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Between Individual and Collective Memory: Coordination, Interaction, Distribution

HISTORY ANIMATES DYNAMICAL SYSTEMS

HISTORY ANIMATES DYNAMICAL SYSTEMS AT MANY DIFFERENT timescales.* Brains, people (with their embodied minds and their more or less mindful bodies), small groups, and institutions are all open to the past, both to specific past events and to general past trends and practices, without in general being overwhelmed by it. Coordinating change at many different rates and at many different levels of organization, these interacting and history-dependent open systems exhibit and contribute to a range of phenomena related to remembering. But *how* do they incorporate and act on the basis of their pasts? By what mechanisms, and through what media do traces shape the behavior of these systems?

Such general questions abstract away, for sure, from the specific neural or affective or interpersonal or organizational features that compose and flavor memory processes in particular individuals and collectives. One critic complains that "the positing of a weakly defined type, *generic memory* . . . subsuming both internal and external states and processes" will not be of significant explanatory use (Rupert, 2004). Others think that my search for an integrated framework within which quite different memory-related phenomena might be understood is "a

non-revolutionary approach to embodied cognition," "a project that can be undertaken while leaving much of the cognitive psychology of memory as the study of processes that take place, essentially without exception, within nervous systems" (Adams and Aizawa, 2008: 179). In contrast, my hunch is that an initial levelling of the grounds of inquiry can fruitfully and substantially rejig the terrain of memory studies by flattening out what otherwise often remain the damagingly disconnected domains of distinct disciplines. We want to examine relations between different memory-related phenomena empirically, as the focus for explicit study (Wertsch, 2002: 37-38), rather than starting with any assumed divisions of proprietary labors between psychological and social sciences.

So there is strategic room in memory studies for deterritorializing, refusing to privilege any particular location—whether in neurobiology or in narrative, in cognition or culture—as the single home of our subject-matter. This might help in developing models of the relations between individual and collective memory based not on analogy or parallel or metaphor, but on understanding interactions between distinct yet highly interdependent phenomena. These interactions between forms of memory and between disparate components in and across (transient or enduring) systems take many shapes, revealing cooperation and complementarity as well as competition and conflict. The pluralist framework sketched in this paper for studying such forms of interaction and coordination has many historical predecessors and contemporary resonances across the disciplines that will not be highlighted here (see also Sutton, 2009). Instead, the paper selectively updates recent literature in the philosophy and psychology of memory and distributed cognition, complementing a distinct treatment of related material from a more empirical perspective (Barnier, Sutton, Harris, and Wilson, 2008).

Before embarking on the task of framework construction, here are two examples from recent empirical studies that do justice to the entangling of embodied, cognitive, affective, and cultural dimensions of remembering. Neither is yet a case of "collective memory"; before

seeking conceptual space for one way of characterizing such a notion, it will help first to delineate a broader range of memory phenomena.

In 1999, Kyoko Murakami interviewed British former prisoners of war about a return visit they undertook to Japan almost 50 years after their incarceration there. Seeking to elicit these men's "views on reconciliation with the troubling past," the Japanese interviewer set up an unusual cross-cultural social setting (Murakami, 2001) in which the following exchange occurred (Murakami's transcript conventions follow those developed by Gail Jefferson for conversation analysis):

Ted: I haven't worked all morning getting it right for you just to look at it

Audrey: Well—well I usually eat first and then [I (. . .)

Ted: [(right) right. (Now) what would you like to hear about (.) would you like to hear how

Interviewer: yes, uhm (.) are you finished with all—

Ted: aye we're all right (.) [we're all right

Mary: [yes yes

Ted: [I am all right (.) you are in charge now

Interviewer: oh (.) no (.) hohoho

Ted: you give the orders *Kyo:tsuke:h*

Interviewer: hh no no no no I'm not here for that (.) hehh (.) um ((drink))

Ted: (now hurry up when) (.) Charlie's out and then you might get some (.) order (.) heh he[h

