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From Dynasty to Songs of Praise: television as cultural resource for gendered remembering

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Article for Special Issue on Memory and Identity edited by Anna Reading

From *Dynasty* to *Songs of Praise*: Television as Cultural Resource for Gendered Remembering.

Abstract

Despite detailed interrogations of the uses of media technologies and texts with overtly mnemonic functions emerging from the emerging field of memory studies, there remains a limited engagement with the significance of television and everyday televisual texts in practices of remembering from specific social locations in the interests of performing and constructing particular social identities. Programming which refers to the past is often considered from a textual rather than an audience perspective and is routinely viewed through the analytical framework of history rather than memory. As a result programmes, particularly those not conventionally thought of as 'historical', have been ignored in terms of what they provide for performances of memory for different social groups. This article attempts to address this neglect by outlining the case for attending to television programmes beyond the conventionally historical as specifically gendered mnemonic resources. The article uses data drawn from in-depth interviews with women about their mnemonic practices to explore how they use television in everyday instances of remembering and consider how these contribute to the articulation and construction of social identities.

Keywords: Remembering; Gender; Television; Identity; Audiences

From *Dynasty* to *Songs of Praise*: Television as Cultural Resource for Gendered Remembering.

Introduction

It is commonplace in cultural studies to talk of the 'uses' of media texts and the struggles over meaning which these involve. In the last decade there has been an increasing focus on the mnemonic uses of media texts and the relationship between processes of remembering and media consumption (Roediger and Wertsch, 2008). This has centred on the uses of overtly mnemonic media, personally produced texts and individually used technologies (Keightley and Pickering, 2006; Dijck, 2007; Reading, 2009). There has been a more limited concern for mnemonic uses of traditional mass media forms, such as televisual and filmic texts, with attention focussing instead on their textual properties. Their significance in practices of everyday remembering from specific social locations and their role in the construction and performance of personal and shared identities are routinely overlooked in spite of their centrality in everyday social and cultural experience. Memory has long been recognised as a process of constructing and articulating personal and social identities. As Gillis notes, all identities are rooted in memory and what is remembered is defined by these assumed identities (1994: 3), but as memory studies research has shown, these processes are increasingly mediated. This article explores how television mediates the construction and performance of gendered identities in everyday remembering and in doing so, aims to redress the routine inattention to televisual texts in personal remembering. Extracts from interviews with white British women on their everyday remembering practices are used to explore the ways in which remembering with television is conducted and the ways in which women's personal identities shape and are shaped through practices of remembering using televisual resources.

Televising memory

Television's flow, immediacy and presentism has been widely considered to facilitate forgetting and a regressive, nostalgic relationship between past and present (Holdsworth, 2010; see for example Doane, 1990; Mellancamp, 1990). Television is routinely claimed to collapse temporal distance, which is the precondition for memory,

'in the instantaneity and simultaneity of time and places of the networked world' (Hoskins, 2004: 123-4). However, an increasing number of studies acknowledge that television and film are not irrevocably tied to a state of cultural amnesia. Both Amy Holdsworth (2010) and Jeffrey Shandler (1999) have explored television's mnemonic potential to construct and reconstruct the past in the present, as a mode of cultural memory which is 'exteriorised, objectified and stored away in symbolic forms' (Assman, 2008: 110). These televisual 'memory texts' (Holdsworth, 2010: 131-2) involve the 'concretion of identity' as it 'preserves the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity' (Assman and Czaplicka, 1995: 130). However the precise ways in which televisual texts are involved in lived processes of remembering, particularly the possibilities that they present for identification with both personal and collective pasts, require further elaboration.

Sensitivity to the relationship between memory and identity at a cultural level has resulted in an analytic focus on the politics of mass mediated representations of the past, from Pierre Nora's study of cultural 'sites' in which the memory of particular groups 'crystallizes and secretes itself' (1989: 7) to the work of Glen Creeber (2001) and Tessa Suzuki Morris (2005) who have attended to the ways that the past of 'remembering communities' are fixed and formalised in televisual texts (ibid: 156). Alison Landsberg (2004; 2009) has explicitly demonstrated how televisual representations can situate us in new remembering communities through an identification with the past of the 'other' by bringing viewers 'into intimate contact with a set of experiences that fall well outside of their own lived experience and, as a result, are forced to look as if through someone else's eyes, and asked to remember those situations and events as both meaningful and potentially formative' (2009: 221). This signals the importance of television in providing sites of identification, not simply so that we can make sense of our own pasts and produce static personal and social identities, but in providing us with new sites of identification beyond our autobiographies, offering new opportunities to creatively develop and reconstruct identities in relation to others.

