

Remembering (Art)Work: Collective Memory-Work in Higher Arts Education and Research

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Abstract

The Collective Memory-Work method carries strong democratic norms regarding equality, ownership and deliberation where emancipation is enabled through collective work and by questioning hierarchies between researcher and researched. Another norm in the Collective Memory-Work method is the scientific norm of creating distance using language as a means to separate the imaginary from the subject. However, these ideas might cause problems when applied in real situations where ownership and inequality are important and meaning-making features, and distance is a way to create legitimacy and demonstrate power rather than enable shared ownership. As a means to explore these issues and develop the Collective Memory-Work further, this article compares the method with approaches within western higher arts education and research, as there are some interesting similarities. In light of experiences from a research project at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm, various possibilities and problems with Collective Memory-Work are addressed regarding issues such as ownership, trust, motivation, and norms of distance and equality.

Keywords

Ownership, inequality, artistic research, higher arts education, artistic methodology.

Introduction

As an artist, researcher and educator, I have in various ways investigated emancipatory and participatory practices in different contexts. I first came across the Collective Memory-Work (CMW) method through a course in higher education at Stockholm University 2003 where we did a Collective Memory-Work on “learning.” What struck me then was the extent to which this was related to a

modernist artistic practice which, in my experience as a student and teacher in western higher arts education, often focuses on some dilemma the artist has experienced, something unresolved that therefore becomes interesting to make visible. This arts practice is based on a belief that the special and personal also contains something universal and of great importance, similar to the second wave feminist argument embedded in CMW that the personal and private also is political. To clarify what I mean by an artistic practice, I want to point out that the pedagogy that is used in contemporary western higher arts education is not so much focused on form or material, but rather about pointing out the singular and particular in a way that makes it universal (Hansson, 2013).

Both what is considered a work of art and what is considered artistic material differ from one context to another. Five hundred years ago, art was mainly about the craft (Becker, 1982; Bourdieu, 2000; Zolberg, 1990). Today, craftsmanship is still important, but it is not just about creating objects but also having theoretical skills, being able to situate one's practice in a political and philosophical context. It is also about making a phenomenon important and special and something that deserves extra attention. Here the role and the myth about the artist is an important "golden frame" that together with all other artworks and artists in art history, are part of the framing of the art as something important. Art is thus not only about creating artworks but creating a context that legitimizes the art.

The pedagogy within artistic higher education is thus not so much about a particular genre or method, but is looking at art as a reflective and critical process. Here the artworks are a subset of the artist's discourse, rather than the goal itself (Thornton, 2008).

The methods used to create the story mediated by the artwork are not primarily about colour or material, but about methods of playing with norms and conventions, and different ways of examining one's own ideas and norms. Common creative methods that are practiced in arts education are, for example, practices such as changing places of different objects, colours, gender, or identifying what is not said in an image. Parables and metaphors can also be ways of developing ideas and images. Different techniques or perspectives help us to change our own perception of how reality is created.

But above all, an arts education starts with the notion that the key is the student's/artist's experience and perception of reality, and the focus is on this particular and personal point of departure. By focusing on these embodied experiences, the more universal structures are understood. Teaching at an arts college is therefore very much about supporting self-reflective processes, and strengthening the individual's voice, and thus strengthening the artistry.

The student is also often a practising artist already before entering the higher education and is also treated more as a colleague than as a student by teachers and professors. The teacher's role is more about being a moderator and the organizer of

meetings than telling the students what to do. For example, my relationship with students as a teacher organizing a course does not differ much from my relationship with artists when organizing an exhibition.

This attitude, empowering the individual by emphasizing its expertise in its particular situated perspective, is not an approach unique to arts education. Within academia, it is especially so-called diversity pedagogy and feminist pedagogy that emphasize this attitude to learning, learning from the students' own worlds of life, and linking these to overall political issues (Howie & Tauchert, 2019; Sinacore & Enns, 2005). Inspired by Freire's (2005) liberation pedagogy this approach situates learning in the students' needs and perspectives, using a problem-based dialogic learning that emphasizes the participants' own knowledge and builds the participants' self-confidence, aiming for emancipation and social action. According to Maher and Tetreault (2001), feminist pedagogy is to encourage the student to find their own entrance into the subject and their own voice in relation to what is being studied. They highlight four important themes: mastery, voice, authority and positionality, which is similar to the epistemology in the higher arts education where students are seen as the main masters of their own voice, questioning authority, and where they largely reflect on their own positionality within different overarching structures.

At the same time, these often prestigious art programs are about educating a small elite. A commercial art world is very much about creating exclusive objects and controlling the artist's brand (Thompson, 2008; Thornton, 2008). In this social reality status and inequalities are what creates meaning (Hansson, 2015). While this economic reality largely determines the production conditions for many visual artists, these may not be what is motivating primarily, instead it can be about being understood and recognized by peers (Hansson, 2015; Heinich, 2009). Whether it is to sell their brand, or to gain recognition from colleagues, it is important to control the brand because ownership is a key feature of the art.