Mary: [heh heh heh

Like many of the war veterans, Ted uses a Japanese phrase—*Kyotsukee*, "stand to attention"—and couples it with embodied actions: Murakami also describes the use of *ichi-ni-san-shi* and *sagyoo sagyoo* ("one

two three four," and "work, work!"), likewise shifting these conversations between their physical and temporal location in English homes and a quite different zone of personal and power relations. At the transition into the interview proper, the hesitant researcher resists the power Ted is ascribing to her: he follows up by announcing "you give the orders" and using the Japanese for "stand to attention," *Kyotsukee*. As Middleton and Brown note in commenting on this extraordinary moment, the utterance creates "trouble" in the interaction, bringing the moral order of the wartime labor camp somehow in to the present with a "visceral shock" (Middleton and Brown, 2005: 134-5). Its effect is not due to its meaning alone, but also to the incorporated and affective force of the word as a material symbol: Ted's highly charged autobiographical memories do not (in this exchange) appear in deliberate reference to particular past experiences, but filtered through the partial enactment of once habitual movement and permeating the present social setting. Whatever remembering is occurring in that utterance, there is no "we" here and now: the interviewer is not among those with whom Ted's relevant experiences were shared. Big history, personal memory, and bodily practices are concentrated together in this uneasy intrusive communication.

A second example also shows embodied and intercultural interaction in coordinating communication about the past, this time in a technologically saturated context. Cognitive anthropologists Nomura and Hutchins (2007) studied the microprocesses of interaction between Japanese training pilots and American flight instructors. Among many multimodal productions of situated communication involving bodily and speaking practices to facilitate joint reasoning, they identify an intriguing example of fluid switching across two people to reinterpret the shared recent past. As trainee and instructor talk about several hard landings in the flight simulator, the trainee looks through a small oval made with his index fingers and thumbs to indicate a particular perspective on the approach to the runway. While the trainee struggles to articulate what's happened verbally, his articulate gesture "has created an opening for the instructor to complete the discourse." Picking up

and reusing this same gesture, the instructor transforms it smoothly to show a new visual perspective on the runway. He then turns his right hand to model the first part of the runway itself, then the motion of the plane down the glide path. The instructor next hits his right hand onto his left three times to indicate what he simultaneously calls "the firmer touchdowns" the pair have recently experienced in the simulator. In a last rapid movement sequence, he makes the same hand model first the plane's starting flare and then an appropriate movement of the trainee pilot's hand in manipulating the controls.

The shared gesture, woven together with linguistic utterances, is here taken up into a rich common structure of meaning as the communicators switch together between distinct referents and points of view: the multimodal communication encompasses remembering, and shared imagining as well as suggesting or instructing. In using gesture and speech together to take the trainee pilot again in memory through the events they have recently shared, the instructor ensures that there is sufficient shared understanding. The two are jointly committed to remembering together, and are pooling their wills well enough to be able to learn from this shared memory activity. Such malleable interpersonal coordination, in which recent history so directly animates both hand and talk, works remarkably smoothly across bodies, words, and machines even in this complex intercultural environment, as parts of the shared past are picked up for renegotiation and joint attention in the present training episode.

These two examples show memory in the wild, even in these highly unusual and constrained settings, in that multiple forms of remembering are operating at once both within and across individuals, and in that memory cannot in practice be isolated from emotion, action, or language. In showing how easily a great variety of history-carrying operators—linguistic and gestural, specialist and idiosyncratic—draw on and influence our history-carrying schemas, they set the bar high for both analytic frameworks and empirical approaches in memory studies. We can now work back to more mundane and artificial examples in describing the diversity of relations between individual and shared memories.

A RANGE OF SOCIAL MEMORY PHENOMENA

In a recent overview of social memory studies, Jeffrey Olick notes that despite "the mutual affirmations of psychologists who want more emphasis on the social and sociologists who want more emphasis on the cognitive," in fact "actual cross-disciplinary research . . . has been much rarer than affirmations about its necessity and desirability" (2008: 23). Olick calls for "at least a basic lexicon so that we do not all feel compelled to reinvent the wheel in our first footnotes, paragraphs or chapters" (2008: 22). James Wertsch likewise complains about the "bogus disagreements" in the field that "reflect a continuing lack of agreement about what the basic categories of collective memory are" (2002: 34). Terminological confusion about "collective memory" could be due to the *multiplicity* of relevant and undertheorized phenomena, not to their nonexistence. It is not that theory or science has settled what counts as a case of remembering, and that different theorists then disagree over whether anything within that fixed domain is in fact *collective* remembering. Rather, what might look like competing theoretical approaches may in fact apply to distinct but complementary aspects of the world of memory phenomena (Hirst and Manier, 2008). So one aim should be to integrate observations of and claims about social memory phenomena into a broader picture of the mechanisms underlying the transformation of *all* kinds of memories. Even if our best theories of individual memory are partly amended or transformed, they will naturally remain central to the interdisciplinary enterprise. Mainstream cognitive psychologists are entirely aware that "in many circumstances in society, remembering is a social event" (Roediger, Bergman, and Meade, 2000: 129).

