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HOW TO TRANSCEND THE RESEARCHER/ RESEARCHED DIVIDE IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES: REFLECTIONS ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY-WORK.

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Abstract

During the academic year 2020/21 a number of introductory online seminars on the method of Collective Memory-Work were organised at the Department of Sociology, Maynooth University. This paper has been written by a group of participants in one of those seminars. The motivation for writing came from the uniqueness of experiences in the seminar and the ongoing reflection after the formal group activities ended. We will first present a general briefing on Collective Memory-Work. Then the concrete activities carried out in the seminar will be described. Against this background we will share reflections arising from our Collective Memory-Work that touch on theory-building, methodological innovation and pedagogy, and in our opinion have currency far beyond the confines of our seminar. More specifically, the aim of this Working Paper is to contribute to discussions about method, methodology, context and character of research, and relationships in research processes.

Part I
Collective Memory-Work – A Briefing[1]

The term Collective Memory-Work (CMW) is open to misunderstandings. In this paper we are talking about a method of research and learning that relies on a group[2] working together on a topic of shared interest. In contrast to history workshops in which the focus is on engaging with collective (cultural) memory, CMW aims at the **collective work with individual memories** (see e.g. Hamm 2020). In CMW participants write short stories from their own memory. The stories are scrutinised by the group via a detailed text-analysis and a recursive discussion on the topic in question. The method follows a structured protocol which is detailed in Part II of this working paper. Working with the stories of all participants in turn can lead to new perspectives and insights. The fun factor in CMW is high, fostering linguistic skills, analytic thinking and argumentation, expanding perspectives on personal and political history. Moreover, as we learned in our exploratory group, there are other outcomes that flow from participating in CMW, as documented in Part III of this working paper.

Collective Memory-Work was developed by German sociologist and philosopher Frigga Haug and the group *Frauenformen* in the 1980s at the crossroads of the feminist movement, social science and Marxist theory. The development of CMW was understood as a practical critique of traditionally male-dominated science by taking the level of everyday experiences of participants in CMW-projects as the starting point and a constant point of reference. Since its inception CMW has been adopted by researchers in a variety of disciplines including gender

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[1] Adapted from: Hamm, Robert. 2020. "'De-romanticised and Very...Different' Models for Distinguishing Practical Applications of Collective Memory-Work." Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives. 9(1):53-90.

[2] It is difficult to be specific about what constitutes the ideal number of a group. Our online group (whose reflections form the basis of the third section of this paper) was made up of 10 participants including the facilitator. As a rule of thumb, a group of around 15 is small enough to have productive plenary sessions, while a minimum of 5 is required to have a productive dissection of a text.

studies, sociology, political science, education, business studies and in a number of regional pockets in the USA, Austria, Scandinavia, Australia, New Zealand and the UK.

Closely associated with the discussions about German Critical Psychology, the starting point of *Frauenformen* was the desire to enter into a process of transformation. Specifically, this involves (a) integrating subject/object in research; (b) defining research as a collective process; and (c) understanding research as a political process that enhances the capacity for action. Each of these premises are now briefly explored.

Haug et al., 1987, sought to bring human agency to the forefront, focusing on how we participate actively in the formation of our own lived experiences. This approach is in contradistinction to much of conventional social science, in which individuals are frequently constituted as objects rather than subjects in research processes. The latter leans toward structural determinism and denies our own role in constituting the very social relations that form us. In this sense, Haug et al. see their approach as a crucial intervention into existing practice noting that: "(...)memory-work is only possible if the subject and the object of research are one and the same person" (Haug et al. 1987:35).

It is important to note that Haug et al.'s vision was overtly radical in that it challenged conventional social science methods by adopting a different epistemological stance, one where we as humans are part of the research interaction, engaged in co-creation and fully present in our inter-subjectivity. This intervention –in a very practical way– resonates with the pioneering work of Dorothy Smith (1987) who also questioned sociological and philosophical ideas and practices from a feminist standpoint. Haug's approach also dovetails with the sociological quest to solve the agency-structure divide in the discipline (see for instance the work of Bourdieu [1972] 2019, and Giddens 1986). Dissolving the categories of researcher and researched immediately makes research into a learning project and learning into research. Hence every CMW project is at all times an educational project, regardless of any other characterisation, e.g. as academic research or professional reflection. For Frigga Haug "memory-work is an emancipating learning project" (2008:40).

Besides setting subject and object of research as one, "the second premiss was that research itself should be a collective process" (Haug et al. 1987:36). CMW is a group process that has at its core the expansion of knowledge about "modes of societalisation of women"[3] and the intention of increasing the capacity to act of those women taking part. It is important to note that the method is not intended to function as individual therapy "but rather a kind of

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[3]According to Tolman (2019: 18-19) while humans are social in a way that transcends place and time, the differentiation of the social across place and time is the outcome of cultural variation: "The cultures of people living now are very different from those living centuries ago. Indeed, we know that cultures can change radically within a single lifetime. In short, this aspect of the humanly social has history, and it is this historically determined sociality, or culture, that for humans has largely replaced biology (i.e. genes) as the storehouse of the information needed for us to become truly human." This is captured in the German term *Gesellschaftlichkeit,* which translates as "societal." Societalisation, therefore, is much more than the commonly used notion of socialization. It relates to the process in which the individual actor is inter- and transacting with a given socio-historical environment, and by doing so becomes this particular person within these particular circumstances. Understanding this interwovenness is at the heart of Collective Memory-Work.

politicizing research process in groups" (Haug and Hauser 1985:60).[4] Groups are always interactive and engaged in doing something together.

The aim in using CMW is not the production of knowledge for its own sake. Instead it is explicitly understood as a political project directed towards an increase in what Critical Psychology terms *generalised action potence.* Generalised action potence is collective; it exists for one and all. It refers not to personalities, positions, or classes. Rather it is better thought of as a capacity that inheres within the generalised network that includes subjective grounds and possibilities for action. It may be helpful to think of this in contradistinction to *restrictive action potence*. The latter operates at the individual level only where the actions taken are beneficial to that particular individual. Such action is not without costs to them, and crucially implies a cost to others and to society as a whole. As Tolman explains:

> "Whereas in generalised action potence the individual gains his or her power through cooperative participation in societal production, in restrictive action potence the power is gained through participation in the power of the dominant forces in society." (Tolman 1994:116)

This phenomenon is something with which most of us are familiar in everyday life as expressed in the well-known adage: "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." But here there is an important contradiction:

> "On the one hand, restrictive action potence is subjectively functional for individuals in a society like ours. On the other hand, to one degree or another it constitutes a denial of the true social interest, and to that degree, owing to the fact that in the final analysis our individual interests are identical to the collective societal interest, it puts us in a position of hostility towards ourselves." (Tolman 1994:116)

Recent events provide an instructive example. The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has brought the clash between generalised action potence and restrictive action potence into sharp relief. For public health measures to work effectively, we must all recognise the generalised usefulness of our individual behaviours. Those who choose to ignore public health advice in pursuance of their individual freedom act against the collective societal interest, producing deleterious outcomes. For instance, in the United States and elsewhere, infection and deaths from COVID-19 are almost exclusively occurring among unvaccinated sub-populations only ("CDC director warns of 'a pandemic of the unvaccinated'", New York Times, July 16, 2021).