Similar to the arts education's focus on originality and positionality the Collective Memory-Work method raises awareness of how we are shaped by, and shape oppressive mechanisms through our everyday actions, as "everyday life is how society reproduces itself" (Haug, 1992, p. 19). Proponents of the method emphasize this emancipatory and feminist ambition, and focus on strengthening the participants by showing how their individual experiences are formed by structures that are collectively reproduced (Fraser & Michell, 2015).

Because of this similarity with educational practices within the art, I have since 2003 used Collective Memory-Work as a creative method in different art and arts educational contexts where a group of artists or art students collaboratively explore a theme while also developing their own art works.

The Collective Memory-Work method has previously been adapted and applied in numerous ways and research fields, and has been used for researching

diverse themes such as for example female socialization (Haug, 1999), emotion (Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault & Benton, 1992), academia (Gannon et al., 2019; Häusler, Leal, Parba, West & Crookes, 2018; Mair & Frew, 2018; Thomsson, Höjer & Åse, 2000), sports management (Markula & Friend, 2005), learning (Ingleton, 2007), social work (Fraser & Michell, 2015), tourism (Grimwood & Johnson, 2019; Marschall, 2019), and aging (Beck, Brewis, & Davies, 2018; Blake et al., 2017). The methodology has been thoroughly discussed in other parts of this special issue of *Other Education*. Here I will only briefly point out aspects important for my argumentation.

Collective Memory-Work can be described as a means to reach a general understanding of a phenomenon by starting the investigation from an understanding of the individual's experiences. To achieve this, one begins by describing conscious individual memories. Thereafter a collective analysis of each memory by the group is intended to detect the underlying conflicts and to identify the cultural norms and behaviours involved, the reason for the memory becoming a memory (Willig, 2013). The method focuses on Husserl's idea that memories are often just remembered because of strong experiences of encountering different structuring norms. The memories are not interesting in themselves, but as examples of situations that contain various kinds of structurally determined conflicts. Although remembering starts with the individual memory, it is important to emphasize that it is not this subjective memory that counts, but the intersubjective process of knowledge that the work with the memories creates in the group (Onyx & Small, 2001). Also, the focus is on change, and for a transformation to be possible. It is important to provide a trustful space for enabling this change (Blake et al., 2016; Fraser & Michell, 2015).

Questioning hierarchies and questioning the dichotomy between researcher and researched, thus making the informants co-researchers, is another central feature of the methodology, "eliminating the hierarchy of 'experimenter' and 'subject'" (Onyx & Small, 2001, p. 775).

Analysing someone's memory collectively with the person who created the imaginary of this memory also involves questioning ownership. In the ideal research situation everyone has a similar theoretical background and can interpret on equal terms, however, this is not the case in practice where people have unequal conditions and motivations to participate (Blake et al. 2016).

Ownership of the memory itself versus the collective analysis can also create tensions (Onyx & Small, 2001; Thomsson, Höjer & Åse, 2000). There sometimes seem to be problems in the use of the method when it comes to the joint analysis, especially when the result is to be published in academic contexts (see, e.g. Blake et al., 2016; Ingleton, 2007). Here, other expectations and rules affect the analysis, such as the need to legitimize research in an academic context.

Another problem is simply how to understand the method. It is difficult to grasp that the memory itself is not the same as the description of the memory, and that it is the description that is what is being analysed, not the event itself. Haug emphasizes that memory work is not about finding the truth behind a memory, but that memory itself is a construct, and that it is this meaning-making production that is interesting (Haug, 2016). It is the “imaginary” itself that is analysed, not the described events (Haug, 2008).

In respect of the artistic process, when it comes to artists, they are used to seeing their expressions as art, something largely constructed, expressing a zeitgeist and part of a genre, just as much as an expression of the individual’s attempt to generate meaning.

One can see the written memories in Collective Memory-Work as works of art, i.e., meaningful acts of understanding from a situated perspective, and, like art, this qualitative method is not about answering questions but about identifying paradoxes and investigating discomfort in order to ask new questions. Therefore, it can be interesting to see what happens when the Collective Memory-Work method is used in the development of an art project where artists examine their own professional identity. Here the questions of trust, hierarchy, inequality, and ownership are also actualized as these are central features in the meaning-making of the art world.

In order to discuss this, in this article I describe the empirical experience of using Collective Memory-Work as an educational tool in a collaborative thematic art project to deepen a collective knowledge development around a common theme. Following this descriptive part I then discuss some implications and opportunities with our use of the method in the specific area of artistic higher arts education and research.

The Collective Memory-Work on Work

The art project “Work a work” [Arbeta ett arbete] is a stand-alone continuation of a previous collaboration called “Performing the common,” where we used Collective Memory-Work the first time to identify a shared theme in a collective process where both researchers, artists and art students participated in a work involving over 30 different participants (Hansson, 2012). Six of the participating artists in this first project decided to explore the method more in depth in a new and smaller project in which we took on the challenge to identify and concretise the concept of “work.” The idea was to use Collective Memory-Work to anchor the concept in our own norms and conceptions, by looking at how we ourselves understood the concept.

