

Alternative Methods – Alternative Understandings:
Exploring the Social and the Multiple 'I', through Memory-Work

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Abstract

Within the social sciences, understandings of identity are formed not only by our theoretical approaches but also – though this is less acknowledged – by the very methods we use. Identity, theoretically understood as multiple 'I', requires empirical methods that can contribute to the unfolding of the 'I' into a variety, also in terms of voices. Here I argue that memory-work is one such method. Having used this method extensively, both collectively and individually, I provide examples to illustrate the type of understanding to be gained through such a methodological approach. The method is particularly fruitful in illuminating gender, class and ethnicity aspects of the social, and the multiple 'I' – in new and unexpected ways. Finally, reflections on merits and shortcomings are discussed – in relation to more traditional methods – in terms of problematizing 'the taken for grantedness' of the social and making visible the social and multiple 'I'.

Alternative Methods – Alternative Understandings : Exploring the Social and Multiple 'I', through Memory-work

Introduction

In relation to the development and sophistication of theoretical and meta-theoretical argument in recent decades, actual practice in sociological research appears to lag far behind. This would certainly seem to be the case with qualitative approaches, where one could have expected the most dramatic changes as a result of the post-structuralist challenges from the humanities. But so far, the awareness that everything social is (also) text, as well as awareness of our role in writing the social – as author of the text – has at most resulted in general reflections touched on in articles or in the introductory or concluding chapter of a book. But the chapters in-between – the presentation of the material, the analyses and the results of the research project – generally appear untouched by the meta-theoretical stance taken elsewhere. With little variation, most research projects of today have used more or less traditional methods throughout the research process, despite our very critique of this.

This paper is not intended as yet another contribution to the general meta-theoretical reflections on interpretation. Neither will I substantiate my rude statement of our shortcomings given above. Instead – with these introductory statements as a platform – I wish to present the use of an alternative qualitative approach and discuss its merits and shortcomings in relation to other qualitative methods. But let me stress: it is *not* my intention to argue for this approach as the one and only, as the one that provides more true or accurate knowledge than all other methods. I will, however, try to argue – through illustrations – its fruitfulness, in the hopes that it can inspire the reader to explore the approach further. The development of qualitative methods is not only an urgent but also a most rewarding task – a lot remains to be done!

Before the presentation of the alternative qualitative approach of Memory-Work, in all its varieties, I should state briefly one more introductory remark – I will return to it in greater depth throughout the paper – and that is the genre of auto/biography.

The renaissance of auto/biography as a qualitative approach within sociology - in Norway (for example Gullestad 1996a, 1996b, Nilsen 1994, 1996) as well as elsewhere but maybe especially widespread in England (regarding England, see for example the special issue of Sociology on auto/biography (vol 27 no 1) or the journal Auto/Biography) - has been a welcome development. It would seem that it is here all the debates now take place regarding structure(system) versus action (individual), and symbolic/meaning (interpretation) versus the real/reality (materiality). It is also here the impact of teachings from the humanities seem to have been most profound. That auto/biography is a 'genre', and a person tells or writes her/ the other's story along implicit guidelines for a story of that kind (sequencing, coherence, a beginning and an end, the construction of an 'I', etc.) is common knowledge among its users. It is this awareness of telling a story, that underlies the indisputable and valuable fact that an auto/biography can tell us just as much about the cultural story of groups or societies as of the individual's lived life. However, to open the way for other stories as well, others than the ones that the genre of auto/biography may give rise to, other methods and techniques should or could be employed while doing auto/biography. Memory-work can be one such tool, as it can help us to see and learn new things about ourselves, our society and culture. Different understandings of the 'I' and the social will require different methods. Exploring methods means exploring the social.

Memory-work as a collective enterprise

Memory-work as developed by the German sociologist Frigga Haug (Haug 1987) had a twofold purpose: First, to establish a qualitative method with non-positivistic relations of production of knowledge, in the sense that all participants are at the same time both researchers and subjects and that they all participate in the interpretation processes (which is to be done

collectively). Secondly, to develop a method intended to problematize the 'natural', the things we take for granted. The reason for the latter point – for Frigga Haug as a feminist – is that the oppression of women, the reign of patriarchy, and our participation in it will continue as long as we go on taking gender relations for granted. We will have to develop methods that can enable us to see gender and oppression in a new way.