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[4]In their book on Collective Biography Bronwyn Davies and Susanne Gannon had included a passage in which they stressed that they are 'doing research' and not 'doing therapy' while the group of Frigga Haug and her colleagues would "focus very strongly on what might be called 'therapeutic outcomes' of their work." (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 6) This passage has been re-used by others to set apart Collective Biography from Collective Memory-Work for the latter being concerned with therapeutic benefits. E.g., "[w]hile drawing on Haug et al. in the writing and analysing of their collective stories, Davies et al. (1997) are more concerned with the research potential of collective biography, rather than its therapeutic benefits" (Hartung et. al., 2017, 45). It is a misrepresentation to play out therapeutic benefits against research when it comes to the work of the Frauenformen projects. In fact, in all sorts of situations therapeutic effects can be the outcome of what is not at all intended to be therapy.

What is looked for in CMW is an expansion of the capacity for action for the participants towards generalised action potence. Capacity for action here refers to the individual engaging with existing social relations in the direction of an increasing and collective appropriation of structures that determine life instead of blindly surrendering to them (Haug and Hauser 1986:79). This has the potential to produce radical outcomes. A good example is the collective efforts of individuals to de-colonise the curriculum in schools and institutions of higher education, as a way to challenge power asymmetries in how the story of existing social relations has tended to be told.

Conceptually CMW builds on a critique of consciousness-raising groups (Haug 1990:33) and significantly expands their practice. Experiences are not only shared, and stories told by participants. These stories are also used as material for a systematic and rigorous analysis, with critical reference to pre-existing theory. For Haug this means taking experience as a point of departure and working back toward generating theoretical explanations:

> "It raises self-consciousness to know that one is not alone with different experiences. But there comes the point where it doesn't lead any further, stories start to turn in circles, no-one likes to listen any more. . . . Our proposal to work with memories and everyday experiences, to theorise them, tries to employ the joy of starting with experience and connect it with the burden of intense theoretical work." (Haug 1990:53-4)

Central to CMW is the analytic engagement with self-generated text/s. These are memory-scenes, short accounts of remembered experiences. The analytic approach deployed is underpinned by basic assumptions summarised by Frigga Haug (2008:28-9) as follows:

- The construction of one's own personality

What we (as of today) understand to be our personality:

> ". . . has a history, a past. We attach meaning to our personas and use this meaning, or understanding of our personality, to determine the steps we take in the near present and distant future."

As such we are actively involved in the process of construction of our personality in historically antecedent social circumstances. Our participation is yet "dictated by our desire to obtain the ability to act and remain able to act" (Haug 2008:28). This process of construction of our personalities is interminable, it continues constantly and is part of our social existence. It includes the negotiation and appropriation of categories of legitimacy for our actions. As noted earlier, Haug's observation aligns closely with sociological theory that seeks to overcome the agency/structure divide in that she suggests that our personalities are shaped both by structuring forces (social and historical) and our own capacity to generate meaning through social interaction (Bourdieu [1972]2019; Giddens 1986).

- Tendency to eliminate contradictions

"An important strategy in memory-work is the elimination of contradictions. We tend to disregard anything that does not fit in with the unified image that we present to ourselves and others. This mostly semi-conscious act of eliminating contradictions may become transparent in the written experiences as we document the details that do not fit." (Haug 2008:28)

The deconstruction work in the analysis of the memory-stories

". . . is aimed primarily at drawing out these contradictions and breaking points in our experiences. It presents them in a new light and connects them to other developments, choices or ways of life. The graveyard-like silence of sameness is thus disturbed in order to enable change." (Haug 2008:28)

- The construction of meaning

Meaning is not inherent in things, acts, words. It rests on a process of assigning this meaning. For meaning to be valid it "requires agreement by others. Meaning occurs in the first place through language" (Haug, 2008:28). Here we can see a direct link to symbolic interactionist theorising which places enormous emphasis on the capacity of humans to create and use symbols (language, make faces, gestures, etc.). Moreover, we have the capacity to agree on the meaning of vocal and bodily gestures, humans can effectively communicate. By reading and interpreting the gestures of others, humans communicate and interact. Blumer noted that interaction is distinct in the human context because human beings interpret or 'define' each other's actions instead of merely reacting to each other's actions. Our responses are not made directly to the actions of one another but instead are based on the meaning which we attach to such action (Turner 1986).

- The politics of language

We describe and interpret things within the taxonomy our language/culture provides. However, a language that has evolved in patriarchal culture will reinforce patriarchy, e.g. in its idioms. Therefore, prevailing norms influence language and normative language shapes the cognitive world-view.[5] This accounts for the necessity to critically scrutinise what we say or write:

"[Language] is not simply a tool that we may use according to our liking. Rather, in the existing language, politics will speak through us and regulate our construction of meaning. Thus culturally a number of ready meanings lie around . . . they push themselves on us when we write and dictate what we might not even have wanted to express. This happens when we less reflectively and more naively use language" (Haug 2008:29).

The concept of personality deployed here is indebted to Lucien Sève's theory of personality with its emphasis on social matrices.[6] The name of the original project, *Frauenformen*, is an

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[5]See the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity

[6]"[T]o be a capitalist or proletarian in a capitalist society is therefore quite different from conforming to cultural patterns or to occupying a social role through 'need for favourable response' or by virtue of any other

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immediate derivation of the engagement with Sève's theory and the forms of individuality he suggests. However, the *Frauenformen* collective also sees the acquisition of a particular form of individuality (e.g. to be "a woman") as an inter-active process of societalisation. Hence in the ongoing education process that underlies this acquisition, the individual is not only a passive receiver of a predetermined and unchangeable socialisation, but an active co-creator of "woman." It follows that a woman doesn't simply behave in the way a woman is supposed to behave in her culture because she knows the norms and passively adheres to them. Rather she learns over time to behave in that way because it is a useful adaptation to her surroundings/circumstances. This does not preclude testing the boundaries of the norms at certain points and retaining only those aspects of being a "woman" that suit her.

In the conceptual framework of CMW history is understood as the concrete lived practice of people with (explicable) interests. Historical conditions in which we find ourselves are the result of earlier struggles, negotiations on societal terrain that are reflected in established structures and institutions as well as in specific constructions of meaning and constructions of self. In this sense, at any given time what we understand as ourselves can also be seen as a temporary identity-balance (Wellendorf 1973:48) in a process of continuous identity-bargaining (or societalisation). This occurs against the background of the social matrices imposed on us by historical social relations. Biographically we cannot escape an educational process that gears towards the acquisition of a general acceptance of the 'chances' offered to us according to our social position and with respect to identity patterns. But we can – and by a closer look actually do – negotiate our position in this process.[7] CMW accords the individual more agency than for instance, does Bourdieu, whose analysis tends to privilege the structuring role of a habitus into which we are born, or which we acquire.

In fact, CMW foregrounds a lucid and dialectical understanding of agency/structure relations, integrating micro and macro sociological standpoints. In our respective (personal) constructions of meaning and of personality we are always involved as *active agents.* At the same time we find the margins of the space for negotiations determined by historical conditions. There is not an indefinite set of possibilities for us in these construction processes. We are always bound to the historically possible spectrum of attribution of meaning. To start with we have to use the existing forms of thought and of action. We can put them together in new compositions, and try to develop them further, but we cannot discard them completely. Consequently what we experience as an act of individual construction of meaning and

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psychological motivation emanating from the individual; on the contrary, this is a matter of necessary matrices of activity which stamp objectively determined social characteristics on individuals. . . . [O]wing to the fact that they are relations between men, social relations, while being absolutely different from psychic acts, constitute social matrices within which concrete human activity necessarily comes to be moulded. The capitalist, the worker is not a basic personality, a psychological type, a set of cultural patterns or a set of roles; it is the objective social logic of the activity of some concrete individual as far as he extends his activity within the corresponding social relations and as far as this activity is considered within these limits. The same observations can be made a propos of all social forms of individuality, from the forms of needs to the basic contradictions in processes of personal life." (Sève, 1978, 258-9)

[7] This holds for children already, and it is very obvious that not every child easily gives in to this imposition. Read from this perspective conflicts on everyday level in institutional education immediately appear in a different light.

personality is more than a unique creation. It is at the same time an act that we share with, and in which we are connected to others in the same historical-spatial context.