The theme “work” was chosen first of all as a reaction to a general discussion; as the labour market is transforming due to the so-called gig economy, enabling a more task-oriented organisation of labour on new global sharing platforms and organizational methods. Secondly, the artist’s work often is created in contrast to

“ordinary” work and it is therefore interesting to look at the identity creation of the artist in general as a way of understanding what is considered a “work” and not, in this changing economy (Hansson, 2017).

The art project ran for three and a half years. It received funding from the Swedish Research Council, thus creating a 25% part-time position for the six participating artists at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm. During these years we met on average two days per month where we did study visits, literature seminars, lectures with invited guests, or worked with the Collective Memory-Work method. In between meetings, the time was spent reading and making our own artistic work, discussions via an e-mail list, and development of the discussions through shared documents on-line. The use of the Collective Memory-Work method was most intense in the first year of the project. The method was part of a broader development of knowledge about the theme, where also the program as a whole was put together by the participants collectively, like a participatory developed course material.

The first task in the memory-work process was to engage in memory writing. As we found “work” too vague to easily trigger the memory writing, we identified more narrow trigger topics in relation to the general theme, such as “to charge,” “having the right clothes,” “tempo,” and “seriousness and play.” During this period each participant wrote one to three texts, on each of these three themes.

For this article, all the participants were anonymized, except for two participants whose art works are discussed. All participants have given their consent to publish the material in this form, and they have all been directly involved in the curation of texts, and have had the possibility to give feedback on this article.

Applying CMW

The first Collective Memory-Work the group did on the theme of work used two trigger topics, simply because we could not agree on one. These trigger words were “to charge” and “having the right clothes.” The task was to identify and describe a situation where this was in some way a dilemma or something one remembered for some other reasons.

According to the guidelines for the method we used it is suggested to write quickly and not give too much thought (see guidelines in appendix). However, not everyone felt comfortable writing “on demand” but wanted more time for reflection. Therefore the time for writing one to two pages was set to about two to three weeks. Then the group agreed to read and do analyses of each other’s work in preparation for a joint analysis. This was also a way to include those who did not have the opportunity to attend the meeting. We did vary this. On another occasion we wrote on site at the meeting, but later edited this on a computer to have all the documentation online. However, despite such flexibility, everyone submitted too late, which meant no one came to the follow-up meeting prepared, instead we

dedicated this meeting to read through everything for the first time. As an organizer, I thought this was annoying but perhaps not entirely unexpected. Finding memories can be quite painful and can also feel embarrassing. There are not always anecdotes you are particularly proud of or that you even want to think about. What one remembers can be quite traumatic situations and that is why they remain in the memory and gnaw. Picking up these memories, remembering details, and writing them down is a daunting task. Even though most of the participants in the group knew each other before and had reached a potentially mature age, it didn't mean that we all completely trusted each other and felt comfortable sharing sometimes banal or sad experiences. We were also professional artists. Some of us used text as artistic style, and everyone was aware how all expressions leave traces in their own public biography. It was therefore difficult to write in a way that did not follow one's own artistic expression, or write something that is not seen as an artistic expression.

Strictly following the Collective Memory-Work method is about moving away from the anecdotal and narrative. The method, unlike what an author does, does not necessarily produce entertaining or artful stories. The text should also be free of reflections and interpretations. This was perhaps the big challenge. As an artist, you are trained to keep control of all kinds of expressions and not let go of something that you don't consider to be of enough quality artistically. Art is also about reflecting on and tapping into one's own feelings about the situation, rather than considering the situation in detail. Instead, submitting to the method and generating some sort of neutral "data" is about stepping out of one's professional identity as an artist, an identity that you take very seriously and do not put away so easily. For artists work is about identity and when it comes to the artist role, it is not as easy to let go of it.

Other working roles are easier to change into. Sometimes it is as easy to change as it is to change clothes, as some jobs are linked to special work clothes. The clothes do something with those who wear them, as in this quote from a memory about "having the right clothes" from a job working as a janitor at a hospital.

Once at the information desk, he stops [a famous musician] who will meet his sister who has given birth to a child.

[The well-known musician] is not allowed to see to his sister because the rules say you must not come to the department of the new-born without the code.

[The famous musician] has freshly washed hair and flowers but no code. Now he gets shit for it.

He [the storyteller] has a white coat and the clothes give him the right to piss on people who do not know a simple rule and just want to give their sister a bouquet of flowers.

It's called power.

You have no code. End of discussion.

Such are the rules.

Sometimes he still thinks that he was mean towards [the famous musician] and should have let him meet his sister and admire the baby.

