Heirlooming:

Rethinking Memory and Relationality through Embodiment and Collapsed Time

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I am identifying a problem in the field of oral history I wish to address (and to which I aim to find a solution in my work, but this iteration of this project is a step on that journey), building some theoretical grounding for my approach and rationale toward a solution, and presenting a decolonial conceptual framework for understanding memory and a methodological approach to holistically and profoundly conducting and communicating the work. This iteration is an introduction and invitation to the concept and method and an investment in their future development.

In lieu of a standard scholarly paper, this work sits more appropriately in the genre of research-creation. In Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk's essay, "Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis, and 'Family Resemblances,'" they explain, "'research-creation may act as an innovative form of cultural analysis that troubles the book, the written essay, or the thesis, as the only valid means to express ideas [and] concepts" in academic research.[1] Pointing to how universities have firmly entrenched "protocols and practices for what constitutes valid scholarship that act as normative frameworks for modes of presentation[, r]esearch-creation can thus be read as a methodological and epistemological challenge to the argumentative form(s) that have typified much academic scholarship."[2] Since the approach I present here insists on the value of feeling in our understandings of memory and experience, it can also "be read as

[1] Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk, "Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and 'Family Resemblances,'" *Canadian Journal of Communication* 37 (2012): 7.
[2] Chapman and Sawchuk, "Research-Creation," 6.

a form of intervention into the 'regime of truth' of university-based research.'"[3] This work combines research, theory, art practice, and critical and analytic reflection to communicate the findings in both content and form.[4]

It is essential as a researcher-collaborator to be aware of, reflect on, and attend to one's own positionality and the ontological and epistemological biases it produces, particularly in this work that underscores relationality, intersubjectivity, reflexivity, and representation. I will state here that I am a white, non-Indigenous, disabled, queer woman of settler (English, Irish, Scottish, French, Swedish, German, Ashkenazi Jewish) descent who was born and raised on Chumash and Gabrielino/Tongva land, came of age on Ohlone land, and resides on Lenapehoking. I'm grateful to contribute work in this space, but I do not speak on behalf of any person or group I learn from or collaborate with or whose ideas I have built upon.

THE PROBLEM

I am eager to expand beyond the term 'oral history' — both as a field and practice — in order to encapsulate the various forms such communication can take, to convey both what and whom we miss by not folding these varied forms into the field's title or practice, and to conjure what we could gain by incorporating them and indicating a more holistic understanding and approach through terminological framing.

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[3] Chapman and Sawchuk, "Research-Creation," 6.

[4] This paper pairs with my multimedia exhibition, found at www.hilaryseeley.com/heirlooming-exhibition.

I will note here that by no means do I suggest that no one considers oral history to encapsulate these various elements; indeed, many Indigenous cultures that use oral history and oral tradition and, at present, many practitioners in the field understand that it necessarily does so. However, I am looking to develop and enter into circulation a term that can convey this more comprehensive perspective and formally holds additional space for communication that is alternative and additional to spoken word. A few communication forms that are non-verbal include sign language, gesture, body language, breath, silence, eye contact and movement, augmentative and alternative communication, art, music, etc. As historian and filmmaker Dan Sipe puts it, oral history is "a methodology rooted in multiple modes of communication."[5] Indeed, it is variously rooted, but I would venture to go further: It is greatly enriched by and relies on multiple modes of communication to do the work of transmitting memory and meaning. In fact, I argue that oral and textual communication cannot be separated and isolated from these other modes; the sole text is inadequate, and the non-text contributes to the central act of generating knowledge and meaning. Why, then, do we not name such a system along with orality?