CMW enables the concretisation of this process giving us real insight into the agency/structure dialectic underpinning all social arrangements. Crucially, the analysis of memory-scenes written by the group members starts from the premise that it is possible to make conscious the trajectories of constructions of meaning that determine our own respective lived practice. This includes new insights that eventually offer the option for re-constructing meaning structures and perspectives of self, thus accounting for new and increased capacity for action. Implicit in this assumption is the idea that human action can be changed via processes of unlearning and (self-)reflection.
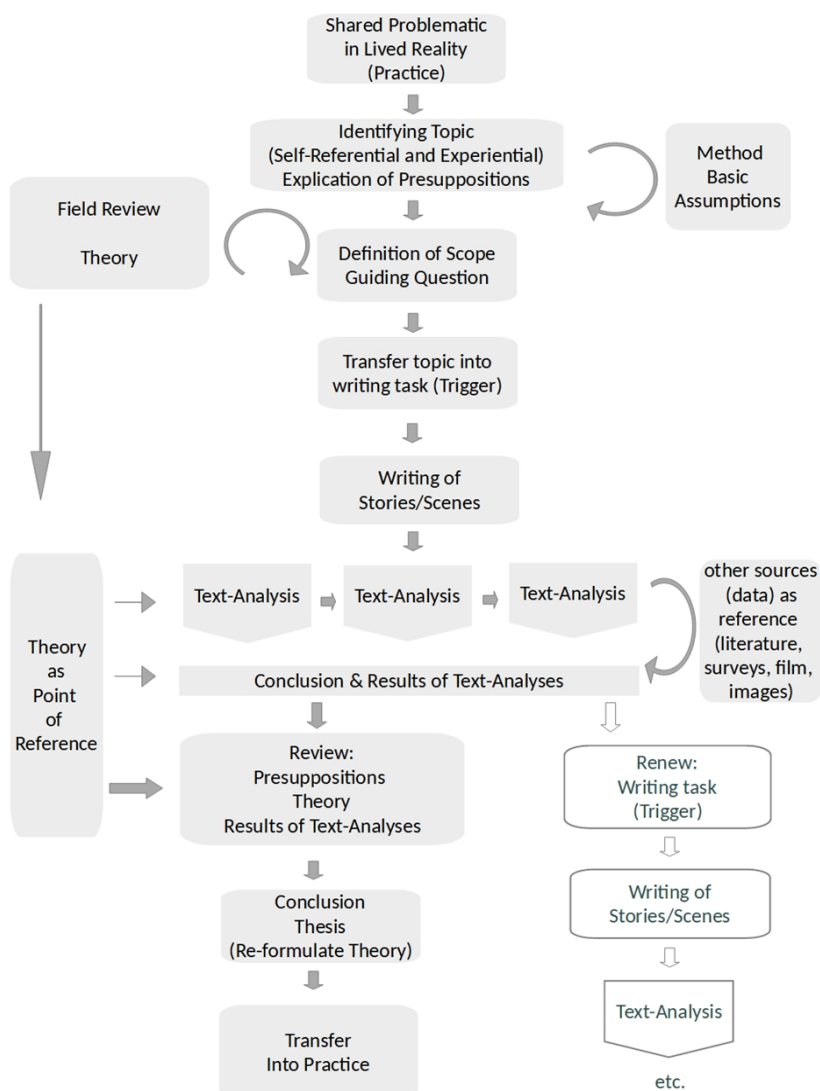
In practical applications of CMW the group becomes particularly important for the critical analysis of the written memory-scenes. It is assumed that the view of others can help in identifying blind spots that otherwise remain undetected (by the authors of the respective memory-scenes). For Haug:

> "Collective Memory-Work is an extensive work of gaining back, and appropriating history by following the traces of becoming this particular person. This is done by way of experiencing one's own complicity in the process of societalisation as a praxis that happens always together with others. Hence changes to this praxis are similarly possible and necessary only collectively." (collectivememorywork.net 2020).

Visualisation: What to do and in what order

In a fully-fledged CMW project writing and analysing texts is part of a larger number of procedural steps. The following diagram[8] visualises the sequential order of a prototypical process of a Collective Memory-Work project. This is not intended as a template to be rigidly applied. The actual method must always be determined by the group. The group members are the masters of the method, which must be adapted to the group's own interests, objectives, ideas, activities and so on. The group decides on how to cover the steps outlined. For a discussion of adaptations in different institutional contexts see Hamm (2020).

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[8]This version adapted from Hamm (2020)

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                    Shared Problematic
                     in Lived Reality
                        (Practice)
                            ⬇
                     Identifying Topic
                (Self-Referential and Experiential)      Method
                  Explication of Presuppositions          Basic
                            ⬇                          Assumptions
   Field Review
                      Definition of Scope
      Theory         Guiding Question
                            ⬇
                     Transfer topic into
                    writing task (Trigger)
                            ⬇
                        Writing of
                       Stories/Scenes
                            ⬇
                                                    other sources
        Text-Analysis ➡ Text-Analysis ➡ Text-Analysis   (data) as
                                                         reference
   Theory                                               (literature,
     as                                                 surveys, film,
   Point          Conclusion & Results of Text-Analyses    images)
     of
  Reference                  ⬇                          ⬇
                        Review:                      Renew:
                     Presuppositions               Writing task
                        Theory                      (Trigger)
                   Results of Text-Analyses
                            ⬇                           ⬇
                       Conclusion                   Writing of
                         Thesis                    Stories/Scenes
                   (Re-formulate Theory)
                            ⬇                           ⬇
                        Transfer                    Text-Analysis
                      Into Practice
                                                        etc.
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The beginning and end of a CMW project are set in lived reality. The group agrees on a topic for their project on the basis of questions (a problematic) originating in the concrete spheres of lived experience of the participants. They clarify amongst themselves what presuppositions in relation to the topic they bring into the project. Comparing existing theories to the participants' experiences and presuppositions helps to define the scope of the project. For this purpose a field review of such theories can take place. Based on the defined scope a guiding question (or questions)[9] are formulated. The group agrees on a writing topic (a trigger word,

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[9]The term 'question' is used here without claiming exclusiveness of format. It is just as well possible for a group to collect a number of key terms, or a working hypothesis as points of reference. The advantage of the format of an explicit question is that it provides a stronger focus in later discussions. The disadvantage is that groups can be fixed too much on finding an explicit answer instead of being open for topical transfers that would impress themselves during the discussions.

sentence, heading). Participants write their memory-scenes. The self-generated texts are used as material for the following text-analyses. During text-analysis the existing theory provides a pool of references that can be tapped into whenever deemed suitable. In addition to the pure textual work it is possible to include other resources as material to inform the topical discussions. After the text-analyses are concluded the results of the subsequently progressing discussions are brought together and compared to the original presuppositions and the relevant theories. The insights gained in this process build the basis for a concluding project report in which a re-formulation of theories is possible. The key outcome is the production of knowledge through research and learning that involves intentional engagement and being fully a part of the group project. Eventually, the new insights are transferred into the lived reality of participants. New perspectives, changed perceptions, transformed comprehension lead to different positioning and ideally an increased capacity for action. The loop for a discussion of basic assumptions as depicted in the diagram can be helpful particularly for groups who work with the method for the first time. It can also be beneficial in groups composed of members from different disciplines, with different traditions of thoughts or world-views.