The examples discussed above both reflect relatively transitory social settings, albeit ones to which each party brings long-standing experiences or skills. They already suggest that many distinct dimensions of variation can be plotted and probed. The challenge is to provide a theoretical framework for robust, empirically accessible notions of "collective memory" in which the term is not "unavoidably obliterating fine distinctions" (Gedi and Elam, 1996: 30). We can sketch three

emblematic abstract kinds of memory case, which contrast in familiar ways, before beginning to firm up some relevant dimensions.

An incident occurs on a busy street corner: an accident, or a bag is snatched. Various bystanders happen to witness the events, and some are later asked for statements. They are explicitly instructed not to discuss the case with each other: their testimony could be contaminated by collaborative recall. Despite the idiosyncrasies of perspective and the fragility of eyewitness memory, the stories in this case pretty much match up: the different memories of the event come out, to some relevant standard of satisfaction, as the same. Although it was accidental that these people experienced the same event, their separate memories can be aggregated and compiled into a narrative that more or less hangs together: case closed.

Now imagine a group of friends travelling together. They plan the great trip and take it, experiencing together the cities or great rivers they had long talked about: they share thrills and dangers, encounter surprises and difficulties and hilarities, they go through emotional extremes and transitions together. Later, things go wrong, as they can: maybe the cracks were already there, but in any case their lives afterward diverge and the group drifts apart. Each of them retains personal memories of the trip, as well as the souvenirs and the photos. Their personal memories are selective and idiosyncratic of course, perhaps colored by later changes of heart, but they overlap and include various common experiences and shared emotions. If they occasionally think, years on, of the others in the group with whom they have lost touch, they each still know that those others also remember those times. What is shared in these memories is not accidental: the remembered plans were shared plans, the remembered actions joint actions. Even if the former friends are not talking to each other and have put it all behind them, a third party with a different agenda—a journalist, a descendant—could still aggregate their memory reports and compile a narrative that more or less hangs together.

But contrast this with another possibility: that relations continued to flourish, and the trip or some of its aspects became deeply woven

into the narrative thread of ongoing friendships. Alongside whatever personal significance these remembered experiences have, the shared memories also have a distinct and ongoing interpersonal significance. Perhaps two of the group ended up as partners; perhaps the whole group continued to travel (or to work) together, and that first big trip took on iconic status; or maybe they merely meet up again from time to time for the odd quiet chat and—amid the gossip and updating—more often than not they return to those stories. Perhaps, across and through the shared pleasure of remembering the escapades, some of them reconsider their priorities or values in part on the basis of, or by way of, retelling and reinterpreting those early times on the road. In presenting themselves to outsiders, members of the group may reasonably develop expectations about the way the shared past should best be presented, and tacit commitments to play their part in doing so. Occasionally, in a long-standing close network, significant reevaluation of relationships and plans is partly enacted through renegotiation of some still-live past. The narratives that more or less hang together themselves have ongoing motivational and action-guiding roles, though the events narrated are long gone.

It is easy to multiply, vary, and twist such examples, across which thoughts or statements of the form "we remember . . ." have quite different context-dependent implications. Remaining within the realm of small groups, where the interdependence of individual and collective memory may be easier to study than in (for example) nations, we can attend to the size and nature of different groups with different histories, aims, and structures, and in which members play diverse roles. Parents and children reminisce about significant family events; colleagues remind each other of information relevant to an important group decision; and skilled practitioners who play music or sports together talk through past performances in planning for their next challenge. Groups rely on different patterns of information-sharing and transmission, on different distributions of decision-making and reporting roles, and on different mechanisms for tracking the group's past commitments and actions.