In addition to the descriptive limitations of its title, the term 'oral history' does not allow for the multi-location of memory. Beyond the Cartesian, colonial conception of memory and knowledge existing in the mind, several Indigenous perspectives —

[5] Dan Sipe, "The Future of Oral History and Moving Images," in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (Routledge, 1998), 379.

especially from the lands that are now commonly referred to as Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand — share how memory resides also in place, object, language, ceremony, tradition, song, dance, the body, and relationships. My work as an oral historian has typically employed material culture and cultural forms of expression as portals to memory and meaning and as sources for analysis of both content and context. However, in the past two years, I have expanded my approach to explore all of the *sites* where memory can live and the ontological notion that those sites are not simply reminders of memories or connections, but that those memories and connections exist therein. This project is a means to assemble conceptual frameworks of memory and consider the process and product of remembering and recounting through both Indigenist and embodied lenses. For the purposes of what is achievable in this chapter of this project, I will restrict the sites I explore to the body and place. As a means to investigate (eventually many of) these sites and the knowledge they hold, I aim to use the frameworks of embodiment, sensorial memory, affect theory, and collapsed temporality as methodological guides and sources for meaning-making. My selection of the body and place as the sites for this iteration is due to the essential nature of the body in the aforementioned frameworks and the fact that we are always in body and in place.

To move toward a term for 'oral history' that both appreciates the numerous ways communication transpires and the many sites where memory lives, we must be attuned to and literate in various forms of transmission; understand that the formation, recall, and recounting of memory and meaning involve an affective and polymorphous

network of elements that integrate into a being; and employ a methodology of accessing those memories and meanings through engaging affective, sensorial, and embodied details. Heirlooming — a term I introduce below — can conceptually and methodologically move us in this direction. It is a way that memory is made and shapes the ways we move through and understand the world; a process by which we understand our relationality and the dynamics of what enters our circulation — that is, what affects and stays with us; and a device we can use to do memory work that brings to the surface what might not arise if feeling, the body, relational pathways, and collapsed time are not explored.[6] In the following sections, I will address some of the theoretical grounding of heirlooming, then describe the concept and some of its methodological guidelines.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The development of my thinking on this topic was informed by and builds upon various Indigenous conceptions of relationality, memory, time, breath, and the multi-location of memory; embodiment theory; sensory, erotics, and affect theory; Black, Chicanx, and queer feminist theory; quare theory; and placial philosophies and epistemologies.[7] In the subsections below, I will speak to these influences. As my

[6] This approach holds space for the right to and reality of opacity in memory work.

[7] My thinking was also influenced by critical disability studies; Gail Baikie's Indigenist and Decolonizing Memory Work research method and the Decolonizing Critical Reflection (DCR) approach; Dian's Million's felt theory; Maria Cotera's notion of *encuentro*; memory studies; physiology; psychology, and biology. In future iterations of this project, I will delve more deeply into some of these theoretical influences.

theory-method is formulated from several realms of knowledge, I am framing this section as theoretical foundations as opposed to a classical literature review in order for it to operate as a way of understanding how these realms intersect with one another, revealing a fertile space where heirlooming blooms. I will begin by unpacking sense-making and orienting the self and components of the world by exploring the notions of relationality and interdependence. I will then delve into the subsequent influences in the following order: the body; feelings: the sensorium, affect, and erotics; queer feminist and quare theory in oral history; placial theories and epistemologies; memory work; othering through temporality; and inclusive temporalities. This section is by no means fully comprehensive; to make it so would be too vast an endeavor for this stage of this project. However, it is an introduction to this theory-method's formation and will be further developed in future iterations of this work.

Relationality and Interdependence

"*Mitákuye oyás'iŋ*" and "*mitakuye owas'iŋ*" are common phrases used by the Lakota and Dakota peoples, respectively, which translate to "all my relations" or "we are all relatives." They encompass a worldview of interconnectivity, interdependence, respect, and reciprocity, as well as a prayer for harmony and oneness, with all things human and non-human. Shawnee, Sac and Fox, Muscogee Creek, Seminole scholar Donald L. Fixico highlights that this immense philosophy is shared by several Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island and consists of "the existence of all things and

energy within all things known and unknown," both physical and metaphysical — a concept the Muscogee and Seminole call *Ibofanga*.[8] This "sociocultural kinship" is "based on the ethos of totality and inclusion" and establishes a cosmic democracy and collectivist ideology where the benefit of the group or whole is priority.[9] Scholar Betty Bastien of the Blackfoot Confederacy outlines how this notion is foundational to and distinctive of Indigenous and *Siksikaitsitapi* ontologies and epistemologies:

> The fundamental premise of *Niitsitapi* ways of knowing is that all forms of creation possess consciousness. The non-separation of nature and humans is one of the demarcations between Eurocentred and Indigenous philosophy. This demarcation creates completely distinct paradigms of reality, truth, and knowing.[10]