Included in the diagram is the possibility to continue with a second (or further) round of textual work, e.g. by agreeing a new trigger and writing new stories. In theory this opening is available after every single round of text-analyses. In practice the time at hand and the interest of participants will determine how feasible a continuously renewed cycle is.

As a prototypical depiction this scheme is in need of adaptation in every single application of the method. There are many openings for adjustments, e.g. the mode of topical introduction (by rounds of verbal story-telling), the inclusion of elements of acting out of scenes (image theatre), the writing of revised versions of the memory-scenes. Collective Memory-Work as a method is deliberately "inchoate and therefore alive" (Frigga Haug, personal communication, July 7, 2019). Adaptations to local interests and situatedness are necessary for assuring the core tenets of CMW are fruitfully integrated in any given project. Haug notes the potential for expanding horizons:

> "What we need is imagination. We can, perhaps, say quite decisively that the very heterogeneity of everyday life demands similarly heterogeneous methods if it is to be understood." (Haug et al. 1987:71)

Part II
The workshop and what we did

Having outlined the epistemological basis of CMW, we think it would be helpful to provide an instructive example of how the method may be applied in practice. Here we offer a detailed overview of a 15 hour workshop, extending over five online meetings of three hours each, scheduled for five consecutive Wednesdays in November and December 2020. The online workshop was designed as an introduction to CMW. Participants did not need to have prior knowledge of the method. The seminar was planned as a facilitated, interactive learning

experience in which the essential steps of CMW were practically applied and also reflected upon. The group in the seminar consisted of ten participants (three male, seven female) from different disciplinary backgrounds: sociology, applied social sciences, education, and early childhood and teacher education.

In the invitation to the seminar a pre-selected topical focus on "School experiences" was indicated. In advance of the first online meeting participants were asked to:

- try to think of an experience you had in secondary school that you would be happy to share with the group and talk about in the seminar (ideally this experience should relate to something that [still] ignites questions or 'perplexity' in you);
- find a picture that relates to this experience (in whatever way), this can be a photograph of you or others, it can be a picture that you find on the internet that reminds you of the experience, literally any picture that in your opinion is related to or represents the experience;
- think of a few (four to six) key terms that capture the topics that play a role in the experience.

These tasks allowed for mental preparation grounded in the lived experience as remembered by participants.

Next we provide an overview of what we did in the five online meetings. Central to the practical application is the text-analysis of self-generated memory-scenes. It is also a crucial element in the experiences in our seminar, although in the overview it is only mentioned as one among other activities. A general description of the text-analysis as applied will follow. The five online meetings unfolded in the following sequential manner:

First online meeting
- Brief welcome and introduction to the seminar
- Collecting questions that participants brought with them
    - some (mainly organisational) questions were answered on the spot, e.g. what tasks are given in the seminar, will there be breaks, etc.
    - some questions were noted and kept for answering during the seminar at a later stage (these mainly concerning methodological questions, or questions that would be answered by practically doing CMW in the group)
- Sharing stories
    - We used the pictures that were collected in advance to tell a story of our own school experiences. After each story we did a short 'resonance-round' with reactions of the others in the group to the story that was told.
- Based on the stories verbally recalled in our group and the subsequent feedback, we identified key terms as point/s of reference for our discussions that would take place in the later stages of our work with the memory-scenes that we would go on to write. These key terms were: power - voice - body.
- For writing memory-scenes we agreed to use the trigger word: "Uniform"

Between the first and second meeting everyone wrote a memory-scene. For the format of writing a set of simple guidelines as suggested by Crawford et al. (1992) was used:
1) Write a memory
2) of <u>one</u> particular episode, action, or event (not a number of events)

3) in the third person (we may agree on a particular pseudonym, ref. to the group's discussion)
4) in as much detail as is possible, including even 'inconsequential' or trivial detail (it may be helpful to think of a key image, sound, taste, smell, touch)
5) but without importing interpretation, explanation, or biography (avoid 'meta-level/s') (Crawford et al. 1992:45).
In writing the memory-scene we did not give the story a title (we only used the trigger as a heading).
Stories were kept to a length of approx. 500 words maximum.

Second online meeting
- Recap on first session, interim thoughts, and new questions.
  ◦ similar to the procedure in the first meeting we looked at some questions immediately, others were again noted and left for later; questions concerned, e.g.
    ▪ how did we arrive at the three key-words?
    ▪ how to address ethical questions in CMW?
    ▪ how to do text-analysis?
- Feedback on writing process
- Text-analysis (Step 1 Empathic understanding)
  ◦ we used one of the self-generated memory-scenes as an example to do an empathic reading; this was done in a plenary with all ten participants
  ◦ we did another two empathic readings of memory-scenes in smaller groups of five participants
- Brief Conclusion with immediate feedback on empathic reading

Third online meeting
- Recap on last session, interim thoughts, and new questions.
  ◦ in this context we discussed basic assumptions, character of text-analysis, results of CMW (thus also addressing some of the methodological questions that were asked in the first two sessions)
- Text-analysis (Step 1 Empathic understanding & Step 2 Distanced Analytic Understanding)
  ◦ we used another one of the memory-scenes to extend the text-analysis; now we moved from the empathic reading to a deconstruction of the text
- Immediate feedback on text-analysis

Between the third and fourth meeting the facilitator formulated a provisional 'reconstruction' (see below, Step 3 of the text-analysis) and sent it to all participants.

Fourth online meeting
- Recap on last session, interim thoughts, and new questions
  ◦ this included questions concerning the practicalities of 'doing' text-analysis in a group, and a discussion on 'common sense theories'

- In two sub-groups we did two further Text-analyses (Step 1 Empathic understanding & Step 2 Distanced Analytic Understanding & Step 3 Reconstruction)
- We collated the results of the two sub-groups in a plenary at the end of the meeting
- Brief conclusion with immediate feedback on process during text-analysis, and questions about ethical issues in CMW

Fifth online meeting
- Topical Transfer
  - we looked back at our discussions during the seminar (pictures chosen, story-telling-round, definition of key terms of reference, trigger for story writing, writing process, empathic reading of memory-scenes, distanced understanding with deconstruction and reconstruction) and identified trajectories of thought for further investigation
- Reflection on method
  - we picked up the questions that were asked during the various meetings and looked at, e.g.
    - In what fields to use CMW?
    - How to adapt CMW?
    - Position of CMW on the spectrum of qualitative research?
    - Potential transfer of CMW to areas beyond research?

So far, we have rehearsed the order of activities in the workshops. Next, we take a closer look at the approach to the analysis of the memory stories in CMW. The template for text-analysis that we used is an adapted version of Frigga Haug's suggestions:

Watch out I

This is not about an analysis of the personality of the author, neither is it about finding out the "true story".

Procedure

The text is read aloud (by the author or another group member).
The group listens and lets the text sink in.

