



technology, children, schools and families

# **Learning, remembering and meta-cognitive/communication skills**

**Steven D. Brown**

**University of Leicester**

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## **Background**

Memory is a key contemporary theme within the social and biomedical sciences. Treatments of memory range from discussions of individual capacities to recollect events accurately, through studies of collective and cultural memory, and to investigations into the immune system's ability to 'remember' and distinguish self from non-self. Given the sheer diversity of these treatments, there has been considerable debate about the scope and limits of memory as concept. Tulving (2007), for example, claims to discern at least 256 different technical uses made of memory in the psychological literature alone. Part of the difficulty here is the difference between the commonsense notion of memory as the recollection of times past and the bewildering range of modalities through which this deceptively simple process might occur, along with the vast array of ways in which this might be studied.

The roots of our modern notions of memory lie in classical philosophy, where remembering is seen as inseparable from questions of moral judgement. Remembrance is the drawing together of the past in the present for the purposes of evaluation and making choices (Sutton, 1998). The Roman philosopher Cicero saw memory as integral to prudence – knowledge of good and bad and the differences that lie in between. She or he who speaks publicly of the past enters into a set of obligations about how to act in relation to the events and times they recount (see Yates, 1992; Margalit, 2002). For the past is rarely neutral. It comes with implications about present circumstances and future courses of action. These may appear in the form of continuities or breaks, succession or branching. A consideration of the past rarely indicates directly some future-to-come. It is better thought of as an interpretative puzzle with numerous solutions, all of which have differing consequences for the present.

In classical terms, memory is also intertwined with the question of 'truth' and how it should best be revealed. Platonic philosophy, for example, treats the practice of reminiscence as one of the means by which a scattered, dispersed original truth of things can be recovered and brought together. Platonism also initiates a view of memory as a faculty or an intrinsic aspect of mind. This 'intra-psychic' approach to memory became embedded in Medieval scholasticism and ultimately into the forms of philosophy of mind from which 19<sup>th</sup> century psychology emerged (Sutton, 1998). Thus for early psychologists, such as Wundt and Ebbinghaus, the relevant questions to be asked were around the relationship between the faculty of memory and perceptual processes. Experimental studies typically sought to measure the capacity and the accuracy of human memory (see Ebbinghaus, 1913). This constituted the dominant psychological approach to remembering through much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The so-called 'cognitive revolution' of the 1960s-1970s elaborated new conceptual models taken from cybernetics and ergonomics to study memory as a multi-level system. Baddeley's (1987) influential theory emphasised in particular the relation between a short-term 'working memory', longer-term storage areas and various executive control processes. More recently, Conway's notion of 'autobiographical memory' has emphasised the role that current perceptions of self play in mediating both what can be recalled and the form it may take (see Conway and Pleydell-Pearce, 2000).

The dominance of the 'faculty' approach to memory in psychology has not been uncontested. Wundt himself proposed the study of the cultural transmission of local history to be conducted as complementary to experimental psychology (Danziger, 1990). Bartlett's (1932) early work on memory sought similarly to show how continuities and discontinuities between past and present were refracted through cultural configurations (see Middleton and Brown, 2005). His notion of 'schema' or 'organized setting' had typically been understood with reference to mental processes alone. This is a very narrow reading of the concept that omits Bartlett's broader concerns with the cultural context and setting in which recollection occurs. Recollection itself is as much a process of reconstruction as veridical recall – 'We mingle interpretation with description, interpolate things not originally present, transform without effort and without knowledge (Bartlett, 1932, p96). Indeed Bartlett famously proposed that the focus on accuracy as the major criterion for approaching memory was in error, since it failed to grasp that 'in a world of constantly changing environment, literal recall is extraordinarily unimportant' (Bartlett, 1932, p204).

