Memory Work in the Digital Age: Exploring the Boundary Between Universal and Particular Memory Online.

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Abstract:

Interactive media have altered the basic relationship between contemporary individuals and their cultural texts. The ability of individuals broadcast their lives, thoughts, and stories begs the question: What is the relationship between collective and individual memory within the age of new media? As Barbie Zelizer argues in her *Reading the Past Against the Grain*, collective memory is a dualistic creation containing both the particular and the universal (p. 230). While collective memories are based on individual lived memories, they also constitute a commonality, a universal story. The memory must exist simultaneously as the particular and universal, remaining clear and significant at both the micro and macro level of interpretation. In order to do so, the memory is mediated materially or conceptually through a meso-level structure: a memorial. This essay explores the changes occurring through new media in the representation of collective memory as individuals increasingly write their own stories into "memorials." By drawing on collective memory literature and focusing on a series of classification for contemporary online memorialization, this study seeks to investigate the tradeoffs inherent in the translation from the individual to the collective: Is there a point at which the texture of individual voice is lost in the chorus, or the chorus is reduced to a cacophony? Utilizing several examples of online storytelling memorials, including *This American Life, StoryCorps,* and The Tate Modern Intermedia site *NoPlace*, this essay explores the balance between the power of particularity and the appeal of the universal and offers several categories by which to read these tradeoffs: *everyday designed*, *everyday edited*, and *everyday abstracted*.

New Media/New Memory: An Introduction

Recent advances in interactive media have resulted in a shift that changes the basic relationship between contemporary individuals and their culture. As Walter Benjamin predicted in his work *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (2008), "the distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character…At any moment the reader is ready to turn into a writer" (p. 28). While in this quote Benjamin refers to an era of mechanical reproduction, Benjamin's description also predicts the age of digital reproduction in which contemporary users of new media switch fluidly in one moment to the next from their role as "reader" to "author" of a text. These technological shifts allow users of new media to access an apparently infinite amount of information while providing them with the option to write their own texts in response. These technological changes affect many aspects of contemporary life by delineating a new role for the private individual within public life. One of the locations where this cultural shift is felt is within the relationship between collective or public memory and individual memory. The ability of private individuals to blog, YouTube, or otherwise broadcast the details of their lives, thoughts, and experiences, coupled with the seemingly endless space for storing this data begs the questions: What is the relationship between collective and individual memory within the age of new media? How is collective memory treated within interactive and new media? How does digital sphere alter the act of commemoration?

New media technology is changing the process of the production of collective memory because online sites of memory constitute new media of translation of memory from the individual to the collective. Collective memory is, at its foundation, a dualistic creation containing both the particular and the universal (Zelizer, 1995, p. 230). Before memories become

collective, they are based on some sort of lived memories. Thus, the collective memory originates as a particular memory—it is particular to an individual or to a group. However, once an individual memory transforms into a collective memory, it also represents the universal; the collective memory is chosen because it represents something universal—something beyond the particular. The memory must exist simultaneously as the particular and universal—remaining clear and significant at both the micro and macro level of interpretation. In order to do so, the memory is often mediated materially or conceptually through a meso-level structure, such as a memorial. This structure, in part, determines the delineations of the collective memory—what aspects of private memory are translated into the collective. However, new media's democratizing role in memory work makes the translations and tradeoffs included in the production of collective memory increasingly visible. As more individuals expect to broadcast their opinions and experiences, more individuals expect their versions of reality to be included in the collective memory. As postmodern literature makes clear, there is a limit to the extent to which the individual voice can be represented in the collective vocalization—at a certain point the texture of individual voice is lost in the chorus, or the chorus is reduced to a cacophony.

Through the investigation of several types of online memorial activities, this paper considers the changes occurring through new media in the representation of collective memory. By drawing on collective memory literature and focusing on a series of classification for contemporary online memorialization, this study seeks to investigate the tradeoffs inherent to different methods of translation from the individual memory to the collective memory. Several examples of this meso-level act of translation are explored: (1) the narrated representation of multiple everyday voices in the radio show *This American Life* (www.thislife.org); (2) the un-narrated representation of multiple everyday voices in the oral history project *StoryCorps*

(www.*StoryCorps*.org); and (3) the visual representation of everyday voices Tate Modern Intermedia site *NoPlace* (noplace.someprojects.info). Each of these examples represents a type of mediation for the act of memorialization, which I have categorized as: *everyday designed*, *everyday edited*, and *everyday abstracted*. Each carries with it a series of tradeoffs: the power of particularity is lost to the abstract, or the universal is overpowered by individual idiosyncrasy, or in an effort to balance the two, clarity is lost.

