documented (see, e.g., Roy, Petitot, Pachoud, & Varela, 1999). This newest manifestation of cognitive science has been most frequently described as "embodied," and/or "situated"—but also as "enacted" and "ecological." There are subtle distinctions implied by these different emphases, but as Anderson (2003) points out, these differences tend to have least impact at the level of psychosocial analyses. As this is the level of our interest here, we treat these new approaches as developing aspects of one "movement," in accordance with their many commonalities. We refer to this movement as embodied active situated cognition (EASC):

> Instead of emphasizing formal operations on abstract symbols, this new approach focuses attention on the fact that most real-world thinking occurs in very particular (and often very complex) environments, is employed for very practical ends, and exploits the possibility of interaction with and manipulation of external props. It thereby foregrounds the fact that cognition is a highly *embodied* or *situated activity*—emphasis intentionally on all three—and suggests that thinking beings ought therefore to be considered first and foremost as acting beings. (Anderson, 2003, p. 91)

As Anderson implies here, EASC represents a distinct development from the preceding (and prevailing) phases of "computational-symbolic" and "connectionist-dynamic" cognitive science, inasmuch as it begins from very different philosophical assumptions about what "cognition" is. Here cognition is not something which takes places solely or exclusively "in the head" (see, e.g., Gallagher & Zahavi, 2007). With the exception of certain sub-personal processes, cognition in EASC is conceived of as a conscious,

intersubjective process (Gallagher & Varela, 2001) of *sense-making* (Thompson, 2004). It has been argued (Wilson, 2002) that this process is to be understood as: situated (i.e., context-sensitive); temporal (i.e., varying according to time available); distributed (i.e., persons "off-load" certain cognitive work onto the environment, and thus the environment co-constitutes the cognitive system); engaged in the world, and thus action-orientated (i.e., intentional in the phenomenological sense); and embodied (i.e., at the very least, the body defines our perceptual involvement in the world).

The meaning and experience of back pain, for example, will vary across situations, over time, and depending upon what the sufferer is attempting to do, and with whom. It is notable, for example, that chronic pain is frequently understood by sufferers to have a "corrosive" effect upon the embodied *self*. Thus, pain is intersubjectively embedded in both the physical and psychosocial aspects of our world, because its most damaging consequences for sufferers fall into this domain. This is illustrated by participants in the third author's pain studies (Osborn & Smith, 1998, 2006; J.A. Smith & Osborn, 2007). The sufferer's intentional relationship to both the objects and the people in the world is transformed and distorted through chronic pain:

> It's so bad it takes over my body, it takes over my mind, it makes me short-tempered you know, talking about the pain I've got, it makes me a pain, it's that feeling of knowing that I must be a pain to others. I'm a bother. On a daily basis it's destroying me, it's stopping the pleasure of my life. (Participant from Osborn & Smith, 1998, p. 76)

Phenomenology and psychology have a long and often interdependent history. From the perspective of psychology, this history often begins with the work of the "Dutch School"—active in Utrecht during the 1950s, and strong advocates for the contribution which could be made to psychology by a Husserlian focus on experience. The fortunes of this group, and their work, were mixed (see Van Hezewijk & Stam, 2008), but through their relationships with the psychologists at Duquesne University in the United States, they have had lasting impact on psychology. Duquesne remains an internationally recognized centre for a form of descriptive, empirical phenomenology (Giorgi, 2000) which has clearly been influenced by the Dutch School. In other respects, however, their contribution to phenomenology's place in psychology has been more equivocal. The group and their work were perceived by some as "elitist" and subjective (Van Hezewijk & Stam, 2008), and their influence in European psychology has long since declined. Given our aims here, it is interesting to comment briefly on Van Hezewijk and Stam's retrospective overview of the widely dispersed published work of one of the Dutch School's key players, Johannes Linschoten. Linschoten died young, in 1964, but his work demonstrated an integrative instinct which appears to anticipate the project of EASC:

> Linschoten saw experiments that were designed well and that accounted for what the participant would experience *as* a participant in the experimental setup, as legitimate and informative ways of focusing on and analyzing the true nature of our experience as a fundamental element of life. (Van Hezewijk & Stam, 2008, p. 204)

Such phenomenological emphases have traditionally been marginalized by mainstream cognitive psychology. For EASC, however, the insights of phenomenological philosophy

(notably those of Husserl, but also Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, and others) have been at least as significant as those from the analytic philosophy (e.g., Ryle, Searle, Dennett) which presided over the preceding phases of cognitive science. *Meaning* is thus of fundamental importance here, because for phenomenologists, consciousness "makes possible the world as such, not in the sense that it makes possible the *existence* of the world, but in the sense that it makes possible a *significant* world" (Drummond, 2007, p. 61).