A textual examination of television's mnemonic properties provides insights into the ideological construction of the past in the present and its potential value in identity-building, but as Bourdon notes, questions about the broader relation between

television and lived practices of remembering are rarely addressed, 'even though over a lifetime, television is a continuous source of information; it is consumed on a daily basis and discussed in various contexts' (2003: 5). Audiences are routinely implied rather than empirically investigated. A consequence of eliding this— 'juncture' of personal and cultural remembering (Radstone, 2005:141-2) is an associated disconnect between collective identities as they are secreted, implicit or positioned in mnemonic cultural forms or symbolic practices, and the ways in which they are lived, reproduced and negotiated through routine, situated acts of remembering. Television as cultural memory needs to be examined in connection with its communicative counterpart; the mode of memory which 'lives in everyday interaction and communication' and is shaped by 'traditions of communication and thematisation and [...] the affective ties that bind together families, groups and generations' (Assman, 2008: 111).

There are exceptions to the tendency to cleave communicative and cultural memory from one another such as Jose van Dijck's work on personal cultural memory, which she defines as 'the acts and products of remembering in which individuals engage to make sense of their lives in relation to the lives of others and to their surroundings, situating themselves in time and place' (2007: 6). She demonstrates, how communicative memory is facilitated by media technologies and the ways in which personal and social memories and identities can become 'concreted' into objectivised forms. However, the converse dynamic also requires exploration: the ways in which cultural memory and the social identities concreted in them are made sense of in the communicative practices of personal and social remembering. By examining the use of cultural resources in personal remembering and the ways that cultural frameworks of meaning are constantly reworked and reconceived in the process, the few studies that have attended to this (Reading, 2002; Giles, 2002) reveal both the complexity and importance of the interplay between these modes of memory in their attempts to 'unravel the ways in which cultural resources interact with individual psychic histories to constitute those representations of the past we know as "memories"' (Giles, 2002: 21). It is only in doing so that we can see how personal identities and their social dimensions are produced and reproduced through the remembering process.

Remembering Gender

Remembering is neither simply a reflection of ones accreted personal experiences or an expression of group identity, it 'is knowledge with an identity index, it is knowledge about oneself, that is, one's own diachronic identity, be it as an individual or as a member of a family, a generation, a community, a nation or a cultural and religious tradition' (Assman, 2008: 114). As a social identity and structural framework, gender shapes what is remembered and how remembering can be enacted, acting simultaneously on past and present. Gender has structured the ways in which women have been able to engage with the past, as they have been historically excluded from public forms of remembering such as autobiography (Anderson, 2001, 58-59). Recent cultural memory research on the construction of identities has been dominated by the nation as a frame of reference (for instance Gillis, 1994; Matsuda, 1996; Ashuri, 2005; Robinson, 2009; Hewer and Kut, 2010). In comparison, the profile of gender as an analytical category has been muted. A sustained analytical focus on the specificities of women's temporal experience remains necessary to redress these historical exclusions and more contemporary inattention to gender without succumbing to an essentialised mnemonic equivalent of a distinct 'women's time' (or for that matter, 'men's time') which has been critiqued by Rita Felski (2000) and Susannah Radstone (2007) amongst others.

The mutuality between memory and gendered identities applies to both cultural and communicative modes of memory. Although there have been few 'studies in relation to broader questions of media and culture [that] specifically investigate social memory from an interdisciplinary gendered perspective' (Reading, 2002: 5), there have been a small number of studies to the representation of women in cultural memory which have sought to redress this imbalance (for example Jacobs, 2008; Paletschek and Schraut 2008). The ways in which gender is articulated in and constructed through the practices of communicative memory has also been explored (see for example Buckner and Fivush, 2000; Fivush and Haden, 2003; Leydesdorff et al, 2005). What remains under-investigated is how gendered identities secreted in cultural memory texts are actively used in acts of communicative memory to perform, produce and reproduce gendered identities. This is in line with what Kansteiner argues is a surprising degree of conceptual homogeneity within collective memory studies in