The Particular and Universal Nature of Collective Memory: Literature Review

The study of collective memory evolved out of Maurice Halbwachs' work (1950) in expanding the study of memory and remembering from the realm of individual psychology into a social activity. As Barbie Zelizer in her *Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies* explains, the study of cultural memory, as opposed to individual memory, refers to the study of the "recollections that are instantiated beyond the individual by and for the collective" (1995, p. 214). Collective memory evolves out of a group's memory and is therefore subject to the group's "activities of sharing, discussion, negotiation, and, often, contestation" (Zelizer, 1995, p. 214). Collective memory allows a society to recontextualize and reconfigure its past so that it resonates in the present. In other words, collective memory changes over time responding as the interests, activities, and concerns of a society change. Or, as Zelizer eloquently states, collective memory "represents a graphing of the past as it is used for present aims, a vision in bold relief of the past as it is woven into the present and future" (1995, p. 217).

Collective memory serves to secure the vision a society has of itself, or, in Emile Durkheim's words, collective memory helps a society to "renew the sentiment which it has of itself" (as cited in Zelizer, p. 219). For Durkheim (1964), collective memory is a part of what he

refs to as impersonal thinking. Impersonal thinking contributes to a societal truth that exists as a structure above the passions of individual agents. Durkheim suggests that beyond the private ideas, thoughts, and experiences of individual people, "there is a world of absolute ideas according to which he must shape his own" (1964, p. 70). However, Durkheim's model does not account for the influence that individuals have on the structure of collective memory; rather this structure is something that is fixed.

A macro-level responsive vision of collective memory can be explained with Anthony Gidden's Stucturation Theory, which explores, in the words of Marshall Scott Poole, "the production and reproduction of the social systems through members' use of rules and resources in interaction" (as cited in Griffin, 2009, p. 236). Structuration Theory aims to acknowledge the existence of human agency while balancing agency against the existence of structures, or what he interchangeably terms rules and resources (Rose, 2006, p. 175-6). Giddens suggests that although humans as individuals have agency, they exist within pre-existing social structures. These social structures exhibit rules and resources that structure the ways in which agents act within a particular society. However, the social structures are produced by the repetitive behavior of agents, and once established, the structures limit the behavior of agents; thus the structures and agents evolve together over time (Rose, 2006, p. 176; Griffin, 2009, p. 238). Collective memory is an example of this form of evolution. At its core, collective memory is born from the memory of individual agents. The repetition of the memory over time can result in a structured memory that constrains the memory of the society of which it is a part. Once that memory exists as a structure within a society it is subject to reinterpretation and reconfiguration as both the agents and societal structures evolve over time.

The cultural theorist Stuart Hall's concept of encoding and decoding of meaningful discourse within television shows is, essentially, a similar process to Structuration Theory. Like Structuration Theory, the process of encoding and decoding information results in structures within which individual agents act. However, Hall's model explains how this process occurs at the micro-level, the level of individuals and can easily refer to the production of cultural memory from individual memory "texts". Hall, in his *Encoding/Decoding*, discusses the difference between what is encoded into a text—or what the producer/encoder of the text intends the audience to understand from that text—and what is decoded—or drawn from the text by the viewer/decoder. His map for how messages are encoded and decoded involves a series of "moments" within the production process in which codes are applied. First, information from the "wider socio-cultural and political structure" is drawn out by the producer/encoder, this information is then encoded using particular meaning structures to make the text—a television program or a cultural memory. This text is the "meaningful discourse" that the encoder and decoder share (Hall, 2008, p. 165). This process is then repeated in reverse by the decoder, moving through his or her own set of meaning structures and eventually feeding back into the socio-cultural and political world of which the individual is a part. Hall suggests "the codes of encoding and decoding may not be perfectly symmetrical. The degree of symmetry—that is, the degrees of "understanding" and "misunderstanding" in the communicative exchange—"depend on the degrees of symmetry…established between the positions of the "personifications" of the encoder-producer and decoder-receiver" (2008, p. 166).