Originally designed as a collective method, every participant was to write down a memory – the theme being collectively decided – and take part in the interpretation on equal terms. Various techniques have been developed to make the writing and the interpretation as fruitful and rich as possible. Let me here briefly present those that I have used, on different themes and in different settings.

I have given several three-day courses for MA- and graduate students in the method of memory-work. The groups have varied from 10 –20 participants of both sexes, though the majority tend to be women. After a short presentation of the method and how we are to use it in the group, the theme for that particular memory-work is discussed and decided. Since this is a temporary group – most of the participants do not know each other – no sensitive topic should be chosen. Besides saying that, with the firm suggestion that the group should choose a 'dull', everyday topic, to test whether the method can bring new knowledge to the things we take for granted, I do not interfere in this process. What topics have the groups then chosen? They include anger, blushing/sweating, knowing/ not knowing something, vacuum-cleaning, dancing, getting dressed, and finally, travelling to work.

Once the topic has been chosen, I ask the group to *write a story of a particular situation* that has really happened, yesterday or long ago. They are told to try to be *as concrete as possible*, by relating in detail everything about the situation. They should also try to *use the words* they would have used at the time this situation occurred. This might mean that the 'voice' sounds stupid, mean or whatever, in the ears of the writer of today. Of course writing a memory always means interpretation, I tell them, since interpretation is what drives the memory forward, how and what we

remember. And every memory has layers of interpretation, especially if the memory is of something that happened long ago. But even so, they should try not to analyze while writing, but give the story a chance to be told as straightforwardly as possible. Concepts, hasty analyses, immediately processing it academically – that is here more of a problem than a resource: it closes more than it opens for interpretation at this stage.

Participants are further instructed to write the story *in three versions*: in the form of the first person and in the form of the male and female third person. With today's computers, this is easily done. One simply writes one story and then orders the machine to replace, for example, the 'I' with a 'she' and then the 'she' with a 'he'. Even though the language might become a bit odd, three versions of the story are thus easily made. One purpose is to see what happens when you objectify yourself (sometimes it is easier to write a story in the third person) or establish a distance to yourself. But more importantly, by using the male and female form, the gender of the text is made visible, often in ways not visible when the gender was 'accurate'.

The text is *written then and there*, usually within a time limit of 1/2 – 1 hour. De-dramatizing writing by doing it together, in a limited time and anonymously makes it seem less pretentious and scary. Under such conditions, everybody can write something. The reason for writing the stories *anonymously*, however, is not only, or even primarily, to facilitate the writing process: it is meant to enrich the interpretation process. The stories are then interpreted collectively. No one can or is allowed to claim 'ownership' of the story (or of the 'correct' interpretation). The participants are further told that once the analyses have been completed, they can, if they so wish, tell each other which story was theirs. After the stories have been written and prepared in three versions for all participants, we *read the stories together*. We then discuss and analyze them as a whole. What kinds of situations and of what life-periods have we written about? And what have we not written about? Sometimes the silence in what we choose not to write about is just as interesting and thus worth analyzing, as what we did write about. For example, on the theme 'to know/not to know something', none of the 20 participants wrote about academic knowledge, although they were all students. Instead, 'knowing' was here taken to mean being able to and

mastering, especially bodily tasks – in childhood or in youth. In the discussion, they all expressed insecurity in relation to knowing in academe, as the probable cause.

In this first and more general discussion and analysis of all the texts, the gender aspect, made visible through the three versions (I, she, he), is also made a topic. What makes the gender appear correct or wrong? The acting or the wording? For example, on the theme 'Getting dressed', which gender – when naked – starts by putting on the socks? And why do women always put on the underpants first, and not the bra? How we do gender all the time, is here made quite clear. But also it shows how very gendered our way of wording and writing about something is.

To be able to make a more in-depth analysis of a situation and its language, one or two stories are chosen. Usually 'rich' ones, in the sense of being ones with much to dig into. Everything we see and learn when analyzing the chosen story is written down on the blackboard, first unsystematically and later organized into sub-themes, situations, relations, emotions and so forth. Analyzing goes on until nothing new comes up.