relation to the assumed powerlessness of individuals in processes of collective memory construction (2010: 3) which goes some way to explaining why the use of cultural memory texts in the performance and construction of gendered identities are often overlooked. Annette Kuhn is one of the few scholars to address this in her ethnohistorical analysis of the personal memories of films and cinema-going (2002) but despite identifying gender-specific cinema memories, her focus is more closely attuned to cinema's historical meanings than the autobiographical uses to which it is put. Anna Reading's (2002) analysis of the gendered nature of communicating Holocaust memory in both social practices and cultural forms is a further exception although in focussing on a specific public event, the ways in which television is used in the mnemonic production of gendered self-identities in everyday autobiographical remembering remain unaccounted for.

Feminist reception studies provide a helpful framework for exploring the production and articulation of gendered identities through mediated remembering. Janice Radway (1987), Ien Ang (1985), Ann Gray (1992) and Joke Hermes (1995) have traced the consumption and negotiation of media from gendered subject positions and their creative use in articulating, constructing and reconstructing gendered identities. This sensitivity to the intersection of gendered frameworks of meaning and their use in articulating and reflexively constructing a gendered identity in the present can be integrated with the temporal concerns of memory studies allowing the emergence and articulation of identities over time to be explored. In practice this involves examining the use of television in the articulation of autobiographical accounts in order to show how gendered identities are produced through the interplay between temporal tenses and sustained over time, rather than conceiving of them in a temporally disconnected present.

The experience of gendered remembering is, of course, not a unitary affair, nor does it occur in predictable ways as different social affiliations and identifications such as class, ethnicity and age, can be brought into play in acts of consuming television at different points in time (see for example Dhoest, 2009). Other social variables and markers of difference interact in everyday life to produce unique subject positions and multiple social affiliations. Gendered identities are constructed and implicated in the memories of class, ethnicity and sexuality and are continually revised and

reconstructed in each new historical moment. Women's experience is often characterised by shifting and competing roles and relational subject positions which they occupy through their lives. Remembering is the process through which complex interrelations between personal experience, social structures and cultural resources are played out and reconciled, resulting in the construction of individual but simultaneously social identities.

Gendered Remembering with TV

In exploring the mnemonic use of television in producing gendered identities four examples of women's use of television programmes to connect with their personal pasts are considered. These examples are drawn from the three year *Media of Remembering* project funded by the Leverhulme Trust which investigates the ways in which individuals and families ~~groups~~ from different social groups and cultural backgrounds use everyday media texts and technologies in their remembering practices. The project involves 90 in-depth interviews and focus groups with individuals, both men and women, and families from different ethnic communities across the English Midlands and incorporates ~~a~~ 30 pilot interviews with women of different generations and ethnic backgrounds also from the English Midlands accessed through community networks and centres. The extracts presented here are drawn from this pilot research and are from interviews with women from the same ethnic group. The interviews involved discussions about participant's everyday mnemonic use of personally produced media texts such as photographs and their use of mass media texts such as music records and television programmes. A close qualitative examination of the manifest content and discursive features of the interview transcripts identified how structuring features of experience such as gender, class and ethnicity are played out in the mnemonic use of these texts and how their use enables the construction, negotiation and performance of these constituent features of personal identity.

The first extract is from an interview with Sian, a white British female in her early thirties. She is originally from a northern English city but moved to the Midlands with her ex-husband. At the time of the interview she was cohabiting with her fiancée.

In her account of the 1980s Sian uses television as a symbolic resource in constructing her own autobiographical narrative:

Sian: Umm, I feel more in control of my life now than I was in the eighties. Obviously I was only a teenager so you did what you were told and you had no control of your own destiny, but now I do what I please really. I think um, people aren't as uptight now as they were in the eighties. If you look at the fashion it's all big shoulder pads and power dressing and the yuppies were around in the eighties and everyone was about how much money they could make and business and everything, but people are a bit more laid back now. Society itself has laid back. And I think I am more laid back than I probably was then. Probably *Dynasty* is the first thing that comes to mind, if you think of the 80s umm and probably...yeah, *Dynasty* is the big one, cos it was all shoulder pads and high powered things.

Interviewer: Does it fit in with your memories of the Eighties?

