

# A Framework for Understanding Spatial Reasoning

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## What is spatial reasoning?

**Agents** (e.g., ants, humans, robots) use behavioral tools to navigate, remember, understand, and manipulate space. Walking down a hallway, remembering the shape of your childhood bedroom, and running across campus are all applications of our spatial systems. In complex **animals**, these behaviors have **evolved** in conjunction with **neural substrates**, and sometimes rely on complex **cognition**. In **robotic** agents, these behaviors must be mapped out and programmed to function effectively and efficiently.

## How was the framework built?

A variety of dichotomies constrain traditional analyses:

- **Empirical behavioral data** vs. **quantitative models**
- **Evolution** (local optima) vs. **Computation** (absolute optima)
- **Modularity** (individual behaviors) vs. **Integration** (full system)
- **Human** reasoning vs. **non-human** behavior

We aimed to balance our perspectives across these divides. We reviewed literature from a diverse array of disciplines, including Biology, Robotics, Psychology, and Cognitive Science.

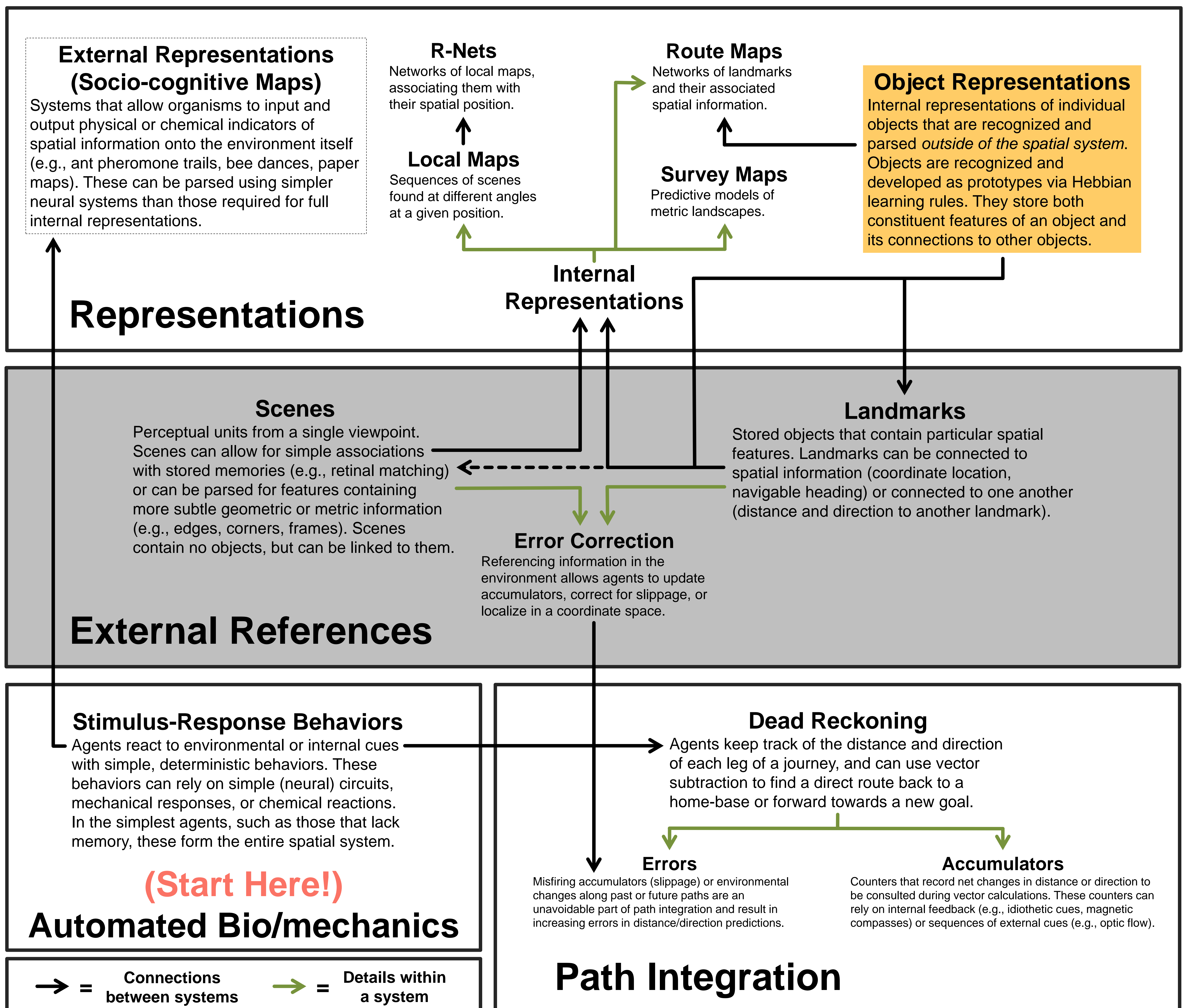
This framework is a **hypothesis**, meant to spur our thinking on the ways in which spatial behaviors can and should fit together.

## Why are spatial problems important?

Any agent that exists in a real or virtual world must deal with that world's environment.

Survival and reproductions of all organisms is constrained by the efficiency of spatial reasoning. Individuals must perform complex spatial tasks to accomplish both short- and long-term goals (e.g., foraging, migration).

Artificial agents (e.g., self-driving cars, autonomous robots) must efficiently conquer spatial challenges to operate effectively. The strategies implemented in robotics may be derived from quantitative rules or may be co-opted from observations of biological behavior.



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