Work such as this has been recuperated within 'sociocultural psychology' (Valsiner and Rosa, 2007). This approach follows the seminal work of Lev Vygotsky (1962; 1978) in treating psychological capacities as interdependent with the tools and social structures in which they emerge. The individual's capacity to remember is then restructured by the acquisition of tools such as language and writing, and through their participation in the communities in which they develop, learn and live. Wertsch's (2002) work, for example, focuses on the cultural tools (such as narratives, technologies, educational policies) which mediate individual and collective remembering. Wertsch is particularly concerned with cultural narratives which structure national identity by providing a common orientation to the nation's past. Similarly work in 'discursive psychology' (Hepburn and Wiggins, 2007; Edwards and Potter, 1992) has studied remembering as a collective, interpersonal accomplishment wherein accounts of the pasts are shaped by the interactional contexts in which they occur (see Middleton and Edwards, 1990). Middleton's work, for example, explores how individual recollections are interdependent with the settings and collectives in which they are expressed, such as families, workplaces or care homes (see Middleton, 2002; Middleton and Brown, 2005).

Although psychology is pre-eminent amongst what Hacking (1995) calls the 'sciences of memory', numerous other disciplines currently lay claim to memory as topic, notably sociology (following the work of Maurice Halbwachs on 'collective memory'); history; politics and international relations and cultural studies. In the past decade the term

'memory studies' has been used to refer to these diverse clusters of interest (see the journal of the same name, launched in 2008). Despite the difficulty in synthesising the range of approaches involved, it can be observed that the common wisdom around memory which emerges here is to treat remembering as practice that is at once both individual and collective, personal and public, wherein the past is contested as a moral, cultural and political concern. To some extent this is a return to a 'pre-psychological' understanding of the complexity of remembering as a domain of human activity, although insights from modern psychology have nevertheless been welcomed.

It against this backdrop that I want to situate what I take to be the most interesting contemporary trends in the study of remembering and their likely future development. The review is organised around a set of key debates.

## **1. Collective vs. individual memory**

One of the key difficulties to be addressed in studies of memory is around the most appropriate level of analysis. For psychologists human memory is, *per se*, a process that occurs within the cognitive architecture of mind set within a neurological superstructure (Schachter, 1996). For example, the division between explicit and implicit memory (ie conscious/reflective memories vs. learned familiarity with something) appears to have a neurological basis (Schachter and Bruckner, 1998). Although culture and society have a role in shaping both what is remembered and how these processes operate, ultimately 'individuals are the ones who do the actual remembering' (Manier and Hirst, 2008, p254). By contrast, from a sociological perspective the primary processes are social in nature. What we remember is constrained by the publicly available symbols, meanings, rituals and rules of a given culture. These constitute a set of 'mnemonic practices' (cf. Olick and Robbins, 1998) which define collective memory and in turn frame individual acts of remembering.

The relevance of this distinction is that it begs the question of whether the transmission of the past, including past values, is best supported at the level of individual rememberers or collective practices. The tradition in psychology has been to focus on the individual, and hence to treat learning as a personal accomplishment. Assessment regimes based on individual testing and examination mirror the experimental methods used by psychologists to investigate memory in the laboratory. However if remembering is an interactional process then it follows that the individual cannot be considered the sole unit of assessment. Joint recollection, where members collectively contribute to a group effort to reconstruct past events, would more accurately model the everyday ecology of memory.

The difficulty presented by the individual-collective debate is that it is unlikely to be resolved by further evidence at either level. Doubtless advances in neurology will deliver more evidence about the pathways involved in specific kinds of acts (eg verbal accounts of episodic memories). But clarifying the mechanisms supporting such acts does not solve the conceptual problem of organising the relationship between levels of analysis. Indeed the very distinction between individual and collective may ultimately prove unhelpful. Much of the current debate stems from Halbwachs' influential (1925/1992; 1950/1980) work on 'collective memory', which seems to imply that social groups are the ones 'doing the actual remembering' (see Wertsch, 2002). This overlooks the very subtle reformulation of individuality which Halbwachs performs, such that the person is considered first and foremost as a social being whose place in a memorial framework is established well before they begin to rehearse and express formal memories of their own (see Middleton and Brown, 2005).