Step 1 Empathic Understanding

If the author is part of the group s/he is silently listening during this phase (see above Watch out II).
To allow the author a positioning as 'silent witness' of the discussion the other participants do not refer to the author by name when talking about the text. E.g. if a text is written by Jenny, and in her text she used as a pseudonym Sinead for herself (as the protagonist in the story), then the participants in the discussion will not refer to "Jenny" when talking about the story. They may refer to "Sinead" or to "the author." Thus in such a discussion a statement about a participant's immediate understanding of the message of the author could be: "What I see Sinead telling me here is: XYZ", or "What I understand the author tries to tell me is: XYZ".
In the discussion the author is also not personally addressed with any further question about the text, e.g. to explain what she meant, or what she really meant, or whether we understood what she meant as how she really, really meant it. The deliberations around what the author meant occurs solely amongst the other participants in the group.

We discuss first impressions and write these down in short terms:

- Context of the scene
- Message of the author (What is s/he trying to say ...)
- Common Sense Theory (proverbial, everyday knowledge)
- The Title that the group gives the story

Then we put the results out of sight.

Step 2 Deconstruction (Distanced Analytic Understanding)

Now we work with the printed text/s. We deconstruct the text. In a table format we note:

Subjects	Activities (Verbs)	Emotions	Motivations
Main protagonist			
Other persons			
Other subjects			
Linguistic Peculiarities / Use of Language (e.g., use of attributes [adverbs, adjectives], sentence structures, incomplete sentences, animated subjects, rhetorical questions, repetitions etc.)			
Clichés			
Topic (How does the topic appear in the story?)			
Connections in the story?			
White spots (Is something missing in the story?)			
Contradictions (Are there contradictions in the story?)			

Step 3 Reconstruction (Abstracting)

Now we also put the printed texts out of sight. We continue working only with the table above.
First we try to answer the question:
• How does the author construct herself (himself) and the other persons?
Then we try to formulate the:
• Message of the story (Subtext)
We may compare our results with our initial impressions from the empathic understanding.

Step 4 Topical Transfer (Shifting the problem)

Taking the theses of Step 3 as a starting point we try to:
• Refer back to our guiding question (respectively, the emerging themes in successive prior text-analyses)

To facilitate the reader getting a more grounded sense of what an application of this template for a memory-scene actually looks like, we include here one of the texts from our seminar and the subsequent step-by-step analysis that was done by the group:

Out on a limb and nowhere to hide[10]

It was Friday, a cold November crisp, clear afternoon in 1996. A gang of teenagers were hanging around outside an Esso garage in a market town smoking cigarettes and chewing gum. Everyone was dressed in school uniforms. The boys had walked down the road from the academic boys school, just up the road . The girls had hitch hiked in twos from the their mixed school, ten miles away. The roads had been busy and it was an uneventful trip....for once. She was last to arrive. Mary walked ahead towards the group. She lagged behind Mary, shy, nervous, unsure. She had met the boys before, in the pub that first night, but this felt different. The bright sun left nowhere to hide. As they approached they could hear the chat and the laughter. A few people said hello as they approached. She met his eyes, he nodded, smiled. She smiled, looked away. 'Hello' she said to everyone and no one.

It was awkward joining the group, she could feel that in every bone of her body. She tried to chat to Mary who was still beside her. They talked about science class that day. Mr Boyle had really lost it this time, kicking Billy's chair in anger when the boys were just messing as they usually did on Fridays. The girls wondered what had pushed him over the edge on that day and not all the others since September. They giggled as they remembered the screech of the chair and the squeaky gasp of Billy as he slipped off the science stool, the thud on the floor. As the girls chatted she glanced over at him again, he was balancing one legged on the wall, she caught his eye, he winked.

She pulled a box of cigarettes and a red lighter out of her shirt pocket. 10 Marlboro lights. She offered them around. A smattering of no thanks. He was beside her now, she offered him one. Their eyes met. He said yes please and thank you. He took the cigarette in his hand and looked at it, moving it between his fingers for a moment. She lit her own cigarette. The cool smoke provided some relief and she relaxed, a little. He continued to move the cigarette between his fingers, she was transfixed. Then he broke it in half, saying nothing at all. It was a dramatic move. All eyes were on him, and then on her. She was shocked and instantly hurt. She looked away, relieved to have her own cigarette to smoke.

Step 1 Empathic Understanding

Immediate reactions
- That was an unexpected ending
- I thought it is a lovely love story, but at the end he was just cruel
- Cruel to be kind
- I wonder about the gesture/s, the picture of balance, the chair and one leg
- It is a pointed statement "I don't smoke" but also "You shouldn't either". That is ambiguous, it has an element of protection, but then it is embarrassment
- The significance of the cigarette is interesting

[10]The story was written without a title, simply using the heading "Uniform". The title is assigned as a result of empathic reading in the group. We are grateful to our colleague who remains anonymous for permission to reproduce her story here.

- There is an offer made
- The breaking is a breaking of feelings, it hurts
- That is a violent finish, the breaking of the cigarette is a dramatic moment
- For someone who doesn't smoke I can see why someone would smoke
- As the reader/listener you are kind of left 'hanging there' at the end
- That is a serious breach of ethical behaviour in a 'gift relation'
- It is a dishonest and not authentic, a brutalist way of indicating something
- It reminds me of being a tall, goofy teenager, trying to feel attractive, while actually being rather shy. Smoking was a psychological crutch.
- Messages are latent amongst teenagers
- I wonder with the changes in perceptions about smoking, are mobile phones the new crutch?
- You don't feel awkward if you have a cigarette
- With the phone it is more awkward
- He controls her emotions
- He was on a power trip
- He was enjoying it
- He was super nasty and super manipulative about her emotions
- There is a big build up to this meeting
- They are hiding in the shadow, but with the sunlight shining in there is no escaping
- I try to find resonance in my own stories, it is a fascinating glimpse into a life that I have no clue of. I did not feel any attraction by boys. I didn't hang out with a gang like that. There was school, the farm, we worked.
- There are lots of boundaries in the story, and symbolism around the cigarette
- I am not getting it, to me this is a heterosexual story.
- The story reminds me of a story about Goffman in a French restaurant messing with the waiter and the expectations of proper behaviour, ordering dessert first, violating unwritten rules of behaviour.
- People who are very confident may not feel bad about such behaviour, they may not be sensitive to it all
- It doesn't have to be a heterosexual story. Isn't there romance, longing, love also in the life and experience of homosexual people?
- It is about fancying, and about power. Who has less, who has more power?
- The interpretation of heterosexual comes from the public display, for homosexual relationships that wasn't the case. That may have changed.

We formulate:

Context of the scene
- Hanging out after school - in public, at a distance from the school

Message of the author (What is s/he trying to say …)
- I put myself out there and I got shot down

Common Sense Theory (proverbial, everyday knowledge)
- 'Going out on a limb' (is a risky strategy, put yourself in danger)

The title that the group gives the story
- "Out on a limb and nowhere to hide"

After a short break we moved on to the

Step 2 Deconstruction (Distanced Analytic Understanding)

This is the collection that we produced:

Subjects	Activities (Verbs)	Emotions	Motivations
She	was last to arrive lagged behind had met (boys before) met (his eyes) smiled looked away said (Hello) could feel tried to chat glanced caught (his eye) pulled out (cigarettes) offered offered (him one) lit (her cigarette) relaxed was transfixed was shocked and hurt looked away (relieved)	shy nervous unsure (awkward) shocked hurt relief	
Mary	walked ahead		
The girls	had hitch hiked (from 10 mls)		
Mary and she	approached could hear talked wondered giggled (as they remembered)		
He	nodded smiled was balancing winked was (beside her)		

	said (yes please) took (cigarette) looked moving (cigarette) continued to move (cigarette) broke (cigarette)		
Their eyes	Met		
All eyes	were (on him and on her)		
A gang of teenagers	were hanging around smoking cigarettes chewing gum		
A few people	said hello		
Everyone	was (dressed in Uniform)		
The boys	had walked		
Mr Boyle	lost it kicking (chair)	anger	
It	was (uneventful trip)		
It	was (Friday in November)		
It	was (awkward)		
It	was (dramatic move)		
The roads	had been busy		
The bright sun	left nowhere to hide		
The cool smoke	provided (relief)		

Linguistic Peculiarities / Use of Language
(e.g., use of attributes [adverbs, adjectives], sentence structures, incomplete sentences, animated subjects, rhetorical questions, repetitions etc.)