Contributions to EASC have so far tended to originate from two main approaches to knowledge construction: phenomenological philosophy and experimental science. In this paper, we wish to point out that, given the epistemological-ontological underpinnings of EASC, a wider range of potential connections with other approaches (to psychology, cognition, and phenomenology) has been opened up, many of which have yet to be explored (but see Hurlburt & Akhtar, 2006, and also Petitmengin, 2006, for some interesting developments in "hybrid" methods). From our perspective, it is striking that the new model of cognitive science is one which shares certain underlying assumptions with a number of experiential-, embodiment-, and context-focused approaches from qualitative and critical psychology (see, e.g., Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). While various philosophers of mind and cognitive scientists have been developing their critique of the dualist, acontextual, and disembodied limitations of "standard" cognitive science, a parallel network of qualitative and critical psychologists have been articulating their own case about certain similar limitations of the social constructionist paradigm, which has dominated qualitative and critical psychology for the last quarter-century:

> Discourse theory seems to leave little space for embodied subjectivity, for the body as body. Instead, the body is, on the one hand, a metaphor, trope or symbol and, on the other hand, a surface for the inscription of social forces, experience, discourse. We need to go beyond this abraded, fleshless, ephemeral person to a view of the subject prey to physiological, anatomical and hormonal influences which act back upon the subjectivity they support, and also—through feedback generated within the brain/body system—may enter into the very core of subjectivity and agency. (Cromby, 2002, para. 9)

From within these approaches, a well-established strand of *phenomenological and experiential psychology* (see, e.g., Giorgi, 2000; Langdridge, 2006) appears to have overlooked, and been overlooked by, the rapid developments in EASC. This strand includes—but also exceeds—the influences of the Dutch School, incorporating approaches to psychology which are influenced not only by Husserl, but also by Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Ricoeur. In particular, there is one approach to qualitative, phenomenological psychology, with a stated interest in cognition, which we will discuss in more depth. This is interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; see J.A. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA offers an established, systematic, and phenomenologically focused approach, which is committed to understanding the first-person perspective *from* the third-person position, so far as is possible, through intersubjective inquiry and analysis. It is therefore committed to situating personal meaning in context. Largely in contrast to the Dutch School (Van Hezewijk & Stam, 2008), IPA draws on the hermeneutic phenomenology of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty (J.A. Smith et al., 2009), to view the personal and social as mutually constitutive. This is captured in the contractions *being-in-the-world* and *person-in-context*, which are typically preferred over *the*

individual. Consequently, the "findings" of IPA studies should be very clearly situated in the cultural and historical context of their production.[1] IPA is also committed to the use of verbatim transcript data. Its use of such data as a form of evidence, and its close attention to the functions of language, are another contrast with the more introspective and literary analyses of the Dutch School (see, e.g., Kockelmans, 1987). IPA is especially relevant to EASC, because of its willingness to "speak to" matters of cognition from a phenomenological perspective. This has marked IPA as distinctive within the prevailing social constructionist milieu of qualitative psychology (see, e.g., Langdridge, 2006; Willig, 2001), and identifies it as a particularly appealing potential contributor in the development of EASC.

Key ideas from phenomenology and hermeneutics, and their significance for EASC

Before we further develop our argument about the utility of IPA for EASC, it is helpful to outline some of the general influences of phenomenological philosophy upon the "new cognition." Phenomenology is itself a "movement" which accommodates a range of distinctions and differences. Indeed, Glendinning (2007) prefers not to characterize it as a single movement at all, but as something more akin to a conversation. From this point of view, there are certain recurrent topics and concerns for the speakers in this conversation, and there is some agreement upon certain principles, or on the nature of certain problems—but it is inaccurate to represent the conversation as if it were, say, a unified theory, or some form of manifesto. Thus, we discuss briefly the development of this "conversation," and identify some of its recurring topics and concerns.

Transcendental phenomenology

The earlier phase of phenomenology, defined most clearly through the work of Husserl, is sometimes described as "transcendental phenomenology." Moran (2000) defines phenomenology as a form of philosophy "which emphasizes the attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe *phenomena,* in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experience" (p. 4). This is certainly true of Husserl, who famously urged us, "Back to the things themselves!" (Husserl, 1913/1982, p. 35). By this, he meant that the phenomena under investigation should be studied free of all prior supposition and assumption (to be examined as they appear, are made manifest—as themselves only).

For Husserl, this was achieved through "phenomenological reduction." "Reduction" here is not a reducing *down*, but a leading *back*—to the phenomena (the technique is also known by other names, including *epoché*, and bracketing—see Drummond, 2007). This reduction involves the examination and then suspension of all suppositions about the phenomenon under investigation, and, indeed, about the world. Husserl suggested that our *natural attitude* to the world is founded upon numerous assumptions, and that while these may facilitate our everyday doing and being, they also obscure and distort proper understanding. Through bracketing we aim to suspend these assumptions and to transcend their "everyday" qualities. The process often continues

throughout phenomenological investigations, because many of our assumptions about the world will not be revealed to us *until* they meet with our observations of the phenomenon under investigation. For IPA, and many other qualitative approaches (see, e.g., Finlay & Gough, 2003), the phenomenological reduction has been problematized (see below) but has nevertheless influenced an important commitment to open-mindedness and researcher reflexivity.