Sian: Yeah, definitely. It's tacky... a tacky programme, a tacky soap opera. But that's how the Eighties were

Interviewer: Does that fit with your own ideas about that time?

Sian: Yeah, I think I saw a programme about Eighties music and they were like trashing it and at the time, I don't know what mood I was in, I was thinking 'no it was fab, the Eighties music was fab because that's when I was teenager and that's when I went out and everything. But then you think about and you think 'no it was naff' but when I watched this programme I was really getting annoyed with it because I thought 'No, it was really good'.

Sian's consistent reference to fashion is significant and can be read as a performance of her gendered relationship to the past. The body is a locus of identity on which history is marked and performed. As Radstone suggests, 'woman is culturally constructed as embodied, whereas man comes to be understood as distanced from the body and more closely aligned with the mind and abstraction' (2007: 71). Sian's articulation of the 1980s through the clothing (particularly women's clothing) of the

period places the body and its changing appearance and symbolic construction at the centre of her account, actively performing the culturally constructed gendered relationship with the body through the act of remembering. *Dynasty* provides Sian with the objectified female body as a symbolic resource for remembering that she can interweave with her own intimate autobiographical experience of the gendered nature of the body. But rather than performing a predetermined 'gendered' relationship with the past by straightforwardly adopting the symbolic resource of the body, Sian is actively negotiating her narrative identity using these televisual representations by using the objectified representations of the body in *Dynasty* to open up a space for critique. She contrasts the embodied 'tackyness' of *Dynasty*, with her own autobiographical narrative which she bases on her past and present sense of agency through her references to 'going out' and being 'laid back' and 'in control', rather than on the aesthetic construction of the body. Far from conforming to gendered constructions of relations to the body, Sian uses *Dynasty* as a resource *within* her autobiographical narrative to resist these and against which she can construct an alternative locus of identity.

The seamless synergy between her own experience and cultural representations of the period is in contrast with her initial rejection of the television programme mocking 1980s music. The retrospective analysis of 80s music in the TV programme is in tension with her memories of the music and the critique of the music is read as a de facto condemnation of the authenticity of her own experience of the 1980s. This has the possibility to destabilise her account of the emergence of her resistive gendered identity ('that's when I went out and everything') in this period as the music was likely to have been analogous to the development of her sense of agency. However, once she has imaginatively extricated her own experience of the 80s from the music itself, reflexively positioning it as a historical cultural form in a shared cultural past rather than simply tied to her own personal experiential narrative, the retrospective critique becomes more acceptable and is integrated into her understanding of the period. Later on in the interview she successfully reconciles televisual critiques of the 80s and the pleasure of remembering her own experience of the period by adopting or affecting a stance of critical and ironic distance from the 1980s. She ~~reconciles~~ brings together the 'tacky-ness' and the 'fab-ness' of 1980s music through-in the development of an ironic sensibility through which enjoyment of

the naff is not just accepted but actively pursued through the consumption of other retro media products.

As symbolic resources these programmes allow Sian to develop a thoroughgoing critique of the 1980s in terms of its aesthetic qualities, social frameworks of interaction and its superficiality without destabilising or calling into question the authenticity or validity of her own pleasurable and formative experiences of developing a gendered identity based on public agency rather than located in the body or the private sphere during that period. *Dynasty* a locus for historical critique, whilst at the same time a symbolic resource for constructing a longitudinal gendered identity located in personal agency rather than the body or its aesthetic construction. TV content is not imposing cultural memories of the 1980s onto Sian. It is precisely through its entry into everyday acts of remembering that the meaning of *Dynasty* as cultural memory is brought into being. Active, imaginative memory work is required in order to reconcile contemporary retrospective representations of a period through which the participant lived with her own affective experience of the 1980s.

The next extract is from an interview with Rachel, a white British single mother in her mid 40s who lives with her children in a city in the Midlands. Rachel discusses the personal and interpersonal importance of television in everyday remembering and in doing so demonstrates how television can draw on in tandem with autobiographical memories in the performance of contemporary gendered relationships and in reflexively constructing her own sense of gendered identity.

