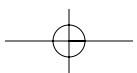
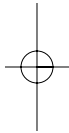
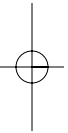
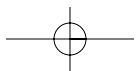
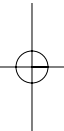
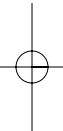




# **PART 1**

# **Remembering**





# 2

## Memory Work

*old-fashioned-looking men wearing black suits and hats as if they had to keep their past with them at all times so as not to lose it. (Desai, 2006: 81)*

*The paradox of memory is the same as that referred to by the 'hermeneutic circle': the past structures the present through its legacy, but it is the present that selects this legacy, preserving some aspects and forgetting others, and which constantly reformulates our image of this past by repeatedly recounting the story. (Jedlowski, 2001: 41)*

These two quotes point to the complexity of temporal relations, as well as the facility of literary modes of expression to capture such coexistences. Our aim in this book is to map a range of academic approaches that can capture the dynamic relationship between the past and present, characterized both by determination (the past shaping the present) and hermeneutics (the present constructing the past) (Connerton, 1989). Yet we recognize that the language of social science is not always best suited to express the subtleties of temporal processes, and for this reason we employ literary examples along the way. In this first section of the book we explore two research methods which take memories as a raw material for the project of researching social change: memory work and oral/life histories. Our approach locates these methods in times and places, showing how the generation of knowledge about personal and social change forms part of wider cultural and political agendas. Through examples, we tease out some of the practical and epistemological challenges of working with memory. Memories are indirect and unreliable evidence – in Freudian terms, they combine manifest and latent meaning, and the capacity to remember is posed as an alternative to a compulsion to repeat. Yet it is the very complex and subjective character of memory that makes it such a rich source for exploring temporal processes.

In this chapter we consider memory work, a technique for the exploration of relationships between pasts, presents and futures that is closely tied up with the development of the women's movement. Memory work has had many moments of popularity in different academic communities. Here we provide an

overview of the very different ways in which memory work has been exercised and adapted, explicated through three examples: the work of Frigga Haug and colleagues (*Female Sexualization*), the work of June Crawford and colleagues (*Emotion and Gender*), and the work of Annette Kuhn (*Family Secrets*). In telling a story of memory work, we seek to demonstrate how methods and ideas emerge in concrete situations, yet are creatively appropriated and transposed into new contexts, giving rise to new situated knowledge claims.

These examples all share a relationship with emancipatory politics, and fall within two disciplinary traditions: social science and cultural studies. The methods themselves are fluid and adaptable. Although the work sometimes gives rise to remarkable products, the most important outcome may in fact be the process – the making of collective intellectual endeavours. While the various memory work projects within this overall history have concerned themselves with the relationship between popular culture and personal memory, the group itself becomes the vehicle for other, hidden histories of the changing relationship between radical movements and academic cultures. It is possible to see parallels with the project of oral history described in Chapter 3, where a methodology was looked to for the promise of political transformation, yet in this case the methodology of memory work was also understood to have the potential to transform subjectivity and consciousness.

We have engaged in memory work as a complementary research practice for ten years, with regular memory work becoming a vital part of communication within research collectives, feeding into the accumulation of a reflexive understanding of our investments in our topics of research, or connections with and differences from each other as well as directly into methodological and theoretical development. In writing this chapter we have become aware that we are arguing *for* the method, and through describing and comparing the projects, detailing their methods and recognizing their limitation, we hope to show the potential of memory work as a method for exploring the intersections of social and personal change.

### **Haug et al., *Female Sexualization: A Collective Work of Memory***

As far as we are aware, the term ‘memory work’ was coined by Frigga Haug and colleagues in a book published first in German as *Frauenformen* 1 and 2 in 1983, then in English translation (by Erica Carter) as *Female Sexualization* (1987). It was reprinted in 1992 and then republished as a Verso Classic in 1999. Haug and colleagues were a group of West German feminist socialists – some were also academics – who worked together on the autonomous women’s editorial board of the Marxist journal-cum-publishing house-cum-intellectual forum *Das Argument*. *Female Sexualization* was the result of a two-year project and the preface to the English edition provides a retrospective account of how the group came together and how they worked in what were heady political times. The overall ambition of the women’s editorial group was ‘reconstructing scientific Marxism along feminist lines’ (1999: 23), and a series of ‘projects’ were established on a range of themes to this end. What is reported in the book is the result of the project that explored how ‘sexuality is constituted as a separate sphere of existence’ (p. 34).

Attempts to 'locate' the memory work of Haug and colleagues for English readers is assisted by an extensive foreword written by Erica Carter for the 1992 English edition. In presenting memory work to a British audience in the 1990s, Carter seeks to translate three main elements. First, we are introduced to the 'Germanness' of the project, and Carter reflects on the difficulty of translating some of the key theoretical terms, and of smoothing the translation between a language of scientific Marxism and an increasingly post-Marxist consciousness. Second, Carter repositions Haug and colleagues theoretically, in line with academic frameworks salient to this new audience. So, for example, our attention is drawn to the impact on the group of the work of the Birmingham CCCS (for example McRobbie and McCabe, 1981, and Willis, 1981) and their appropriation of Althusserian perspectives on how we come to desire or own oppression and in doing so remake inequality. This dynamic and psychoanalytically influenced approach to understanding the way in which agency is active yet constrained is linked by Carter to a second influence on the group – their reading of Foucault and the notion that power is fluid and circulating. She suggests that the authors draw productively on these ideas for their exploration of the body as a site of discourse, facilitating an understanding of ideology as mediated in and through the material. Thirdly, Carter positions the reader's orientation to the practice of memory work as a resource in feminist engagements with postmodernism and in particular providing feminism with a means to understand how memory is 'mobilized collectively' while avoiding the construction of the kind of 'linear historical development towards liberation' (1992: 14) which had been the focus of so much political and intellectual critique.

