Editorial

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Beyond memory again: Risk, teamwork, vicarious remembering

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Asking readers to 'look beyond memory studies' in my first editorial for this journal (Sutton, 2009), I suggested that we respect our topic best by disregarding disciplinary boundaries and by embracing the extraordinary diversity of relevant phenomena. The fact that memory is so often in use when it is not explicitly in question remains a practical and intellectual challenge for movements towards integration, institutionalisation, and discipline-formation in memory studies, such as those discussed in this issue in the paper by Dutceac Segesten and Wüstenberg, and the commentary by Olick and colleagues. Memory cannot be neatly insulated and isolated from the other cognitive and affective, bodily and social, technological and ecological domains in which it is often so intricately entwined.

Care for and attention to the motley breadth of memory phenomena might help address residual, frustrating gulfs between the various forms of cultural memory studies and the equally diverse cognitive sciences of memory. If we imagine and engineer our way into slower collaborative research, the opportunity to catch the varied forms of remembering in dauntingly diverse cultural settings might encourage longer-term immersive teamwork across the humanities and the social and cognitive sciences. We want simultaneously to bring to bear multiple methods and tools, drawn from across the disciplines, on complex patches of the world and of social activity where memory shows up at different spatial and temporal scales.

In Lola Arias's production *MINEFIELD/CAMPO MINADO*, first performed in London and Buenos Aires in 2016, the experiences and memories of three Argentine veterans and three English veterans (including a Nepalese-born Gurkha) of the Malvinas/Falklands war of 1982 developed over a long rehearsal period into a bilingual theatrical assemblage of extraordinary power (Arias, 2017). The six 'amateur' performers together narrate and reenact on stage each other's different war stories, fears, and angers, their subsequent struggles and traumas and recoveries. They confront each other and their very different audiences in England and Argentina with renderings of personal political psychologies and histories which are heartbreaking and playful at once. The production uses music, noise, and multimedia evidence with wonderful collaborative precision and with uncanny aesthetic and bodily skills to elicit a dynamic array of intense but uncertain emotions. As Cecilia Sosa puts it, 'rather than staging veterans as war heroes, Arias' experiment exposed both teams on a common ground of fragility and vulnerability', creating new resonances and ways of

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imagining the war 'not on the basis of consensus, but difference' (Sosa, 2017; see also Blejmar, 2017; Finburgh, 2017).

I saw *MINEFIELD* in London in 2016, caught up in these six men's pasts, overwhelmed by the brilliant risky performance and by the powerful meetings of multiple memories which fuelled and shaped it. In both content and form, in its enactment of memories and in the collaborative processes which produced such a disturbing, provocative, and hopeful emergent spectacle as output, I wanted to take inspiration back to my day job, back to memory studies and into the interdisciplinary teamwork of research collaboration.

At the same time, I was reading brave, detailed, and original work on interdisciplinarity across the social sciences and the neurosciences by Felicity Callard and Des Fitzgerald. They highlight the pragmatics of interaction across the disciplines – the luck, the bewilderment, the struggle and the shifting emotions (Callard and Fitzgerald, 2015). They also focus on the power dynamics involved, arguing, against fantasies of total reciprocity, that learning to live together may sometimes require accepting temporary and situated forms of subjugation, being willing to destabilise prior assumptions in the service of a potential 'sense of risk and play', of 'a pleasure that might come from … taking the consequences' of new 'experimental entanglements' (Callard and Fitzgerald, 2015: 106). A genuinely interactive mode of engagement between social sciences and neurosciences might contrast sharply with both ebullient enthusiasm and grim critique (Fitzgerald and Callard, 2015).

These are helpful suggestions to bring to memory studies, where suspicion still abounds and where it remains so hard to find the right allies or even the right questions and concepts to take travelling across campus or across disciplines. Spanning the personal and the political dimensions of memory, psychology – ideally of the 'expanded' variety so productively developed by Steven Brown and Paula Reavey (2014, 2017) – must remain at the heart of the integrative project. Despite understandable ambivalence concerning terms like 'cognition', 'mind' and 'psychology', with their uncertain semantic and cross-cultural grip, a cultural or political memory studies without a rich psychology will be thin and disconnected from the complex everyday social settings in which we learn and conduct our practices of remembering.

Neither cognitive psychology nor the broader cognitive sciences are irretrievably reductive, essentialist, individualist, or universalising. This has been one repeated message of research in the tradition of 'distributed cognition' over more than 20 years (Clark, 1997; Hutchins, 1995). Remembering, in its many distinctive forms, does not occur inside individual skulls, but spreads across brain, body, and world as we incorporate disparate but complementary neural, bodily, social, technological, and environmental resources in managing our pasts, carrying our histories, and negotiating ways into our shared futures (Sutton, 2015). Promising recent work on 'distributed affectivity' applies these frameworks effectively to emotions and moods in concrete ways which implicate memory – embodied memory, personal memory, and shared memory in particular (Colombetti and Krueger, 2015; Krueger, 2014; Slaby, 2016; Sutton, in press). The language of cognitive, affective, or mnemonic 'ecologies' (Hutchins, 2010) is intended to catch the uneven, shifting nature of these heterogeneous resources, encouraging us to study the distinctive balances of strategies used individually and collectively to manage the past in different settings.