Rachel: 1970s (laugh). Got to be the 70s. Things like, things that were on TV. Particular music. Fashion. Definitely fashion... And anybody who I meet who is my generation, the first thing you'll have in common is all of this common ground of our past. Whether it was *The Goodies* on TV (pause). I was talking to someone the other day about *The Goodies*, because Bill Oddie was on this, in fact it was my boyfriend Terry, we were watching *Gardeners World* on Sunday morning and I said 'look Bill Oddie ' and he say 'yeah' and I said 'do you remember when he used to be in *The Goodies*'? And that was 1970s and someone of your generation wouldn't know *The Goodies*

unless you'd seen a re-run. [...] And when you're in relationships and you're talking to people, that's something that is common ground and does become very important. Like with my previous partner, cos he was only 8 years younger, there was so much we didn't have in common and it was really quite odd [...]

Interviewer: How do you feel looking at that those things?

Rachel: They seem ridiculous. It's like my husbands permed hair. You look back now and you think, like me editing all the photographs with me with pink glasses. At the time it's the fashion, it's a fad, its whatever, but when you look back at it you think 'oh dear' [...] Even you see TV footage as well, I mean the TV footage as well what you can find is that you also think it's very poor quality which makes it seem as though it was even longer ago than it was. Because things have just improved so much. But no, you do feel, I think ridiculous is probably a good word. That's how it makes you feel. There's a lot of happy memories with it as well I suppose because like when you see TV programmes when you were a child, if you've had a happy childhood, obviously if I sort of see um, what was that one called? Oh, *The Magic Roundabout* and the little saying and all sorts of things that come from things like *Trumpton* and that or *Soup Dragon*, like people making silly noises when they're drunk like the *Soup Dragon*, it's just, y'know, what they do. So yeah, there's a lot of happy memories associated. But I think the teenage bit, possibly when you see, I suppose it's like people of my mum and dads generation that were into Beatles and you still see this black and white footage of these hysterical screaming women at the airport, fainting all over he place because the Beatles are there. And you look at it now and you think, that is just so over the top, it was, it was just how it was.

The primary role that Rachel assigns to television in remembering is a social one. She talks specifically about the knowledge of particular programmes, especially children's programmes as key elements of a repository of generational knowledge;

reference points which index a common past and operate as resources for collective remembering. She uses televisual remembering as a framework for judgement in the evaluation of relationships, particularly romantic relationships. The programmes operate as short-hand references to broader value systems and ways of seeing the world which are constitutive of her generational experience. The use of these texts in remembering does more than symbolise a simple generational identity. They become usable resources in the performances of gendered relationships and relational identities. Far from free floating signifiers of a non-experiential past, these texts operate as symbolic resources deployed actively and reflexively in social contexts. She deliberately questions her boyfriend as to whether he remembers particular TV programmes in order to elicit from him, not just a recognition of the programme itself but a recognition of their shared past. This signals a deliberate use of cultural memory in the interests of performing and cementing familial relationships and commonalities which conforms to Haaken's recognition of women's role as 'emotion managers' in the ways in which they hold and use social knowledge (1998: 101). It also corresponds to Fentress and Wickham's observation that women bear the main responsibility for the maintenance of familial memory (1992: 142) and the identities sustained by it. Both Rachel and the following interviewee clearly demonstrate their active use of television in the discursive construction of a common past with their life-partners, in the interests of enacting and reinforcing these relationships. This can be seen in more detail in an extract from another white British interviewee in her mid 60s.

Louise: [My husband and I] were sitting having a meal outside one evening and I said 'D'y'know I woke up this morning with this tune running through my head' and it was, laugh oh no, I've forgotten it. It was a little tune running through my head and I said 'I can't remember where it's from'. And I said I think it's a 1950s musical. And then it was, was it *Carousel* or *Oklahoma* or was it *South Pacific*, and we narrowed it down. And um, and then we started talking about the films we went to see when we were children, before we knew each other y'know. And he was talking about his Dad taking him to see all the Westerns and my Granny taking me to see *Calamity Jane* [...] Cos we spent the whole evening, (laughing), we were sort of walking away from this singing y'know, we were singing all these songs from 1950s

musicals. [...] And that's what I can never understand about men who leave their elderly wives and y'know sort of a 25 year old bimbo. Cos what would you talk about?