Consciousness in all cosmic entities expands the sources of knowledge, wisdom, and communication: "Sometimes *Ihtsipaitapiyo'pa* doesn't speak directly to humans; instead, the knowledge is revealed through the natural order, such as animals and stars."[11] Due to its centrality to survival, learning about this interdependence is "a preeminent

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[8] Donald L. Fixico, *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World: American Indian Studies and Traditional Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2024), 2.
[9] Fixico, *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World*, 39.
[10] From Bastien's glossary: "*Siksikaitsitapi* – All Blackfoot speaking tribes; the term means 'Blackfoot speaking real people'" (Betty Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi*, ed. Jürgen W. Kremer [University of Calgary Press, 2004], 215); "*Niitsitapi* – Generic term for real people or all Indian, Aboriginal, or Indigenous peoples, including those that have Blackfoot as their language" (212); 80.
[11] From Bastien's glossary: "*Ihtsipaitapiyo'pa* – Sacred power, spirit or force that links concepts; life force; term used when addressing the sacred power and the cosmic universe; Source of Life; sun as manifestation of the Source of Life; great mystery; … that which causes or allows us to live. The term 'natural law' does not have a direct *Siksikaitsitapiwahsin* equivalent; however, it is through *Ihtsipaitapiiyopa* that all 'natural laws' are governed. It is *Ihtsipaitapiiyopa* that orchestrates the universe. Its laws govern the universe and including [*sic*] human life" (Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing*, 200); 82.

objective in the [*Siksikaitsitapi*] educational process. Learning how to connect the power of self with all other forms of life is the essence of human development."[12] Furthermore, Bastien highlights that pedagogy is tied to epistemology: "the cultural methods of teaching reflect conceptions of the natural world and cultural reality."[13] This kind of learning is not oriented solely toward cognitive comprehension; it intertwines "the ceremonies, lands, stories, ritual, language, roles, and responsibilities" to "form the cultural and ceremonial integrity of *Niitsitapi*."[14] Understanding the meaning of life, she explains, in mind, body, and spirit "is premised on the connections with the sacred [relationships of alliances] and the development of transformational experiences."[15] Through holistic pedagogical practices, ceremony, and living with a cognizance of and appreciation for this reality that all entities are connected, conscious, and consequential yields a *Siksikaitsitapi* strength of "living the circle" — an understanding that cosmically, the "'circle comes around.'"[16]

While these philosophies of consciousness and interconnection are all-inclusive, they are not fixed. Muscogee elder Jean Hill Chaudhuri and her husband Joyotpaul Chaudhuri remarked that "fundamental [Muscogee] Creek thought also eschews the existence of atomistic permanent souls, selves, and entities."[17] Instead, the entities — all relations — "are all part of a continuum of energy and spirit, *boea fikcha/puyvfekcv*, and

[12] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing*, 95.
[13] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing*, 119.
[14] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing*, 90.
[15] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing*, 84.
[16] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing*, 24.
[17] Fixico, *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World*, 2.

the ever-present principles of transformation and synergy illuminate the meaning of all-important entities in the Creek world."[18] This thinking, where "nothing is secure or stable or permanent," and interrelation, reverberance, and fluidity are inherent in the existence of all things, is foundational to heirlooming.[19]

Serpent River First Nation member and Indigenous Studies scholar Lianne Leddy speaks to how Indigenous oral history methodologies rely on relationality and connection and serve as a sociopolitical action: "our ways of knowing are defined by our relationships and personal experiences."[20] She reminds us of the utility of this way of knowing and thinking: "remembering and retelling history continues to be a significant form of social and political interaction, while fostering the relationships through which we learn. … I have become part of that process whereby the past renews the present."[21] Cree-Assiniboine-Saulteaux and English-Irish historian and scholar of Indigenous Studies Winona Wheeler has a similar way of expressing her people's ways of knowing and being: "We are a people to whom understanding and knowledge comes by way of relationships — with the Creator, the past, the present, the future, life around us, each other, and within ourselves. And, like my ancestors, I am here on this earth to learn."[22]

