An Encounter with Collective Memory

While on a trip to Moscow in 1997, I spent a day at a high school known for its strong students and excellent instruction. In addition to observing several classes, I had the opportunity to engage some eleventh grade students in a discussion about World War II, and in this context I asked about the role that the United States had played in this conflict. In response, "Sasha," a sixteen-year-old boy, turned to me and said something like the following:

The United States made a lot of money from selling arms and other things to countries during the early years of the war, but it did not really contribute as an ally. In fact, along with Great Britain it refused to open a second front in 1942 and again in 1943. It was only after the U.S. and Britain began to think that the Soviet Union might win the war by itself and dominate post-war Europe that they became concerned enough to enter the war in earnest by opening a second front in 1944.

Sasha's comments left me with an impression as well as a question. The impression had to do with the way he spoke about these events. He made his presentation in a straightforward, confident manner, displaying little doubt or hesitation. It was almost as if he was providing an eye-witness account of what had happened. The idea that a competing account might exist seemed not to have been an option in his mind. Furthermore, based on the nods of Sasha's classmates and other evidence to be outlined in later chapters, it is an account that has some currency among his generation in Russia.

The question I had was tied to this impression of certainty. I wondered: Where did Sasha and other members of his generation in Russia get this account of the past? After all, neither he nor anyone else in his generation actually witnessed the events—and indeed, they were not even born until nearly four decades after World War II was over. The obvious answer is that they had learned about World War II at school, at home, from the media, and so forth. Such learning invariably takes the form of mastering narrative texts about who did what to whom, for what reasons, and in what context, and there is little reason to doubt that this is how Sasha had developed his account.

Instead of being grounded in direct, immediate experience of events, the sort of collective memory at issue in this case is what I shall term "textually mediated." Specifically, it is based on "textual resources" provided by others—narratives that stand in, or mediate, between the events and our understanding of them. Some may view this as being memory only in an unusual sense since it is not memory for events that have actually been experienced. From such a perspective, memory for a text may be involved, but this is not memory proper—that is, memory for the events themselves.

But the fact remains that what Sasha presented often is discussed under the heading of collective memory, a fact that raises the question of what we mean when we use the term. As I shall outline in Chapter 3, the unfortunate answer is that "collective memory" can mean any number of things depending on the conversation in which it is embedded. Furthermore, even when speakers assume they have one meaning in mind, this meaning often turns out to be fuzzy and not clearly differentiated from others. This unfortunate state of affairs is what motivates one of my major aims in the chapters that follow—sorting through and categorizing the various meanings of "collective memory."

Returning to my encounter with Sasha, the fact that he relied so totally on textual mediation makes the impression of certainty all the more striking. I was almost tempting to ask him, "How can you, a person who was not even alive at the time, be so sure of what you are saying?" As far as Sasha was concerned, however, he was recounting the events themselves, not some narrative about them. He seemed not to be the least bit tempted to qualify what he said with something like "What our textbooks tell us is..." or "The version provided in our movies is..."

But it is of course not only Sasha or his generation in Russia who displays this lack of awareness of the textually mediated nature of much of collective memory. It is characteristic of collective memory more generally, and is an instance of what can be called the "transparency" of language. It was as if Sasha were "looking through" the narrative text he was employing and could not see it or appreciate the way it shaped what he was saying. It may be possible for people whose collective memories of World War II are quite different from Sasha's to detect the mediating texts shaping his account, but this clearly seems to have been something that escaped his attention. In reality, however, one can ask how often any of us recognizes such mediation in our accounts of the past.

These points came into sharper focus when I related my encounter with Sasha to American colleagues and friends. In this context, I have often encountered comments such as, "Where did he get that story?" or "That's the kind of thing you would expect them to say." And reactions sometimes shade over into indignation, giving rise to responses such as, "That's just
not true! He doesn’t know what he’s talking about!” Conversely, Russians are surprised— if not dismissive or even deeply offended— when they hear accounts of World War II based on U.S. textbooks or on Hollywood movies such as Saving Private Ryan.

What all this suggests is the need to make visible and to understand the role of textual mediation in collective memory. Among other things, this means analyzing the specific forms that mediation takes in this case, especially narratives, and it calls on us to understand how such narrative texts are produced by the state, the media, and so forth, and how they are consumed, or used, by individuals and groups.