Besides courses, I have also used this method in other collective settings – in the form of workshops– where the purpose not was to learn the method as such, but where a particular theme was in focus. In a half-day workshop on 'fatherhood' at a Nordic research conference, I asked the participants to write a short memory story on 'My friend's father'. And even though they were asked to write in English – a foreign language for the vast majority of the participants – the stories were surprisingly rich in content, meanings and variations. Having no time to copy all the stories for all of the participants, I read them aloud instead. Each story was read twice and slowly, each after the other without any comments. Participants were asked to write down their reflections when listening, and afterwards we had a general discussion about the patterns, relations, situations and emotions that we found the stories revealed. The same pattern was used in another half-day workshop at a conference on drug treatment in a gender perspective. Here participants were asked to write a memory story about ' a drunk person'. When reading these stories aloud I also changed the gender in the story to open up for gender

reflections. In both workshops nobody complained about having to do writing. They could all write a story and they all had something to write about. That the theme is concretely and not abstractly formulated is of course of vital importance. Writing about 'fatherhood' instead of 'my friends father', is far more difficult; moreover, it would probably result in more abstract and general stories.

Summing up my experiences of the use of the method in collective settings, let me point out a few things. First, the very act of writing. Instead of articulating orally – even though everyone in the group knows it is to be read or heard by someone else – writing opens for reflections of a different depth in the subject, although I would not necessary say different dimensions. One reason is time factor: it takes longer to write than to talk. Also, writing necessitates searching more, to find words that fit. Words also become more important since we cannot talk around the subject, as we do orally. In other words, writing provides for more reflection on the meaning of the words, a reflection of the intermingling of the symbolic and materialist dimensions. That is, more of an interpretation of our own experience but also more on our own terms, although always in an implicit dialogue with what we understand as the normative interpretation of the experience in question. It is accordingly not a dialogue in the same way as an interview is a dialogue. Even though we may be writing for a reader, this takes place without the interference of the reader's reactions or interpretations during the act of writing. As another form for articulation of experience, this method should therefore be explored to reveal all its potentials and possibilities.

A further aspect of this method that makes it well-suited for grasping experiences, is that the topic for the writing is always a specific situation or an event on a theme. Writing about anger for example, means writing about a specific situation in which I was angry. When this is used collectively, it is the situation rather than myself that is in focus. It is a method where the I is not the main thing, but rather the situation – the relations in the situation – that make up the experience. This facilitates an interpretation of social relations that form the experience, rather than looking for the causes 'in' the individual. Memories are written and interpreted to see the social relations,

on all levels, that shape the experience in question. And, I feel, it is precisely this aspect of making the social aspect of the experience visible that makes the method particularly fruitful. It can indeed be used to unveil the things we take for granted in everyday life – not least gender!

Memory-work as an individual enterprise

In relation to auto/biography it is more relevant and interesting to see if and how the method can be used as an individual enterprise. Can it be used as an alternative way of writing a life-story? And if so, what are the merits or shortcomings in relation to other more traditional auto/biographical methods?

I myself have used the method as an individual enterprise both in the form of a pilot study for a research project on sexual harassment, as well as in the form of a main research project on 'the gender of knowledge'. In both cases the themes were decided beforehand. Even though, as we have seen, it is the theme and not the I that is the primary focus in memory-work, the I, and the construction of the I in any story of oneself, will always be lurking in the background. The thematic focus in memory-work does not eliminate or deconstruct the I: it simply gets constructed in another way. And, I would hold, it is precisely in how this method can contribute to another construction and understanding of the I, that it has something to offer to auto/biographical research.

The pilot study of sexual harassment

Once I was in charge of a research project on sexual harassment. Two of us in the research group did an individual memory-work on the theme. The purpose was simply to prepare ourselves for the interviews that were to be done. None of us could have imagined how decisive this work would be, not only for the form and content of the subsequent interviews, but for the entire design of the project and for the understanding of the 'phenomenon' of

sexual harassment. How did we go about this individual memory-work, and what did we learn?

The theme for my memory-work was sexual assaults, including sexual harassment. Over the course of half a year I wrote down all the different occasions I could remember – as stories, written one at a time. I tried to focus on *what* I could remember, *how* I remembered it and how I interpreted the situation – at the time, and today. This is what I found:

1. I remembered occasions I had 'forgotten'. All the events were not remembered at once, but came to the surface over a longer time-span, triggered by the memory-process as such.
2. I was surprised by the number of such occasions and their variations. Is that so, I wonder, for other women as well?
3. I had problems defining some of the events as 'assault', even though they were clearly unwanted from my part. The problem was the language, the wording, the connotations of 'assault'.
4. I experienced some of the events as 'assaults' even though 'nothing' actually happened – for example, a situation of intense threat.
5. I felt shame in relation to several of the events, I would not wish to tell anybody about them, even though I knew I was not to blame. If I had been interviewed I would probably only talk about the situations when I did the 'right things', not the ones when I was 'naive' or 'stupid' – that is, situations when I behaved as if there was no such thing as patriarchy.
6. The shame and contempt I felt towards myself as a victim, didn't that indicate that I felt the same towards other women as victims? Feelings and thoughts I did not wish to have or to know, began coming to the surface.