Bracketing is thus one defining characteristic of transcendental phenomenology, and it is also connected to another of Husserl's principal methods: the "eidetic reduction." This is a process of imaginative variation: we identify and examine each aspect of our chosen phenomenon to ascertain which of those aspects are *essential*. We ask, "What if . . . ?"—and then imagine alternative ways of seeing a phenomenon—by varying or removing certain characteristics. This is an ongoing process, rather than a single step. A process of comparison and corroboration follows, with the aim of establishing the invariant aspects of the description. The final descriptive account, indicative of a successful Husserlian study, will be abstracted from these processes. This should transcend any particulars of situation and individual variation—the account should describe the universal features of "what something is like." The various aspects of these reductions reflect many of the analytical processes which are common to most approaches to qualitative psychology: the detailed identification of key features, the processes of comparison and pattern development.

Two common misconceptions should be noted here. Firstly, the phenomenological reduction has often been misrepresented as if it were a form of "closure" or "objectification." But to "bracket" one's preconceptions is to suspend them, and allow them to be examined—not to eradicate them. In EASC studies there is sometimes an uneasy use of bracketing as if it were a means of "laundering" out subjectivity (to borrow an accusation levelled at Dennett elsewhere). This is not consistent with bracketing as it is usually understood in phenomenological psychology (see, e.g., Giorgi, 2000). Certainly, within qualitative psychology, bracketing sits squarely within a broader tradition which questions the status of "facts" as objective constants in the social sciences (see, e.g., Gergen, 1973), and which typically sets out to reveal and reflect upon values (rather than to exclude them through experimental and statistical closure—see M.J. Smith, 1998). Bracketing is more about open-mindedness than it is about doubt (see, e.g., Glendinning, 2007), and can be seen as a means of exposing and engaging with one's own presuppositions (see, e.g., Finlay, 2002).

Secondly, Husserl has often been unfairly accused of having established the idea that phenomenology is simply an introspective study of "inner" experience. This is now widely acknowledged as a misreading (see, e.g., Drummond, 2007; Gallagher & Zahavi, 2007), because Husserl places *intentionality* at the centre of his analyses. This is a key concept in phenomenology, where it does not refer, in the commonplace sense, to a person's intentions (what they "plan to do" for example.) The term originates from the Latin *intendere*, meaning "to stretch forth" (Spinelli, 2000, p. 11). It speaks of our relationship with the world and how as conscious beings our experience is always *of* something, in its appearing in the world, and specifically for *us*, as uniquely embodied and situated persons. The intentional act is hence comprised of a relationship between that which is experienced, and the manner in which it is experienced (Husserl, 1913/1931). Thus,

phenomenologists note that human consciousness has qualities of *mine-ness* (I do not have to ask myself, "Who is experiencing these things?"—it is self-evidently me) and *about-ness* (I am sad *about* something; I am angry *at* someone). This sense of consciousness as perspectival and embodied, captured in the intentionality of our "directness-at-objects," has the potential to transcend the usual dualisms of mind–body and subject–object. From the point of view of cognitive science—and key to the development of EASC—we have a model of consciousness which does not rely principally on inner representations of an independent reality. Indeed, it is more accurate to describe it as a model of being-in-the-world, or relatedness-to-the-world.

Hermeneutic and existential phenomenology

The later phase of phenomenology is often described as "hermeneutic phenomenology," because it develops through ideas taken from that tradition where "understanding is always from a perspective, always a matter of interpretation" (McLeod, 2000, p. 56). The key participants in the conversation (for us, here) are Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty.

In his work, Heidegger retained "intentional directedness as essential to human activity, but [denied] that intentionality is mental" (Dreyfus, 1995, pp. 50–51). He draws our focus away from "private thought," and the search for its location. Heidegger's view of the person as always and indelibly a "person-in-context," and the phenomenological concept of intersubjectivity, are both central here. From Heidegger's perspective, we are mistaken if we believe that we can occasionally *choose* to take up a relationship with the various somatic and semantic objects that make up our world—to move outwards, from some inner world—because *relatedness* is a fundamental part of our constitution (Heidegger, 1927/1962).

From this perspective, and that of IPA, the personal and the social are elided, just as the subject and object are. The "social world" is more than "mere" context; it is the constituent ground of personhood, and a prerequisite for human being. At the same time, the "personal" aspect of our existence is unique, and refers to the *related*, *perspectival*, and *meaningful* nature of our engagement and involvement *in* that lived, social world (elsewhere, we have referred to this as "positionality"—see Palmer, Larkin, de Visser, & Fadden, 2010). The personal and social are drawn together by the essentially related nature of Being-in-the-world; although, of course, IPA does typically engage with participants' accounts under circumstances when the personal is made especially *salient*. Our use of the word "context" is intended to evoke the worldly circumstances in which meanings are made.

Intersubjectivity, then, is the concept which aims to describe this relatedness—and to account for our ability to communicate with, and make sense of, each other. It is the emergent property of our engagement in the world, and, as such, AI theorists (e.g., Anderson, 2003) and philosophers of mind (e.g., Gallagher, 2007) use the concept to offer models of cognition which rely less on representation, simulation, and analogy, and more on an interactive, dynamic, situation-relevant, and altogether more "worldly" understanding. The world is emphasized because it affords the embodied, intentional actor a range of physically grounded (what is possible) and intersubjectively grounded (what is meaningful) options.