An alternative distinction is provided by Assman (1995, 2008). He distinguishes 'communicative memory' – relatively informal, non-specialised talk of the past grounded in a particular family, group or culture – from 'cultural memory' – the objectified, formal

versions of the past contained in public symbols, monuments, archives, etc. Communicative memory lives and dies with the interacting generations who share it (usually no more than three), having a horizon of about 80 years at most. Cultural memory, by contrast, has an institutional character that elevates it to the level of tradition. Based on Assman's estimates, we would assume that the content of communicative memory in 2025 has a window of intelligibility stretching back no further than the generation born in the late 1950s/early 1960s. Anything before this will belong to the distant past of formal record and cultural/institutional memory. The implications here are that events which fall within the frame of cultural memory are far more likely to be contested and to vary as a function of the community background of the rememberer. The differing 'authorised versions' of such events are likely to be held by the communities themselves rather than by a common definitive source, and attempts to overrule cultural with institutional memory are likely to prove problematic. There is more at stake and greater sensitivity will be required in discussions of the recent past.

Assman's work has been influential in recent studies of intergenerational memory. One of the major questions here has been the relation between 'generationality' (the shared experiences of a generation) and 'generativity' (the transmission of the experiences to succeeding generations) (Reulecke, 2008). In a study of three generations of German families, Welzer et al (2002) described a common process whereby memories of the first (wartime) generation were discredited and mistrusted by the second (baby boomer) generation, but re-interpreted and re-evaluated in a positive light by the third (post-reunification) generation. If robust these findings would seem to indicate a kind of skipping of generational identification which might have relevance for understanding changing social identities across generations.

For example, recent debates about radicalisation in British Muslim communities have focussed on inter-generational conflicts. Second and third generation British born Muslims are seen as potential at risk of rejecting a coherent national identity in favour of a turn towards radical politics and 'extremism'. From the perspectives of Welzer's work such conflicts are to be entirely expected. One point of engagement might then be through exploring the nature of the positive identification between first and third generations, and the way the experiences of the former are re-interpreted with respect to national identity by the latter. Another might be through understanding better how the second generation carries the burden of 'vicarious memories' (cf. Hirsch, 1997) of the experiences of the first (eg of prejudice, racism, violence) which have hitherto been considered unspeakable. The second generation may then struggle with the role of acting as witness to these memories without the support (or blessing) of the first.

## **2. The 'memory wars'**

The term 'memory wars' has been used to refer to a set of debates about the nature of 'recovered memories' that emerged during the 1980s and early 1990s in the USA and Northern Europe (see Campbell, 2003; Haaken and Reavey, 2009). The term was originally used to describe memories of past trauma, typically child sexual abuse, that re-emerge in adulthood having been previously unacknowledged. In the majority of cases of recovered memory these arise during the course of psychological therapy (see Bass and Davis 1988). A movement of advocates claiming to speak on behalf of those with recovered memories emerged around this time. It involved therapists who were concerned to advise their peers on how best to help clients identify and cope with recovered memories. It also included womens and childrens rights activists, lawyers and adult survivors themselves. This movement made some notable accomplishments, such as supporting survivors in bringing legal cases against their abusers, who were usually, but not always, a parent (see Commonwealth vs. Landon Carter Smith, 1990).

By 1992, a counter-movement coalesced with the formation of the 'False Memory Syndrome Foundation' (FMSF). Set up by Pamela Freyd, whose husband had been

accused of childhood abuse by their daughter (Jennifer Freyd, a cognitive psychologist who later published *Betrayal Trauma*). The FMSF claimed that recovered memories were actually fictitious and were invented by vulnerable clients under the systematic influence of therapists. For the FMSF, therapists were centrally responsible for the rise in 'false memories'. They referred to the phenomenon using the medical sounding term 'syndrome', although no medical authority had actually defined it as such (see Campbell, 2003). The board members of the FMSF consisted of a eminent body of mainly academic psychologists, including Elizabeth Loftus. FMSF board members acted as legal experts, usually for the defence, in cases of abuse accusations following recovered memory, and wrote a number of powerful critiques including Richard Ofshe's *Making monsters* and Loftus and Ketcham's *The myth of repressed memory*.