Existing methods in cognitive, developmental, and organizational psychology already suggest ways to analyze the dynamics and microprocesses of collaboration and discussion in different groups, their uses of different media for informational and social exchange, their explicit or implicit social decision schemes, and their responses to disagreement. Mainstream empirical paradigms for studying collaborative recall, memory contagion, and especially transactive memory (Wegner, 1987) are being extended to more significant emotional and autobiographical material (Barnier and Sutton, 2008; Barnier, Sutton, Harris, and Wilson, 2008; Harris, Paterson, and Kemp, 2008). We can study both the processes of remembering together, and the expressions that emerge, whether consensual or contested. If there are shared cognitive states, they are not restricted only to these occurrent outputs, such as "expressions in a public language," as critics suggest (Rupert, 2005). As well as these emergent products, we also want to understand the more enduring potentials that underlie the group's capacities to engage with the past. It is this consideration that motivates attention to traces. Such dispositional states can take the form of information or habits or artifacts, and may be widely distributed across different people and across records or instruments or rituals, with no single individual or archive necessarily holding more than partial or incomplete traces or resources: these are then merged or compiled often on the fly, in the moment, for some particular purpose, and then perhaps recoded or reconsolidated or restored in transformed state.

Whatever the nature and the dynamics of the group, the past events and experiences on which its subsequent activities may depend can themselves vary, as our examples show. The experiences may have been quite deliberately shared, the product of joint deliberation for some collective goal, or accidentally shared, yet still driving some significant later episode. Alternatively, group processes can focus on events that were originally unshared, but which nonetheless influence current projects, and which may have been entirely unique to one or a subset of group members, or similar in their separate impact on each member.

Already, then, we create a feel for the kind of multidimensional space in which studies of social memory phenomena can operate, and in which a notion of true "collective memory" marks not a metaphysically distinct set of sociocognitive systems that differ from "individual memory" on some single discoverable criterion, but rather a region in this space in which the cases of shared remembering under investigation score more highly on more of these relevant dimensions. It could turn out that few real-world cases occupy these further reaches, in which enduring, cohesive, purposive groups collectively reconstruct emerging versions of the shared past that differ significantly from any mere juxtaposition of individual memories. But then, equally, some other corners of this multidimensional space might also be fairly empty—such as those in which isolated individuals privately reproduce unique and unshared experiences for no real or implied audience, untouched by social or contextual influence. The past is not, in general, processed by impersonal groups or technologies wholly divorced from the affective and motivational concerns of their members or users. Nor is it, in general, processed solely by naked brains bereft of feedback and support.

As is apparent by now, the framework suggested here works outward from cases that involve some personal experience of some events remembered, setting aside for current purposes the important but distinct forms of "collected memory" (Olick, 1999: 338) or "collective knowledge" (Wertsch, 2002: 27) that do not directly relate to the experiences of those remembering. The laudable wish to "bring people back in" and to restore psychological dynamics to collective memory scholarship (Schwartz and Schuman, 2005: 183, 198-200) has, in some recent social-scientific literature, been identified most closely with approaches that aggregate individual beliefs about the distant past, and thus tap in primarily to the spread or distribution of attitudes or of semantic or factual memory. But the investigation of shared personal memories may also reveal intriguing and different pathways between individual and collective memory. To support this possibility, the next section steps back to flesh out some under-noticed features of personal memory that make it apt for various forms of integration into larger

sociocognitive-mnemonic systems. We examine some social and personal roles or functions of remembering, and then briefly sketch the significance of the constructivist consensus in the psychology of memory.

REMEMBERING AND TEMPORALLY EXTENDED AGENCY

Personal remembering is a context-sensitive activity from the start. As young children build on their initial abilities to understand typical sequences of events, their capacity to remember particular past experiences is supported and shaped by adults. Joint attention to the shared past emerges in an interactive social environment, as children come to see that there can be different perspectives on the same past time. The child's changing competence in dialogue about the past in turn influences the parent's reminiscence style, encouraging the dynamic or spiral co-construction of richer narratives (Sutton, 2009). Spontaneous self-conscious thought about the personal past is a gradual development out of these memory-sharing practices, which can vary considerably in nature, frequency, and significance across contexts and cultures (Nelson and Fivush, 2004). One condition for its full emergence, which may be surprisingly late, is that the child picks up the causal connections between events in time, and within the child's own history. Some grasp of the temporal asymmetry of experience is needed to understand that, in principle at least, remembered events can be integrated on a connected temporal dimension. Children's personal memory, then, is a sophisticated achievement closely linked not only to their emerging self-awareness and understanding of other minds, but also to their recognition that they cannot change the past, and that their actions are unique and irrevocable (Campbell, 1997; Hoerl, 1999; Hoerl and McCormack, 2005).