The English translation is divided into three parts, opening with an account of the memory work employed by the collective. The introduction explains that the decision to privilege the methodology of the project was made late in the day on the advice of the typesetters, who suggested that the intended opening chapter (an engagement with Foucault) was perhaps too dense and uninviting. It is thus that the book opens with an extensive discussion of method (Chapter 1), in which the problem of the book is posed as 'the way in which human beings construct themselves into the world ... the threads of that development and the points of their interconnections in our memories' (p. 52). This is followed in Chapter 2 ('Displacements of the Problem') by sections representing a series of projects undertaken by the collective into aspects of female embodiment and their relationship to feminine socialization: the hair projects; the body projects; the slave girl projects; legs projects and notes on women's gymnastics. The main resource in these projects is written memories and analysis of those memories, although photographs are also drawn on.

The group describe their work as being based on two premises:

1. *The subject and object of the research are one.* Rejecting the criticism that memories are too subjective a resource for social science, they treat them as evidence of identity formation – the focus of their investigation. But this does not mean simply treating 'experience' or narratives of the self as unproblematic; rather they recognize that such narratives will gloss the kinds of contradictions, silences

and ruptures that are of interest to the analyst. The generation and analysis of memories of embodiment is offered as a way of disrupting and getting into these places.

2. *The research should be a collective process.* The authors argue that group analysis enables the boundaries of forgetting to be made visible. It also enables the construction of the collective subject – ‘historical contemporaries engaged in reconstructing the mosaic of experiences by which we were trained to enter society’ (p. 58). The more diverse the group, the richer the insights

The authors clearly state that there is ‘no single true method’ (p. 70). ‘In our experience new modes of analysis express themselves continuously’ (p. 70), and ‘what we need is imagination’ (p. 71). They do, nevertheless, reflect on their method and share the lessons that they learned. These are not laid out as a recipe but have to be gleaned from the text, which we summarize as follows:

### The principles of memory work

- *The importance of good research questions* is central to their approach. Questions should not simply reproduce normative notions. So, for example, in their sexuality project they began by questioning ‘how is sexuality constituted as a separate sphere of existence?’ (p. 34) which, in turn, helped them construct the projects. They contrast this with an approach that takes sexuality at face value and enquires simply into topic areas such as ‘loss of virginity’ or ‘sex education’, questioning whether such an approach could produce anything useful beyond stories of painful recognition and disappointment.
- Another focus is on the development of *techniques for reducing prejudice*. Despite their view that memory work is predicated on there being no subject/object split, they also seek a systematic approach and practices to ensure that the subject is not ‘prejudiced’. Their approach here is shaped by psychoanalytic insight that treats self narratives as based on ‘continuities that are manufactured retrospectively in the mind’ (p. 48). These techniques for reducing prejudice in the creation of memory texts include focusing on a specific situation (rather than life in its entirety), using the third person (thus approaching past selves as a stranger) and attempting to escape the constraints of relevance by describing everything and anything. They also suggest juxtaposing past and present rather than seeking to forge self narratives, thereby avoiding value judgements and deliberately attempting to imagine the motives and position of all involved.
- Their methodological approach is also distinguished by a *focus on form*. Their discussion of the methods pays a great deal of attention to language and writing. This includes noticing the genres employed, the

use of cliché, metaphor and popular sayings, and treating these as evidence of the imbrication of the social within the personal. In seeking to get past these popular discourses, their work is also characterized by a search for an authentic voice, based on the view that women's voices and the voices of the everyday have been silenced in literature. The writing of memories and rewriting of memories represents an attempt to forge the missing voice.

We have found it interesting to revisit this text, 23 years after it was written and possibly 10 years since we looked at it properly. In the light of subsequent appropriations of memory work we are struck by how open and unprescriptive the method was, involving a range of practices from critical group reading through to writing exercises. We are also struck by the extent to which the book is a product of its own time and place, reflecting a coming together of consciousness-raising practices and the generation of theoretical insight. Some of the language is dated, and the political optimism jars, exposing its absence in contemporary climates. Yet it is not as theoretically naive as one might have feared, with the exception, perhaps, of the search for an authentic female voice through writing.