Following extensive reports by both the British Psychological Society (BPS) and the American Psychological Association (APA) and several relatively even-handed contributions (Haaken and Reavey, 2009), much of the intensity has passed out of the debate. However a number of important lessons about the nature of memory have been learnt as a consequence. There is now little disagreement that individual memories are reconstructions rather than literal depictions of past events (Schachter, 1996; Engel, 2000). This makes sense in neurological terms – brain activity reconstructs past states rather than preserves them directly – and cultural terms – our accounts of the past are continuously evolving through the narratives and contexts in which they are told and re-told. If this is so then the 'storehouse' metaphor often used to describe memory (see Draaisma, 2000) is in error, since it fails to capture the dynamic, transformative relationship to the past that seems to characterise memory.

The shift to a transformative account of remembering means acknowledging the context-sensitive nature of memory, or, as it is sometimes called, the 'ecological' aspects of recollection (Neisser and Winograd, 1988). The context in which recollection takes place has a shaping effect on both the availability of what can be recalled and the form in which it is recalled (Engel, 2000). The school, as an ecological context in which remembering occurs, will always have such a shaping effect – it is simply not possible to imagine a purely neutral context for remembering. The question then becomes one of either refining or increasing the ecological diversity of memory.

Another lesson is that what is meant by 'truth' in relation to memory is not a straightforward matter. Haaken (1998) argues that memories of abuse may not be strictly accurate, but may instead act as a 'master narratives' for all manner of routine, casual oppression suffered by women. The memory is not false, since it is made up of entirely real experiences which have nevertheless been re-arranged into a pattern imposed at a later date. It has been argued that this difficulty is resolved when an individual memory is treated on its merits and subject to fair test (ie external corroboration). However some groups of rememberers – notably women, children, persons with mental health issues – find their testimonies subject to systematic mistrust and suspicion. They tend not to be regarded as 'reliable rememberers' (see Campbell, 2003). The assumption that children's testimony may be unreliable has wide and far reaching consequences for the interface between schools and welfare services, particularly in the light of the *Every Child Matters* agenda. Teachers must clearly be alert to the recollections and testimony offered by children, whilst at the same time sensitive to complexities of how a child may recall a given event. Motzkau's (2006) studies of social workers, police and judges demonstrate that these different professional groups often work with very different conceptions of what counts as 'good testimony' by a child and of children's capacities to remember accurately.

It might appear that the solution would be to wait for a clarification of exactly how children's memories function – are they given to inherent distortion or is the norm

towards accurate recall? However a more realistic alternative might be to find ways of tolerating this ambiguity in memory. Children's memories can be reconstructive and transformative, introducing new elements and reappraising and refiguring existing elements. Yet at the same time, children are capable of veridical recall and as vulnerable rememberers stand in need of protection of their right to bear witness to their own past (cf. Reavey and Brown, 2006). These two versions of how memory functions need not be seen as contradictory. We ought to expect that a child who offers an imaginative reconstruction of a given event is entirely able to offer a detailed accurate account of another. This is so because memory is not an individual capacity or aptitude but rather an interactional dynamic between the individual, group and setting. Greater consideration of the variety and organization of the interactional contexts in which children are either invited to remember or have the opportunity to spontaneously recall within school would be a better starting point for exploring these tensions.

### **3. Memory and history**

The distinction between history and memory is superficially easy to make. History refers to formal, public, shared accounts of the past, subject to matters of record, whereas memory is constituted by informal, personal experiences. This overly neat distinction has been rendered problematic for some time. Studies in the oral history tradition, in cultural history and commemorative practices have all treated 'history' as a contested terrain which is given shape when social groups attempt to secure the dominance of their own particular collective memories of past events (Misztal, 2003; Hutton, 1993). It is then perhaps more appropriate to speak of the historical as underpinned by a 'politics of memory' (Hodgkin and Radstone, 2003). For example, Schwartz et al (1986) demonstrate how the Jewish story of the collective sacrifice at Masada in AD73 took on a completely new life during the founding of Israel and its early years. The historical is then transformed when it becomes a vehicle for the embedding of collective memories of the early years of the Jewish state.