In this artfully crafted story, the author cannot help but to reflect. The memory of the superiority of the clothes the hospital gave is disturbing. The janitor in the white coat upheld the rules, did the job, but ignored the human side and another kind of power. He might have seized the opportunity to pin down someone he enviously regarded at a distance, an artist with the power to enchant. Now the artist was under the power of the white coat, and was forced to follow the rules. He certainly would not think he would be treated as someone special. Ordinary people follow the rules. They should be clean and tidy, and remember both flowers and codes.

The memory-work on the janitorial work does not give many details, instead the short text through its fragmentary and wordy arrangement creates a special rhythm and feeling. The author of this text writes as he usually expresses himself artistically. Especially the participants who worked with text in their art found it difficult to deviate from their style. The collected material we generated during the Collective Memory-Work can thus be seen more as curated artistic expressions than written accounts of memories.

Several of the memories were also from childhood, and therefore quite a lot of details were missing from the recollections. The memories were also often more like a short story. As in this example of "to charge" where a game becomes serious work through the act of charging, and the neighbours are transformed from relations to customers:

They were two girls about nine years old. At the age when you play cashier and customer with sticks and leaves. Old enough to roam around the kitchen and bake. The parents did something elsewhere. The girls had come up with a work that would be a good business. A lottery where the first prize was a large bag of homemade caramel. Second prize was a small bag of caramel and as third prize they had made a bag of popcorn. Everything was nicely packed.

The customers were the neighbours in the villa area. This was the 1970s and the villas were newly built in an area that was previously a field, and the forest and meadows still spread out around. In total, it was

around 60 small houses in mixed style. Between the houses there were small fences and hedges that did not yet provide any privacy.

It was nerve wrecking to ring the door bells as they really only knew their closest neighbours, but most people who opened seemed happy and gladly paid a penny for a lot. The prices looked great. The family that won the big caramel bag lived in a house one street away.

Making caramel is difficult, it is important not to heat too much so it becomes too hard, and it is easy to burn yourself in the handling. They had spent all day baking the caramel and wrapping each caramel in paper. It had become an impressive bag and they felt proud when they handed out the prize.

Later in the evening, the doorbell rang at the girl's home and her parents opened. Outside is the father of the family that won first prize. He's upset. He wants the money back and has a quivering tone to the parents. He does not step into the hall but stands outside on the door step.

It turns out that all the caramels have clumped together into a single large ball of caramel. The man feels cheated and disappointed. His Friday night was destroyed. The parents are annoyed that the children have charged their neighbours. The girl has to apologize.

Precisely because the stories largely became like small tightly written short stories, and expressions of a person's childhood memory, it became difficult to look beyond these stories and reach the structures. It was simply too interesting as a starting point to get to know the person better who wrote. It was also often about more than one memory, or several consecutive anecdotes that created a longer story that described the narrator's life situation. Therefore, the conversation became more about giving context to the story rather than using the story as a material for analysis.

Our intention was to analyse the texts further by applying the Collective Memory-Work method strictly and coding the texts in order to more easily compare them and find patterns and differences. But it was difficult enough to move the discussion from the meaning in the individual memories, to see how they constructed meaning in different ways in comparison with the other memories, and there was no strong interest from the group of participants in doing a more structured coding of the material.

The ambition varied in the group for different reasons. I, who also was organizing the project, having a formal research education and most experience of the method and similar participatory methodologies, pushed most for following the method strict. Other participants for whom writing was part of their artistic tool box had their own interpretations and understandings of the method, which meant that we had an ongoing negotiation about how to interpret the method. That created a

meta discussion that was about the method rather than the theme, which of course caused some confusion. Just to agree on common categories became difficult. Then, for other participants the writing process was in itself an obstacle, as writing in general was something they had different types of problems with, so that just to produce the text became a great achievement. Then when they finally started the writing process, it triggered their curiosity for digging deeper into their personal narratives, and they spent most of the time on their own writing rather than comparing narratives. Other significant inequalities concerned age, whereby the age difference between the oldest and youngest participant was more than twenty years, which also comes with differences in life situation and career stage. The inequalities within the group, regarding experience and understanding of the method, previous writing practice, and also a diversity of life situations, thus affected the type and amount of attention each participant could give to the collaborative effort. Foremost, participants in general had problems letting go of their individual history, and the discussions were therefore seldom able to move on from the individual memory to looking for shared structures.

After a couple of meetings on the first piece of work, the participants wanted to continue to write down new memories. Instead of going deeper into the analysis of “to charge” and “clothes,” a new trigger topic was developed. This time the word “tempo” was chosen.

As a trigger word, tempo may be a little vague and not very provocative. Yet it was easy to relate to, and aroused many bodily memories of situations that were about the feeling of being able to master something, and the pride of being able to keep pace, as in this childhood memory of running on a rocky coastal strip.

Running over stones that sometimes roll away requires total presence and to be constantly prepared for the ground beneath the feet to slip away. You are barefoot. Wet soles provide the best attachment and coolness when the stones are hot from the sun.

The trick is to always plan the next step in advance, partly to see the fastest route, and partly to be able to parse if the stone you jump on is loose and rolls. Above all, it is about having a high tempo and never stop, but always having the aim on the next stone. You travel in a group but are at the same time lonely and it is a quiet competition to see who is the fastest. If someone is too fast, the others lose interest in the game.