Returning to the Dutch School, Buytendijk's (1943/1961) classic phenomenological study of pain offers a good starting point: "Genuine pain afflicts us and severs the psychological unity of our person; our personal existence is unmolested, but it is thrown back on itself and subjected to the destruction of all meaningful associations" (p. 134). Consider how even familiar environments are transformed for us through the debilitating experience of a severe and chronic back pain. Furniture and other objects present themselves as newly complex obstacles. Calls to communication (answering the door, or reaching for the phone) suddenly require excruciating care. The world must be renegotiated through these affordances. The range of "what is possible" has shrunk, and the meaning of those possibilities has changed, and the self with them. For sufferers, pain is embodied, but it is not simply "contained" by the physical body; it is manifest in the person's diminished relationship to the world:

> I don't go out, I don't answer the phone. I live at the back of the house and I dread it when the postman comes. (Participant from J.A. Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 528)

The situated, everyday nature of such claims, which Husserl aimed to transcend, was for Heidegger not only inescapable, but also crucial for understanding our being-in-the-world. We are always-already "out there" in a meaningful world of this kind, and, indeed, meaningfulness is a fundamental part of its constitution. Thus, we can only be properly understood as a function of our various involvements with the world, and the world in turn can only be properly disclosed and understood as a function of our involvements with it. This represents a fundamental rejection of the Cartesian divide between subject and object. It is captured by Heidegger's characterization of human-being in terms of Dasein, by which he implies that our very nature is to be there—always somewhere, always located, and always amidst and involved with some kind of meaningful context. This is a hermeneutic phenomenology, therefore, because it emphasizes that sense-making is always situated, and it is existential because it is grounded—there—in the lived world. This in turn problematizes the possibility of any form of full and successful phenomenological reduction—observations, because situated, are always interpretations:

> There is no *pure* third-person perspective, just as there is no view from nowhere. . . . This is not to say that there is no third-person perspective, but merely that such a perspective is exactly a perspective from somewhere . . . it emerges out of the encounter between at least two first-person perspectives; that is, it involves intersubjectivity. (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2007, p. 40)

Merleau-Ponty took a similar view, placing his "focus *between* the person and the world, rather than within either" (Butt, 1999, p. 135). He agreed that it is highly doubtful that the phenomenological reduction can ever be fully achieved, because we are always being brought back into our own situatedness (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962). Most important for Merleau-Ponty, however, is the idea that situatedness is also very notably *embodied*. For EASC, this is crucial. Merleau-Ponty argues that the body shapes the fundamental character of our knowing about the world. We are, first of all, *body-subjects*. Practical activities and relations—the physical and perceptual affordances of the body-in-the-world—are thus more significant than abstract or logical ones (Anderson, 2003).

Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty all distinguished between some form of first-person "lived body" (so often effaced and invisible to us, unless it becomes present through some challenge, limitation, meditation, or dysfunction) from the third-person "objective body" (an awareness of one's body as it may be perceived by another). Merleau-Ponty's concept of the body extends further, because it offers an embodied sense of intentionality. For example, in the act of pointing, or dancing, our sense of embodiment seems to exceed the physical limits of the body: "Consciousness projects itself into the physical world and has a body, as it projects itself into a cultural world and has its habits" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 137). As with Heidegger's transformation of intersubjectivity, so Merleau-Ponty's development of embodiment again shifted phenomenology further away from the concept of an "inner" subject (Ihde, 2003). On this reading, embodiment and intersubjectivity overlap at the interface with culture. Culture here brings with it the material-discursive correlates of our embodiment: gender, ethnicity, ability, health, and illness. These have an impact upon the body as lived and the body as perceived, and upon the affordances which the world offers us. On the one hand, as Ihde (2003) suggests, the lived body is "situated" within, and "permeated" by, the culturally constructed body. On the other, the lived experience of being a body-in-the-world can never be entirely captured or absorbed by cultural constructs—the intentional quality and meaning of "mineness" and "aboutness" are always personal to the body-subject. For Gallagher and Zahavi (2007), this is crucial to understanding how we make sense of one another:

> When presented with behaviour, it is not as if we are faced with mere bodily processes that can then be interpreted any way one likes. Rather, it is more like being confronted with a language. Even a foreign and incomprehensible language is perceived as meaningful, and not simply physical noise. When you see somebody use a hammer, or feed a child, or clean a table, you don't have a problem understanding what is going on. You don't necessarily understand every aspect of the action, but it is immediately given as a meaningful action (in a shared world). (p. 148)

Intersubjectivity, embodiment, and the world

On the whole, contributors to EASC have steered clear of writing about the social or cultural context of experience—but this is an important part of the shared, lived world in which the body is situated and represented, and in which consciousness and cognition are involved in making meaning. Given that, historically, empirical psychology has tended to treat matters of context and meaning as unnecessary or undesirable variables, matters for exclusion through design (e.g., Van Langenhove, 1995), this suggests that the relationship between phenomenological and cognitive aspects of EASC is still not yet mature and reciprocal.