The explicitly gendered use to which televisual texts are put is striking and can clearly be seen in Louise's juxtaposition between herself as a culturally knowledgeable 'older woman' and the '25 year old bimbo'. She grounds her marital relationship in the intertwined cultural and autobiographical knowledge that both she and her husband possess. The importance of this cultural knowledge is signalled at a particular time in Louise's life where other stereotypical physical signifiers of femininity are assumed to be waning with age, implied in her characterisation of the 'elderly wife'. She constructs a social identity for older women based on the alternative 'gender capital' of common generational knowledge in stark opposition to younger woman's identity based on physical attractiveness a lack of cultural knowledge. In using the stereotypical term 'bimbo' she ties the absence of cultural knowledge to specifically feminine youthfulness, discursively undermining a gendered identity built on physical attractiveness. Through this rhetorical use of this cultural knowledge in everyday remembering, Louise stakes a claim on her relationship and legitimates her position within it. It is the televisual memories which provide the opportunities and resources for her to activate and imaginatively perform the past that she shares with her husband. They allow her to construct as shared memories from a period before their relationship began, even reconstructing their individual childhoods as shared memories through the indexical use of the films. In this context, televisual resources provide a communicable framework around which the individual autobiographical memories which she and her husband possess can be built and interlaced around, and in doing so assist in the construction of her identity as an older heterosexual woman.

For Rachel television programmes index the subject positions of the past viewer but without providing any narrative continuity between the past viewer-subject and the remembering viewer-subject in the present, creating incongruity between past and present subjectivities, resulting in a feeling of ridiculousness. However, in marking the insurmountable difference between past and present, televisual texts involve the construction, rather than the collapse, of temporal distance which is the precondition

for historical engagement. Rachel uses this opportunity to articulate a historically situated account of gendered identities. She likens her own feelings of ridiculousness in watching TV programmes to her youth to watching people of her parents age in 'black and white footage of these hysterical screaming women at the airport, fainting all over the place because *The Beatles* are there'. It is not simply the otherness of the past that Rachel recognises, it is a specifically gendered past. It is the gendered performance of fandom, as of women screaming and fainting, that is singled out as other. The intensively embodied 'over the top'ness of the women seems incongruous with the 'cool' sensibility of ironic detachment which characterises contemporary mediated pop-cultural consumption (McGuigan, 2009), and can be seen the pleasure that both Rachel and Sian take in the ridiculousness of programmes for their childhood and their ironic engagement with them, evocatively characterised by the drunken imitation of the 'Soup Dragon' mentioned by Rachel. They use these programmes to construct their own longitudinal gendered identities in an ironic opposition to the historic versions of femininity on offer in the texts, whilst at the same time taking pleasure in their consumption.

The ways in which Sian and Rachel discursively construct interrelationships between their own past experience and a broader cultural past using television is quite different from the ways in which Gertie, a white British woman in her Eighties, uses television. In this extract Gertie demonstrates the ways in which television is used as a symbolic and practical resource for engaging with her personal past and the social dimensions of it. Gertie comes from a traditional nuclear family and has three brothers (two of whom have died), three children and several grandchildren. Her husband died twenty years prior to the interview.

Interviewer: Are there any specific times when you particularly think about the past?

Gertie: Oh yes, I do. I like to be at home Sunday evening. I like *Songs of Praise*. I've had two strokes and I know I sail pretty close to the wind at times with stress. But I do like, I can't sing, the second op took my voice, so I don't go to church but I do like *Songs of Praise*. That's when I think about things. Not all sadly. I go to the cemetery for special occasions, but I like to go by myself and I always feel better

for having gone. But not that it upsets my private life but actually I can be something of an introvert. Because my father was, the biggest introvert I've ever known. I really feel that I must take after him quite a bit. The one brother I've got left, he can be the same.

Interviewer: Has the way you feel about *Songs of Praise* got to do with the music?

Gertie: Yes a lot of it, but I do believe in Christian beliefs, you see, I live here alone and it's detached and it's quite awe inspiring sometimes. I've had a few knocks on the door, people coming to the door at night and it's scared me a bit. And now I've got no dog either, that's rather...gives you food for thought. But I've also got a lot of trust. And I like period dramas. I like good acting.

Interviewer: What do you like about period dramas?

Gertie: I like the leisurely attitude to life of the period dramas. What was on last night? *Midsomer Murders*. That takes you into the countryside and village life. Those sorts of things. But these modern programmes drive me batty. There's not one soap that I look at.