Rønnaug Sørensen, the other person in the research group who did memory-work on sexual harassment, found – besides the similar points –that:

1. The relation between her and the abuser was difficult to reconstruct. What was actually said and done?
2. She felt an urge to 'touch up' the stories, to make them appear less serious. Otherwise, she would have to re-evaluate her self-image, something she

intensely resisted. She became tired and irritable and found all kinds of excuses for not doing memory-work.

3. She found that she had to be utterly concrete in her descriptions of what had happened. When she looked at the event from different angles, the context and the definition of her possibilities for action varied.

4. She found language to be an obstacle. How to put words to the 'unspoken'? Atmospheres, gestures, feelings and gazes, all the non-verbal communication seemed important – especially between the sexes.

These insights, hers and mine, brought about by the memory-work, had several consequences for the design of our research project on sexual harassment, and for the interpretation process throughout the project. First of all, we made follow-up interviews with victims into a standard procedure. The memory and reflection process, triggered by the first interview, was hereby included and documented. And any changes in the stories, between the first and the second interview, were registered and understood as being the way these things work, rather than as proof of 'deviations' or untrustworthy statements/subjects. The result was an understanding of sexual harassment as experiences that are both interpreted and continuously reinterpreted: in relation to other/new experiences, to age and varying gender-experiences and -relations, etc. This in turn means that it is impossible to state or measure the consequences of assaults of harassment once and for all, even though this is what most research seems to imply. Experiences of sexual harassment are not a separate phenomenon in a woman's life: they are part of her self-image, her image of others and the relation between others and herself. This is something you have lived and are still living with.

This memory-work on sexual harassment had consequences not only for the research project, but also for us – memory-workers – personally.

The experiences which the memory-work made us remember changed our understanding of ourselves. We seemed to have lots of victim-experiences, without having previously thought of ourselves as 'victims': we had no explicit victim identity. Maybe few of us actually have! Perhaps this identity is just as much a construction brought about by the traditional methods and

approaches used within social sciences, where assaults are 'phenomenized' instead of 'relationized', personally and culturally. In any case, for us and up till then, our personal identity-project and cultural identity-contribution had obviously been to construct an identity that made invisible any personal or structural victimization. Invisible to ourselves, and to others.

To study how this was done, in detail, the memory-stories would make an excellent starting point for further memories, reflections and discussion. In other words, the memory-stories can make us question our own identity-story, as well as showing exactly how the identity both shaped and was shaped by the experience in question.

The 'I' in the memories also varied extensively. The voice, the acting and reacting shifted. The picture that emerged was of an 'I' both contradictory and fragmentary. And non-flattery! – we revealed ourselves as mean, stupid, and so forth. Since the focus was on the theme and not on the construction of the 'I', the 'I' was let loose in all its variation. Besides getting to know the different 'I', this made me consciously relate to others. As in the Whitney Houston song-text 'I'm every woman, it's all in me', the boundaries between me and the others began to dissolve.

Memory-work led me to question the earlier implicit version of my life-story and identity. More specifically, it made me question my sexual history. Having written about my memories of assault, I became curious about my memories of sexual pleasure. How did they relate – in time and place – to the assault memories? And so I started on another memory-work, this time on sexuality; and that was later followed by another one, this time on knowledge – a natural and urgent theme for me as a feminist researcher.

The study of sexuality and knowledge

For more than a year I wrote memory-stories on the two themes of sexuality and knowledge, in hopes of understanding myself and my social context, 'society', better. At first I had no intention of publishing anything; when there were no more stories that urged to be written, I simply put them away.

It was not until a year later, when I was on sabbatical and had time to read them all through, that I saw them as material for a book.