EASC has made most use of phenomenological ideas at a relatively "contained" level of psychological inference—for postulating the relationship between two persons (Gallagher, 2005), or modelling the subject exploring the physical world (Anderson, 2003). But the phenomenological concepts of embodiment and intersubjectivity also speak to a wider contextual level of analysis. When Heidegger writes of

Dasein as being *thrown* into the world, he gives us a metaphor for understanding our relationship with cultural objects and resources. The physical, social, and cultural world has a factical existence which precedes us, and which limits what we can do, be, and claim. Heidegger's world is a "with-world" (*Mitsein*—being-with—is a further characteristic of Dasein). When Heidegger famously writes of language as "the house of Being," he further points out that our interpretations of experience are always shaped by—limited *and* enabled by—language. Our understandings of our experiences are thus woven from the fabric of our many and varied relationships with others, in the context of a world which is shaped by language and culture at least as much as it is by bodies and objects. Accounts of enculturation and intersubjectivity which are broadly consistent with these positions can be drawn from developmental psychology (Trevarthen & Aitken, 2001) and cultural psychology (Cole, 1996; Shweder, 2003). Conversely, a much stronger form of this claim arises in discursive psychology (DP), where the socially constituted nature of personhood (to the exclusion of a personal or worldly dimension) is often employed as a central, delimiting tenet (see Cromby, 2002; Hammersely, 2003). IPA has developed out of a critique of some of the limitations of discursive psychology (e.g., Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; J.A. Smith, 1996; J.A. Smith et al., 2009). It differs from DP because of its explicit interest in understanding participants' accounts under circumstances when the personal is made especially salient. We might call this a "post-constructionist" phenomenological psychology because it recognizes the value of the constructionist view, whilst wanting to affirm and reinstate experiential meaning-making as a useful mode of understanding in psychology.

Understanding enculturation means understanding how we become, and how we sustain ourselves as, successful participants in culture. Gallagher (e.g., 2005; 2007) has been concerned with the former here, drawing on developmental psychology's accounts of the emergence of "primary intersubjectivity" to underpin his "interactive theory of mind." But the latter part is equally important, and has been granted less attention in EASC. How does intersubjectivity work once we are "up and running," so to speak? To answer this, we need an account of how both the *embodied-situated* and *intersubjective-relational* qualities of human understanding come together, from the perspective of *a given person, in a given context*.

Qualitative methods of inquiry, like IPA, are especially effective when it comes to offering insights at this level. In order to make sense of people's experiences of pain, for example, we also need to consider the cultural imperatives which shape our informants' understandings of personhood, and in this context to understand pain as a phenomenon abrading the body, the self, and relations with others. When one asks, "What does it mean to be a good person?" (see our section below "The wordliness of the body-subject: The case of chronic pain"), it may not immediately appear that this a question about "pain." However, it will be evident that this *is* a question about the world, and that our answers will vary according to cultural context. The answer to this question (and others like it) will be the ground against which the lived experience of pain acquires its meaning, and, consequently, EASC must be cautious in its search for invariant or universal phenomenal structures. Hermeneutic phenomenology shows us how even something so apparently and fundamentally embodied as pain can be a relational and

contextual phenomenon. In this example, some of these existential consequences of pain are clearly illustrated:

> It's not who I am, it's just who I am, if you know what I mean. It's not really me, I get like that and I know like, "You're being mean now," but I can't help it. It's the pain, it's me, but it is me, me doing it but not me—do you understand what I'm saying? If I was to describe myself like you said, I'm a nice person, but then I'm not, am I? And there's other stuff, stuff I haven't told you. If you knew, you'd be disgusted—I just get so hateful. . . . I know your gonna say it's all me, but I can't help it even though I don't like it. It's the mean me, my mean head all sour and horrible, I can't cope with that bit, I cope with the pain better. (Participant in J.A. Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 522)

The participant here describes a psychosocial battle for identity itself, an attempt to retain the old "nice" self against the onslaught of the new "mean" self. The self "as it appears to our flesh-and-bone selves" (Varela, 1999, p. 267) is made meaningful for this participant *within a given context*—the context of relationships with others. She describes her struggle to preserve an acceptable self as more challenging even than the pain which threatens it.

Phenomenological methods and EASC

Certain ideas from phenomenology have been taken up by both EASC and qualitative psychologists for the purposes of working with empirical data. The matter of their common interests and boundaries is complex and disputed (e.g., Gallagher & Zahavi, 2007; Thompson, 2004). This is beyond the scope of our argument here, and we merely note that the capacity of insights from either approach to "invalidate" those from the other is extensive. This will be a problem for EASC unless it matures into a well-balanced hybrid, which can accommodate and resolve these conflicts through a shared epistemological framework. Our efforts here are directed towards that end.