In recent years an increasingly critical perspective has developed within feminist theory regarding the use of experience and 'consciousness-raising as a mode of discerning and delivering the "truth" about women' (Brown, 1995: 41). Wendy Brown describes consciousness-raising as operating as 'feminism's epistemologically positivist moment. The material excavated there, like the material uncovered in psycho-analysis or delivered in confession, is valued as the hidden truth of women's existence – true because it is hidden, and hidden because women's subordination functions in part through silencing, marginalization, and privatization.' (1995: 41) Brown's position poses a challenge to methods such as memory work which 'demand the right to use experience as the basis of knowledge' (Haug et al., 1999: 34). Brown points to the 'sharp but frequently elided tensions between adhering to social construction theory on one hand, and epistemologically privileging women's accounts of social life on the other' (Brown, 1995: 41). For Brown, the danger of consciousness-raising (and standpoint perspectives) is that the knowledge gained from such approaches 'while admitting to being "situated", cannot be subjected to hermeneutics without giving up its truth value' (pp. 42–3).

To what extent does the approach of Haug and colleagues fall into this trap? Certainly, the practice of collective memory work originates in the kinds of consciousness-raising practices that were a familiar part of the women's movement of the time. Haug distinguishes their 'memory work' from less sophisticated group endeavours and consciousness-raising groups that failed to take a critical approach to the object of their enquiry (in this case sexuality) or to theorize insights made available by the practices of retrieval and collective analysis. The methodological and political agendas in relation to which *Female sexualization* was written differed from those of today. Their arguments were with positivism rather than post-structuralism. They had to demonstrate that the use of their own subjectivities as a raw material for the

production of knowledge was valid, that it was not – in their words – ‘prejudiced’, which may go some way toward explaining their investment in distancing techniques. Theoretically, they were very much concerned with hermeneutics, the indivisibility of subjects and structures and the impossibility of standing outside of these processes. Yet, politically, they expressed an investment in a relatively unproblematized feminist project, including ideas of forging an authentic female voice in their writing.

Haug and colleagues walk a fine line in relation to Brown’s charges of feminist positivism, which itself is the culmination of a long series of intense debates with feminism regarding the status of experience, ‘voice’ and their relationship to politics and agency (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 1999; Scott, 1992). Certainly their approach is based on a critique of female experience as absent from existing knowledge, and memory work is offered as a way of generating knowledge from female experience, for the direct purpose of changing women’s lives. Memory work in this sense is understood as an intervention in the world, an emancipatory practice, and not simply as a tool for the collection or creation of data. The categories ‘women’ and ‘feminism’ are treated in an unproblematic way. Yet, in their defence, they do not understand the memory stories produced in the work as transparent or ‘true’ in any way. In particular they are critical of the part played by narratives of the self in ‘making sense’ of contradictions, pointing to the collective interrogation of memories as central to destabilizing these narratives: ‘we set out to investigate the process through which we have formed ourselves as personalities, rather than the way that things “really” – objectively – were’ (p. 40). Undoubtedly their approach is inspired by their attachment to notions of false consciousness and the operations of the unconscious rather than by a critique of the fiction of the unitary subject. It is a position that is resonant of the theoretical and political climate of western Europe during the 1980s.

To what extent can we understand their project of memory work as an investigation of social change? As we will explore in the following chapter, historical discourse has played a vital part in the formation of feminism as an intellectual and political project. Central to this has been the use of both historical and anthropological methods to demonstrate *specificity in formations of femininity* (De Beauvoir, 1949/1997; Rubin, 1975). It was perhaps the primary achievement of second-wave feminism to demonstrate the non-universal, socially-constructed character of gender, and the way in which such formations were and are articulated through other historically and culturally defined formations of social class, ethnicity, sexuality and place and so forth. The project of revealing social construction was so successful within feminism that it undercut feminist claims as to a common subject: be that ‘woman’ or ‘feminism’.

The work of Haug and colleagues emerges at exactly this turning point in the history of western second-wave feminism. Their project is engaged with questions of social change in complex ways. The group take as their focal point the process of ‘socialization’, the passage from childhood to adult femininity. They do not treat this as a natural or universal developmental process, but rather one in which they are active agents operating within historically- defined parameters. Working as a collective and a generational cohort enables them to identify those historically-defined parameters. The



fact that they have come together to review this process through memory work also locates them within a project of change for the future. They act on the idea, indebted to psychoanalysis, that in understanding how they came to be as they are today, they are also intervening in their own futures. These women are both studying and inciting themselves as a generation that is self-consciously engaged in progressive transformation. The 'we' that their investigations represent is both the specific 'we' of the group and, through theorization, an abstract 'we' encompassing 'women', 'sexualization' and 'socialization' in the collective.

### ***An Australian appropriation of memory work***

In 1985/6 Frigga Haug visited Macquarie University in Australia as a visiting scholar and gave a series of seminars. In attendance were feminist psychologists June Crawford, Una Gault and Sue Kippax. They had been working together (with Jenny Onyx and Pam Benton) in a reading group exploring critical ideas in social psychology. Inspired and challenged by the ideas and practices presented by Haug, the women began working as a memory-work group, exploring the theme of 'emotion', the outcome of which was published as *Emotion and Gender: Constructing Meaning from Memory* (Crawford et al., 1992). This book, in turn, played a critical role in disseminating and popularizing a particular approach to memory work to an international audience.