Interviewer: Is that how you remember..?

Gertie: Yes. It's like a way of life as it was. Although there were two classes then. And I'm a mixture of both. We were quite poor but my mother had a sister who lived with us who never worked, so when we were born in the town, the top of the road was quite rough and we were forbidden to go up there. Consequently my friends were shop owners children and my brothers friend was the only son of a bespoke tailor who's premises are now that café in Gyll street next to the gents outfitters. Well, Aunt Nora used to say to my mother, 'you take the children out and leave me, I'll prepare the lunch', which my mother did. So we used to live in the park with my mother or David's mother. Consequently the children in the park that were accompanied lived in Gyll Street and they were doctors and dentists. Professional people lived there. So we played about with these sorts of children at the past, but we weren't allowed to go up the other end.

Songs of Praise, a BBC1 programme aired on Sunday teatime featuring Christian music and worship, is an interesting choice as it is not conventionally designated as historical. It is being used, not only to connect Gertie to the past of a particular religious group, but also to legitimate her own remembering practice and the time she spends reflecting on her personal experience. Throughout the interview she describes herself as having been brought up as a Christian and in viewing *Songs of Praise* Gertie is able to imaginatively participate in and connect to a social group that she feels unable to physically (due to ill health). The television allows a public space for performing collective memory to be domesticated, allowing its access to be regulated through the domestic rhythms of the home which are routinely coded as feminine (Felski, 2000). The home has been central to Gertie given her long-term role as a housewife and as a television programme *Songs of Praise* allows her to mnemonically identify with a public religious identity, but also to reconcile this with her domestic identity through her autobiographical narrative in the private arena of the home. The intertwining of the personal and collective Christian memory is evident in the way she comes to terms with this imposed shift from a physical to a virtual participation in the lived mnemonic practices of Christianity. As she draws on the idea of her own inherited introversion in tandem with her accumulated religious experience, to explain the suitability of this mode of engagement for her.

When discussing her television preferences Gertie identifies *Midsomer Murders*, a 'whodunnit' ITV television drama produced in the UK set in a contemporary fictional village and its environs. The action focuses on a stylized version of village life and on the mostly wealthy, conservative inhabitants and includes a small number of rather stereotyped working class characters. The respondent identifies this particular programme as speaking to her own past despite the fact that, similarly to *Songs of Praise*, it is actually set in a fictionalised present. The programme does have a notable lack of contemporary cultural markers giving the programme an amorphous temporal quality. Gertie identifies directly with the 'way of life' identified in *Midsomer Murders*, and uses it as a framework for bringing into the present those cultural frameworks which have structured her autobiographical memories in contrast to her present experience which is characterized by fearfulness and detachment. These identifications are both classed and gendered.

Gertie's experience is geographically mapped in the description of her childhood in the same way that the fictional village of Midsomer is mapped according to the social position of its inhabitants. For Gertie, her memories of childhood experience are marked by gendered roles and routines of the lower middle classes specific to this period including her mothers publically visible childrearing role signaled by the 'accompaniment' of her children to the park (in an implied contrast with 'unaccompanied' children of working mothers), her aunts domestic role and an emphasis on professional identities of other children's fathers. Conventional distinctions in gendered identities are also a feature in *Midsomer Murders*. The lead character is an older male Police officer with his wife Joyce cast in a supporting, domestic role and disruptions of familial relationships are a usual plot device with narrative resolutions providing a return to a gendered middle-class status quo. The ways in which class and gendered distinctions are visibly embedded in the physical fabric of communities in *Midsomer Murders* in a similar way that Gertie experienced in her own childhood, makes it a usable cultural resource for recollecting the ways in which class and gender have together textured her experience and for articulating the lower middle class gender identity that has developed from the accretion of and imaginative engagement with this experience over time. The value of television content for remembering her past experience and discursively constructing her own identity lies in its reconstruction of aspects of social life which she perceives as absent from the present.

Both *Songs of Praise* and *Midsomer Murders* provide the respondent with resources for maintaining and reflexively constructing continuous sense of self over time, by providing the imaginative space for personal reflection on experience within the cultural conventions provided by the programme and by providing cultural reference points and frameworks of meaning with which she can identify and use in the discursive construction of her own classed and gendered identity.