Because early personal remembering is socially situated in this way, it is also, from the outset, tightly meshed with emotional and social/ moral development. Mature social practices, such as promising and forgiving, and some central complex emotions, such as grief, love, and regret, depend on personal memory and on a grasp of temporal

relations. It's not just that the fallible but more-or-less reliable operation of memory in two or more people is required to give them current informational access to the past times at which their paths have crossed. Personal memory's affective tone and influence means that, in addition to its causal links to the past, it also has forward-looking functions, as both psychologists and philosophers have argued (Alea and Bluck, 2003; Conway, 2005; Nelson, 2003; Poole, 2008; Wollheim, 1984). Remembering can keep what happened in the past alive, giving it significance for ongoing relationships and projects. As Wollheim suggests, the past affects people in such a way that they become creatures with a past. We do not need to assume any fixed account of the relations between individual and collective memory to note that any group that is itself partly held together by, or identified with, particular accounts of the shared past may itself use its past in some of these same ways.

So among the identity-maintaining and directive functions of personal memory is its bidirectional role in driving self-fulfilling self-narratives. I remember what I did and what happened to me, for sure, and in part I remember according to my self-conception: my peculiar selectivity or angle on my personal past depends partly on the kind of person I take myself to be, and I will sometimes remold or revise my personal memories on the basis of changes in that self-conception (Ross 1989). But as well as my self-concept's influence on memory, memory in turn influences my life, in a familiar feedback loop: my decision-making, choices, and attributions of significance are driven in part by the content of those ongoing activities of remembering that have themselves been sculpted by my working selves with their goals and their motivations (Barnier et al., 2007; Conway, 2005).

In their detailed operation, these loops between self-descriptions and self-conceptions exhibit considerable individual, cultural, and contextual variation. Sometimes, or in some people, there will be stronger, more direct feedback from reflective self-representation into behavior, with ongoing integration lived out between actions and self-ascribed character, emotions, memories, and plans (Velleman, 2006). But in other people or on other occasions, there can be significant gulfs

between autobiography and the control of action, since we can get by with less coherence between story and life, with narrative self-descriptions more like a government's or an organization's public relations reports that float fairly free of the causal processes behind its behavior. This does not have to be morally or psychologically suspect, due to deliberate suppression or (self-)deceit, for the narrative capacities—like the PR spokesperson—often will not have or need the knowledge or the contacts or the access either to get the backstory right or, crucially, to play the right kind of motivating role in reflexively feeding in to future choices and actions (compare Clark, 1994).

But the mechanisms by which life tracks stories, when and to whatever changing extent it does, also often loop out into the social world. I can make up my own actions on the fly by myself: sitting in my armchair I may think or announce "I'm going for a walk," when the declaration is causally responsible for getting me up and out of the door rather than a report of an already-made decision. But—perhaps even more commonly—my mind is made up and my course of action determined jointly with others. I give voice, for example, to a conditional intention—"I'll go for a walk if you will"—and if (and only if) you answer (or indicate) "Then I will!" then off we go. In Velleman's persuasive analysis of shared intention, our effective conditional intentions combine to form "a single representation that causes our actions by representing itself as causing them—a single token intention that is literally shared between us" (1997: 47). Building on an account of intentions as representations that can cause what they refer to, Velleman here integrates philosophy of mind with social ontology by showing how such completings of partial or incomplete intentions can straddle individuals. If the concept of the "plural subject" (Gilbert, 1989) can also be applied to the case of memory, it will likewise have to be integrated with a rich picture of the dynamics and functions of remembering in general.

We return to this challenge for the social ontology of memory below, but first we need briefly to address a different strand of research on individual memory that might, on some interpretations, seem in some tension with the current interactionist approach. This is the

firm and now long-standing consensus in cognitive psychology that remembering is a constructive activity (Engel, 1999; McClelland, 1995; Schacter, 1999; Sutton, 1998). This means, first, that remembering is not determined—in its form or its content—by what was encoded alone, or by any stored traces. Instead, any "engram" or memory trace in mind or brain enters into a live and interactive relation or conspiracy with the current cue and the surrounding circumstances. Second, such engrams or traces are themselves reconsidered within a flexible and dynamic picture of "storage," on which memories do not sit round passively between experience and recall. Traces are plastic and open to influence, potentially permeated by subsequent history, as interest-ridden and "interest-carried" as Bartlett had suggested (1932: 212).