There is a strong counter-position that the conceptual conflation of history with memory is itself a political act (Klein, 2000). Pierre Nora (1989) argues that the term 'memory' has gained currency at precisely the time when the local commemorative practices and traditions in which community memory is transmitted are under threat – 'we speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left' (1989, p7). For Nora, modern culture is under the sway of an immense drive to archive and preserve the past, orchestrated by what Lowenthal (1985) sees as the 'heritage industries'. The past is stored up as 'sites of memory', gigantic empty symbols which are evacuated of all meaning and which prevent an active relationship to the past, leaving us merely with the duty to remember but with no terms of participation.

The problem, as Nora and Lowenthal see it, is a failure to make the past directly relevant to the present. What Nora calls 'living memory' is a relationship to the past marked by continuous debate and with ongoing implications for current actions. Life in small rural communities, for example, is structured by such living memory, with daily events informed by a rich common past. By contrast, the heritage industries render the past as a commodity which is seen to have value in its own right but does not speak directly to present concerns. One way of addressing this might be to explore ways of transforming heritage into living memory by connecting it to live issues faced by local communities. Following Nora, the key would be to situate this at the local rather than the national level, since it is the empty gesture of supporting a generalised sense of national identity by commodifying the past in general that is seen as problematic.

In a similar vein, Huyssen (2003) observes that 'monumentalism' – the attempt to capture the past in a grandiose architectural testament – no longer adequately functions as a means for urban and national communities constituted by diverse social groups. By their very nature, monuments typically function as what Eco (1989) calls 'closed texts' –

objects which promote a single reading or interpretation of the events of which they speak. Inevitably this favours the historical consciousness of one group over another. For example, the debates around the statue of Arthur 'Bomber/Butcher' Harris erected in London in 1992 demonstrate that monuments can be used as a means for one group to attempt to settle an interpretative dilemma.

The attempt to settle the past through monumentalism might then be better characterised as collective forgetting, rather than collective remembering. The sheer scale of monumentalism can render what is commemorated as no longer a matter of debate or concern. We build monuments in order to forget, to have done with the past as a live matter for debate. It is this tendency which has led to a counter-trend of monuments which function as 'open texts' by promoting multiple interpretations and discussion around past event. Maya Lin's Vietnam war memorial in Washington, which seems to equivocate between commemorating the dead and commenting on the senseless of loss on such scale, is one well known contemporary example. However, such monuments tend to attract controversy if not outrage (Sturken, 1997) – in Lin's case a separate monument based around more traditional military themes has been built opposite the official monument. One of the difficulties here is with the commemoration of problematic or traumatic pasts – for instance, how do state authorities manage to commemorate terror that was previously enacted in their own name? The Berlin Holocaust Museum and Buenos Aires Memory Park are recent examples, and the New York Twin Towers site and Madrid Atocha station memorial are ongoing.

Holocaust memorials are a particular case in point described by Young (2000). The recent trend amongst artists and architects seeking to commemorate the Holocaust has been to design 'counter-monuments' which resemble elaborate puzzles (such as the Gerz's 'disappearing monument' against fascism in Harburg). These monuments set up complex, often unsettling experiences for viewers which encourage reflection rather than soothing the duty to commemorate. Young observes that many such monuments are designed by artists who have no direct experience of what they seek to commemorate, although in many case they are only one generation's remove. Hirsch (1997) uses the term 'post-memory' to capture the dilemma which this second generation face. Since they have grown up hearing the stories of survivors, is not the Holocaust also a part of their own past, albeit in this vicarious way? As with the intergenerational conflicts described before, the second generation face the particular dilemma of feeling burdened with the task of commemorating the first generation's experiences which have hitherto been considered either private or unspeakable. An illustration of this is provided by the graphic novel *Maus* by Art Spiegelman. This offers a narrative of his father and mother's experiences in Auschwitz intertwined with a narrative of his own anxieties and ambiguities in telling their story. Commemoration is then combined with reflection on both the interpersonal difficulties of his relationship with his father and the on what it means to take ownership of telling the story of his experiences.

