

Introduction to Memory

Theodore Parker

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Estonian Academy of Music and Theater

During the second day of Lab 5 a number of exercises were explored which make use of Autoethnographic reflection in regard to memory. The documentation videos of this day provide some of the exercises, reflections, and tactics for analysis which can be used in the approach to research. This text provides some of the background information which were used to help prepare the participants for the exercise. Often this information was presented throughout the whole day as small interludes interconnected with the exercises. However, it is presented here in text format for ease of understanding in an online format.

Memory plays in active role in several of the themes discussed in our bootcamp. It contributes to the sense of self as well as the behavior one exhibits in relationship to their social surroundings. The first important aspect to consider is how unreliable one's memory can be. Memories are often inaccurate, and two individuals can have drastically different retellings of the exact same events. Furthermore, verifying a memory can often be difficult as much of the evidence which could corroborate it are lost over time. Often, those professions which rely on the use of individual's memory, such as criminal detectives or legal prosecutors, must compare and contrast a wide range of experiences in hopes that a more stable truth can be derived. However, the instability of memory does not really play a role in how Autoethnography uses the past as a research tool. Arguments regarding this topic are discussed later in this text.

Furthering the discussion past the unverifiable bits of memory, participants were acquainted with the different types of memory as they are defined in psychological research. These include: Explicit, Implicit, Semantic, Episodic, and Cultural memory. Explicit memory requires conscious recall, the individual must retrieve the idea in their mind and is aware of the process they are undertaking. Implicit memory refers to activities which do not require conscious recall, this often applies to routines, habits, and skills. One does not have to recall how to tie their shoes, they simply can do the action while engaging the mind in some other activity. The following three can be seen as subcategories of the explicit/implicit structure. Semantic memories refer to the memorization of facts, ideas, and concrete thoughts. Episodic memories, sometimes referred to as flashbulb memories, refer to events or moments of great importance to the individual and can cover a wide range of emotive and intellectual experiences. Cultural memory refers to the idea of collective memory. Usually these are framed with broad categories which do not pertain only to one individual but can be observed through the subjects inside of an individual culture. These types of memories refer to issues related to national identity, cultural objects, embodied behaviors, and

understandings/interpretations of history. In Autoethnography, episodic and cultural memories can play a key role in extracting subjective data regarding personal experience.

In the bootcamp an idea was proposed for the sake of discussion if something like an artistic memory could perhaps be conceptualized. This was proposed not as biological truism, but for the sake of categorizing what types of information would we place inside of an artistic memory. Some general ideas discussed concerned whether the act of remembering itself is possibly a creative action. Additionally, there was some discussion regarding creative uses of the memory, such as re-staging one's past and/or attempting to sonify and individuals past experiences. Though no conclusions were drawn from this discussion, it should be noted that the idea of artistic memory may contribute to how participants developed through the days exercises.

Memory as a data source is a common tool for Ethnographers. Memory data applies to the collection of stories, perspective on events, the formations of rituals, and the individual's life experience. Such categories do not necessarily differ in Autoethnographic research. The major difference here is in the use of subjectivity in the research process and the types of information focused upon. Autoethnography prefers to focus on the emotive experience as communicated by the subjective experience of an individual. Here, how the individual feels about what they have experienced in a culture is far more significant than any truism about the historicism of a tradition or accuracy of an event. A major connection point for the researcher is to connect their own implicit /explicit memories with the cultural surroundings from which they are born. This connection is the main theme explored during our bootcamp, questioning how we can analyze our own subjective experiences and identities either as a representation of our cultural backgrounds, or as a deviation from it.

There is an additional benefit regarding memory from a subjective individual source as relevant data and representation. Rarely does ethnographic research provide the perspective of the insider or individual with privileged access to a lifestyle or experience. How the individual experiences being an insider of a specific community, what episodic moments they recall in relationship to that community, and how this has contributed to their own formation of identity is the main purpose for taking an autoethnographic approach to social research. In this case the positivistic approach to truth is actually counterproductive to the objective of Autoethnography. The concern is not on what has actually happened in the past, but the individual interpretation of it and the investigation of how such interpretation has been formed. Here memory is more like a substance used to elicit a deeper understanding of the self which can be then used to refer back to the cultural surroundings which have formed it.

Storytelling was one of the main tools used for explicating some of these ideas regarding memory. Stories and storytelling is an ancient form of knowledge transfer. Before the written word,

there were not many other ways to transfer knowledge down to younger and more distant generations. The use of stories is an interesting prospect for knowledge transfer as it's contents, meanings, emotions, and interpretations all arrive at once inside of the narrative's unfolding. This allows the story itself to have pluralistic meanings, each individual may reflect differently on the significance of the narrative for themselves, while at the same time using the story as kind of symbolic representation for some aspect of their heritage and/or culture.

Participants were asked to tell stories focused around a specified theme. The first one chosen in the day was to tell a story about the first creative moment one remembers from their childhood. It was stressed that participants were not to worry about the validity of the story, what mattered most was that they concretely felt they can remember this moment and that they describe it as if they were telling this story to a friend in an everyday conversation. It is important for the individual to not feel that they need to extract a deeper research meaning out of the story at this first stage, as analysis and interpretation can occur after the story is written down or recorded. The researcher can use emotive and self reflective language during the telling of the story, and can even digress from its main content for communicative purposes.

Once the story has been written or recorded the next important step is to analyze and categorize its contents into three containers: Data, Interpretation, and Culture. Data are the bare facts of the story in which no emotive language or reflective language is used. These are not irrelevant to the story, but during the retelling they are simply stated as facts without any emotive or reflective qualities. Any details which are stated during the retelling which fit this description are placed in the Data category. Interpretive refers to statements made during the telling of the story which expose the perspective of the individuals experience. Often these statements use emotive language, include reflections on the events, and perhaps even suggest a meaning why the memory may be important to the individual. Culture refers to any statements made during the story which attempt to relate the experience either directly or metaphorically to others. These are less likely to occur during the telling of the story, but may pop up when reflecting back on the recording or written documentation of it. Our participants were asked to reflect on their individual stories through this prism, in order to access a deeper sense of the meaning of this memory and how it may apply to their current artistic identity and/or research projects.

Often one story will need to be reviewed several times. This happens because ideas which are placed in the Data category may change and enter into the Interpretation or Culture category. It would not be uncommon to experience a transition of such information, because as we reflect on the story new details emerge that may have not been present during the first access of the memory. Furthermore, aspects of how the story may relate to a culture may need contextualization with other

sources or even other memories. In essence one story from our past could be used for quite some time before we are able to exhaust its possible meanings to us.

The following videos for day two of our bootcamp pertain to the use of these kinds of exercises. As stated previously, the methods themselves were presented and enacted without any theoretical context. Ideas concerning theoretical background, analysis methods, and communicative text were addressed as they arose in exploring the method in an effort to help our participants to have a real experience of how the theoretical connects to the actual practice of applying the method.