The tempo here is about mastering your own body, being strong, agile and fast, and having control. But also about being in constant motion, and keeping up the beat whatever happens. Tempo is also about keeping the same pace as others, and thus being part of a collective. Like this example, describing a restaurant job one of the participants had during her studies.

It is important to collect as much as possible on each round without losing the pace. The trick is to not think too much about remembering but to trust that everything is stored in memory. Be present and listen attentively to the customers, then quickly to the cash register, pick up empty dishes on the way, turn in the order to the kitchen and another to the bar. Return to the dining area to pick up more plates and collect the payment.

The wallet firmly on the waist. She can give back change with her right hand while balancing plates on her left hand. Now it is full on her left arm and she takes another pair of glasses with her right hand. Into the kitchen and unload on the sink.

In the dishing area the air is damp and the machines are banging. Glasses that clink against each other and cutlery that rattles. Another pace, more brutal without smiles and it is important not to get in the way. Next to the kitchen. Here she looks in to check the situation with the chef. Is he in a good mood? Does he get the orders made on time? Is he drunk? The chef must be kept in a good mood for him to keep up the pace and cooperate. She keeps her distance, to avoid getting groped. Sexual jokes that sometimes become violations belong to the jargon.

The work is here about keeping pace and adapting to the situation. The situation in a restaurant kitchen can seem quite chaotic and stressful and there is no time for reflection. In this memory, satisfaction is expressed in being in control and being able to do the job although it is difficult. It also describes different power schemes where the hierarchies of the staff group become clear, and where sexual harassment is a way of maintaining the balance of power between the kitchen, bar and serving.

Structuring time, and working between different times and with a predetermined defined task, were other aspects that were raised on the theme tempo. The work situations described were most often physically strenuous situations on extra jobs or temporary summer jobs, and not from the artistic work. Often, the contrast is great between these types of work, often referred to as day jobs, which differ from the artistic work where time and pace do not exist in the same way. The idea of the artistic work is created in opposition to the day job. In the artistic work you are expected to set your own time and pace and create your own rules and routines.

Sometimes he thinks he has no work at all. There is no pace. That his own work cannot be seen. That he is allowed to create rules, agreements, with himself in order for it to become something. Especially in the beginning.

Then there is just nothing. The big zero.

The big gap zero needs food from outside to be able to move.

He thinks that he makes a circle on the floor and that everything that is inside the circle is something and that everything that is outside the circle is not something. Then he thinks on the contrary that it is the small circle that is zero and that which is outside is something. He thinks it's important not to be able to. Being able to play. That zero also is something.

The artistic work is here described as the opposite of a “regular” work where someone else defines the content and the pace. Where you do not have to decide what to do, but where someone else decides for you. This echoes in advertising for jobs in the so-called gig economy where you work on demand, when you have the desire and time, when you chose to work.

Indirectly, this memory also expresses the idea of a regular job as the opposite of being an artist, assuming that there still are ordinary simple jobs, work community, clear tangible tasks with a beginning and an end, limited in time, and where someone else creates the rules. The art profession appears here as an inevitable vocation, something you are destined to become and summoned to. There is really no choice.

Tempo is also about discipline, not giving up too easily, but working on and keeping pace even on the slopes. Having a free job means being able to discipline yourself without external control. To work on untroubled at an intense pace, stubbornly without any external confirmation. Being the perfect self-motivated worker. Art is also about showing that you have invested a lot of time. It must not be too easy. There must have been a considerable amount of energy behind the work.

The purpose of the Collective Memory-Work was not to develop it into art projects, but a way to get started with the theme and above all link it to lived experience. Nevertheless, in some works there where clear links between the Collective Memory-Work and the artwork. For example, George Kentro's text on tempo described the everyday life of a professional musician who devotes many hours a day since childhood to maintaining and developing his art.

The first session didn't require notes, it was about scales and exercises to stretch the muscles of the left arm and strengthen the fingers in both hands. He had been doing the exact same exercises for 10 years now and knew them by heart. They hurt pretty much. Afterwards, he would rest his muscles for five minutes, so he smoked a cigarette. Today there was only one pass before he went to school, so he started counting how long he would have to stay at Forum after school to get 7 hours [violin practice] that day. And what time he should be eating dinner then to make sure he got hold of an exercise room after 5pm. He had a deaf retired neighbour

which was lucky but there were others who did not like to hear him play the same thing over and over after 6pm. So he couldn't practice at home in the evenings.

Here, the amount of organization required for the work, and the focus on time becomes clear. Another aspect is the worker's body and how that body is adapted and marked by the repeated movements of a whole life. There is a big difference between the idea of the free artist and the reality of the discipline of the body that the artistic work entails. The motivation to submit to this discipline must be great, but even so, it is difficult to accurately account for what the motivation is, somewhere between contradictory drives such as curiosity, masochism, and the pursuit of external affirmation. George's artwork on the theme, a performance where he literally plays on a violin that he is breaking, is a way to approach the paradox between discipline and creativity, to follow the rules and to create new ones.