In their introduction to this volume the group provide an explanation of how their project developed. The origins are quite distinct from the culture of Marxist feminist activism of Berlin in the early 1980s. Here the account is of a group of feminist academic friends, all of whom experienced marginalization within their mainstream psychology departments, and who wanted to explore new ideas beginning to stir within critical social psychology. They described themselves as 'academics, and psychologists, and women' (p. 1) who have managed to sustain a regular commitment to collective work in the 'interstices of full time paid work and the endless work of young and older children and sick or ageing relatives, of overseas study and travel, of political commitments' (p. 1). Explaining their debt to Haug, they credit her with developing a method that is 'empirical but not empiricist' (p. 4), 'a feminist theory that was more than a critical analysis of existing society, one that incorporates its own method for empirical research' (p. 4). Discussing their enthusiasm for working with written memories, the group explain that 'We liked the feminist political Orientation. We liked the collective way of working'. 'We were intrigued by the collapse of the subject and object, by theory and method, by the idea of becoming our own subjects' (p. 4).

In a different time and place, Crawford and colleagues inevitably put memory work to different use. The book, written collectively at the end of four years of group work, represents their creative appropriation of the methodology. It is a version that is more circumscribed than the range of practices described by Haug et al. (1992), focusing specifically on the collective analysis of written memories. The method is also presented in a much clearer and more schematic way, as a set of 'rules'.

## Memory-work rules

They divide memory work into three phases:

*Phase 1:*

Write a memory<sup>1</sup>

1. of a particular episode, action or event
2. in the third person
3. in as much detail as is possible, including even 'inconsequential' or trivial detail (it may help to think of a key image, sound, taste, smell, touch)
4. but without importing interpretation, explanation or biography.
5. Write one of your earliest memories. (p. 45)

All but the last of these injunctions are derived directly from Haug (although in the original they are much more extensive and discursively presented). The last injunction was added by Crawford and colleagues, who in exploring emotion from a psychological perspective considered themselves to be looking at a developmental process that is most active in childhood. As such, they wanted to excavate memories from this period.

It is also interesting that while the group let go of much of the flavour of Haug's original methodology, they retained and amplified the concern with avoiding 'prejudice'. In their introduction they acknowledge that in using an approach such as memory work they were 'denying the imperatives of our training', asking whether they could also 'remain rigorous' (p. 4). They emphasize Haug and colleagues' warning against the beguiling coherence which biography brings. 'Coherence hides resistance and in this way works against the method' (Haug et al., 1987: 41); a method in which the analysis 'has to be seen as a field of conflict between dominant cultural values and oppositional attempts to wrest cultural meaning and pleasure from life' (Crawford et al., 1992: 47). Thus memories are to be written in the third person and interpretation avoided in the initial stages. The choice of the authors to employ pseudonyms in the book is explained as both an attempt to maintain anonymity but 'more importantly, it helps resist the temptation to write biography' (p. 6).

The gestation of a written memory could take up to a week. Once memories were written the group would convene for *Phase 2*. Crawford and colleagues offer a set of rules for this stage of the memory work, yet note that 'we did not adhere to all of them strictly' (p. 48).

1. Each memory-work group member expresses opinions and ideas about each memory in turn, and
2. looks for similarities and differences between the memories and looks for continuous elements among the memories whose relation to each other is not immediately apparent. Each member should question particularly those aspects of the events which do not appear amenable to comparison. She or he should not, however, resort to auto-biography or biography.

3. Each memory-work member identifies cliches, generalizations, contradictions, cultural imperatives, metaphor ... and
4. discusses theories, popular conceptions, sayings and images about the topic.
5. Finally, each member examines what is not written in the memories (but what might be expected to be), and
6. rewrites the memories. (p. 49)

Again they clarify that 'it is important that autobiography and biography which emphasize individual aspects of experience be avoided. What is of interest is not why person X's father did such and such but why fathers do such things' (p. 49).

*Phase 3* of the process is that 'in which we evaluate our attempts at theorizing' (p. 51), and for Crawford and colleagues this involves a comparative consideration of accounts generated by different episodes of memory work and a recursive conversation between their memory work and the psychological literature on emotions. Writing the book was one of the outcomes of this final phase. They observe that in an ongoing memory-work group these phases would run concurrently.

Reflecting on the particular character of this group's appropriation of memory work is revealing of the ways in which research methodologies evolve as they move across times and places. Most striking is the way that they take what is a messy, unboundaried and highly politicized practice and make it into a 'technique' that can be used by others. Undoubtedly this will have been the result of attempting to extract, share and justify a method within their particular disciplinary framework – psychology. Crawford et al. report that they not only had their own memory-work group but also set up others to work in parallel, where they might act as facilitators and/or researcher/members. They were successful in securing competitive research grants to undertake empirical research using memory-work methods. Crawford and colleagues effectively 'transcribe' memory-work from its original genre of Marxist feminist activism to institutionalized academic feminism within which they are able to maintain the hermeneutic character of the methodology.

Although their version of memory work was very schematic, the team saw these methods as contributing to the wider methodological project of promoting social constructionism within a psychological framework. Where Haug et al. employ the language of the sociologist in their concern with agency, structure, reproduction and change, Crawford and colleagues considered the method in the light of social psychological concerns with inter-subjectivity that were current in the early 1990s (referring to the classic work of Mead and Vygotsky revisited in the then contemporary work of Shotter). They express excitement with the potential of the method to capture both the 'I' and 'Me' dimensions of the self, suggesting that in phase 1 of the process the self talks with itself, and in Phase 2 the self responds to itself as others respond to it. The collective mode of analysis is seen to be critical in mirroring and confirming the collective condition of the self that is captured in memories, with analogous processes observed in 'the commonness of the episodes and the

common sense reached' (p. 52). Both the 'I' of the written memories and the 'Me' of the group discussion are constituted socially, confirming for the group the 'intersubjectivity that proceeds subjectivity' (p. 52).