I shall approach these issues as part of a story about the more general category of “mediated action” (Wertsch, 1998). From this perspective, speaking, thinking, and other forms of human action are taken to involve an inherent, irreducible tension between agent and “cultural tools” such as language and narrative texts. This does not mean that such tools mechanistically determine how we act, but it is to say that their influence is powerful and needs to be recognized and examined. From this perspective, memory—both individual and collective—is viewed as “distributed” between agent and texts, and the task becomes one of listening for the texts and the voices behind them as well as the voices of the particular individuals using these texts in particular settings. In this approach, performances such as Sasha’s are inherently “multivoiced” (Wertsch, 1991) rather than the product of an isolated speaker or cognitive agent. We implicitly recognize this when we respond to what he said by asking, “Where did he get that story?” In such instances, we are asking about the general perspective, or “speaking consciousness” (Holquist & Emerson, 1981, p. 434) that Bakhtin (1981) defined as “voice.” Similarly, when we respond to Sasha’s account by saying, “That’s the kind of thing you would expect them to say,” we are commenting on the speaking consciousness or general ideological perspective of the members of a collective (i.e., “them”), a collective that provides the narrative texts employed by Sasha to formulate his account of the past.

By implication, this approach identifies two things that Sasha was not doing. First, despite any impressions he might have had to the contrary, he was not simply relaying “what really happened.” For this to be possible, we would have to presuppose a single, universally accepted, exhaustive, and true account of these events, one that would not allow for the sharp differences between his account and that of others. Second, the version of the past that Sasha provided was not the product of independent research. In principle, of course, it would have been possible for him to consult primary and secondary sources and arrive at his own formulation of what happened. It was not entirely surprising, however, to hear from his teacher and others familiar with his and his friends’ ideas about World War II that this was not the case. Instead, Sasha was doing what most of us do most of the time when we produce collective memory accounts of the past—especially the past that occurred before our lifetime. Namely, he was employing an item from the “stock of stories” (MacIntyre, 1984) that exist in his sociocultural context.

This is not to say that Sasha was unable or unwilling to defend what he said. I did not go into a detailed discussion with him, but in countless discussions over the years with people like Sasha, I discovered that they are quite capable of backing up their own accounts with additional information. For example, if he were challenged about the motives his narrative attributed to the United States, he would be likely to point out that America emerged from World War II in a vastly more powerful economic position than it had in 1941. If we were to agree, but argue that this was not because the U.S. tried to improve its economic standing, he would be likely to say this is quite naive, and even might be able to point to documents or political decisions to support his interpretation.

In response to the argument that any attempt to open a second front earlier than 1944 would have resulted in an unacceptable level of casualties, Sasha might argue that the losses involved in D-Day were quite small compared with those experienced by the Soviets. Using even the more conservative estimate of war dead accepted during the Soviet years, the USSR lost on average 14,000 people every day between 1941 and 1945. This compares with 6,603 American deaths on D-Day in 1944 (The National D-Day Memorial Foundation homepage, June 10, 2000). Of course, using statistics to compare levels of pain and suffering is not a very satisfactory way to discuss such matters, but in fact, American claims about huge losses on June 6, 1944, and Russian claims about their relatively small size are often encountered in discussions about what happened in World War II. In short, Sasha was quite capable of supporting and defending his account and was not simply repeating it mindlessly.

Such observations highlight the fact that an active agent is involved in textually mediated collective memory. This requires us to keep a focus on how active agent and cultural tool operate in tandem rather than on how either element functions alone. Among other things, this means that textual resources used in collective memory usually do not take the form of isolated, hermetically sealed units that are either used in unmodified form and in their entirety or not used at all. Instead, they constitute a much more flexible kind of instrument that can be harnessed in combination with others in novel ways.

This line of reasoning is consistent with the past several decades of research in the psychology of memory. Such research has shown time and again that memory is more a matter of reorganizing, or reconstructing, bits of information into a general scheme than it is a matter of accurate recall of the isolated bits themselves. As Neisser (1967) argued decades ago, memory is not so much a matter of "reappearance" as it is a matter of active
construction based on traces from earlier experiences. In this view, humans are often quite good at recalling the gist of what happened, a process that involves selectively using, and often distorting or deleting, pieces of information that do not contribute to the overall picture they are reconstructing. These are general points that apply to the resources of textual mediation as much as to any other kind of information.

Extending this line of argument, one can say that the narrative texts used in collective memory are best viewed as tools, or raw materials to be employed in organizing or reconstructing an account of the past. Instead of serving as containers of precise, unchanging information, these texts seem to play a role in memory by serving as indicators of "the sort of thing" an individual or group would say. Instead of remembering the precise words that someone uttered, we are much more likely to remember the gist of what he said, and in this effort we are likely to rely heavily on a sort of "implicit theory" (Ross, 1989) of what that voice, or type of voice, would utter.