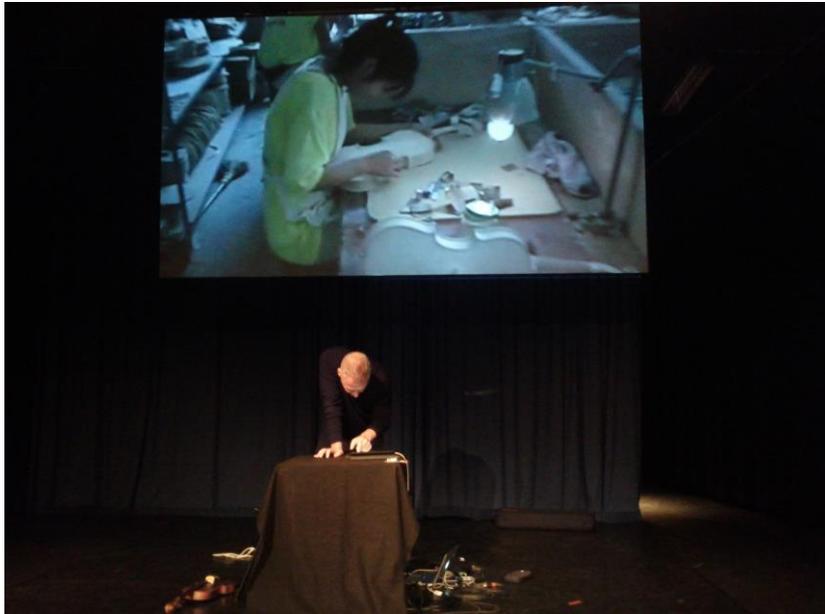


Figure 1: Photo by Dan Lageryd of the performance *This Violin Must Die*, by George Kentros (2019)

As part of the performance he shows a film from violin factories in China where violins are mass-produced, positioning his own body's experiences of violin work to other violin workers, linked by the contradictory value the art has (Figure 1).

The third trigger word we worked with was "seriousness versus play" to identify situations that are about the tension or shift between these states. Artistic work is often portrayed as something playful, as something beyond what is serious. At the same time, art is taken very seriously, and without this core of gravity it is not art. The artist's work is very much about legitimizing the game, with earnest intent, and by following the conventions for what an artist should be.

Here the memories were, among other things, about how you in your role as an artist float on the surface of society, and are able to move between different places and situations in a nomadic state without real connection to the places where you are located. The cliché about the outsider, as an eternal stranger always on a temporary visit and without family or anchored in "real" life. On tours or guest exhibitions in foreign countries, far away from Sweden, in Kazakhstan, Ukraine, or the Philippines. A traveller, who can leave the country when it gets to messy or difficult. Someone (typically a Western man) who looks on from the outside without actually living in reality. Therefore, it becomes shocking when reality knocks on the door and when the artistic games provoke serious reactions as in this memory from a journey in Kazakhstan:

Twenty artists from Europe and Asia tour the country by bus to understand and do art in dialogue with the prevailing situation in the country. They are sponsored by a meat factory and survive on sausage and vodka for three weeks. They are in the poorest and most economically affected regions in the southern parts of the country. They stay overnight in an almost completely deserted mining centre. In the ruins of the former ideal city old people and families with children live, those who have not managed to move elsewhere and are stuck in the ruins. One of the Kazakhstan artists in the project pays some children he meets to be photographed hidden in jute sacks. The woman thinks it looks beautiful and scary with the contours of the small bodies in the sacks. However, the children's parents are not amused when they hear that foreign artists pay the children to do strange things while being photographed. In the middle of the night, windows are smashed in the room where the artists live. The artists are urged by the local authorities to leave the city early the next morning.

Making art in the public outside the cool and white-painted art context of the white cube can often get you into conflicts you are not aware of. Art is here like a barometer of the trust in a situation, as freedom of expression is no longer self-

evident in situations of crisis. The game ends when the seriousness comes in, like the birth of a child or that someone dies, and as abruptly as death the game ends and the conversation becomes silent.

The four-year-old plays with older siblings and friends in the summer evening. It is good energy in the game, that is tag or ball in the ring. There is dew in the grass, and the clock may be around ten and it will start to darken. Parents make repeated attempts to bring in the lively children and nag them to pick up what has been pulled out during the day. Instead of helping, the four-year-old throws himself on the mattresses that the others try to carry from the lawn. There are some reprimands. Exalted, the four-year-old lands on the mattress pile on the kitchen floor. Breath taken, the four-year-old looks up into the kitchen lamp and lies still. Against the dazzling light, the four-year-old realizes that just as the game is over, everything else will also end. The image of death comes as an illuminated room floating in an infinite space. As paralyzed with eyes wide open, the four-year-old is lifted and put to bed.