If cultural memory can be equated with the meaningful discourse, the original act of encoding the discourse can be seen as the production of a memory and the decoding and feedback process explains the change in meaning over time. This model occurs at the individual

level, but writ-large it explains the dynamic of collective memory by, in the terms of Structuration Theory, the repetitive encoding and decoding of a piece of meaningful discourse establishes a social structure that, once established, limits the behavior of agents.

Hall's model explains that individuals may not decode a message "symmetrically"; this points out the moments where individual agents may not share the collective memory and, as a result, those moments where shifts in cultural memory occur. Marita Sturken's article, *The Aesthetics of Absence: Rebuilding Ground Zero* (2004), explores one such moment through one of the best-known locations of contemporary collective memory: Ground Zero in New York City. In the article Sturken argues that the Ground Zero site constitutes a sacred ground; it is a location "charged with meaning. It implies not daily life but worship, contemplation, and a suspension of ordinary activities" (p. 315). However, the designation of Ground Zero as sacred ground is controversial. Whose sacred ground is this? Whose memories are most honored here, and how? How can life in and around the site move forward on hallowed ground? Whose memories determine the collective commemoration at the site?

Somehow it is the nature of absence at the site that highlights the multitude of claims to it. Every American surely agrees that this is a site of American collective memory. However, the nature of that collective memory—and therefore how it should be commemorated—has yet to be solidified. In her article Sturken (2004) references William Langewiesche's book *American Ground: Unbuilding the World Trade Center*:

> Langewiesche's book…describes the ways that the various groups involved in the operation—the firefighters, the police officers, and the construction workers and engineers—fought constantly over the meaning of the pile and how it should be treated. The firefighters were angry at the construction workers, who, they felt, used their enormous machine callously, as if the ground were not littered with the dead. The construction crews, for their part, were angry at the firefighters because they perceived them to be treating their dead differently than the civilians who died there (p. 181).

The tension that Langewiesche recounts in his book shows the moments at which collective memory is being structured. The policemen and firefighters in this passage see the site of Ground Zero as a monument to the bravery of their fallen colleagues, men and women who were lost due to their selfless effort to save civilians. At the same time, the engineers and construction workers view the site as a reminder of the civilians who were killed by an act of terror while going about their daily lives. The meaningful discourse here is the same: the physical location of Ground Zero. However, the memory attached to the site and meaning of that memory differs. Langewiesche captures a moment that is not often seen, the moments after a devastating change has take place, but before society has decided on a way to treat that change. In Giddens' macro-level terms it is a view into the moments in which agents begin to produce a structure, but before the structure is clear. Or, to use Hall's model, at a micro-level, it is the moment where multiple meaningful discourses are starting to form collectively. In other words, there are group memories forming around particular relationships to the site: the firefighters versus the construction workers. However, a larger collective discourse remains unformed. This allows for a view into how collective memory is negotiated, compiled, and formed. It also allows for a view into the individual memory and how an individual memory can be formed into a collective memory.

In reviewing the nature of collective memory as a negotiated co-construction, collective memory appears to be problematic insofar as it constitutes a generalization built of individual memories. Not only does this mean that certain memories, experiences, and interpretations of the past are left out of collective memory, the ways in which collective memory is determined is affected by larger issues of "identity formation, power and authority, cultural norms, and social

interaction" (Zelizer, 1995, p. 214). Those texts worthy of preservation for the cultural memory "were typically the products of intellectual and artistic elites" (Haskins, 2007, p. 402). The technological advances of new media provide a platform through which individual memories can be transmitted as contradictory accounts to those of cultural memory.

As Zelizer highlighted in *Which Words is a War Photo Worth? Journalism Must Set the Standard* (2004), throughout history the government set the standard for the types of war images available to citizens. And throughout history citizens have sought to better understand wars through their imagery; "images continually rise to the forefront of a war's documentation, despite the broad attempts of governments and other official circles to prohibit their display" (p. 1). However, current technology has made it increasingly difficult for the American government to have authority over the images the public views; the speed at which new media technology allows for the wide dissemination of images is astonishing. For instance, at the time of Zelizer's article in April of 2004, the American government was attempting to renew control over the images of coffins returning home from the wars in the Middle East, and was being challenged by new media technology. This technology allowed the pictures a cargo worker in Kuwait took of "flag-draped caskets in an aircraft" to be published in the Seattle Times (Zelizer, 2004, p. 1). New media technology also allowed for the rapid dissemination of 350 photos of flag-draped caskets—which were released under The Freedom of Information Act—via the website The Memory Hole (Zelizer, 2004, p. 1). These circumstances, and others like it, make it obvious that access to the information upon which collective memory is produced is ever-increasingly broad due to the shifts in technology that allow individuals to document and disseminate their own "lived" memories, experiences, and reflections on current topics, such as the wars in the Middle East.