Various authors working in, or speaking to, the EASC strand (e.g., Dennett, 2003; Gallagher & Sørensen, 2006; Gallagher & Varela, 2001; Gallagher & Zahavi, 2007; Varela, 1996) have attempted to outline a methodological place for phenomenology in the empirical study of cognition. Despite an awareness in these discussions that phenomenology ought not to be the "handmaiden" to cognitive science, the hybrid forms produced have nevertheless tended to emphasize the primacy of empiricist methods. In a sense, this is inevitable—the task in hand has been characterized as the need to "naturalize" phenomenology (usually meaning, "orient towards a more legitimate natural science model"). As Gallagher and Varela (2001) concede, phenomenology is, "by definition, non-naturalistic." However, they go on to argue that, "everything, however, depends on what one means by naturalization" (p. 19), indicating that a range of positions may be possible. We would suggest that a certain degree of plurality may even be helpful here.

As it stands, EASC has at least three well-developed methodological options already. These have been discussed in some depth elsewhere, and so we will not cover them in any detail here (see Gallagher & Varela, 2001; Gallagher & Zahavi, 2007). In brief, firstly, both Marbach (1993) and Roy et al. (1999) have advocated different degrees of

formalization (translation of highly structured Husserlian phenomenological analyses into a formal or mathematical notation devised for the case). From a hermeneutic perspective, this is clearly problematic—phenomenological accounts will refer to situated *meanings*, but formal logic of this sort requires *relation* and *causation*. Secondly, Varela (1996) famously championed a *neurophenomenology*. This follows a Husserlian model, and applies it in experimental settings, but the premise is that both experimenter and participants are trained in aspects of the phenomenological method. An initial, phenomenological analysis of the participants' experience of an experimental task is used to develop an experimental protocol which is then tested empirically (e.g., Lutz, Lachaux, Martiniere, & Varela, 2002). Finally, Gallagher (2003) has advocated a third option—the phenomenologically informed experimental design. He calls this *front-loaded phenomenology*. Here, studies test a premise which follows from a phenomenological description (e.g., Farrer & Frith, 2002).

These hybrid methods which might be adopted in EASC require a relatively structured approach to the collection and organization of phenomenological material, and in design terms they effectively treat the empiricist methods as a trump card, which explains, validates, or "cashes out" (Gallagher's term) the phenomenological material. However, the conceptual underpinning of EASC suggests that the role of phenomenology should be *more* than simply a "convenient stop on our way to a real explanation," and indeed, "an active participant in its own right" (Varela, 1996, p. 344).

These hybrid forms of phenomenologically based investigation, and the information developed from them, are already paving the way for phenomenology to *speak to* empirical accounts, and to inform their development. They offer innovative ways for scientists to engage with phenomenology, and to generate knowledge which *begins* to have some degree of in-built "phenomenological validity." However, much of the *research*-focused writing about EASC implicitly presumes the primacy of a scientistic model over any account evolved from phenomenology. To us, this looks like a missed opportunity.

What is missing here is what Varela and Thompson have referred to as "putting human life back in" to the study of mind. Reflecting on the impact of their landmark text (Varela, Thompson, & Rosca, 1991), Thompson notes that,

> although the ideas about embodied cognition have been widely acknowledged and assimilated by the field, the book's central theme has yet to be absorbed. . . . That theme is the need for back-and-forth circulation between scientific research on the mind and disciplined phenomenologists of lived experience. (Thompson, 2004, p. 382)

Despite the strong influence of hermeneutic phenomenology on the conceptual underpinnings of EASC, then, the principal influence on its research appears to be a rather narrow "version" of Husserl. As Gallagher and Zahavi (2007) point out, Husserl was no more amenable to any sort of "cashing out" or reducing *down* to empirical accounts than were any of those who followed him in the phenomenological conversation. Nevertheless, it would appear that the concept of the person as a situated, embodied meaning-maker is not yet speaking *through* empirical research in this area, despite its clear presence in the conceptual base of EASC.

We would strongly recommend the development of a richer and broader dialogue to explore the value of both positions as "mutually constraining and enriching approaches to the study of the mind" (Van Gelder, 1999, p. 246), rather than as inequitable partners. To this end, we show a different form of phenomenological work—a qualitative, hermeneutic variation—which should be an important part of this dialogue. Approaches like IPA have the potential to capture some of the more situated and meaningful aspects of human Being—to put the human back in, so to speak.

Two significant consequences of such a move can be anticipated. Firstly, the qualitative, contextual, and less structured nature of such work will lend itself less readily to any sort of cashing out by empirical methods. Secondly, the emphasis on capturing phenomena as they are understood by persons-in-context may well problematize the evidential status of some claims made from the existing cognitive-empirical approaches to EASC. In the short term, these may be challenging. In the longer term, both of these outcomes will lead to the development of a more coherent, balanced, and resilient EASC.

Embodied active situated cognition (EASC) and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)

IPA aims to understand how people make sense of events, relationships, and processes in the context of their particular lifeworlds. Whatever phenomenon is being studied, the aim is to understand "what it is like to be experiencing this, for this particular person, in this context." Often IPA researchers will use the terms *Being-in-the-world* and *lived experience* to express this. "Being-in-the-world" captures the sense of an intentional, embodied, and situated person; and "lived experience" is intended to encompass the interpreted and meaningfully lived aspect of our being-in-the-world. In other words, IPA aims to understand the lived experience of a conscious, situated, embodied being-in-the-world, where "the world" is understood through a respondent's involvement in it.