- Sentences without verbs (incomplete)
- 10 Marlboro light
- A smattering of no thanks
- Esso station
- "that first night"
- Short sentences, staccato → run-on sentences
- Ellipses (...)
- Personification/s (screeching chair)
- Figurative language (caught his eye)
- Descriptive language (market town, red lighter, etc.) setting the scene but not moving the story forward
- Motifs
    ◦ cold day, cool cigarette (coolness)

◦ balance (chair, one legged on wall - precarious, it can get lost when 'kicked') • Verbs relating to non-verbal communication • Colloquialism (pushed over edge)
Clichés • A gang of teenagers hanging around, smoking and chewing gum • Teenager pulling out 10 Marlboro light
Topic (How does the topic appear in the story?) *"Uniform" (Power - Voice - Body)* • Everyone dressed in uniform. Sets the scene. • Cigarettes are placed in the uniform (and pulled out from there).
Connections in the story? • Connection as a succession of events ('that first night'). • Connection between students of two schools - bridging over 10 miles (girls and boys). (Girls go a long way) • Mixed vs. academic school (connected as opposites)
White spots (Is something missing in the story?) • Uneventful trip (for once) - what is an eventful trip? • Names of protagonist (and the boy). • No adults in the scene • Surroundings - staff, customers • The group remains blurred, how many?
Contradictions (Are there contradictions in the story?) • Smoke - cool? (Unhealthy) • Teenagers at start are smoking. She offers them cigarettes but no-one takes her up. • He says, yes please - and breaks the cigarette.

Step 3: Reconstruction (Abstracting)[11]

a) How does the author construct herself and the other persons?

There are only two characters in the story who are named (Mary and Mr Boyle). All other characters have no name.

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[11]The reconstruction was formulated by the facilitator following the group meeting. It is "incomplete" insofar as it was written up as a draft but in it no further discussions of the group are represented. It is included here simply to show the *possible format* of such a reconstruction.

This applies also to the main protagonist. In the story she is depicted as a character whose emotions speak of vulnerability, she relies a lot on visual cues, non-verbal communication. On her own she does not talk (besides saying Hello), even chatting she only 'tries'. Only in combination with Mary she becomes more lively (giggling, wondering, talking). Otherwise she remains in a role of (anxious?) observer.

"He" is similarly 'voiceless' in the story (besides 'Yes please') using visual cues for communication, but there is no vulnerability or anxiety in him. "He" keeps his balance, a construction which is reinforced by the absence of emotions.

The group (gang) of teenagers remains blurred, thus serving as a cliché that the reader can easily fill with pictures from a 'standard cultural repertoire'.

There is a gender difference in the construction, the girls go a long way to meet these boys in town, depicted as from the 'academic' school, i.e. better quality boys than the ones in the mixed school.

The two characters in the story that are most lively in their approach to the world are Mary and Mr. Boyle, both belonging to the mixed school. They provide a counter-pattern to the indirect/subtle/non-verbal/non-physical contacts between the main protagonist and 'him'. As mentioned above, once in conjunction with Mary the main protagonist joins this counter-pattern.

Physical engagement of the characters in the story is restricted to dealing with cigarettes and negotiating balance (at the wall). There is no physical contact between any of the characters either.

The only character in the story who is constructed as actively interfering with the environment is Mr Boyle, albeit that he is part of the scene only as a tale to be told (and giggled about) and his action is depicted as 'losing it', i.e., inappropriate, improper, out of place.

It is striking to note the absence of further characters in the story. Such absence/s are also part of the construction, and when picturing the scene (at a petrol station in town) it would be very unlikely that there are no other people (adults) around, customers, staff, people passing by, people sitting in cars, etc. - but the primary role is allocated to the other teenagers in/of the 'gang'.

A prominent role in the story is given to eyes (they even appear as active subjects in the sentence constructions), and the visual as medium of communication.

Another element that gains status in the story is the specific brands of Marlboro and Esso: it is not any odd garage, and not any odd cigarette that are dealt with in the story, (instead they suggest "American dream" icons).

The uniform (which they all wear) stands in contrast to the highlighted brands. There is no description of the uniform. It is merely setting the scene, providing a 'familiar picture' similar

to the smoking teenagers. The readers/listeners fill this void (again) from their own 'cultural repertoire'. By wearing the uniform the teenagers are still constructed as connected to school/s. The girls may hitch hike 10 miles, thus bringing a considerable distance between themselves and the school, but they still carry the (signs of?) school with them (literally on their skin). This construction is enforced further in the story by including the episode of Mr. Boyle in the narrative. Obviously this episode would not be necessary to tell the 'broken cigarette' story. It functions as a reminder of the world the girls 'come from.'

b) Message of the story

The story speaks about the attempt of girls to get away, leave behind one world, and enter another one.

It tells us about a generation (of girls) who grew up with American Dream pictures. In the setting (1990s) the negotiation of (power) relationships between genders is not done openly. There is no language for it. It takes place by way of visual cues, non-verbal communication, gestures. In this environment it is essential to be (remain) cool, even if that means to revert to smoking (potential health risk).

School provides a background as a counter-environment. There, action takes place (messing), and emotions are acted out (anger). But this is what the girls are to leave behind in a bid for relations with/of higher status (boys). To find an alternative they are prepared to go a long way. The alternative though is fraught with potential rejection.

It is important to note that the story relies a lot on the white spots. By leaving out motivations in the text, and by not referring to any of the characters (and their acts) the reader/listener is drawn into a kind of drama/film scenario that zooms in on two characters only, despite the fact that their act/s are embedded in a social situation: a) In a narrow sense of 'this situation', i.e., the 'gang', the 'garage', the physical environment. And b) in a wider sense of 'the situatedness' of this situation being part of a continuum of situations.

The actual 'situation' takes place in public (even in bright sunlight without a place to hide), which also speaks of the particular situation of teenagers and their negotiation of space in the world, and of what can and what cannot be legitimately lived out (smoking under-age?), what is tolerated, what is not, and how do they have to present themselves 'in public' to be able to 'hang around' or to 'mess'. The group in the story is not depicted as 'messers', does that make them tolerable, even if they appear deviant (smoking)?

Step 4 Topical Transfer (Shifting the problem)

In the context of our seminar, we did not attempt to come to a 'result' in the form of a joint conclusion or a final report on our topic. The nature of the methods seminar (albeit learning about the method by doing it) set a limit that did not allow us to attend to the topical transfer as a group in a sufficient manner.

There were ample starting points provided in our discussions during the seminar that– if it had been a CMW research project– could be used to drive the investigations on power/voice/body in school settings much further. Elements that grew out of our memory-stories included for example:

- the lack of descriptions of other people (besides main protagonists) in stories
- the construction of dyads (relationships/interactions of two people) in the stories, and the exercise of power in them
- the question of 'roles', teacher, student
- the question of school memories being reproduced as tainted ("good", "bad")
- the differences in time and location
- the framing of (research) question/s as influential factors on what memories are actually evoked, or selected for (re-)production

For readers who are interested in gaining an insight into the dimensions of results of such further engagement, please refer to the links to resources in the Appendix.