As a result of the access to information evolving out of broad participation, the potential information upon which public memory is based is increasingly large. In *Public Memory in a Digital Age,* Ekaterina Haskins (2007) discusses some of the affordances and limitations that evolve in a digital age when "all kinds of stories can now become part of an evolving patchwork of public memory" (Haskins, p. 405). Haskins explores the *September 11 Digital Archive* as an example of a digital space of public memory that allows for the memorialization of individual ephemeral memories that continue to evolve over time. Within the space of the Archive all individual voices are classified as "historical records," which allows the archive to "preserve a vast and diverse set of stories, images, and points of view that otherwise would have been lost or dispersed in cyberspace and private archives" (p. 419). The Archive creates a space in which each user can investigate and interpret the archival material in his or her own way, the site provides little influence on the user's passage through the information. Haskins argues that such an approach "to historical research and remembrance may indeed be a self-conscious reaction against the traditional dictatorial role of official institutions of memory" (p. 419). However, "this approach also shifts the burden of active remembrance to individuals and groups, effectively disavowing the *public* nature of the enterprise" (p. 419).

Haskin's argument suggests that through new media technology and the affordances it provides vis-à-vis the individual and group memory, the nature of a singular public memory risks being lost to, in the words of Lev Manovich, "the logic of new media…which values individuality over conformity" (as cited in Haskins, 2007, p. 407). This privileging of the individual within collective memory, to the point of the loss of the vary nature of collectivity is reminiscent of Michael Calvin McGee (1990) image of postmodernism. In his *Text Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture*, McGee argues that through the diversification of

educational and informational content, American culture has been fractured and fragmented; it is no longer fair to assume a shared basis of knowledge in America. There are no longer complete texts within postmodernism; rather there are fragments of texts that refer to other fragments of texts. This results in what Fredric Jameson termed as a postmodern "new depthlessness" (2008, p. 486). When this lens is shone on collective memory the collective nature of memory appears to disintegrate into individual memory, which, too, becomes unstable, fragmentary, and fleeting.

However, at its very nature collective memory contains this dualism: it is both particular and universal (Zelizer, 1995, p. 230). Collective memories are based in lived memories; although collective memories represent the universal for some individuals, they also represent the individual and/or group memories from which they evolve. This duality of collective memory is essential to the nature of collective memory: "The significance of memory rests in the interdependence between the two, yet a group can subscribe to one meaning without actively emphasizing the other" (Zelizer, 1995, p. 230). This dualism is played out in Marita Sturken's discussion of the tourist nature of American collective memory. Sturken (2004) argues that Americans who are removed from the lived memory of our collective tragedies, like 9/11, act as tragedy tourists, or individuals "for whom history is an experience once or twice removed, a mediated and reenacted experience, yet an experience nevertheless" (p. 9). In this vision of historical tourism, the duality of collective memory lives: the tourist exists with the universal qualities of collective memory, yet the universal could not exist without those for whom the memory is, at least in part, a lived experience. The tourist may assign a different meaning to 9/11 than someone who was in the twin towers but the source of the memory and, thus, the source of the meaning is the same.

Arguably the question of how collective memory is formed—whose accounts are included, what aspects are highlighted—is a question that has existed for as long as collective or cultural memory has existed. Throughout time many accounts of important events have existed and very few survived for posterity. The democratization of historical accounts that has occurred, in part, as a result of new media technology has made this negotiation visible and debatable. What accounts should be recognized? How can we choose among them? Is a 9/11 survivior's account more authentic than the account of someone who watched the towers fall from their home television in Kansas? Is it more important to capture the universal experience or the particular? Perhaps the visibility of the "activities of sharing, discussion, negotiation, and, often, contestation" (Zelizer, 1995, p. 214) that help to create and recreate collective memory in new media can provide better answers for a collective memory that represents a universal and unifying voice, while providing room for the particular and individual experiences that create, contradict, or challenge the larger narrative.