Sexuality and knowledge are both about 'being in touch' (Evelyn Fox Keller's expression, 1985); about pleasure, comfort, honesty, personal growth and fulfillment, and about being present. A wish and an effort that in reality often turns to the opposite: instead, we feel discomfort, distance, diminished personally, non-present, dishonest and oppressed. This happens both in the act of sexuality and in the act of knowledge. I saw all this when analyzing my own stories, but I also began to realize how gender links knowledge and sexuality together, connects them and sets them in motion. Knowledge, sexuality and gender are formed in the same process. In negotiations as to the kind of woman and man we want to position ourselves as, knowledge and sexuality appear as important pieces of the bargain.

Seeing these patterns in the memory-material made me wonder whether this could be used to explore and discuss issues of female subjectivity and objectivity. More specifically, I wanted to explore the kinds of experiences that might explain the contents as well as the forms of feminist knowledge of production, i.e. the feminist endeavor in academe.

With this as my purpose I wrote the book *The Gender of Knowledge* (in Swedish and Norwegian, Widerberg 1995), where I present and make use of the material from the memory-work on sexuality and knowledge. Here I will not try to summarize the content of the book but just give a few examples of insights gained regarding the multiple 'I', through the use of memory-work.

Since the stories had been written one at a time with the purpose to explore and illustrate diversities rather than similarities and connections, the result is of course a picture of an I that is multiple. This is accordingly a result of the method as such. On the other hand, each story as well as the relation between the stories, express dualistic dilemmas. That is, the multiplicity or the multiple I seem 'overdetermined' by a dualistic frame of reference. The Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde syndrome seem to pervade almost all situations in the stories. The reading I in contrast to the social I, the erotic I and the loving I, the I in the family and the I among friends, the I among male

friends and the I among female friends, the I among intimate female friends and the I among more casual female acquaintances, and so forth...And although this dualism is often both focused upon and rooted in the problems of handling sexuality for women under patriarchy, it is not restricted to it.

Living dualistically, experiencing, interpreting and then writing its story – this can be seen as an expression of how culturally pervasive dualism actually is or was. In another frame of reference, a different I might have been seen as complementary – the multiple I – instead of as contradictory. And in my stories I do make use of this different I, in order to survive, but all the time I feel like a crook, dishonest and fooling the others. To be *one*, to be fully there, all of it, to be allowed, as a 'proper subject' and not having to be either—or all the time, is a wish expressed throughout the stories and the analyses. The wish of my generation (born in the forties), where gender identity still – in relation to previous generations – was formulated in a totally culturally dualistic mould. If identity in general and gender identity in particular is less so, for the generations after mine, then so many and contradictory 'I's might not be experienced. The possible implications of such a multiply I for the (feminist) production of knowledge (embodying intellectuality), is an issue I cannot probe into here, although I have discussed it elsewhere (Widerberg, forthcoming).

It is important to stress that the focus on the themes of sexuality and knowledge serve to make invisible other important themes and aspect of the I. Children and everyday life, for example, were not focused upon thematically in my book. As a result of this 'lack' one very important aspect in the formation of identity and female subjectivity of my generation, is made invisible. And that is all the 'doing'. As intellectual women of a generation that – ideologically, politically and economically – was expected to be both equal and ordinary (no elite), we both wanted to but were also forced to do it all ourselves. We wanted children and work, but paid help in the household was out of the question, both ideologically and economically. Equality meant having *and* doing it all. As intellectual women we were no longer an exception, we were and wanted to be counted as ordinary – especially us feminists. Breaking the barriers between 'them' – ordinary

women – and 'us' – intellectual women, establishing a we-women as a social category – that implied a lot of doing.

All this dualism, all these splits and all the 'doing', have embodied the intellectuality of my generation. How we work, and what themes we work on, can be understood from this background. Likewise the feminist project of my generation. I would like to argue that our feminist enterprise can be understood as a desire to 'be in touch'– in relation to research themes, as well as research approaches and methods. And that this wish, in turn, might emanate from our experiences of the dilemmas of not being in touch: all the problems with connecting body and mind, sexuality and knowledge, and so forth. In other words, the kinds of experiences that I find in my memories and that I argue I share with other women of my generation, might be precisely what was needed to ignite the development of a major part of feminist theory of knowledge and its particular stances. I would even say that my generation has been positioned – by way of our kinds of experiences – to be 'outsiders within' (to borrow an expression from Sandra Harding, 1991), in a revolutionary way.