### Why we remember

Crawford and colleagues are particularly interested in the collapse of the distinction between the subject and the object, which they identify as the hallmark of memory work. It is this that locates memory work for them within a hermeneutic epistemology and in opposition to an atheoretical empiricism. They are cautious in making claims for the generalizability of insights generated through memory work, arguing that 'plausibility', 'credibility', 'recognition' and theoretical generativeness may be more appropriate claims for the method. In a chapter called 'Remembering and Forgetting', the group engage in an extended discussion regarding the veracity of memories, and how they mediate the relationship between the present and the past. On the question of veracity they are clear that there is a distinction between real memories and real events and that the focus of memory work is 'the process of construction ... the search for intelligibility, not the actual event' (p. 151). They are also clear on the question of reality vs construction. Memories are reconstructions of past events, and in memory work 'we are not seeking to uncover the nature of the event itself but rather the meaning that the event had for us then and now' (p. 152). They endorse an approach that understands the self as constructed out of memories. We do not remember everything, and what we remember is highly selective. Drawing on a wide body of psychological literature, including the writings of Freud on repression, Crawford and colleagues argue that we tend to 'remember episodes of unfinished business' (p. 154). The mundane is generally not remembered, nor is the resolved. Such memories can be retrieved, but may only be accessible indirectly. Following Freud they also observe that repressed material, or more consciously suppressed material, may be forgotten and/or unavailable. They summarize their view as follows:

The ways in which the memories we produce in our memory work, the building blocks for our theory of self, represent a biased selection of all the experiences that ever happened to us. The bias is a meaningful one ... Nevertheless in theorizing our memories, we are concerned at the possibility that there were experiences which we do not remember and therefore do not produce in memory-work which were important in our construction but were not reflected upon, as were those which we produced. (p. 159)

In discussion of an example of a repressed memory they suggest that one of the reasons that a memory may not be available to a particular trigger may be that this cultural framework, within which to make the experience intelligible, was not available to the individual at the time.

The work of Crawford and colleagues is part of an ongoing tradition within social psychology in which experience and subjectivity are interrogated within changing theoretical landscapes (Stephenson et al., 1996; Gillies et al., 2004,

2005; Stephenson and Papadopoulos, 2006). This discussion has shown how Crawford et al.'s project differed from that of Haug and colleagues (being less Marxist/sociological; more boundaried; more focused on technique; more engaged in questions of subjectivity and psychology), but also some of the ways it was similar (shared focus on socialization; structure/agency; theoretical generation; a partial constructionism/partial hermeneutics; concern with distancing techniques; avoidance of auto/biography). Although Crawford and colleagues were using their childhoods to explore meaning, the outcome of their project does not bear much light on questions of social change, other than in contributing further towards an understanding of emotion as 'constructed' and thus neither universally produced nor determined. These themes are brought into relief when we compare this Australian appropriation of memory work to a UK cultural studies tradition, influenced by Haug and colleagues as well as by others.

### **Annette Kuhn's Family Secrets**

The original English translation of *Female Sexualization* (1987) was published by Verso in the series 'Questions for Feminism', edited by a group that included Annette Kuhn. Kuhn went on to publish another landmark example of memory work in 1995, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*. There are clear connections between Kuhn's approach and that employed by Haug and colleagues, although Kuhn herself does no more than cite *Female Sexualization* as an example of further reading. Kuhn takes the method in a very different direction from that taken by Crawford and colleagues, into a tradition shaped more by the arts than the social sciences and connecting to oral history, cultural studies and psychoanalysis. This section begins with a description of the main components of Kuhn's approach before considering its antecedents and some of the developments that came in its wake.

#### **Acts of memory and imagination**

Memory provides 'material for interpretation, to be interrogated, mined for meaning and possibilities. It involves active staging of memory; it takes an enquiring attitude towards the past and its (re)construction through memory. (Kuhn, 1995/2002: 157)

In stark contrast to the approaches of Friga Haug, June Crawford and colleagues, Annette Kuhn's memory-work project embraces auto/biography, understood as a tool through which it is possible to detect the traces of the collective and the historical and not an obstacle to such understanding. Kuhn's own project draws on a range of primarily visual raw materials, including her family photograph albums and the traces of their use over the years, including inscriptions on the backs of pictures, and the cutting down and reordering of photographs. She also draws on films, music and paintings, as well as a range of sensory triggers and media through which versions of the past are

represented and consumed. She describes her approach as treading ‘a line between cultural criticism and cultural production’ (p. 4), driven by a concern for the way in which memory shapes the stories we tell, and what it is that makes us remember.

For Kuhn, memory work can be an individual activity. In fact, she luxuriates in the accessibility of the method, describing memory work as requiring ‘the most minimal resources and the very simplest procedures. Making do with what is to hand—its raw materials are almost universally available—is the hallmark of memory work’s pragmatism and democracy’ (p. 7). Moreover, memory work is ‘easy to do, offers methodological rigour, and is fruitful in countless, often unexpected, ways’ (p. 6).