#### **4. Embodied memory**

It is a legacy of faculty philosophy to consider each of the different organs of the body as being the 'seat' of a particular aspect of psychological functioning. Thus the heart is the emblem of the emotions, the stomach and digestive system the symbolic site of worries and anxiety, and the brain as the repository of memory and identity. And yet we also share in a common sense experience that our bodies think and act for themselves outside of our conscious control. Our fingers appear to remember a telephone or pin number as they type it out, our bodies seems able to navigate the car we drive without requiring our sustained attention. Popular culture is replete with stories of transplant patients who have acquired something of the memory of the donor, usually in the form of preferences or desires, along with the donated organ. Common sense and paucity of evidence suggests this to be highly unlikely, not least because if the brain is not really a

storehouse of the past, than neither is the heart of the kidneys. So what is the status of these body memories?

Young's (1995) analysis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) notes the emphasis placed on the body in this condition. Although the dominant symptom is the presence of chronic intrusive memories, another strong symptom is consistent autonomic arousal, manifesting as irritability, explosive violence, hypervigilance. Young notes that chronic trauma has long been associated with 'body memories', most significantly in Freud's work. In part this is because the psychological concept of trauma was directly modelled on the physical concept. But this need not lead to the view that mental images are contained throughout the body, but rather it suggests that a link to the past persists through symptoms expressed by the body. Such a link may have its own logic that is distinct from mental logic, Young claims. The body has acquired habits and norms of behaving that effectively reverse the flow of chronological time – it behaves as though it were still preparing itself to endure the original trauma.

The philosophy of Henri Bergson (1905/1991) developed an influential notion of 'habit memory' that usefully clarifies Young's claims. Bergson proposed that in recollecting the process of learning or acquiring a skill, memory could be divided into distinct memories of the actual occasions on which learning took place ('reminiscence memory') and the overall changes in one's skill ('habit memory'). What is learned becomes a 'bodily automatism' – the body is oriented towards and anticipates the act without need of conscious intervention. Whilst this distinction clearly resembles the later psychological division of 'explicit' and 'implicit' memory, in Bergson's philosophy it also marks a distinction between time and space since reminiscences are a part of the ongoing flow of lived time, whilst habits establish our attunement to the concrete world of action or 'attention to life'. Habit memory connects us to space and place, whilst reminiscence connects us to the unfolding of time.

This relationship of habit-memory to place is further explored by Casey (2000). Drawing on phenomenology, Casey treats the body not as pure physical anatomy but rather as a 'lived body', the surface or contact point of our experience in the world. All experience, for Casey, is experienced through the body, through the 'concrete feeling of bodily efficacy' (2000, p175). This feeling is the substrate for all conscious reminiscence since it is what connects to the world. Thus the more elaborated our memories become, the more they tend to leave behind the body. For example, an amorous experience that left us 'tingling' for days afterwards eventually becomes transformed by narrative rehearsal into a description of people and places. However lived, embodied experience remains at the core of memory as the central fact of experience.

Feminist work has argued from a similar phenomenological basis that experience can become normalised or discredited when its felt, embodied basis is excluded from recollection. Haug et al (1984) developed a methodology known as 'memory work' as a corrective. The basis of memory work is for participants to write individual memories around a trigger word which evokes a specific bodily sensation. The memories are deliberately written in a concrete descriptive form with attention to specific details rather than narrative elaboration. The group then discusses the memories collectively and offers reactions and analysis of each. The guiding idea is to strip away something of the layers of cultural normalisation that are built up around the experience and offer them up for renewed questioning (see also Crawford et al, 1992). Here body memories are not treated as neutral but rather as the root to a political analysis of women's experiences which are usually excluded from narrativisation.

