

Maternal mo(ve)ments in memory work

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Abstract

This is a textual introduction to the video piece 'Maternal mo(ve)ments in memory work.' The purpose of the video piece is to approach the production of collective and memory work data through its mo(ve)ments, sounds, and affects, and to perceive memory as a collective process of production. In order to question the construction of memory as a 'singular entity' and build an understanding of memory as the collective production of mo(ve)ments, I have combined the extracts of memory work recordings and collaborative writings with 'snapshots' of theory on memory and affect on the video display. The video piece begins by presenting the 'excerpts' of memory work recordings and their transcripts. Another set of memory work transcripts follows these, also providing writings and recorded expressions of the memory work encounters. The piece ends with 'snapshots' of theoretical insights on the presented data. The oral articulations/'voices' on the video are of women in my family and the written articulations are of Laestadian women in my study.

Key words: memory work, affect, voices, experimental methods, postqualitative research.

'Mo(ve)ment' as a term is used by Bronwyn Davies and Susanne Gannon (2006, 2012), and expresses being attentive and making visible the elements of the events of memorizing and the process of one's subjectification (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. x). Here, mo(ve)ment is understood as an event in which expressions, articulations, and affects are able to compose memories with various (re)collected images and experiences (Bergson, 2010; Deleuze, 1988). The affect enfolds in these mo(ve)ments of memory work, in every encounter and event, taking different forms from atmospheres, feelings, and reactions to embodied and produced intensities and sensations as the affect exceeds singular and bounded human bodies and existence (Blackman, 2015, p. 25–26; Massumi, 2008). The focus on mo(ve)ment and productions shifts the research interest from the individual experience to processes: to examine the Laestadian women's desire to mother and the situated and collective processes this involves. The maternal is a space in which collective and embodied memories are entwined and affectively formed (Baraitser, 2009; Ettinger, 2006).

The data used on the video is part of my doctoral study focusing on the aspirations of women belonging to the religious revival movement in Finland, namely the Conservative Laestadians. The data displayed here were produced together with ten women by using autobiographical writing, memory work, and/or collaborative writing. The texts were translated transcripts of recorded memory work sessions and writings. The 'voiced' expressions on the video were of Laestadian women, but also of women in my family, who were raised in the Laestadian movement. As a non-Laestadian connected to the movement through my family background, I was able as a researcher to be part of the data production. These open-ended methods of producing data enabled me to

approach women's aspirations concerning female and maternal subjectivity formation within this religious movement. While producing data we did not follow the method of memory work as such, the method was partly employed to assist examining the interwoven and complex issues of motherhood and female subjectivity. These examined issues are in the interests of recent feminist studies on Laestadian women and their agency due to the Laestadian movement's negative attitude towards birth control (Kupari & Tuomaala, 2015; Nissilä, 2013).

To avoid considering memories as individual constructions, feminist poststructuralist and new materialist methods were used to allow for examination of women's re-remembered 'experience' as "affectively lived but collectively made," as Davies and Gannon (2006, 2012) put it. In order to implicate both collectivity and affect in the productions of memory, I displayed the women's expressions, oral and written articulations, and demonstrated the vulnerabilities and affectivity in them. This enabled me to interfere, dissect, and rearrange 'the individually recognizable voices and enunciations' (Mazzei, 2016) and, therefore, to produce 'breaks' in the encounters. These breaks made the 'events' in the data 'glow,' inviting further productions (MacLure, 2013). Thus, each encounter formed "'an opportunity' for a 'particular constructed cut' that 'delineates an object from the agencies of observation,' and that marks something off from 'a particular instance of wholeness'" (Barad, 2007, p. 197, as cited in Davies & Gannon, 2012, p. 373). The 'cuts' were taken out of the flux of production to demonstrate the production of memories through affective events and encounters (Ettinger, 2006; Massumi, 2006). This is to understand memories as situated but not as past constructions, as the women's expressions are moving and momentary.

Experi(m)entality in operating through 'extracts' to make the data 'heard,' 'felt,' and 'visioned' is part of the postqualitative research approach. It enables one to avoid well-worn representational modes of research by treasuring leakages, ruptures, and explanation (see Holmes, MacLure, MacRae, & Jones 2010). It also allows profounder thinking on the ethics of the methodological choices involved and takes into consideration the affects of memory work production with possible readers/viewers/listeners. Since I was unable to visually present the encounters of the memory work due to the women's wish to remain unidentified, I experimented instead on (re)producing the articulations, expressions, texts and sounds of the data so that 'singular' voices and sounds were not recognized. In these events the 'voice' is not the subjective threshold of memory through which the singular memory is expressed, but the 'voice' is a collective production constituted in the event of memorizing (see Manning & Massumi, 2014). The memory can be affectively lived, embodied, and 'voiced' even though it is collectively produced. This requires rethinking the 'individuality' of memory, since in the changing event, in which the memory is voiced, the affect is released and the mo(ve)ment produces memory beyond the 'individual' experience (Massumi, 2008).

With this experiment, I have attempted to extend the notion of memory from being a discursive or textual site of production to thinking of memory as an ongoing affective process, or as Davies and Gannon put it: "the relational, cognitive, and affective flows amongst bodies and the very matter of the spaces and places we are in, intra-act and comingle" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 170, as cited in Davies & Gannon, 2012, p. 373). This processuality enables us to understand experience as part of knowledge construction, which is beyond the subjective and the individual (c.f., Haug et al., 1987; Koro-Ljungberg & Ulmer, 2016; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). The maternal, shared (element) of memory works here to reconfigure and sometimes even transmogrify the 'authenticity' and 'singularity' of both the 'individual' voice and memory (Osgood, Giugni, & Bhopal 2016). In this (re)production of memory, the maternal is the space in which memories are made but also connected to produce and affect. The complexity of collective and affective 'texture' in the data exposes indefinite and evolving 'passages' outside traditional collaborative data production. Working within these 'passages,' the viewer/listener/reader is inspired and also invited to join into the production.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LBW76GecX0&feature=youtu.be>

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