### A recipe for memory work

Kuhn provides her own ‘recipe’ for memory work, which can be usefully compared to others. Her assumption is that the project will begin with a photograph:

1. Consider the human subjects of the photograph. Start with a simple description, and then move into an account in which you take up the position of the subject. In this part of the exercise, it is helpful to use the third person (‘she’, rather than ‘I’, for instance). To bring out the feelings associated with the photograph, you must visualize yourself as the subject as she was at that moment, in the picture: this can be done in turn with all of the photograph’s human subjects, and even with animals and inanimate objects in the picture.
2. Consider the picture’s context of production. Where, when, how, by whom and why was the photograph taken?
3. Consider the context in which an image of this sort would have been made. What photographic technologies were used? What are the aesthetics of the image? Does it conform with certain photographic conventions?
4. Consider the photograph’s currency in its context or contexts of reception. Who or what was the photograph made for? Who has it now and where is it kept? Who saw it then, and who sees it now? (p. 8)

Although Kuhn suggests the use of the third person in the exploration of the image, she does not do so as a ‘distancing technique’. Rather she encourages the memory worker to identify promiscuously with everyone and everything in the image, as an exercise in imagination. Perhaps this is because her way into the social and collective is not through the process of socialization or development (as with Haug et al. and Crawford et al., respectively) but through an examination of the form of cultural production. Thus we are encouraged to see evidence contained within the form of the photograph, its genre and technologies of production. We are then invited to stay with this photograph through the passage of time and to investigate the part that it plays in the construction of contemporary memory and identity. Rather than

seeking to escape the 'coherence' of the biographical, Kuhn seeks to explore the situated practices through which these stories are constructed.

In the course of the book Kuhn adopts a number of different approaches, which accumulate to provide a layered memoir in which memories are traced from origins to application. Examples include her reflections on an image of herself from childhood. The photograph was taken originally by her father, a semi-professional photographer, and for Kuhn it is a record of their adoring and exclusive relationship. This image is traced through its place in a family photograph album created by her eight-year-old self, in which all images of her mother were eradicated. Subsequently the album and the image are revised by her mother who, through rearranging, cutting and inscribing, imposes her own account of the family story. Photographs continued to play a part in her communications with her estranged mother, and are used by Kuhn as ways of attempting to understand her mother's investments in a particular version of her daughter – as well-dressed, neat and slim. The simple image of her childhood self, holding a bird in her hand, with crossed-out notes on the back of the photo, is the site of conflict over memory, about which there is no last word. For Kuhn 'in the process of using – producing, selecting, ordering, displaying – photographs, the family is actually in the process of making itself' (p. 19).

### **An auto/biographical approach**

Kuhn's approach is indebted to the ideas and the practices of psychoanalysis, and she takes from this field a rich vocabulary for considering the operations of memory: accretion (how memories accumulate meaning over time), condensation (how meanings intensify and become 'simpler' over time), secondary revision (the way in which we create retrospective narratives to fit with present needs), repression (material that is 'forgotten' or pushed into the unconscious), and melancholia (an inability to let go of what is lost – a form of hyper-remembering). Her investigation of her family photograph albums is inevitably also an investigation of the unique psychic constellation that is her own family. Yet in accepting the autobiographical she also enables us to gain access to specific details of the past and to the ways in which biographies are enmeshed in history. Hers is a biography firmly located in time and place – post-war London – and shaped by a painful process of social mobility. It is an account that captures the interplay of personal and social change. Kuhn's interest in the representation and evocation of memory extends beyond her own biography, yet it always starts with her experience. Beginning with herself enables Kuhn to see beyond herself, whether that be to read from the image of herself in her special 'coronation dress' through to the creation of popular nationalism, or the familiarity of a world before her birth evoked through the trigger of the image of a burning St Pauls Cathedral. Kuhn employs memory and the connections that are evoked through it (including what Barthes describes as 'piercings' that appear to transcend historical or biographical time) as a way to navigate through the incessant and iterative flow that is popular culture. Paradoxically, although she is much more autobiographical than either Haug et al. or Crawford et al., her approach also speaks more directly to an interest in social and historical processes such as social class, educational mobility, nationalism and the operations of nostalgia.

In the opening pages of the book Kuhn explains to the reader:

The family secrets are indeed mine – in a manner of speaking; and like all such things, they have roots in the past and reverberations in the present. None of which can be understood until the memories behind the secrets are brought to life and looked at closely. This calls for a certain amount of delving into the past, and for preparedness to meet the unexpected. What is required is an active and directed work of memory. (p. 3)

In beginning with ‘secrets’ rather than simply with memories, Kuhn’s approach demands that the autobiographical is the route taken into memory work. It is an approach that prioritizes the present, and the idea of ‘unfinished business’. Kuhn speaks of memory as ‘a position or point of view in the current moment’ (p. 128) and memory work as ‘working backwards – searching for clues, deciphering signs and traces, making deductions, patching together reconstructions from fragments of evidence’ (p. 4). The autobiographical is also the medium through which to apprehend others, to imagine their motives and perspectives and to unleash this material into our inner world.