The implication of this focus on embodiment is to shift the focus away from cognitive processes *per se* and towards the body as integral to remembering. This broadens the range of the aptitudes which are seen as relevant to memory. Emotions and capacities for sensory experience play a role in the process of recollection. For example, an early

childhood memory involves the physical and sensory experiences of a child's embodiment. Pedagogic practice then requires an additional sensitivity to memory as an embodied process – we remember through sensing, feeling and acting. The learning environment needs to offer opportunities for physical engagement as well as abstract recollection.

Connerton (1989) also offers a political analysis of body memories, but in top-down rather than bottom-up account. He observes that commemorative rituals tend to involve stylised or ritualised movements – for example, the taking of a communion wafer or saluting during a parade. These movements are invested with symbolic value. They literally establish a moral order involving obligations, correct behaviour and relations of dominance and submission. But since they are also automatic, so do the values that they establish which become transmitted during the ritual without conscious reflection. Hence social groups and institutions will entrust to the body the role of transmitting values which they wish to preserve without debate or contestation.

This work has been influential in offering a reading of how control over the body – primarily through ritual – is central to control over the past. From this it follows that interpretative flexibility around the reading of past events also involves 'de-ritualisation'. There are interesting implications here for debates around the role of religious belief and the wearing of religious symbols in schools. Symbols and rituals are the prime means – according to Connerton – for establishing an automatic, unreflective relationship to the past. As such they are not merely occasions or markers of a particular kind of identity, but also preserve a particular perspective on history and collective memory.

## 5. Mediated memory

Aby Warburg is a founding figure in art history (see Michaud, 2007). One of his major projects *Mnemosyne* was the creation of an atlas of images, both classical and contemporary, from low and high culture. The images were designed to be subject to repeated re-arrangement. No auxiliary commentary was to be included. This was to be 'art history without a text'. The idea of the atlas was that the transmission of certain kinds of gestures, experiences and values could be revealed through taking this random walk through cultures, exploring the relationships between images directly.

Eighty years later, trawling through the bricolage of images and icons which litter the interconnected pages of a social-networking site such as MySpace or Facebook one cannot help but be reminded of *Mnemosyne*. For here too it might be possible to reconstruct the links between past and present – what is preserved, what is lost, continuities and discontinuities. Social networking sites are complex arrays of symbols, images and texts which serve as ongoing representations and commentaries on the lives of users. As such, a profile on a social networking site also serves a commemorative function. However, the commemorative work which is done is highly shaped by the medium. For example, on MySpace routine updating of profile pictures tends to be the norm, hence there is a re-invention of self as much as a commemoration. Furthermore, since profiles can be commented upon by other users – typically friends and relatives – there is a need to fashion the past so that it does not attract controversy or ridicule (ie making inflated claims about one's life and previous experiences). Social networking sites are illustrations of a distinctively contemporary way of performing personal history, one which requires continuous updating and sensitivity to the claims of others.

Warburg's work highlights the mediated nature of memory, and specifically the role of the image in such mediation. A significant body of work explores the role that photographs play in sustaining family memories (see Barthes, 1980; Kuhn, 2002; Kuhn and McAllister, 2006; Hirsch, 1999). Domestic photography is a common strategy for drawing individual memories into a collective framework for narrativising the past. This is typically done through organising, displaying and collectively reviewing photographs.

Photographs may also serve as points for contestation – what is depicted and what is left out serve as resources for telling alternative and counter-narratives of family life. This is even more so when family photographic albums become historical artefacts. Here they take on the status of interpretative puzzles whose organization needs to be decoded.

Changes in the technology of photography and photographic reproduction have tended to shape this process (see Lury, 1997). For example, exchanging, tagging and annotating one's own and others photographs on websites such as Facebook and Flickr has broadened the scope of visually mediated collectively remembering such that it need not depend on face-to-face interaction. Developments in this area, such as accessing these sites through mobile phones, are likely to further widen this.