Part III
Reflections on our explorations of Collective Memory Work in a university setting

Here we as a group of participants reflect on the research and learning potentials of CMW both within the university and beyond. We also document the elements of CMW which particularly captured our imaginations and led us to very positively evaluate the seminar. Specifically, we explore the group dynamic that emerged enabling us to give voice, to listen actively and to co-create textual analysis in a spirit of collectivity and mutual respect.

CMW as a participatory method in hierarchical settings such as education

Periodically, during the five consecutive workshops we discussed our reflections on the Collective Memory Work process. Reflections sometimes honed in on the theme of hierarchies and micro sociological ideas about how people interact with one another in different settings. Our observations were likely underpinned by the assumption that academia has certain pronounced hierarchies which set the stage, to use a dramaturgical analogy (Goffman 1959), for the interactions we would have. We may have assumed, for example, that differentials between students, lecturers, early-career academics and professors would manifest in our Collective Memory Work interactions as much as they might in any other university setting (lectures, classrooms, administrative meetings). Other differences like those of gender, age and personality may have been expected to shape or at least impact the power distribution in our interactions. However, the group effectively bracketed the roles we inhabited in ordinary, everyday contexts, and operated on the basis of parity of esteem:

"I loved the democracy of the group dynamic. For the purposes of CMW we were all equals and I found that I learned much from the interactions we had with each other. Status and position were entirely irrelevant to the task at hand."

"I loved how we spoke with each other, there was an inherent respect that shone through each interaction."

Humility and boisterousness were both on display, with members contributing equally to discussion and being acknowledged equally. From the perspective of the students who participated, it was surprising and validating to have an attentive audience of academics for our ideas; and for lecturers it was a novel opportunity to gain insight into students' perspectives without an explicit power dynamic in play. Student participants demonstrated their capacity to be fully active agents in the CMW, an opportunity which is not always available/taken up in more conventional classroom settings.

Structuring a collective group without hierarchies

Here we briefly consider each of those factors mentioned above which may have muted the effects of hierarchy on our interactions. The format of CMW is reminiscent of restorative circles which is part of the restorative practices paradigm that deliberately organises group interactions to manage the effects of hierarchy. Lyubansky and Barter (2019), for example, have discussed restorative practices and the relational benefits of power sharing in a school setting. Considering universities have power hierarchies similar to those of schools, it may be reasonable to expect similar relational benefits to these power sharing approaches in third-level settings. These simple structures seem to have an effect on the contributions made to discussions. The principle of egalitarianism overrides participants' differing social positions. Organising people in a literal or metaphorical circle, assigning the identical roles to every participant, and assigning equal right-to-speak to everyone involved seems to contribute to these effects.

In the CMW workshops, our facilitator acknowledged some deliberate steps he took in consideration of these issues. By starting straight into the tasks without introductions, our facilitator ensured that there was no opportunity to establish and recognise any hierarchy based on (supposed) merits or status outside of the actual workshop. Instead, we were all thrown straight in and were required to complete tasks as a collective. This distraction using work as a focus allows a work-oriented dynamic to emerge as the primary focus of the group, rather than general social hierarchies being recognised and figured out first as a means to organise group structure. It is also the case that everyone had contributed an equal amount of material prior to our commencing and so there was a kind of equal stake from the beginning. These structures did seem to positively affect how we came to interact with one another.

CMW and (education) design

The question arises as to why this sense of an egalitarian rather than a hierarchical dynamic prevailed. We considered if there was something intrinsic to the structure of the method that had this effect, if it was something in our facilitator's style that produced this result, or if it were due to the circumstances of a coronavirus pandemic which meant our interactions were mediated by a screen. The group was constituted through each person zooming in from their respective homes away from a university or other more formal space. Our reality as seminar participants dovetailed precisely with Castells' characterization of modern society as "a space of flows" that involves "organizing the simultaneity of social practices without geographic contiguity" (Castells 2000:14). The "network society" in which computer mediated communication facilities networked interactions that are no longer subject to the constraints of time and place, intensified dramatically during the pandemic. It seems that all of these factors– the nature of the method, the style of the facilitator and the computer-mediated context– played a role in equalising power relations, producing a striking sense of equality and mutuality in the group. We suggest therefore, that paying more attention to these factors in other contexts could help to attenuate hierarchy and disparity in social interactions. This would be particularly useful in the context of co-creating collectively, such as in research, teaching or in the development of a political movement for which the method was originally intended.

It occurs to us, however, in the context of our conversations around education that these effects may be most purposeful in *an education setting*, particularly at this time when efforts are being made to include students as peer-designers in the development of educational approaches (Vaugh et al. 2018). It seems possible that a method that produces a form of social levelling could be useful to those seeking egalitarian participation from students in research and design for improved educational approaches. The growing popularity of the concept of universal design for learning suggests an increased demand for qualitative research methods that can account for human variation and nuance. For example, qualitative research was utilised in a recent education design project by Marder et al. (under review) in the hopes of identifying discrete details in the education experience of students that could lead to 'actionable' changes in the redesign of a module. More specifically, Bereiter (2002) describes a 'design research' for education that doesn't fit neatly into a quantitative-qualitative dichotomy. Rather, it is better defined by its own attributes such as not being distanced from its subject and being 'interventionist'. Thus, it is perhaps better aligned with participatory research methods such as CMW rather than a leave-no-trace type paradigm. Not only is CMW not distanced from its subject, but it aims to collapse the researcher/researched divide entirely.

One issue with conventional qualitative methods deployed in the education context is that they tend to involve the collection of in-depth data from students. These data are then taken away to be analysed by those who are not themselves service users. Yet they are expected to empathise with these detached data and to imagine a service which meets the needs of the data-providers. As noted above, in the discipline of design innovation, there is an increasing move towards including participants as peer researchers and co-creators of knowledge (Vaugh et al. 2020). Peer perspectives may be infinitely more valid in their interpretation of data and their ability to imagine solutions than those coming from a more etic perspective. The possibility for CMW to complements service design could be explored further. The involvement

of both service users and service providers working together in the process also facilitates the kind of empathy and mutual recognition described above which is core to design principles.

Spatial effects on group interaction and the pandemic

We equally considered the role that our situation at the time may have had in mitigating hierarchies. Ireland was experiencing its second wave of the coronavirus pandemic, in the depths of Autumn 2020, and we were probably all a bit miserable. Everyone was working from home and meeting virtually via webcam. There did seem to be a certain derealisation[12] that stemmed from sitting at home in a bedroom and calling into a meeting. We are so used to the fictional world appearing on screens in the form of entertainment that there may be some cognitive lag in accepting that our zoom meetings are really as high stakes as any other face-to-face interaction (Walther 1996). The mediated quality of our interactive space (literally we were physically removed from each other yet were together in digital space) probably allowed all of us to speak more freely than we would have in the physical and embodied space of the university. There is a certain ambiguity here: can we be recommending wider use of Zoom and other computer-mediated communication tools, when we were simultaneously longing for the in-person collegiality of the physical campus? It is something we feel requires further consideration. It may be a mistake to neglect the role of the body in social interactions including the signalling from clothing, body language, position in a room, ableness in different situations, etc. in establishing a micro hierarchy and in influencing the way we interact with one another. The exhaustion we were feeling at that point in lockdown may also have had a disinhibiting effect on interactions. We were so weary and starved of social interaction we may have neglected to play our roles appropriately and formally, straying widely from pro-forma scripts (Goffman 1959). There is also the point that social norms for zoom meetings had to be established ad hoc as opposed to employing the pre-existing norms of on-campus interactions. Further exploration could help establish what components of the CMW method's design produced these effects. We suggest that there are times when encouraging this kind of online interaction is highly desirable, such as in efforts to include students and teachers in co-designing curricula.