The focus on lived experience means that IPA researchers approach the phenomenon under investigation from the research participant's perspective. Detailed and rich data are taken from small numbers of cases, in order that they can be adequately situated, described, and interpreted. Typically, these take the form of various verbatim, first-person accounts (interviews, diaries, written accounts—following a range and degree of structures). Transcripts are then subjected to systematic processes of reflection, identification, description, clarification, interpretation, and contextualization (e.g., Eatough & Smith, 2007; Larkin et al., 2006). These processes reflect various aspects of the standard phenomenological method as described above, within a hermeneutic framework.

IPA has often been positioned as distinctive, but also problematic, amongst qualitative approaches (e.g., Langdridge, 2006; Willig, 2001) because of its stated interest in cognition (e.g., J.A. Smith, 1996; J.A. Smith & Osborn, 2003). This may be based on a misconception (i.e., that IPA researchers claim to be investigating cognition *directly*, or, indeed, simply to be "doing" cognitive psychology). Yet, the concerns of hermeneutic phenomenological psychology and standard cognitive psychology are distinct (they

are interested in acquiring different sorts of knowledge, in making different levels of claims, and they employ different definitions of the terrain) but they do overlap at certain key points. The most obvious of these (and the most relevant for EASC) is meaning-making. People make meaning. For IPA researchers, the sense-making activities of people (in conversations, diaries, group discussions, or other forms) are the basis for learning about their relationship to the world. This allows us to develop an account of what an identifiable experience (an event, process, or relationship, etc.) has come to *mean* for particular people, within certain contexts. At the level of interpretation and discussion, this phenomenological account can then be related back to existing theoretical accounts from psychology.

In summary, then, we want to argue that IPA (and indeed other related approaches from phenomenological psychology) can and should contribute to the development of EASC. It can contribute to the inductive development of systematic accounts of common structures of meaning, but it problematizes any claims that these are invariant structures, in the Husserlian sense, because, for IPA researchers, experience is always already situated (in historical, linguistic, cultural, and embodied contexts). The attention which IPA consequently grants to the personal and contextual worldliness of the body-subject can be an important aspect of EASC, not least because it may counterbalance some of the more "laundered" and abstracted accounts of experience which are produced to some extent by existing methods in EASC. That is, it offers EASC an opportunity to put human life "back in."

The wordliness of the body-subject: The case of chronic pain

In this final section, we offer a more "data-driven" illustration of the argument which we have developed so far.

Embodiment is often effaced in favour of the intentional act. In the absence of any exceptional or unexpected demands upon the body, we often do not notice our bodies in our involvement in the world. When we reach for something from the refrigerator, for example, we may be thinking about the preparation of an ingredient for a recipe, anticipating the taste of a quick snack, experiencing pangs of hunger in our stomach, or concentrating on the extrication of the item from a precariously overstocked shelf. Each of these, we may think, reminds us that we are embodied subjects. And yet, in the sense of our immediate interaction with the item in the refrigerator, only in the last of these instances will we have any awareness of the shape and actions of our hand as we reach for the item—because only in this instance does the environment place an exceptional demand upon our dexterity.

Similarly, the body may also be effaced by the presence of other, more explicitly meaningful claims upon us. Thus, we may not be particularly aware of our bodies as we sit at a desk, writing an academic paper—at least until we get stuck, and find that the refrigerator beckons.

The body can very be quickly be made critical, however. Becoming *aware* of ourselves as a body-subject, through some critical social judgement, or physical illness, for example ("something gone awry"), can be a very troubling experience. As Buytendijk

(1943/1961) has it: "The essence of pain lies in the subject's being separated from the body yet at the same time chained to it" (p. 151).

Chronic benign pain is a case in point. It is any pain that has persisted for longer than 6 months and is not related to an ongoing peripheral disease process. Here we present a few further data extracts from a series of studies which began as an exploratory and descriptive study of the experience of living with chronic pain (Osborn & Smith, 1998), and developed over time into an analysis of the participants' struggle to retain any sense of a socially valued or coherent self whilst in pain (J.A. Smith & Osborn, 2007).

The participants' accounts were rich and varied, but strong shared themes described a chronic sense of confusion, social withdrawal, and a worry that they were being persistently disbelieved. These themes seemed to converge when participants described their concerns for their own identity. The extraordinary personal salience of the pain, and its implications for the body-subject, are evident. This was most powerfully evoked in a series of statements which elided pain with the self—for example, "*I am a pain,*" and "*It makes me a pain.*"

Furthermore, the accounts established pain as something that went beyond the sensory or cognitive domains, situated within a significant affective and relational context. Pain was understood in the context of a relational self, which encompassed the body, sensory experience, and the social connectedness of the person:

> I'd love that [being alone on a desert island] . . . but to be away from people and not have to be something else you're not, that would be bliss. . . . I'd still be a miserable old git [i.e., still have pain] but it wouldn't matter, it's only when other people come around that it matters. If you can just be yourself it doesn't matter what you do, I wouldn't have to put on that front so it'd be easier. (Participant from Osborn & Smith, 2006, unpublished data)