Production of Collective Memory: Examples for Analysis

Currently there are many types of online sites of memory from blogs, to memorial sites, to interactive archives, to name a few. Online memory-making democratizes a certain aspect of memory work, while other aspects remain true to the "traditional dictatorial role of official institutions of memory" (Hakins, 2007, p. 419). Each category, in turn, highlights certain features of collective and private memory because they each offer new sites of mediating the individual memory for the purpose of a vision of collective memory. In other words, online memory resources function at the meso-level as translators from the micro to macro-level of memory, and back. I will explore several examples of this meso-level act of translation: (1) the

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narrated representation of multiple everyday voices in the radio show *This American Life*; (2) the un-narrated representation of multiple everyday voices in the oral history project *StoryCorps*; and (3) the visualization of everyday voices Tate Modern Intermedia's *NoPlace*. Each of these examples represents a type of mediation for the act of memorialization. In the following section I will discuss the details and history of each of these examples.

The Memory-Making Examples

      This American Life is a radio show that has been on the air for over 14 years, producing over 380 hour-long episodes. Each episode is based on a particular theme and contains a series of stories, generally between two and five, that relate to the theme. The stories chosen for the show are the stories of people "who are thrown into situations that shed light on something larger" (*This American Life*). The stories included on the show do not represent a particular generic definition and include various genres including documentaries, interviews, oral histories, and audio art pieces. The stories are journalism, non-fiction, or fiction and are created by any number of people: *This American Life,* long-time contributors, professionals, or listeners. What is consistent, however, is that the stories are about "what it's like to be here, now, in America" (*This American Life*). Each episode of the show is heavily narrated. The show host, Ira Glass, introduces episode theme in a prologue, exploring it through a short story. He ties this theme to each of the stories included in the episode, carefully contextualizing it. Although the show is a radio show, it quickly adapted to new media; most weeks it is the most popular podcast in the country (Barclay Agency). A large part of the of distribution of *This American Life* is through new media delivery methods and, as a result, the show's reach becomes global rather than strictly a nationally distributed radio show. Futhermore, the show has a strong online presence,

including free online streaming of the show's archives. In this way the show is able to provide new users with background on the show and old users with access to their favorite shows. While the radio show began as just that, a radio show, its delivery methods and online presence make it function within the realm of new media.

StoryCorps is David Isay's non-profit oral history project that has evolved since 2003 from a small venture to a project with national scope. The project mission is to "honor and celebrate one another's lives through listening" (*StoryCorps*). The project evolved from a single story booth in Grand Central Station in New York City in which people were invited to interview their family and friends. The project now has four stationary booths and three mobile booths that travel the country. Through recording the stories of tens of thousands of everyday people's lives, *StoryCorps* aims to provide access to the voices of everyday people: "By recording the stories of our lives with the people we care about, we experience our history, hopes, and humanity" (*StoryCorps*). The focus of the project is to encourage storytelling within existing groups of family and friends, rather than offer a professionally "storied" version of individual lives. The archive of stories are available online and are played weekly on NPR stations across the country. These stories remain unedited to the extent that they are not reordered, narrated, or highlighted with music, however, the stories available online and on the radio are one or two minute clips of the 40 minute interview sessions. While *StoryCorps* requires physically going to a story booth to conduct an interview or submitting through a do-it-yourself kit, the project is clearly aided by its online component; it could not have reached its national scale of recording and international scale of accessing stories without the help of new media.

Noplace was a Net Art project by Marek Walczak and Martin Wattenberg for the Tate Modern's Intermedia Art online exhibition that focuses on individual "notions of Paradise and

Utopia" (Tate Modern Intermedia Art). Their interactive art piece used participatory software to allow users to input their stories, ideas, and thoughts about Utopia. The user input was inserted into an algorithm that "mines" creative common material on the web in order to produce a video. The site explains: "As you write, your words trigger a set of visual associations, colliding to form a video of your ideal. Once you've described your noplace, you can preview it, then turn it into a movie that others can see and contrast with" (Walczak). This project allowed everyday people to describe their particular vision of utopia in order to create an artifact of that vision. The site is, unfortunately, no longer active, but some of the videos are still available online.