Some concluding remarks

Trying to illustrate the merits and shortcomings of memory-work as an alternative method of writing the 'I' and the social, I have led the reader along a winding road – in and out of research projects and courses. My aim, and hope, was that the reader would see the sights (and the light) along the way. But just to make sure, let me sum up what I have tried to point out:

The focus on the theme, in memory-work, has the advantage of making more visible the social and cultural aspects of the 'I' (gender, class, ethnicity, etc.). Dealing with one memory at a time also helps to make it visible in a more concrete and detailed way, which in itself furthers and stimulates the memory process, with the result that new insights can be gained. We can see new things, or maybe see old things in a new way.

The focus on the theme also makes it easier for the I to unfold in all its varieties. This is so because the aim, the focus, is not to construct a coherent I throughout the stories. It is the history of the experiences, on the theme chosen – not of the I – that is to be told. As such the method can be used to produce images of identity and the I different from what emerges from more traditional methods within the social sciences.

On the other hand, the very focus on themes also makes other themes invisible, so the method can never aim to give a full or more whole account of self-identity. My life is different from my sexual and knowledge history. They are both part of my total life-history, but maybe not the ultimate or the most important ones. And my sexual and knowledge history might not even be the full or most 'accurate' stories on these two themes. The focus on distinct experiences makes us remember and want to work on experiences that stand out as special or as problematic. This was the case for me when I was producing the material for what was to become my book. The everyday way of experiencing gets left by the wayside. That is, however, a dilemma that could be confronted without abandoning the method. One just have to decide to approach or define the theme differently – for example, the way we did on the courses that I described earlier on.

The purpose of the method is not to find out how things 'really' are or were, but to make us see things in a new way. All the same, here I should mention some aspects of the memory-process that are relevant for my previous illustrations and discussions. As Freeman (1993) has pointed out, we live our lives in episodes. The overall plot of the life-history that makes up of all these episodes is something we cannot know until afterwards. Remembering is therefore not only a recounting of the past, but also a reinterpretation. It is an interpretative act that aims to expand our understanding of the I. Through memory, a new relation between the past and the present is created, one that can give structure to past and present experiences. Memories from the past are therefore not memories of facts, but memories of how we imagine and construct facts.

What we remember is dependent on language and on culture. Now that we are adults, language plays such a decisive part in the formation of an

experience that we find it hard to remember anything from our pre-verbal childhood. Language thus both enlightens and darkens an experience. Culture, on the other hand, is decisive to what is considered important and accordingly what we remember. That is why what is remembered will vary with culture and historical period. People from different cultures who share the 'same' experience may well remember it quite differently. The same is true for different groups within a culture. Oppressed groups, for example, often do not want to or even cannot remember. This has been interpreted (Taylor 1993) as an expression of resistance towards the submission or oppression pervading their experiences and their memories of these. In order to survive and regain dignity, one learns to forget. And if, and when, one does remember, the unbearable makes the memory incoherent and fragmentary. This unwillingness to remember and the way one remembers, if forced to, is highlighted in the literature on sexual assault as well as in the memory-work on sexual harassment, described above.

One final point: to remember, especially in writing, is not only to gain something – for better and for worse. It is also to lose something. Once the memories are written down, it is hard to remember anything but what has been written. (Likewise, what we tend to recall of visual impressions of childhood is very much determined by the photos in the family album). In a way, it locks or fixes the memory, and thereby perhaps also future experiences – registered, reflected and remembered in the light of what we have of memories of our past.

With these brief comments on some aspects of the memory process, directly relevant in the discussion of memory-work as a method, let me return to the discussion of the merits and shortcomings of the method.

Besides the focus on the theme, the very act of writing should be stressed. Making use of writing as a technique allows for several and different voices and reflections on the theme. As another form for articulation of experience, this method should therefore be explored to reveal all its potentials and possibilities. Writing is not here the preserve of the professional writer – traditionally the researcher – and that ought to make us reflect on the assumptions that may underlie the tradition where subjects are expected only

to talk. Do we think this is more spontaneous, true etc.? Or do we assume that the 'others' are incapable of writing? Or that they will not write the way we want them to?

For all these reasons, I see this method as an approach that can stimulate the development of a whole variety of different methods and techniques within qualitative research. It is not necessary to 'buy' the whole memory-work package' at once, it can easily be used in combination with other methods and approaches, for example when writing one's life history or when interviewing for a life-history. Or when doing sociological research in general. As I wrote in the introduction; "The development of qualitative methods is not only an urgent but also a most rewarding task – a lot remains to be done!"

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