Kuhn ends *Family Secrets* with six theses about memory, insights that she has gained through her involvement in memory work, summarized as follows:

1. *Memory shapes our inner world* (i.e. there is a relationship between memory, the psyche and the unconscious)
2. *Memory is an active production of meanings* (i.e. the past is not simply there to be retrieved. Memory is always staged, shaped by ‘secondary revision’, an account that is always discursive)
3. *Memory texts have their own formal conventions: nonlinear/sequential/synchronous, counterposing/contrast*
4. *Memory texts voice a collective imagination* (although our route to the memory may be individual, the memory itself is, as argued also by Haug et al. and Crawford et al., imbricated with the social/ collective)
5. *Memory embodies both union and fragmentation* (here Kuhn points both to the way in which memories provide a sense of coherence, but also how the proliferation of memory texts facilitated by media technologies undermine this promise of coherence as it becomes increasingly hard to forge narratives of self)
6. *Memory is formative of communities of nationhood* (It is difficult to know whether Kuhn wants to suggest that there is a privileged relationship between memory and nationality or whether she was able to use memory work to explore nationality, in the same way that Haug et al. used it to explore sexualization and Crawford et al. to explore emotion)

Kuhn locates her exercise in memory work within a tradition of ‘revisionist biography’, in which she includes key texts such as *Truth, Dare or Promise* (1993), Liz



Heron's collection of feminist stories of childhood, the oral historian Ronald Fraser's *In Search of a Past* (1984), feminist historian Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1987) and photographer Jo Spence's *Putting Myself in the Picture* (1991). These are all examples of the use of memory as a resource for accessing the historical and cultural, but also use the personal as an interruption of more traditional academic discourse. Kuhn talks about feminist and socialist 'outsider biographers' engaging in critical deconstruction of the autobiographical self, for whom there is a gap between the 'I' that writes and the 'Me' that is written about of this generation. Memory work is presented as an 'instrument of conscientisation: the awakening of critical consciousness through their own activities of reflection and learning, among those who lack power' (p. 9).

### Memory work: family characteristics

Looking across these examples of 'memory work', it is clear that although they are recognizably within a 'family' they differ considerably and on most counts. These differences are shaped in part by the time, place and disciplinary context in which the exercises in memory work take place. From this perspective it is difficult to see memory work as a single method – as Haug and colleagues observe, there is no 'true method'. Yet in creating and refining guidelines, different researchers have productively drawn attention to different potentialities within an overall methodology. In juxtaposing these approaches we seek to further enrich an understanding of what could be done with and through memory work.

What all the approaches have in common is an embracing of a hermeneutic epistemology which recognizes that, when dealing with memory, the past is apprehended through the subject. Inherent to this hermeneutic position (in which subject and object are one) is an understanding of time as subjectively experienced. This refers to the temporality described by Bergson as *duree*, in which the past is not simply 'out there' to be retrieved but which must always be evoked subjectively and through the present. In each example of memory work discussed in this chapter it is recognized that the selection of memory (acts of remembering/forgetting) and representation of memories (in albums, as narratives, genres, mediated by popular nostalgia/moral panic) are practices of a present. As such, both are shaped by the context and communities within which and for whom the remembering takes place (Halbwachs, 1992/1950). One criticism of the consciousness-raising roots of memory work is that such approaches to excavating 'experience' privilege it over other kinds of knowledge: 'admitting to being "situated" ... without giving up its truth value' (Brown, 2001: 42–3). As we raised early in this chapter, this is a serious challenge to memory work, but one to which it can respond confidently if not conclusively. Certainly, all the approaches to memory work described here go a long way in 'situating' the material generated. The different memory workers tend to do this through problematizing the relationship between the memory text and associated narratives, yet in different ways. In the social science tradition, both Haug and colleagues and Crawford and colleagues employ distancing techniques to disrupt the formation of autobiographical narratives. Within the cultural studies tradition, Kuhn embraces the autobiographical in order then to treat it as a cultural

product, historicized in time and located within space. Whether the memory workers 'give up the truth value' of the memories they are working with is another matter. All respond to the question of veracity within the terms of their discipline, understanding memories as constructions and as 'raw material' for the work of social, psychological and cultural analysis.

Yet the question of the veracity of memories or what Hacking (1995) calls 'memoropolitics' has become a volatile and politicized subject, with a history of its own. Memory work as a method for the generation of memories has to be understood as coexisting with a wider culture of remembrance and testimony within which it has become possible, for example, to 'excavate' and tell stories of sexual abuse and survival (Plummer, 1995, Reavey and Warner, 2003). In 2001 Frigga Haug reflected on her dismay during a visit to Canada in the early 1990s as to the inability of her students to distinguish between an invitation to participate in memory work and an invitation to reveal experiences of child sexual abuse. Haug understands this as a symptom of the growing individualism of the feminist movement which focuses on personal confession and the crimes of individuals rather than on global economic processes. In a subsequent response to her article, Jane Kilby interprets Haug's view as attempting 'to re-establish the Marxism underpinning her early and influential writing on memory work. ... For Haug, memory work is a method that should take us beyond domestic history' (Kilby, 2002: 201). While sympathizing with Haug, Kilby outlines how high the stakes are in debates around memory, and the difficulty of balancing the hermeneutic understanding of the past being shaped by the present (a recognition that our memories are shaped by present-day identities, cultural context and the communities with and for whom we remember) and the determinist position of the present being determined by the past (for example, understanding current identities as the result of events remembered).