Each of these memory media enables or hinders aspects of individual and collective memory. Drawing on collective memory literature to investigate the characteristics of memory at the micro-level and macro-level, each of these instances of meso-level memory mediators I will analyze each of these examples in the following section.

Everyday Designed, Everyday Edited, Everyday Abstracted: Findings

This American Life

In *This American Life* they stories are those of everyday people. On the website the show claims that: "We think of the show as journalism…what we're doing is applying the tools of journalism to everyday lives, personal lives...It's also true that the journalism we do tends to use a lot of the techniques of fiction: scenes and characters and narrative threads" (http://thislife.org/About_Radio.aspx). Despite the impression that these stories are the result of individuals telling their stories about their "everyday lives," the stories contained in *This American Life* constitute something other than strictly the stories individuals tell about their lives. *This American Life* solicits the stories heard on the show. Furthermore, they help draw out

the stories of their interviewee's so that the stories are of interest to their listeners. As host Ira Glass says in *Radio: An Illustrated Guide* (2006): "The one other thing you need is a *reflection* on what it all means…just start to try out hypotheses on them…and some of these questions will go *absolutely* nowhere. But eventually something will stick" (p. 13-14). Finally, the stories in the show are edited, themed, and narrated by the *This American Life* producers and contributors in order to make particular lessons, ideas, and experiences within the stories shine forth to the audience (Savoie, manuscript in submission).

All of the alterations that a story on *This American Life* undergoes occur in order to make the individual stories meaningful to a wide audience—in order to lend a sense of universality to the stories. However the show preserves the particularities of individual storytellers in order to retain an authenticity to the stories as individual by using the voice of the storyteller and presenting the story not so much as journalism, but as oral history. Meanwhile, the show addresses the translation to the universal through theming and narration, which helps the audience to draw correlations between the other stories in the show and the episode theme. *This American Life* attempts to represent a broad spectrum of stories, while tying them together with the universal; then, the show distributes the stories widely, reaching audiences that might never have understood the daily existence of some of the people who lend their voices to *This American Life*.

This form of presentation of new media public memory is what I refer to as "everyday designed" given the high universality brought into the stories within the show through the interview and presentation methods outlined above. Although the show presents the stories as having high particularity—through the personal nature of the stories told as well as the use of the storytellers voice to relay much of the story—the reality of the production of the show is such

that the individual intentions for their stories are of little consequence to the final product. The show, of course, responds to the stories told by those who contribute their stories to the show, but those storytellers have little structural affect, aside from a cumulative affect over time, on the show and its format. The show uses individual stories, which were initially encoded by their storytellers, often with the help of *This American Life,* as elements through which they encode a larger story. This story constitutes the story that *This American Life* writes about the universality of the experience of American life, through the particularities of individual lives.

StoryCorps

StoryCorps, on the other hand, does not directly solicit or theme their stories. The story booths that allow users to share their stories with *StoryCorps* are open to anyone with the desire to interview a loved one and/or be interviewed by a loved one. One must reserve a time to use the story booths, but other than that, the booths are open for anyone's use. Once the interview is completed the entire interview is archived and available for the users as a complete interview. These interviews function as family mementos as well as archival documentation of the stories that users think are important. The project allows users to preserve their memories for posterity both within their immediate social groups as well as within national archives. These recordings become both familial and historical artifacts.

The main source of distribution of these stories, however, is not through either of these means. Rather, it is through those stories that *StoryCorps* highlights on their website and weekly podcast. The project selects interviews and edits those interviews down to the most touching minute or two of the 40 minute interview. The weekly podcast provides an unthemed edited story while the archive loosely themes the available shortened stories based on loose categories such

as "Discovery," "Growing up," "Hurricane Katrina," "Wisdom," and "Work." These categories help the user to find particular types of stories. This allows for the story selection to feel wide-ranging and individual while helping users navigate the site to find the information that is of interest to him or her. Furthermore, the categories are loose enough that the user can form his or her own connections within and between the stories he or she accesses. The stories are shared universally through themes, but the lessons drawn from them will vary between users more so than with *This American Life*.