These constructivist views can and should, as I will argue in a moment, reinforce the picture we are after of remembering as distributed across neural, bodily, social, material, and institutional resources. But an influential alternative interpretation construes the influence to which individuals are open in primarily negative terms, treating the plasticity and malleability of inner processes as troubling, as leaving our memories vulnerable to external distortion and corruption. Interpersonal aspects of remembering from this perspective appear as the relentless intrusion of the social into individual memory. Research on misinformation effects has led to important safeguards in the context of legal concerns about suggestibility or cowitness discussion. Yet while social forces can contaminate or inhibit, perhaps they can also facilitate and support memory. Sue Campbell (2003, 2006) has persuasively argued that much successful remembering is relational: our attempts to be faithful to the past, or to maintain values like integrity in dealing with the past, can often be centrally supported and guided positively by listeners or participants in shared memory activities. Both ordinary memory narratives and more public testimonial activities can be coconstructed.

Campbell's philosophical case can here be enhanced by reference to psychological studies of the role of listening and uptake in talk about the past (Pasupathi, 2001), and of the widespread "social sharing of emotion" in regard to autobiographical episodes (Rimé, 2007).

But Campbell goes on to argue, further, that locating appropriate emotion in the activity of remembering can be a significant component of recollective accuracy, where accuracy is understood in a broad and context-dependent way: representational success in memory is rarely a simple matter of matching an isolated present item to a single past event, for the events and experiences remembered are themselves, after all, complex and structured. Commonplace memory-sharing practices bring obligations and accountability along with them; and when negotiations concern experiences that were themselves shared, the epistemic and affective mnemonic interdependence between individuals is magnified further. We can of course rightly criticize a rememberer for errors, but more common than straightforwardly false memories, perhaps, are faults to do with the choice of grain or precision in recall. We all know people who give us far too much irrelevant detail about what has happened, or who offer only very general reflections, or who do not or will not engage with what seem the key relevant concerns or emotions in relation to the events they recall. Getting the appropriate perspective on the past for what is required in the present is one aim of remembering, and it is rarely a simple matter.

In resisting the more extreme individualism of certain kinds of false memory research—by which social effects on individual memory are unremittingly malign—we can thus more wholeheartedly embrace the constructivist vision of the neuropsychological bases of human memory. It is just because items of information are not in general held in stable and discrete form in the brain that we so pervasively lean on and think with the diverse bits of the world—social and material alike—in which we are collectively embedded (Clark, 2006; Donald, 1991: 308-333; Rowlands, 1999: 119-147; Sutton, 2009).

Distribution, coordination, and integration also operate, of course, within the brain as well (Clark, 2007a, 2007b; Hutchins, 2006: 376; Wilson and Clark, 2009). So a further implication of the current view is that existing neuropsychological dichotomies between putatively distinct *internal* memory systems too should not be overemphasised. Standard phenomenological and neural separations of declarative memory from procedural

and skill memory, for example, are being rethought in light of dynamical network-oriented neuroscience, which reveals evidence of substantial corticostriatal interactivity in the context-sensitive exercise of skills as well as in their acquisition, and of the openness of "automatic" habits and routine actions under certain circumstances to top-down influence (Yin and Knowlton, 2006). The varied and subtle coordination of disparate elements in distributed systems has to occur under time constraints whatever the mix of neural, bodily, interpersonal, and institutional resources involved (Kirsh, 2006).

None of this is to say that the study of more collective memory phenomena, to which we now return, is not special: the media and the mechanisms that support interpersonal and artifactual contributions to remembering differ dramatically, of course, from those operating in the brain. The cognitive neuropsychology of memory and the cognitive psychology of memory are each vast and heterogeneous fields, each with their own diverse subdomains, some of which focus more than others on interactions between distinct components within larger cognitive and memory systems, and some of which rely more than others on methods and data from elsewhere among the disciplines of memory. The approach to social memory phenomena that I am recommending is not intended (absurdly) to replace these projects with their greater attention to intra-individual processes. Rather, the aim is to encourage memory researchers at all points in the interdisciplinary spectrum to keep an eye out for contexts in which the disparate processes involved in remembering—neural, cognitive, habitual, interpersonal, organizational, archival, and so on—are complementary and interactive. Because we are so adept at hooking up our human brains with systems that use dramatically different formats and dynamics, it will sometimes be useful to study how all of these distributed systems coordinate.