This memory-text foremost describes the feeling of the moment and the context itself is barely described. It primarily conveys the feeling the memory consists of, and is far from the descriptive language that is the material the Collective Memory-Work method should generate. Instead of the specific, the text describes a general feeling, a feeling that arises in the gap between a creative flow that one does not want to end, to an inexorable and fate-filled understanding of life's limitations and structures. An insight into the unimaginable presence of death through what we call time.

How the game gets serious through adults' violence was a theme that came up in another memory-text. The importance of caring, love and violence for the fundamental conditions for survival, is a key issue here. Shiva Anoushirvani's artwork "Love's Labour" started in a personal memory of violence and lack of care. In her artistic work, she linked these experiences with utopias of new technology, where robots are developed to replace the lack of emotional support. The starting point is that the care work and the love work is a basic ability without which we do not survive as a group. In her performance work, she develops the idea that, (simplified) if this love work can be programmed and instrumentalized, there is perhaps hope that even emotionally injured people can be reprogrammed and learn to live loving lives (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Photo by Dan Lageryd of the performance *Labour's Love*, by Shiva Anoushirvani (2019)

Discussion

The results from the process described a broad picture of the theme, and linked together conflicting images and conceptions that in different ways have a bearing on how we orient ourselves and find meaning in our work as artists.

We periodically had trouble following the Collective Memory-Work method according to the instructions used (see appendix 1). The first obstacle was ownership and submitting to the method. The method requires that participants write with a certain ease at the same time as they do not treat writing as their identity and as an artform. There is a paradox in this. Those who are good at expressing themselves and therefore work professionally with this themselves might also see this self-expression as part of their identity. Something that is emphasized in higher arts education is that an artist should take great seriousness in all kinds of creative expressions and shouldn't launch something that is not considered high quality. As the organizer and the one who knew most about the method, I found it difficult to find a suitable didactic that convinced everyone of the importance of following the methodology. Usually in arts education, it's the participants who lead, and you don't submit to someone else directions. Submitting to the method goes against the self-image where the artist's identity is strongly linked to finding and owning his/her personal expression and creating his/her own and constantly new rules. Although everyone agreed to follow the method, there was an unspoken resistance and the forms and rules were constantly questioned. Therefore, all memories came to be described in very different ways, and sometimes even in opposition to the method.

Another obstacle was to handle the norm of distance. The result of writing became to a great extent an artistic expression, and was therefore difficult to separate and distance from the author. Inevitably the focus was on the authors and their intention rather than the collective work. With this, one can either ascertain that artists live up to the stereotype of artists, and are exempt from the norm, and that this is not a problem with "ordinary" people. Or one can question the idea that it is possible to separate "data" from the "subject," and that it is possible to write more or less neutral descriptions. There is an underlying scientific norm in the Collective Memory-Work method, that one should be able to distance oneself and thus see more clearly, and this is also a norm that should be taken up for examination. For example, writing a text in a third person may not be a way of distancing oneself from it and thus making it easier to share collectively, instead it may simply be an artistic approach that allows the focus to be shifted and to give the story new meanings. Such an interpretation of the method can also more easily open up to Collective Memory-Work in formats other than text. Today, the method is largely text-based like so many scientific methods, even if there are attempts made to use other types of formats (See e.g., Gillies et al., 2005). However, if one

sees *the forms of expression as creative methods to change perspective* this opens up for other formats.

The third obstacle was trust in the group, another important principle of the method, which we did not quite reach. Although several of the participants knew each other well, not all did, and maybe they knew each other as colleagues, in a local art world where we are all interconnected and dependent on each other financially. In the gig economy of the artistic precariat, there are no free spaces, instead everything is a kind of production place where anything can be transformed into artistic expression or lead to important contacts. There is also a view within the art world that everything you do is art and therefore in a way also public. There was never any violation of, for example, the rule that “what is said in the room stays in the room,” but despite this and a generous and kind atmosphere, there was a basic caution. This caution can also be due to the fact that some in the group knew each other too well, and wanted to keep a certain distance and not cross the limit of what friendship can endure. Sometimes it is easier to talk to strangers than to friends with whom you share complicated pasts. Here we would have needed better insights and perhaps guidance on how this could be handled.

The fourth obstacle was about the importance of incentive structures for the collective analysis and ownership of the memory. When I am writing this essay I am motivated to produce a certain type of analysis through different incentive structures that clearly link publications with supply opportunities. However, since the groups’ work was situated within an artistic sphere where artists are required to produce their own works as part of an artistic corpus, the ultimate goal was not primarily collective but resulted in the production of individual projects, or clearly defined collaborations. In the same way as what emerged in our Collective Memory-Work on the theme of “to charge,” this created various incentives, where individually tied external affirmation such as status and money weakened other types of motivation such as curiosity and community.

