

Introduction to Cultural
Analysis Volume 7, Special
Issue: *Memory*.

Even beginning to speak of memory is difficult, because what is memory? If it exists, which it must, then where is it located? A list of possible answers includes books, petroglyphs, neurons, traditions, narratives, architecture, film, and oak trees. Different disciplines address the question of memory differently, from computer science to ethnic studies. While the functioning of memory is assuredly rooted in biological phenomena, there is a general agreement across many disciplines that the experience of memory involves something more complex than even the intricate network of brain impulses that sustains it. In this sense, memory is a multi-tiered process, something that involves the coming together of biological, psychological, linguistic, social and cultural elements.

There is a general agreement that memory involves recalling the past, whether of one's own individual experience, or of a learned (social) memory. In cognitive science, Tulving's work on memory (*e.g.*, 1972, 1983) has proved seminal at modeling different types of individual memory, such as the procedural, and episodic. Both types we share with much of the animal kingdom (see, *e.g.*, Clayton *et al* 1988, 2007). Humanity's use of complex language, narratives, and (more recently) inscriptions has pushed our social, learned memory to a particular complexity and rhetorical power. Yet when one attempts to trace the sources of this power, they quickly

become diffuse. Across cultures there are broad similarities in the practice and expression of memory, yet myriad cultural differences between groups and even between individuals intimately link memory practices to cultural contexts. Similarly, different modes of memory activities become popular or unpopular (film, heritage sites, contemporary ballad festivals), yet just as assuredly the changes are not completely random.

Scholars of folklore have long been at the forefront of research on the connections between memory and culture. However antiquated some of their theories might seem today, the early works of the antiquarian folklorists, at least as far back as the Grimms' *Deutsche Sagen* (1816-18), reflected many concerns with the collective remembrance of the past that would not be unfamiliar to contemporary scholars of cultural memory. With the increased emphasis on individuals as the originators and disseminators of folklore in the twentieth century, folklorists increasingly sought to interrogate the part played by individual memory in the maintenance and reproduction of traditional culture. (Wesselski 1925; 1931; 1934; Anderson 1923; 1935; Lord 1960) In recent years, more nuanced investigations of the interplay of social and cultural elements in the lives of traditional performers (Dégh 1969; Pentikäinen 1978; Glassie 1982; Holbek 1987) have led some scholars to call for a reinvigoration of the concept of "collective creation" of traditional materials, including historical remembrances, rejected outright by many folklorists in the early twentieth century. (Hafstein 2004)

The multifarious nature of memory often demands an interdisciplinary approach, a demand that often yields conflicts and confusion in equal proportion to its rewards. All interdisciplinary work is fraught with the potential for miscommunication and misunderstandings, dogged by the difficulties of mastering multiple knowledge sets. Yet, at the same time, this halting, stuttering conversation is desperately needed, in order for scholars to agree upon basic foundational ideas and expose points of conceptual disjunction between disciplinary methodologies.

In this volume, scholars from a wide variety of disciplines, from psychology to cultural studies, have contributed their perspectives on the interplay of society, culture and memory through the vehicle of narrative. As such, the work assembled here proposes to investigate the relationship between memory and narrative on levels ranging from the minutely biological to the broadly cultural.

In his article, "Where was I?: Personal Experience Narrative, Crystallization and Some Thoughts on Tradition Memory", folklorist Timothy R. Tangherlini brings the findings of his extensive scholarship and fieldwork on legend and personal experience narration (Tangherlini 1990; 1994; 1998; 2003) to bear on some of the basic models of memory processes put forward by psychologists and cognitive scientists. Tangherlini argues for the creation of a new model of traditional memory that can more accurately account for the variegated findings of folklorists with respect to the skill level of traditional narrators.

David Rubin and Bergsveinn Birgisson bring forward a variety of critiques of Tangherlini's approach in their respective responses to his article. Aside from the specific points Rubin and Birgisson address in Tangherlini's article, their critical discussion serves to highlight several places of substantial theoretical disjunction between the approaches of folklorists and those more familiar with the approaches of cognitive scientists. While contemporary folklorists have tended to conceptualize tradition and traditional memory as a set of tensions between the individual and the social, the works of psychologists and cognitive scientists, as well as scholars who follow their approaches, have tended to see tradition and memory more as the activity of individuals. Under the latter model, cognitive functioning is located so firmly in individualized biological bases of memory that other extrasomatic instances of memory are often difficult to locate. Nonetheless, the overlap of interest in memory between these disciplines should serve to formulate new theoretical models bridging the individualized biological bases and the shared, learned memories, including those embedded in narratives, stone, and paper.

Sara Reith follows this path through landscape and ballad by investigating social memory among the now-settled Travellers of Scotland, and in particular its loci in such places as "Auld Cruvie", the giant, ancient Oak tree, and in ballads, photos, and other physical mementoes. Expanding upward from the level of individual memory, Reith's work suggests some of the possibilities for ethnographic work to develop a fuller understanding of the deeply social aspects of

individual memories. But, perhaps more importantly, her work demonstrates the strong role that these memories of a disappeared lifestyle play in the continued maintenance of group identity. In Reith's work, one can see the significance for these disadvantaged communities to continue to remember walking roads that they, as individuals, perhaps have never visited.