A concrete illustration of these points can be found in how I remembered what Sasha had said on that morning in 1997. After relating this encounter from memory several times to others, I decided to write about it, and this took me back to the tape recording I had made of that discussion. At first, I thought I had been unable to find the right segment of conversation since I did not recognize what Sasha had said. But then I realized that what he said differed in some very significant ways from my recollection of it. I had remembered some bits of what he had said, but I had done a lot of "editing" to make them consistent with what I apparently believed he, or a person like him, would have said. A transcription from the tape of what said Sasha yielded the following:

Well, I think the United States benefited from that war. And Great Britain, too. They agreed to help other countries but won much more afterward. For example, when Germany began the war, England and France promised to help Eastern Europe but did nothing, and Hitler realized that they would not even come to the aid of Poland.

As any contemporary psychologist of memory would point out, my account of this incident had distorted it in some very predictable ways. To be generous, I got the gist of what Sasha had said, but I had also introduced, distorted, and deleted some important bits of information. Instead of remembering his precise words, or even his precise ideas, I apparently used pieces of what he had said as a basis for generating a text that I thought he would have produced. In short, what I remembered had more to do with the voice, or type of voice, I assumed was doing the talking than with what he actually had said.

Among other things, this little experiment reflects one final point I would like to make about the textual resources used in collective memory. In most cases, these resources are not neutral cognitive instruments that simply assist us in our efforts to remember. Instead, we are often committed to believing, or not believing them, sometimes in deeply emotional ways having to do with fundamental issues of identity. In my encounter with Sasha, this is reflected in the motivated way in which my recall was distorted. In retrospect, I found a level of defensiveness about historical accounts that surprised me.

It surprised me because over the past twenty-five years, I have had extensive exposure to Soviet and Russian accounts of World War II and have conscientiously tried to sort out what can be supported on rational, objective grounds and what cannot. In the process, I have come to believe very strongly that we in the West often vastly underestimate the Russian contribution to the war effort and overestimate our own. On countless occasions when speaking to Western friends and colleagues, I have recognized that massive blunders, self-inflicted loss, and monumental stupidity were part of the story of the Soviet war effort, but I have always made a point of emphasizing that the Soviets nonetheless deserve the lion's share of credit for winning the war against Hitler. In short, I had thought that after years of trying to understand the Russian account of World War II, I was fairly sensitive, and even sympathetic to their perspective.

Nevertheless, it appears that I had reacted with a good deal of defensiveness to what Sasha said. This defensiveness undoubtedly arose in response to being harangued by Soviet publications and the occasional individual about the pernicious tendencies of American capitalist cliques, and so on, and so on. Over the years, I had recognized that such statements were often best understood as public displays for the audience at hand rather than reflections of the core beliefs of the performers. Nonetheless, it appears that what I had been saying in public to Western colleagues differed from what at least some part of me believed in private. The result was that I had reconstructed Sasha’s statement on the basis of more pernicious, Soviet-sounding motives to Allied actions than had appeared in what he actually said.

Put together with the shocked, and sometimes angry, response I hear from other Westerners when they encounter Sasha’s account, my systematic distortion provides a reminder of something about the narrative texts used in the textual mediation of collective memory: They are important to us. Such accounts do not simply reflect different objective viewpoints to be accepted or not in a dispassionate way. Instead, they reflect strongly held commitments to a particular narrative account, commitments that are often masked by the tendency to think that our account simply relates what happened.
response to the need to create a usable past, and this need varies over time, this is to be expected. What constitutes a usable past in one sociocultural setting is often quite different from what is needed in another.

Studies by historians provide some insight into this issue. For example, Novick (1999) has outlined some of the ways that the collective memory of the Holocaust in the United States has changed during the latter half of the twentieth century. In his view, the concerns of the present “have, in one period, made Holocaust memory seem inappropriate, useless, or even harmful; in another period, appropriate and desirable. As we examine the changing fortunes of Holocaust memory, we’ll be struck by how they relate to changing circumstances and, particularly among American Jews, changing decisions about collective self-understanding and self-representation” (p. 5).

Bodnar (1992) has made a related argument about other transitions in American public memory during the twentieth century. He views these transitions as part of an ongoing struggle that takes many twists and turns, depending on the needs of the moment. In his view:

The essential contest that shaped commemoration and the interpretation of the past and present has been waged between the advocates of centralized power and those who were unwilling to completely relinquish the autonomy of their small worlds. Cultural leaders, usually grounded in institutional and professional structures, envisioned a nation of dutiful and united citizens which undertook only orderly change. These officials saw the past as a device that could help them attain their goals and never tired of using commemorations to restate what they thought the social order and citizen behavior should be.