This form of presentation of individual stories for the purpose of collective memory constitutes "everyday edited" display. The stories in the online archive are available to users at will as individual stories. This allows for high particularity. These stories stand alone as stories. Furthermore the stories told in the show are those of people who sought out this way to tell their story and who chose to preserve this story in this way. However, the means through which the stories are available edits and loosely themes the information contained within the stories. In this way the *StoryCorps* project attempts to universalize the individual stories archived on the site. This act of creating a universal structure and shortened length within which the stories fit allows for easier access to the stories, but it also affects the meaning of the stories and what a listener can take away from the stories.

Noplace

The site *Noplace* constituted a space in which each user can generate individual and particular images. By inputting a individual response to the universal question: What is paradise or utopia? the user is actually answering the question: What is paradise or utopia *for you*? The

user has control of their input into the site and each user theoretically develops a different and personal set of images based on their own reaction to the question.

The universality in this project is found in the question itself as well as within the continuous format for every individual video. However, the most interesting use of universality is found in the images that the site mines in response to user input. These images are pulled because they are labeled with the key words the user inputs. There is some kind of agreement within a particular community (namely the creative commons community) about the connection between the words the user inputs and the meanings suggested by these images.

Particularity, in this case, occurs within the control over the input that the user has. Furthermore, the user's creation is individual and personal. It can be shared within the site or posted on a blog, but the product is not necessarily shared broadly. The sense of a common universal artifact is somewhat lost through these particularities. Despite the fact that the video produced by the site may be shared, it is an abstracted and individual output from which generalizations may be drawn. For this reason I labeled this example as "everyday abstracted."

These three examples constitute three categories of new media public memory: *everyday designed*, *everyday edited*, and *everyday abstracted*. Each of these categories celebrates the everyday lives, experiences, and memories of people. Each finds a place in public memory for democratizing individual particularities. However, each goes about celebrating this category of public memory in a distinct way. The example of everyday designed is *This American Life.* It is an example of low user particularity—the stories are already themed, narrated, and put together in shows, but users may navigate them differently online—but high universality due to the narrative abilities of the show. Everyday edited is exemplified by *StoryCorps*, where the stories are available for user's to access at will as individual stories, but these stories are edited for

content and length and loosely themed. This is an example of a midrange particularity and universality. *Noplace* provides an example of high particularity—the user has a lot of control over the content—but low universality.

Future Work

Future work would see a text-based comparative rhetorical analysis of a selection of examples of each of these projects. The sample selected for this study will be selected through a random sampling of a criterion sample chosen for adherence to standard structures for each example, such as length, authorship, etc. Additionally, if the project sites offer examples of their best or featured work (as is the case with *This American Life* and *Noplace*) the sample will be limited to these examples, because they provide samples of what the producers see as most fitting of their goals. This work would explore the particular instances in which the individual stories contained in the projects are appropriated by the projects.

Conclusion

New media has not created the debate over whose voices are heard in collective memory—the ways in which individual voices are represented within cultural memory has been part of an ongoing debate throughout history of who speaks for whom and how. This is due to the nature of collective memory as at once particular and universal (Zelizer, p. 230). Collective memories are based on the lived memories of individuals and groups; they retain some of the particularities of original memory, but must be adjusted so that they are pertinent at a universal level. The memory is significant because of this duality. As a result the nature of the collective memory exists within the balance between these two aspects of the memory. New media

technology has created new spaces, platforms, and activities for public memory. These new locations of public memory are, by their nature, democratizing the space of public memory because they allow for increased access to individual and group memory as well as increased ability to broadcast one's own personal experiences, thoughts, and memories. New media, rather than creating the debate about what is and is not included in collective memory, draws attention to the question of what is and is not included in public memory. The increased access to individual accounts as well as the ever-increasing ability to store these accounts makes this debate visible and tangible. Which accounts do we believe? Which do we relate to? Which do we retain? The nature of new media can appear to support the concept of a postmodern conundrum of infinite individual experiences, of relative and equal standing memories. However, the spaces of memory on the Internet do not show the characteristics of unending relativism. Rather, they show an attempt to create a shared reality in which collective consciousness can strike a new balance with individual particularity and individual control.

The visibility of these types of tradeoffs that occurs alongside the democratization of public memory provides interesting insights into the nature of collective memory, specifically the balance between particularity and universality. It appears as though the relationship between particularity and universality is an inverse relationship, however, further investigation may provide insights into how better to represent a universal voice, while providing room for the particular and individual experiences that create, contradict, or challenge the larger narrative.

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