Similarly, the landscape as inscribed memory features strongly in Ihab Saloul's work on Palestinian filmic memory, as does the experience of cultural loss. Loss, in this context, takes two forms. First, Saloul discusses the erasure of the geographical touchstones for social memory, a procedure that potentially inhibits the functioning of social memory. In its second context, however, Saloul points not to the loss of memory, but the collective memory of loss embedded in a film as a route for present and future generations to share remembrances of the past. As Saloul suggests, this type of filmic memory toys with the traditional and the official, with the real and the fictional. In doing so, Saloul reveals the critical importance of understanding the role of extrasomatic prosthetics, such as modern media, in the development of social memory across a widely dispersed population.

The three articles in Volume 7 address very different, yet highly significant, aspects of memory across a wide range of disciplinary concerns. The challenges to assembling meaningful interdisciplinary dialogues and models on such a large topic are substantial, and daunting. As Beiner (this volume) rightly observes, for instance, the process of forgetting

that is implicit all work on memory is rarely given the scholarly attention that it deserves, a point also made in his 2007 book on Irish folk historiography, *Remembering the Year of the French*. (Beiner 2007)

Memory studies continues to have a need for meaningful and substantial cross-disciplinary dialogue, as work from a variety of disciplines continues to expose the very different aspects of memory. More importantly, perhaps, the flexibility of approaches that characterizes all three pieces in this volume gives us hope that such dialogue, however difficult, will produce meaningful interdisciplinary models in the future, in order that all scholars might agree as to what we mean when we speak of memory.

Cultural Analysis is pleased to contribute to this project in our special issue volume 7: *Memory*.

Anthony Bak Buccitelli,
Tok Thompson,
Editors, *Cultural Analysis*

Works Cited

- Anderson, Walter. 1951. *Ein Volkskundliches Experiment*, Folklore Fellows Communications 141. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica.
- . 1956. *Eine Neue Arbeit Zur Experimentellen Volkskunde*, Folklore Fellows Communications 168. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

- _____. 1923. *Kaiser Und Abt: Die Geschichte Eines Schwanks*, Folklore Fellows Communications 42. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica.
- Beiner, Guy. 2007. *Remembering the Year of the French: Irish Folk History and Social Memory*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Clayton, N. S., and A. Dickinson. 1998. Episodic-like memory during cache recovery by scrub jays. *Nature* 395:272-78.
- Clayton, Nicola S, and Lucie H. Salwiczek and Anthony Dickinson. 2007. Episodic memory *Current Biology* 17: R189-R191
- Dégh, Linda. 1969. *Folktales and Society; Story-Telling in a Hungarian Peasant Community*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Glassie, Henry H. 1982. *Passing the Time in Ballymenone : Culture and History of an Ulster Community*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Grimm, J., and W. Grimm. 1816-18. *Deutsche Sagn*. Berlin: Nicolaische Buchhandlung.
- Hafstein, Valdimar Tr. 2004. The Politics of Origins: Collective Creation Revisited. *Journal of American Folklore* 117: 300-15.
- Holbek, Bengt. 1987. *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales*, Folklore Fellows Communications 239. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica.
- Lord, Albert. 1960. *The Singer of Tales*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Pentikäinen, Juha. 1978. *Oral Repertoire and World View : An Anthropological Study of Marina Takalo's Life History*, Folklore Fellows Communications 219. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica.
- Tangherlini, Timothy. 2003. "'And All Anyone Heard...': Crystallization in Paramedic Storytelling.' In *Dynamics of Tradition: Perspectives on Oral Poetry and Folk Belief*, edited by Lotte Tarkka, 343-58. Helsinki, Finland: Finnish Literature Society.
- _____. 1990. "'It Happened Not Too Far from Here...': A Survey of Legend Theory and Characterization.' *Western Folklore* 49: 371-90.
- _____. 1994. *Interpreting Legend: Danish Storytellers and Their Repertoires*. New York: Garland Publishers.
- _____. *Talking Trauma: Paramedics and Their Stories*. University Press of Mississippi, 1998.
- Wesselski, Albert. 1934. "Die Formen Des Volkstümlichen Erzählguts." In *Die Deutsche Volkskunde*, Edited by Adolf Spamer. (216-48) Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut.
- _____. 1925. *Märchen Des Mittelalters*. Berlin: Herbert Stubenrauch.
- _____. 1931. *Versuch Einer Theorie Des Märchens*. Prager Deutsche Studien 45: Reichenberg.
- Tulving, E. 1972. Episodic and semantic memory. In *Organization of Memory* Edited by E. Tulving & W. Donaldson. (382-402). New York, NY: Academic Press, Inc.
- _____. 1983. *Elements of episodic memory*. New York: Oxford University Press.