Brookfield et al (2008) discuss the practice of life-story work amongst adoptive parents. Here adults involved in the care of adoptive children attempt to document the child's life using photographs and other materials in order to provide a form of continuity for the child (and also between carers). However due to the precarious nature of the adoption process it is inevitable that some periods of the child's life are either not documented, or the materials which are available are considered unsuitable (eg photographs in which the child is apparently neglected). Adoptive parents are then confronted with a dilemma – should some aspects of the past be avoided, or 'airbrushed', or perhaps invented altogether? Brookfield et al offer examples where inventing the past, using the 'powers of fiction' may ultimately be beneficial.

Middleton and Brown (2005) describe how family websites similarly create continuities in the collective memory of the family. Through the use of picture collages, calendars, separate pages for family members and so on, a kind of coherent family identity can be staged. But such websites can also create discontinuities, such as between images and text, or ambiguities in relation to common memories (such as memories of an absent 'home' or a deceased family member). Lury (1997) argues that images often overtake memory. Images do not so much mediate as reformulate memory, offering up new possibilities for elaboration through combination. Digital imaging, in particular, with its capacity for manipulation, provides an uncertain transformative relationship to what is apparently depicted. For example, the images around the destruction of the Twin Towers building on 9/11 might be thought to serve as clear and unambiguous records of what occurred. However an awareness that such images can subtly altered or edited has made these images central to conspiracy theories around the events – alternative versions of the events are built around pointing to possible signs of distortion in the images. There is a strong contrast here with the footage of the Kennedy assassination where the images were considered capable of potentially settling rather than perpetuating the controversy. Digital imaging unsettles memory.

Sturken's (2008) work reverses the direction of the analysis. Taking recent cultural memory in the USA as her object, Sturken argues that meditational objects such as kitsch images and comfort objects (eg Twin Towers snow globes) serve to tame rather than elaborate the past. They remove the burden of questioning the past and replace it with an already settled sentimental relationship to trauma and loss. This is another instance of the sort of commodification and simplification of the past identified by Nora. Sturken suggests that the circulation of such objects and images serves the ideological purpose of estranging North Americans from their own recent history.

## **Summary**

Research around memory has broadly shifted in the past hundred years from a focus on remembering as an abstract process of restoring awareness of past events and retaining information to one of studying remembering as a highly context-sensitive process of reconstructing the past in the present. As a consequence, there has been a corresponding shift from asking questions as to the literal accuracy of what is recalled

towards questioning how and why particular sorts of things are remembered as circumstances change. The methods and approaches used to study these processes have also vastly expanded. In one direction this has led to more fine-grained studies of the neural mechanism thought to be involved in the formation and recollection of memories, and in the other to a greater awareness of how memory is integral to maintaining cohesion to groups, institutions and cultures.

The five domains that seem to me to best represent modern 'memory studies' deal with changing formulations of the individual/collective division, different versions of 'truth' and 'accuracy' in memory, the shifting borderline between history and memory, growing awareness of the embodied and phenomenological dimensions of remembering, and change in the modalities through which memory is mediated, most notably the technological means through which representations of the past are created and managed. These domains have been affected by both specific historical events (eg the 'memory wars'; recent forms of Holocaust commemoration) and by general social/cultural shifts in how the memories of collectives are considered within the historical awareness supporting the nation-state.

Over the next fifteen years it seems likely that these domains of concern around memory will diversify further. For example, the awareness that the contribution of cognitive processes needs to be set alongside physiological, emotional, proprioceptive and neurological mechanisms will doubtless led to more complex descriptions of remembering as an activity requiring complex relationships between differing systems. Equally, the trend to speak of collective memories existing in parallel states rather than a single version of the historical will certainly increase given the relative inability of national identity to serve as an coherent principle for organising the past. Further clarification of the relationship between the social/cultural dimensions of memory and the strength of the investments group members make in particular versions of the past will prove useful.

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