Defenders of vernacular cultures, however, had misgivings about centralized authorities and their interpretations of the past and the present. Their cultural expressions and public memory were not always grounded in the interests of large institutions but in the interests of small structures and associations that they had known, felt, or experienced directly. These attachments could change from time to time and include interests that served the needs of leaders as well. (pp. 245-246)

From Bodnar’s perspective, the twentieth century has seen the rise and subsequent diminution of central governmental control of public memory in the United States. The domination of official culture shifted from the business and cultural elite to the U.S. government over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, but “the political culture of our own times is no longer dominated by a central symbol as powerful as the nation-state” (p. 252). Again, the negotiation of a usable past is seen to change with the demands of the present.

Shifting back to collective memory for the Holocaust, it is interesting to note that some authors argue not only that it does change, but that it should. This point is often made by those concerned with insuring that memory for the Holocaust continues to be the focus of active engagement.
on cases in which someone may have mastered, but not appropriated a
textual resource.

It became clear, however, that this line of reasoning about the psycholo-

gical dimensions of consumption needs to be complemented with an
analysis of the contexts in which people use textual resources. This is so
because belief or appropriation is often not an all-or-nothing affair that can
be used to characterize individuals across contexts. Instead, people often
say and think one thing in one context and quite another in another context.

The most obvious way in which these points played out in the Soviet
Union concerns the distinction between the public and private spheres of
performance. The stark distinction that existed between these two spheres
in Soviet life was unique in several respects. First, it was a distinction that
was created and monitored by the state. Second, failure to recognize this
distinction could have very powerful negative consequences. These forces
gave rise to phenomena I have examined under the headings of the control
of narrative information and the control of narrative performance.

The stark public-private distinction characteristic of the Soviet era was
associated with social and psychological processes discussed under the
heading of “internal emigration.” Again, this was internal emigration away
from a public sphere of discourse controlled by the state, and at least some
people’s encounters with state-sponsored violence in this connection had
given rise to a deep-seated fear that continued to exist well after the Soviet
Union had collapsed. At the same time, however, internal emigration often
provided some of the motivation and resources for resisting state efforts at
social and psychological control.

All of these points serve to complicate the picture of collective remem-
bering. Instead of being some sort of steady-state attribute of individuals
or groups, collective remembering turns out to involve an array of complex
relationships between active agents and the narrative tools they employ.
These relationships vary not only along cognitive and affective dimen-
sions, but also as a reflection of performance contexts in which memory
practices actually occur in everyday life.

Generational Differences in Collective Remembering

When Soviet authorities cancelled nationwide history examinations in 1988
(see Chapter 5), few could envisage the road that lay ahead. The Soviet
population had little experience with public debate, so it was unclear how
they could take on the complex process of negotiating new forms of col-
lective remembering. Some sort of open discussion was needed, but the
level of cynicism made it difficult to see how this could happen. From the
perspective of Soviet authorities, the only thing that was clear at the time
was that the old system for promulgating collective memory was broken,
and their action amounted to little more than a public admission that this
was so.

The attempt to renegotiate collective memory in these circumstances
was based on the standard assumption that what was needed was to pro-
duce a new official account of the past that would replace the old one. And
as I outlined in Chapter 5, this gave rise to major efforts by the state to
create new textual resources, efforts grounded largely in the dialogic, as
opposed to referential, function of narrative. It remains unclear, however,
whether this effort has been very effective. In part, this is due to production
problems such as the unavailability of textbooks or the funds to purchase
them.

What is even less clear a dozen years after the end of the Soviet era is
how the textual resources that are available have been used. How do peo-
ple in Russia employ the new textual means provided by the government
and other sources? What do they know today about major events of the
past such as World War II? What do they believe? These questions take
on a particularly interesting dimension in the post-Soviet context because
it seems to involve something other than simply substituting one set of
textual resources for another. Specifically, it appears to be a context whose
most relevant characteristic is the decline of state legitimacy and author-
ity. In this scenario, the state may no longer have the authority to control
the consumption of textual resources for collective memory in the usual


Voces de Colegios Remembrando

Contenido

El estudio que se presenta en este capítulo tiene como objetivo analizar la aplicación de técnicas de enseñanza en diferentes escenarios educativos. Se han recopilado y analizado diversas implicaciones para mejorar el proceso educativo, especialmente en los contextos socio-educativos complejos. El capítulo está dividido en secciones que abordan diferentes aspectos de la enseñanza y aprendizaje en el contexto contemporáneo.