TOWARD A SOCIAL ONTOLOGY OF MEMORY: PROSPECTS AND PUZZLES

I have argued that some kinds of thought and talk about shared past experiences reflect stronger kinds of shared memory and shared

remembering. They may, but need not, receive explicit expression (by one or more parties) in the form of a "We remember . . ." thought or statement. Active discussion of (or other forms of joint attention to) the shared past is one possible outcome of the context-dependent activation or merging of relevant enduring states that may be spread across different people and/or objects. In some such cases, each individual might in other contexts still access the same memories in a similar way with similar meaning—it might only be the ease (rather than the very possibility) of such access that the social group facilitates. In other cases, what has been retained by the individual may be incomplete or "shrouded" (Halbwachs, 1950/1980: 71). But in either kind of case, whatever individuals *could* in principle do and remember alone, one job for memory studies is the investigation of how they *actually* work over and return to their pasts. Of the former students who attend a 20-year high school reunion, for example, some have maintained strong social links with their fellows over the years, while others' lives have taken quite different paths. Among those who have regularly rehearsed their shared past, slight cues now prompt new exchanges of memories and rich swapping of the funny or significant events long ago. In the one-off encounter, however, it is much harder for those who have had limited contact to find relevant detail on many aspects of the mutual history (Barnier, Harris, Sutton, and Wilson, 2008; Vinitzky-Seroussi, 1998).

What is the best way of understanding cases in which the shared history of a small group and its members does more pervasively animate present activities and thoughts? Is there any useful explanatory work for a robust social ontology of memory to do here, or can all these interesting phenomena of interdependence and mutual renegotiation of the shared past "be explained without invoking anything beyond the conservative ontology of individuals and their states" (Rupert, 2005)? While awaiting longer-term evaluations of the burgeoning interdisciplinary research programs that do invoke stronger notions of shared or collective memory and remembering, we can already seek to ward off at least some reasons for unease about them, and indicate some constructive frameworks in which to place them.

Does a robust notion of true collective memory entail and thus depend on a robust and reawakened notion of a group mind? With philosophers and social scientists alike retreating from "metaphorical" or "metaphysical" misapplications of individual-level concepts to collectives, there are a number of options here. *Memory* could be construed more functionally still, and rendered thoroughly generic, as suggested at the outset of this essay, and thus as not intrinsically "mental" (whatever that means) at all (compare Velleman, 1997: 37 on intention). Rupert suggests that any group mental state must be the state of a *mind*, invoking Descartes' certainty that a mind must exist if there is thinking going on at all (Rupert, 2005). In contrast, the divorce of collective memory from the group mind might be supported by arguing that "mind" is a much trickier, less well-grounded and well-entrenched, and more culturally and historically specific concept than "memory" or (for that matter) "belief," "thought," "action," and the like. This consideration suggests, at least, that the direction of logical dependence is not so clear: if it is still maintained that any memory is *ipso facto* mental, then whether there are collective mental states will depend, in part, on whether there are collective memories (compare Velleman, 1997: 38 on intention).

Next, we can note that the multidimensional framework outlined above suggests that there will be no sharp distinguishing line between any cases of true collective remembering and other cases in which remembering is less heavily dependent on a social group or social process in its manifestation and flavor. Since we tend to think of a mind as something that either exists or does not, again a decision about the explanatory utility of more robust notions of collective memory and remembering may be better divorced from assessments of revised group-mind hypotheses. Certain kinds or episodes of remembering may indeed be best conceived as intra-individual processes with their own dynamics to which external and social inputs are merely triggers or cues, while other kinds or episodes of remembering occur only when the individuals engaged in them form part of a social group of a certain kind (Wilson, 2005; Barnier, Sutton, Harris, and Wilson, 2008). The open

question is whether, in yet other kinds or episodes of remembering, which differ from these latter cases in subtle ways on a range of dimensions, it may still be fruitful to see the group itself as remembering.

With these disclaimers in place, we can now conclude by briefly examining possibilities for a more wholehearted attempt at a naturalistic ontology for true collective memory. It is curious that the literature on memory in the social sciences has as yet made little contact with what should be the most helpful philosophical tradition here, the diverse defenses of the "plural subject" and related notions in social ontology (Gilbert, 1989; Pettit, 2003; Tuomela, 2002). Assuming that "human size is not basic to agency" (Rovane, 2003: 181), such work in social ontology has developed robust analyses of notions like shared or joint action, mutual or collective belief, and shared intention. But, in turn, even when that work has addressed diachronic and historical aspects of groups, it has paid little attention to memory (List, 2008; Pettit, 2003; Pettit and Schweikard, 2006). Although the application of these analyses to the case of memory will take considerable care since memory (of the kinds discussed in this essay) has various features that distinguish it from either belief or action, there is room here for natural alliances between social ontology, distributed cognition, and the interdisciplinary study of remembering (Tollefsen, 2006; Sutton, 2009).