CMW as therapy or CMW as an intervention to reduce isolation

CMW is not therapy and it is not meant to be. Nevertheless, in our reflections some of the participants noted effects for which they used the term 'therapeutic'. One way in which this was expressed was in the absence of judgement within the group. This was related to the egalitarian ethos developed from the start and meant that a norm of reciprocal respect underpinned all of our interactions:

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[12] Sierra, David, and Hunter (2004) describe derealisation as a phenomenon "in which the external environment also appears unfamiliar, with other people… and the world appearing as if two-dimensional or like a stage set."

> "We represented our values and biases in our memories and we remembered our past as a group but yet I never once felt judged or that anyone else was judged."

> "I feel like we suspended judgement in the spirit of participation."

It felt great to engage with one another in this way, especially in the depths of lockdown, and we felt as though a sense of community formed as we worked together:

> "I liked the feeling of community. We were one group. We had our little Wednesday evening meeting. It felt safe."

> "There are parallels between the CMW method and the modus operandi of community development working in groups, engaging in meaningful and deep participation."

> "Thinking back on the workshops I see that we had to listen to each other quite intently and respectfully and negotiate our collective responses to story narratives. That sort of listening was much deeper and more demanding than ordinary, everyday listening."

Some members of our group suggested that these community-building effects were particular to the context of the pandemic. The weekly meetings were a tonic for the unusual level of isolation. However, others felt that the isolation induced by the pandemic may be analogous to the isolation experienced by people in other contexts such as those experiencing social marginalisation, stigma, or those experiencing isolation due to the pervasive individualism in capitalist societies (Putnam 1995). This explanation suggests that CMW has therapeutic effects as a consequence of its community-building aspects that counter isolation. Attributing such a therapeutic effect to CMW depends on the assumption that all isolation is the same, on a level that can be similarly impacted by the kind of community-building produced in a CMW workshop. With the proviso that these effects should be tested outside of a pandemic and with different kinds of isolated groups, social scientists (social workers, educators, community and youth workers, restorative practitioners) working with groups who are socially isolated ion may be interested in employing CMW to purposively utilise these aspects of the method.

It is important to note that Haug and colleagues developed CMW as a feminist political method to build capacity for collective action among subjugated groups in society such as women under patriarchy (Haug et al. 1987). Part of the potential success of the method in those contexts may be due to this interaction between underlying forms of isolation and working collectively to build community and counter isolation. As with any participatory qualitative method, there is an ethical issue when introducing an intervention with therapeutic effects solely for research purposes and without explicitly therapeutic intentions only to withdraw the intervention when research is concludes. We ourselves found we had a desire to continue our collective deliberations after the initial project was concluded. As more experiences of CMW are reported in the literature we are likely to learn more about the "unintended" and continuing effects of engaging in a CMW research process.

Epistemology and CMW

The design of the method has some apparent epistemological advantages worth reflecting on briefly here. These advantages relate specifically to aspects of the method's design which differ from other methods using human research participants. The core difference in terms of research design, aside from those factors already mentioned, lies in the act of ongoing collective analysis *alongside* collective data generation. Interpretivist critiques of data analysis note that different researchers can observe the same data and describe it differently. Sceptics of this critique might suggest that so long as researchers employ parsimonious descriptions of data, without imbuing meaning that is not a direct description of the observed data, such differences should be minimal. Moreover, they would suggest that differences in descriptions will be superficial with meaning being exchangeable across interpretations.

However, researchers who are interested in minimising the risk of conflicting descriptions, and who want to safeguard against unwitting biases shaping the interpretation of data, may be attracted to the collective aspects of the CMW approach to data analysis. Other conversations about the collective aspect of CMW have discussed the tendency for CMW sociologists to be aligned with the political left and to come from critical feminist perspectives that influence the nature of their analyses. But participants in collectives are afforded the opportunity to have their understandings of concepts challenged constructively by those who come from a very different point of view (Onyx et al. 2021). Therein may lie an opportunity to understand how those from different backgrounds come to imbue the same basic construct with different meanings. The benefits of this organic intersubjective approach may be in the possibility for collectives to come across some ideas that are agreed upon, and others that have not hitherto been recognised. These convergences and divergences may be more difficult to discover by a single researcher eliciting data from passive participants. In this sense CMW aligns with other group-based research activities, e.g. in the literature CMW has been depicted in terms of focus groups (see Johnson 2018). For a critical appraisal of the effects of practical adaptations of CMW according to a focus group model see also Hamm (2020; and forthcoming).

Collective Memory Work, Grounded Theory, and Data

Finally, data analysis is also ongoing in parallel with data generation which means it aligns well with the principles of grounded theory. The grounded nature of the method is another of its clear advantages. The researcher gives over directorial control to the group (of which they are a member) allowing research priorities to be chosen collaboratively rather than by a distinct 'researcher' who is separated from 'the participant.' This kind of critique is arguably understated in academic research where the priorities are largely set by scholars attached to academic disciplines. It is rare to come across social research in which there are democratic processes underpinning the selection of what gets researched, and how it gets researched (although Participant Action Research strives toward such a model). In CMW there is also a feedback loop between data generation and analysis with multiple stages of data generation punctuated by collective analysis alongside components of simultaneous data analysis and generation. This is another way in which CMW aligns well with grounded theory principles. For a brief and simple 2-page introduction to grounded theory epistemology with a constructivist

ontology see Charmaz (2017). A final advantage of the CMW research design is multi-dimensional data generation. First, the written memories and photographs or other initial data elicitation tools which form the basis of the work, offer data for analysis. This is followed by the generation of another level of data by the group reflection on the memories, and their collective deconstruction. Additionally, there is a kind of meta data generated through the group's notes observing how the group interacts and how the collective work develops. In some ways CMW is like an experimental ethnographic method where instead of observation in the wild, a group is artificially and purposively put together with the possibility of their progression as a group being observed and analysed collectively and reflexively. Meanwhile they collect their memories much as they would be collected through other qualitative methods such as biographical interviewing and narrative inquiry. Except participant-researchers in the CMW context *collect* rather than *be collected*.

CMW may also function like a collective auto-ethnographic method offering a unique kind of group emic perspective through the individuals' participation in the collective, each as researcher and as participant, with the possibility of a simultaneous etic perspective in the intersubjective dialectic between participant-researchers coming from different world-views. For example, one participant-researcher coming from a different background may offer a different perspective to another participant-researcher on their observations giving a kind of etic exchange. On the other hand, participant-researchers share insider, emic, perspectives on those constructs they experience in common. Weiner (2021) reports his effort to theorise social psychological dynamics at play in higher education settings using participant observation and in-depth interviews but sees the potential benefits of an intersubjective approach such as that offered by CMW in this kind of theorising.

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Appendix

Links to resources

- A bibliography of literature on CMW.

- Some open access publications, including a number of PhD-Theses in which CMW was used (e.g. Erin Stutelberg's work on 'teacher's bodies' as an example for topical transfer/s even if it is not labelled as such).

- Models for distinguishing practical applications of CMW.

- Frigga Haug's research guide for doing CMW.

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