The fifth problem I experienced is the norm of equality in participatory practices like this, where the idea is that the barriers between the subject and object of research should be broken down (Onyx & Small, 2001), and the researcher and the researched are the same. This underlying norm of equality in the Collective Memory-Work method poses problems and conflicts in the application of the method, as most social situations contain a certain degree of inequality, which means that the collective negotiation, the memory work itself, is never owned by everyone equally. There is always someone who dominates even the most equal conversations, someone who is more motivated, or just has more energy. Here, for example, I was the one who introduced the method, and the one who completely dominated the analysis due to previous experience with the method. Therefore, I think it is important that in the application of the method it should be noted that

groups are always unequal and contain different conflicts that are never completely resolved.

Concluding Remarks

In the artistic research project “Work a work” at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm, Collective Memory-Work served as a way of activating personal memories and anchoring the rather abstract concept of work in childhood memories and the experiences of young adults. Here we started to reflect on our own norms on work and what they meant for our artist identity, and put this in relation to theories of production conditions in the new/old gig economy.

Using Collective Memory-Work meant a significant development of the theme, in that we approached the subject on an existential level more than a political one, based on our particular bodies’ experiences and personally created meanings.

I have in light of this project described various possibilities and problems with Collective Memory-Work and suggest that insights from artistic practices can be beneficial in further developing the method by taking into account ownership, trust, motivation, and norms of distance and equality.

In several texts on Collective Memory-Work, there is an idealization of an unattainable ideal of equality. Onyx and Small (2001), for example express the idea that the dichotomies between objects and subjects should cease and the researcher and the informant be equal. This is a great ideal, but there is a risk that this ideal is mistakenly used as a norm, which obscures the view of the real power systems in the group. Unlike ideal norms about a collective process where everyone is equal and owns the work together, I want to emphasize the conflicts in this approach and the importance of recognizing that the individuals’ particular connection to their lived experience can never be reduced to structure. Like art, which is a highly elitist practice when it comes to professional artists, the participants are also not equal and ownership is an important issue in several ways. First, it’s about legal ownership and economical incitements, and that these structures always influence the collective work and need to be addressed. Second, but most important, it is about acknowledging the particular and specific in each experience, respecting the individual voice, and emphasizing that ownership in this way can be an important motivator. The basic idea of the method is to be emancipatory, raise awareness of how we are shaped by and shape oppressive mechanisms through everyday actions, and this is perhaps the most important guideline to consider. This insight contains a deep humanistic ideal, that the actions and experiences of all individuals have great significance, in all their particularity.

Another norm in the Collective Memory-Work method is the idea of creating distance through language, using third person, a detailed description, and avoiding reflections in the text. As if this could separate the individual experience from the described event, and make it less “subjective.” Instead I suggest that this way of

writing rather is a genre, a format that creates another perspective on the described event. This opens up for other formats than text, as images or performance, as means to give even more diverse perspectives. This way of looking at the production of imaginaries (Haug, 2008) also make it easier to open up for other research formats than text.

The project highlighted aspects about CMW that I learnt as new, as outlined above. Educationally then we can say that CMW needs to be adapted to a situation where participants are (more or less) unequal and conflict is the norm rather than consensus. For CMW to be educational in this sense a particular and discipline-specific situated methodology is required. It is also important to emphasize, as Haug (2008) points out, that memories are our “imaginaries,” not “recordings” of history, and that we learn from understanding the processes and structures that forms these constructs. Here reflexive methods from arts education can provide a useful tool box when adapting the CMW method also in other educational contexts. It is important here to not follow the method strictly, but rather to understand the methodology and the underlying epistemology, and to see students as the main masters of their own voice, supporting their questioning of authority and overarching structures.

Appendix 1: Three Phases of the Collective Memory-Work method

This is a summary of the method descriptions provided by Crawford et al. (1992) and Onyx & Small (2001).

Phase 1

1. Write 1 to 2 pages about a particular event. It is important to find a subject that can work as “triggers,” questions that do not easily produce conventional answers but questions one does not usually post.
2. Write in third person and use a pseudonym. The idea behind this is to create a distance between the description and the person from which the description originates to easier look at the event itself without the context and explanation the biography provides. This also makes it easier to write about sensitive topics.
3. Write as detailed as possible. Details that seem unimportant can also be important. Avoid biographical references if possible.
4. Describe the experience, not interpretations, explanations or biography. Interpretations level out inconsistencies and flaws that can be significant when considering the memory-work overall.

Phase 2

1. Each group member takes turns to express opinions and ideas about each memory.
2. The group analyses the memories by looking for similarities and differences between memories. The group also looks for the elements among memories whose relationship to each other is not immediately apparent.
3. The group identifies clichés, generalizations, contradictions, norms, etc. This is a way of identifying markers that are “taken for granted” and social explanation.
4. The group discusses theories, popular notions, speeches and ideas on the subject, again as a way of identifying common social explanation of the subject.
5. The group also investigates what is not described.
6. The memory can be rewritten.

Phase 3

The third phase involves an analysis and interpretation of the work as a whole and here it is often a researcher who does the work. It is important, however, that the result is anchored in the group.

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