Although it may be possible to accept an interplay of hermeneutic and determinist dynamics in social and psychoanalytic theory, such uncertainty and indeterminacy are more challenging within political, legal and evidential terrains. This is a tension that underpins a range of contemporary debates, including the 'history wars', that we will consider in Chapter 3. We can add to this ongoing debate within feminism and other progressive political movements concerning the problems of *ressentiment* – a dependence of feminist/socialist/marginalized identities on the injuries of the past (Brown, 2001) and a desire to be open to imagining alternative futures from the position of an open present, one that is not precluded by particular narratives (Grosz, 2004, 2005).

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have traced the development of memory work as both an empirical practice and a field of theoretical development. The three examples of memory work discussed are situated within particular times, places and disciplines and to some extent can be understood as the product of and responses to these circumstances. Together they form a methodological 'family'

with a shared hermeneutic approach in which past memories are understood as personal constructions within the present, yet which include traces of the conditions of their production.

Memory work has its roots in forms of collective consciousness-raising and individual 'conscientization', which both seek to make public previously hidden stories and experiences but which also problematize the self that remembers. All of the approaches are comfortable with the idea of an unconscious, with latent as well as manifest meaning, and recognize a relationship between fragmentary/contradictory memories and narratives that forge coherence. How we orient to our memories is politicized and moralized territory. There is no reason why memory work should lead inevitably to 'melancholic attachments to the past', but rather it might enable an awareness of the surfacing and diffusing of the past within the present (Brown, 2001). At its best, memory work insists that we interrogate what and why we both remember and forget. And although it invariably begins with the personal, most approaches to memory work ultimately seek to comment on wider social, cultural and historical processes. It is not only the outcome of memory work that makes it a popular practice across disciplines and social fields. The process of reading, thinking, remembering, analysing, theorizing and writing alone and together can make memory work productive as a parallel research practice to other projects, generating ideas tangentially and feeding into the analysis of wider data. As Grosz (2005) points out, perception is enriched by memory, and perhaps it is this generative facility that arises from what Wendy Brown calls 'mindful remembering'. Our own experience supports the comments of Crawford and colleagues who point out: 'what was unexpected, what overwhelmed and excited us, was the strength of memory-work in enabling us to ground emerging theory in our data and their analysis. We found that memory work worked even better than we anticipated' (1992: 43).

### Summary points

- Memories are not simply records of the past, but in their evocation represent the past within the present.
- Memories are *constructions* into which the personal, social and the historical are intertwined.
- Memories are likely to be fragmentary, contradictory and include latent as well as manifest meanings.
- Memories can be distinguished/distanced from the narratives that give memories coherence. It is also possible to explore memories through the narratives that occasion their telling/representation.
- Memory texts can be productively analysed as cultural texts: asking questions about audience, genre, composition, etc.
- The context in and through which memories are produced is always relevant. We remember for and with others, and this will shape what is remembered and how it is remembered.
- The process of engaging in memory work can heighten perception and contribute to creativity and theoretical generation.

- The value of memory work is not simply that it provides access to the personal or the autobiographical, but rather that this is a vehicle for the understanding of social, cultural and historical formations.

## Further reading/resources



Fraser, R. (1984) *In search of a Past: The Manor House, Amnersfield, 1933–1945*, London: Verso.

Fascinating and moving combination of memoir, oral history and self-analysis. Example of how the complexity of memory can be captured through formal writing techniques.

Marker, C. (1998) *Immemory*.

CD ROM created by filmmaker and artist Chris Marker that uses hypermedia techniques to map the kinds of non-linear connections that link memories represented by mementos of a lifetime: childhood books, family photographs, picture postcards.

Radstone, S. (ed.) (2000) *Memory and Methodology*. Oxford: Berg.

Edited collection bringing together leading writers on memory including Annette Kuhn, Frigga Haug and Richard Johnson. Explores the politics of memory, the impact of technologies and the art of memory work as practised in different disciplines.

Reavey, P. and Brown, S.D. (2006) 'Transforming agency and action in the past into the present time: adult memories and child sexual abuse', *Theory & Psychology*, 16: 170–202.

Exploration of how theories of remembering can be employed to create new ways of thinking about traumatic childhood memories. Emphasizes the way in which memories are structured spatially.

Smart, C. (2007) *Personal Life*, Cambridge: Polity Press. (Chapter 5, 'Secrets and Lies')

Exploration of secrets and silences within families, and how new technologies and legal frameworks shape what it is possible to tell and to hide.

## Note

- 1 Once a general subject matter is chosen, a trigger word is generated. They describe their own process of generating trigger words as an iterative process. Beginning with the trigger 'Sorry', they were surprised not to discover memories marked by guilt and shame. They then tried the trigger 'Transgression'. Subsequently they experimented with a directly emotional label, 'Happiness', following this with 'Anger' as a contrast. They used the trigger 'Praise' in juxtaposition with the previous use of 'Transgression' and the situational trigger 'Play' to see if it would produce reports of happiness. Memories of both childhood and adulthood were produced in response to the trigger 'Holidays'. The group advises that around a week is needed to 'gestate' on the trigger and to engage in the first phase.