This suggests that effective interdisciplinary teams for memory studies will tend to be built around difference rather than consensus, because dramatically distinct skills and areas of expertise will be required to tap and map multiple ecologies of memory in different times and places. Such teams will also be fragile: what works for a while in terms of division of labour, daily practice, and intellectual exchange may always break down.

Vicarious remembering, memory of other people's experiences, is one memory topic which shows up in many different contexts, and on which we could usefully integrate a wider range of

disciplines and approaches. Recent scholarship in both history and psychology can enrich treatments of vicarious remembering in mainstream cultural memory studies. In his book on vernacular memory in early modern England, *The Memory of the People* (Wood, 2013), Andy Wood works outward from the archive – primarily from depositions and witness statements in records of disputes in customary law – to offer a rich cultural history of popular 'topographies of remembrance'. Seeking to articulate the experienced lifeworlds of working women and men across changing times between the 16th and 18th centuries, Wood offers a rich account of place memory as social, dynamic and contested, embodied and practical, and as a set of interactive relations between people and the landscapes they walked and worked. On top of its intrinsic interest, memory history of this kind affords productive comparative distance, unsettling our own categories and revealing the social, psychological, narrative, and political power of many a customary practice which for much of the period still seemed to unfold as it had for time out of mind – same as it ever was.

One practice was the beating or riding of the bounds, not merely delineating but deeply embedding a memory and a feel for local boundaries in bodies and hearts (see also Whyte, 2009). These occasions left many sensory markers and traces, and their stories were retold over decades and generations. In 1738, a 92-year-old Yorkshireman Christopher Slater recalled being given at age 12 a green ribbon by which to remember the boundary stones of Melmerby and Aggerthorpe. This imperative had been impressed on him those 80 years earlier by 'old Antient Men' who declared that these 'Bounder stones … had been so riden all their time and as they had heard old people declare before them': as Wood notes, such memories 'interlocked community, place and custom … to cascade memories down the generations' (Wood, 2013: 209; cf Schwyzer, 2010). Wood considers the social power of stories as collective local artefacts, not necessarily having a single author, tying members of local groups 'into a dense web of shared memories' which maintain and renew communities. He invokes Luisa Passerini's vision of intersubjective remembering, whereby a memory 'is possible because it evokes another memory. We can remember only thanks to the fact that somebody else has remembered before us' (Passerini, 1992: 2; Wood, 2013: 283–285).

Memories which float free of any easily identifiable source, circulating and reforming, have been of enduring interest in cultural memory studies. Cultural history of Wood's style can, like ethnography, provide rich and challenging comparative material against which concepts like prosthetic memory, post-memory, and vicarious remembering can be refined (Brookfield et al., 2008; Hirsch, 1997). In Brown and Reavey's expanded psychology of memory 'in the wild', one powerful case study of ways of 'living with a difficult past' addresses the many modalities, functions, and affective challenges involved in the joint construction of memories for adoptive children. These must often uneasily bridge gaps between narratives of the child's past and present families, to find or create some kind of usable past (Brown and Reavey, 2015; cf Keightley and Pickering, 2017).

Connecting existing work on larger-scale vicarious experience and vicarious trauma to the intense and emotionally confronting smaller stories involved in the ordinary remembering practices of smaller groups such as families, this kind of expanded psychology offers new integrative opportunities. As well as historical and anthropological comparisons, a concerted interdisciplinary enquiry into vicarious remembering could now also find allies in more mainstream cognitive psychology.

David Pillemer et al. (2015) introduce their questionnaire study of vicarious memories with powerful motivations for investigating 'recollections people have of salient life episodes that were told to them by another person'. Their project draws inspiration from published autobiographies, but not from relevant literature in cultural memory studies. Pillemer et al argue that vicarious memories 'dramatically increase the number and diversity of remembered past episodes on which to draw for guidance, inspiration, self-understanding and interpersonal connection'. If episodic memory includes or is tightly entwined with imagining the future, counterfactual thinking, and

scene construction, perhaps it can also incorporate or fuse with vicarious remembering of other people's experiences.

The language, questionnaire methods, and use of an American undergraduate student population firmly mark residual differences between this experimental psychology tradition and the expanded psychology of Brown and Reavey, let alone other, less psychological corners of the memory studies world. But Pillemer and colleagues' findings offer suggestive starting points for integrative future work. Their student participants report experiences of vicarious remembering very similar to their own autobiographical memories, although typically at lower levels of intensity. One intriguing finding is that almost half of the participants reported experiencing at least some vicarious memories from a 'field' perspective, as if through the eyes of the past person who in these cases was not themselves: this may support suggestions of considerable fluidity in the relation between 'field' and 'observer' or external visuospatial perspectives on the past (Sutton, 2014). Pillemer et al. (2015) conclude that 'existing definitions of episodic Autobiographical Memory should be expanded to include mental representations of specific events that happened to other people' (p. 233; see also Thomsen and Pillemer, 2016 on vicarious life stories).

This example confirms that substantial efforts are required to integrate the practices and concepts of the cognitive psychology of memory with cultural memory studies and with parallel investigations in the humanities. But the phenomena of memory do not stay compartmentalised. They circulate, they crop up elsewhere, they fuel other personal, collaborative, and collective practices, in daily life, in the arts, in politics: memory repeatedly takes us beyond memory studies.

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