While personal and social relationships were made painfully salient, there was sometimes a sense of detachment from the physical "site" of the pain. The internal workings of the body appeared to be absent from the self, and the body in pain was excluded from the self:

> I never thought about my body before, I just abused it, I suppose. Now I feel it and bits of it feel really weird, as if they're not part of me any more . . . the numb bits and down the leg where it hurts and I can't move it like I could, they're somehow separate now. (Participant from Osborn & Smith, 2006, p. 219)

A body which may once have been easily effaced ("I never thought about my body before") was now both the site of a sort of exaggerated self-awareness, and yet simultaneously disembodied:

> Now it's me with this bit that doesn't fit, but it's/ but it's not me, it's a part of my body which doesn't belong. . . . Well it feels different, you know about it, it tingles and burns sometimes, back and down my legs so you can isolate it, you can tell the part that doesn't belong to you, like it's been infiltrated or something like at the dentist, not just the pain but all the tingling and numbness and the fact it doesn't work as well. I can lift my arm, no problem, but you have to work harder to get the legs to do stuff, you have to make them. . . . Yeah, kind of

because they're not me so I have to kind of make them. (Participant from Osborn & Smith, 2006, p. 219)

It is striking that the descriptions of pain in these accounts offer much more than accounts of physical sensations and damage. They capture a sense of the intersubjectively *corroded* self. Rich accounts of the struggle to retain some kind of a contemporary, valued sense of self emerged. This was particularly evident in participants' attempts to distance themselves from experiences of self-disgust and shame:

If I can't be the image that I think I am then I'm in trouble . . . but it's not me, that's not me, I'm not like that.

It's not me but I suppose it is and if you didn't know me you'd think I was a miserable cow, so maybe I was a nice person and now I'm a cow.

I think things which are mean, things which I'd never tell anyone and I'll not tell you so don't ask. (Participants from Osborn & Smith, 2006, unpublished data)

There is a sense that the expected social and cultural frame for making sense of person-hood, and for embodied experience, has been disrupted. In particular, ideas about the coherence and consistency of one's character appeared to be overturned by the experience of chronic pain ("*I was a nice person and now I'm a cow*"). In pain, participants' relationships to the world were transformed.

The implications for an account of consciousness, cognition, and emotion as embodied, active, and situated are complex. The above examples illustrate the debilitating impact of chronic pain, not only through capturing something of the personal and embodied distress of back pain, but also by illustrating the social, cultural, and moral context of disability. Our purpose here has been to demonstrate that these embodied and situated dimensions of pain are, firstly, important to any proper comprehension of our participants' experience of chronic pain, and secondly, because embedded in *meaning,* accessible through the qualitative methods of interpretative phenomenological psychology. Thus, the *sensory* unpleasantness of the participants' pain was accompanied by a *social* and *moral* unpleasantness, which was linked to feelings of humiliation, embarrassment, and shame. Chronic pain left them vulnerable to punishment, rejection, and condemnation, and thus emerged as a phenomenologically malignant condition.

Summary

We have described the confluence of two bodies of work—the developing model of embodied active situated cognition and its engagement with phenomenological philosophy. We have argued that EASC has neglected (or been neglected by) an important body of work, in the field of qualitative phenomenological psychology. We have endeavoured to show that methods from phenomenological psychology (notably, IPA) can make a useful contribution to the development of EASC, not least in providing a hermeneutic counterpoint to the strong empiricist flavour of the emergent discipline. Through

reference to the sustained example of participants' accounts of chronic pain, we have illustrated the importance of situating embodied personal experience in the context of meaning, relationships, and the lived world.

Funding

Note

1. One of the challenges for researchers working primarily in the Husserlian tradition is the requirement to produce an abstracted account which transcends context. Linschoten's (1953/1987) account of "sexual incarnation" is a telling example of how difficult this is. Fifty-six years' worth of changes in sexual politics have transformed the text.

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Michael Larkin is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology on the University of Birmingham's doctoral training course for Clinical Psychology. He has a specific interest in phenomenological and cultural approaches to psychology. Much of his research explores the experiences of families and young people who are using psychology services. Address: University of Birmingham, School of Psychology, Edgbaston Park Road, Birmingham, B15 2TT, UK. [email: m.larkin@bham.ac.uk]

Virginia Eatough is a Lecturer in the Department of Psychological Sciences, Birkbeck, University of London. Her primary research interest is emotional experience, in particular, feelings, and methodologically she uses a range of phenomenological approaches. Current research includes adult crying and the phenomenology of feelings. Address: Birkbeck, University of London, Psychology, Malet St., London, WC1E 7HX, UK. [email: v.eatough@bbk.ac.uk]

Mike Osborn is a consultant clinical psychologist based at the Royal United Hospital, Bath, UK, and the Centre for Pain Research, University of Bath, UK. His clinical work covers long-term conditions, cancer, and critical care. His research interest is focused on the phenomenology of serious illness and, in particular, illness, pain, and self-conscious emotion. Address: Royal United Hospital, Combe Park, Bath, BA1 3NG, UK. [email: mike.osborn@ruh-bath.swest.nhs.uk]