Margaret Gilbert in particular builds these analyses into a general picture of the "plural subject" as a number of people who are jointly committed in certain ways (1989; 2004; 2007). It must not be accidental that group members share certain beliefs, or participate in certain activities; particular kinds of common knowledge or webs of mutual awareness must be in play concerning the sharing or the joint action. Similarly, as we have seen, the fact that many individuals all happen to remember the same episodes does not make a collective memory; following Gilbert, we can look in addition for group members' joint readiness or standing commitment to remember certain experiences as appropriate and in certain ways. A strength of Gilbert's picture is in suggesting how, where group members pool their wills and become a plural subject (the subject of the "we remember" thoughts and claims),

this introduces the characteristic set of obligations and expectations that participation in a community of memory brings. While there is always room for disagreement and renegotiation over the details and meaning of the shared past, both within the group and in relation to outside agents, this structure of commitments already exhibits the coercive force of shared memories.

In turn, Philip Pettit's distinctive picture of group agency stresses the need for diachronic coherence and consistency in genuinely purposive groups. Truly integrated collectivities are (fallibly) responsive to reasons, and care about making sense over time in their decision making and in their actions; a change of plan must be acknowledged and explained rather than simply shrugged off. Thus "groups with minds of their own" rely on substantive mechanisms of intertemporal accounting in keeping track of past judgments and actions to check how they constrain present decisions and plans (Pettit, 2003). The characteristic forms of coordination for shared purposes that groups exhibit thus impose two requirements. One, which Pettit explores in detail, is the possibility of "stark discontinuity" between the group's belief or decision and the beliefs or wishes of many or even all group members: because relying on mere aggregations or majorities will often lead to inconsistency in the group's actions over time, a diachronically coherent group is committed to submerging individual will or attitude where necessary just because it is answerable at this collective level. The other, suggested by the discussion above of the bidirectional roles of remembering, is that forms of memory must operate at group level in generating, as well as in recording, the right kind of group self-regulation over time. This point invites investigation of the range of ways in which different effective groups and organizations use their histories and memories, coordinating for present purposes what can be widely distributed over people and practices.

From the distinctive approaches to social ontology by Gilbert and Pettit of which I have offered bare sketches here, we can see that memory studies can potentially draw ingredients toward a less mysterious account of collective memory, adding them to the experimental

traditions independently investigating collaborative and transactive memory. Crucially, in these traditions there is nothing incompatible with the best pictures of individual cognition, but rather an acknowledgement of the various ways in which shared purposes and shared processes can elicit specific forms of coordination and interaction. New questions are also suggested, for empirical as well as theoretical attention. Do collective memories ever exhibit the "stark discontinuity" with individual memories that can occur with (for example) collective beliefs? As well as the features that shared memories have in common with shared beliefs and with joint actions respectively, what might be unique to the "plural subject" analysis of remembering? When considering shared memories of shared experiences, do we build in to our analysis the kind of causal links between experience and remembering that seem to be required in the individual case? How do shared or mutual beliefs permeate or shape or fill in memories of shared experiences? Many different things happen where there is negotiation of the shared past in a group with a history and shared purposes. Psychology and the social sciences have to coordinate better to understand these diverse and ordinary cases in which some "we" is the plural subject of memory.

This paper has presented a fast and abstract view over a number of potential elements for the design of a multidimensional framework for understanding relations between individual and collective memory and remembering. Attention to the forms and mechanisms of coordination or competition between distinct components of cognitive systems can be fruitful no matter how distributed the resources, no matter how collective the episode. This is so whether we are investigating the dynamics of interaction between memory systems in a single brain, or the uses of gesture and technology in two people's communication about recent shared experiences, or the subtler influences of personal and political history on embodied interactions in some present social context. However metaphysical and pragmatic debates about the best use of the term "memory" turn out, there may be explanatory gain, for at least some of the relevant sciences, from invoking processes that

span brain, body, and social world and that thus operate simultaneously on states with very different formats and dynamics.

NOTES

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