Conclusion

Exploring the interweaving of cultural texts in personal remembering has opened up new opportunities to see how gendered identities are articulated and produced in this

process. The analysis highlights that there is no homogeneous gendered use of television in remembering. The participant's gender did not dictate a predictable selection of particular programmes. Television programmes selected ranged from children's programmes watched during the interviewee's youth, remembered soap operas to contemporary dramas. These programmes were not put to uniform use in remembering, nor were unitary identities produced from these mnemonic processes. This is not to say that gender played no structural role in the ways in which television programmes were used in remembering practices, nor that they were irrelevant in the production and performance of gendered identities. However the analysis also confirms that although gender is not a pre-existing entity that determines particular cultural practices, it is actively constructed and reconstructed through them (Zoonen, 1994: 123).

Television programmes and their meanings are discursively interwoven with autobiographical accounts in the participant's narratives. The programmes are used to legitimate particular experiences or senses of self, and signal the relationship between the gendered self of the past, and the remembering subject in the present. This is performed and constructed in plural and complex ways, ranging from resistive constructions of feminine identity, to much more conservative articulations. Gendered identities on offer in representations of both the past and present are not passively received or imposed as an interpretative framework in personal memories. There is a mutual interpenetration between cultural and personal memory which is creatively performed, and although structured by social subjectivities, is contingent on personal autobiographies. At the same time as being used in the production of gendered self-identities, remembering with television is actively used in the performance of these identities in contemporary social contexts, constructing the self in relational terms in line with dominant discourses of femininity in play in contemporary culture (Reading, 2002: 169). Television content is used to mark common cultural knowledge and is actively deployed to articulate and re-establish commonality. Women's agency in this process signals the gendered nature of their emotional labour in their everyday remembering and the key role that televisual texts can play in its performance, and in undertaking this they are actively re-articulating their relational identities.

The relationship between remembering and gendered identities appears to be bi-valent. Remembering with television is being directed inwards through the use of television and in this process the interweaving of autobiographical and cultural remembering results in the retrospective construction of the gendered self, providing resources in articulating and making sense of continuities and change in subjectivities. At the same time it is also orientated outward, involved in the contemporary performance of gendered social roles and relationships, constructing continuities and managing change not simply between past and present selves, but between past and present social relationships and contexts. In this dual role television mediates between personal and collective dimensions of memory as it provides imaginative space in which collective and personal pasts and their relationship to the present can be negotiated and it is at this juncture of personal, social and cultural modes of remembering that gendered identities are brought into being. It is in precisely this way that redressing the routine inattention to televisual texts in personal remembering has a wider significance for memory studies as a field. Although textual analysis is undeniably crucial in considering the mnemonic affordances of media content, there must be an accompanying focus on the ways in which remembering is actively performed, enabled and limited through the active consumption, negotiation, and uses of these texts. It is crucial to examine how symbolic resources are used and interwoven with personal experience in processes of remembering, as it is through these processes which socially situated identities are produced and performed. By attending to this process of reconciling public and personal pasts in mediated remembering, it is possible to empirically explore the ways in which everyday remembering involves the reconciliation of individual, social and cultural dimensions of memory.

In addition to providing a route into an exploration of the way in which different levels of memory are negotiated, attending to the reception of television content is of considerable importance if the field of memory studies is to develop a holistic political analysis of mediated remembering. The ways in which mass media texts as symbolic resources are structured to promote particular formulations and understandings of the relationship between past and present should not be the only concern in an analysis of the power relations which underpin and inform cultural memory. An understanding of how these symbolic resources can be mobilised (or not) through remembering from

different subject positions and used to negotiate personal experience and construct identities must also be assessed. This provides an insight not only into how dominant mnemonic narratives and the social relations that they support shape the ways in which people make sense of their own experience and actively reproduce their identities, but also into the opportunities for these narratives to be negotiated, appropriated and resisted. The reception of textual content is simultaneously patterned by the frameworks of meaning which structure media representations, social contexts of reception and the agency of individual subjects. Television content is often talked about as embodying cultural memory, but in order to be considered in this way it has to be activated through lived, situated engagements with it, involving precisely the kind of struggles over meaning identified in early reception research. An assessment the ways in which this process is enacted and is shot through with relations of social and representational power should be an ongoing concern for memory studies.

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