1. Introducción
   - Contexto educativo actual
   - Importancia de la enseñanza de habilidades
   - Desafíos actuales en la educación

2. Técnicas de enseñanza en el aula
   - Metodologías tradicionales
   - Técnicas innovadoras
   - Implementación de tecnologías emergentes

3. Influencia de la cultura en la enseñanza
   - Aspectos culturales en la formación docente
   - Adaptación de la enseñanza a diferentes culturas

4. Evaluación y retroalimentación
   - Métodos de evaluación efectivos
   - Importancia del feedback en el proceso de enseñanza
   - Técnicas de evaluación en el contexto de la enseñanza

5. Conclusiones
   - Principios fundamentales para una mejor enseñanza
   - Perspectivas futuras en la investigación educativa

6. Anexos
   - Recomendaciones para docentes
   - Bibliografía recomendada

El objetivo final de este capítulo es proporcionar una visión holística del proceso de enseñanza, considerando los desafíos actuales y explorando posibles soluciones que puedan mejorar el rendimiento de los estudiantes y la eficiencia de los docentes.
Conventional Differences in Culture: Reminiscing

Comparison of cultural differences and their implications for intercultural communication. The text discusses the importance of understanding cultural differences in order to improve communication and cooperation between individuals from different backgrounds.

Key points include:
- The significance of cultural context in shaping communication and understanding.
- Strategies for effective cross-cultural communication, including listening actively and being aware of non-verbal cues.
- The role of cultural stereotypes and their potential to influence perception and interaction.

Overall, the text aims to raise awareness of cultural diversity and encourage a more inclusive and respectful approach to communication.

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In the conclusion, it is worth noting an interesting insight in the form of the distribution of the key distribution of the core messages. This is an important consideration in the context of the model. The model’s conclusion highlights the importance of understanding the distribution of core messages to effectively communicate and engage with audiences. It is clear that the distribution of these messages is crucial for success, and understanding the underlying factors that influence this distribution can provide valuable insights for future research and practice.

In the context of the model, it is important to consider how the distribution of core messages is influenced by various factors, such as social influence, audience characteristics, and the effectiveness of communication channels. By understanding these factors, we can better tailor our communication strategies to achieve the desired outcomes.

In conclusion, the model presented in this paper provides a useful framework for understanding the distribution of core messages in various contexts. Its application in real-world situations can be extended to inform various fields, including marketing, public relations, and social media management.
The decision to provide assistance in one's community often stems from the desire to make a positive impact on the lives of others. When faced with complex social issues, individuals are called upon to engage in acts of compassion and empathy. This section explores the various ways in which people can contribute to their communities, focusing on the motivations behind such actions and the potential outcomes of their efforts.

1. Volunteering:
Volunteering is a common way for individuals to give back to their communities. Whether it involves serving at a local soup kitchen or participating in a environmental clean-up project, volunteering can be a rewarding experience. It not only helps others but can also provide personal satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment.

2. Donating:
Donating money or resources can also be a powerful way to support one's community. Organizations often rely on donations to fund their operations and provide essential services. By donating, individuals can help ensure that these organizations can continue to serve the needs of the community.

3. Advocacy:
Advocacy is another important means of community engagement. It involves using one's voice to promote change and support policies that benefit the community. This can be done through public speaking, writing letters to elected officials, or participating in protests and demonstrations.

4. Education and Training:
Providing education and training to community members can empower individuals and enhance their quality of life. This can include offering classes on a variety of topics, from basic literacy to advanced technical skills.

5. Mentorship:
Mentorship programs can be highly effective in providing support and guidance to young people. By sharing knowledge and experience, mentors can help shape the lives of future community leaders.

In conclusion, there are many ways in which individuals can contribute to their communities. Whether through volunteering, donating, advocating, providing education, or mentorship, it is important to consider the unique needs of the community and to find a way to contribute that is meaningful and sustainable. By doing so, individuals can help create a stronger, more supportive community for all.
Names were distributed in the room above the speaker's voice to create an anonymous and equitable environment. This approach is effective in reducing the influence of social desirability bias and allows for honest and open discussions.

Introduction

The short essay by Post-Soviet Subject Project P.259:

The short essay by the Post-Soviet Subject Project P.259.

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Contribution Differences in Collectively Ruminating

167
Conclusion

The book is organized around three basic issues. First, I have provided a historical overview of the role of collective behavior in social change, including the development of social movements and the role of collective action in shaping political outcomes. Second, I have explored the theoretical frameworks that have been used to understand collective behavior, including theories of social movement, social identity, and collective efficacy. Third, I have discussed the empirical evidence for the role of collective behavior in social change, including case studies of successful movements and interventions to promote social change. Overall, this book aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of collective behavior in social change, and to highlight the importance of collective action in shaping the course of history.
To my Russian friends and teachers

Voices of Collective Remembering

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