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[18] Fixico, *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World*, 2.
[19] Fixico, *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World*, 36.
[20] Lianne C. Leddy, "Interviewing Nookomis and Other Reflections: The Promise of Community Collaboration," in *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale* 30, Special Issue: "Talking Green: Oral History and Environmental History," eds. Alan MacEachern and Ryan O'Connor (University of Western Ontario, 2010), 17.
[21] Leddy, "Interviewing Nookomis and Other Reflections," 9.
[22] Winona Wheeler, "Reflections on the Social Relations of Indigenous Oral History," in *Walking a Tightrope: Aboriginal People and Their Representations*, eds. Ute Lischke and David T. McNab (Wilfred Laurier University Press, Aboriginal Studies Series, 2005), 190.

Relatedly, in her oratory, "Salmon is the Hub of Salish Memory," Stó:lō writer, activist, and cultural critic Lee Maracle describes the connection humans have to all Earth and how the Western commitment to isolation, ignorance, disconnection, and the devaluation of certain lives leads to degradation for all. She declares:

> Only when we understand the connection between ourselves and all living things, and connect this to the historical direction we are travelling, can we find the means to develop a clear perspective. Only when we have uncovered the places in which stasis cripples development can we free ourselves to develop a rational and inclusive value system. Only when we see ourselves in our relationship to the whole can we master our lives and govern ourselves in a sustaining way. When we understand the connection between the living world and ourselves, we will begin to study history as the connection between humans and the living world. It is imperative that we become governors in a sustainable world and benefit from holistic historical inquiry. … But the humans in charge do not have an accurate perception of their place in history.[23]

Maracle reminds us that in oral societies like the Salish, the process of witnessing, committing to memory, and recalling is holistic, heedful, and "at once historical, sociological, political, legal, and philosophical."[24] She notes that Indigenous orators influenced Ralph Waldo Emerson, who then influenced C. Wright Mills, who wrote and is credited for the concept of 'the sociological imagination' — yet such recognition has never been ascribed in Western academia to Indigenous thinkers. The concept, which Wright Mills limits to humans but Maracle extends to the interconnectedness of all life, is rooted in Indigenous thought on how to understand and manage events, behaviors, actions, and systems, and "on the direction humanity needs to travel to augment its

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[23] Lee Maracle, "Salmon is the Hub of Salish Memory," in *Memory Serves: Oratories*, ed. by Smaro Kamboureli (NeWest Press, 2015), 62-63.
[24] Maracle, "Salmon is the Hub of Salish Memory," 54.

humanism and connect itself to the world."[25] Cree-Métis writer and poet Samantha Nock explains this connection and how we co-integrate through storytelling:

> When we witness a story we are not only present physically, but emotionally and spiritually, to hold this story in our hearts. When someone tells us their story, that story becomes a part of us. When you witness someone's story, be it a comedy or a tragedy, you are carrying a part of that person with you now. You have entered a very specific and powerful relationship that exists between the storyteller and the witness.[26]

In carrying parts of others within us through their stories, the memories become embodied and our relation deepens.

For oral historians, including those of us who are non-Indigenous, beginning our work from an understanding of micro- and macro-level relationality and interdependence of all living and non-living things and amongst various historical, social, economic, political, scientific, psychological, and spiritual factors can enhance what we are able to learn through interviews and the impact our work can have for individuals and communities. Additionally, the ontological notion of consciousness and animacy in all things brings memory sites beyond the mind and the question of how memory functions to the fore. While embracing the insights we find in the threads that link individual biography and larger systemic forces ('the sociological imagination'), appreciating and seeking all of those that connect to a narrator and their stories can expand what 'life history' can mean in oral history interviews — in methodology,

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[25] Maracle, "Salmon is the Hub of Salish Memory," 56.
[26] Samantha Nock, "Being a witness: The importance of protecting Indigenous women's stories," *Rabble.ca*, September 4, 2014, https://rabble.ca/indigenous/being-witness-importance-protecting-indigenous-womens-stories/.

perspective, trajectory, and content. Through heirlooming, our oral history methods can be both centered and expanded by bearing in mind that knowledge arrives through relationships and experiences, inviting memory workers and rememberers to follow previously unnoticed or unpulled threads; doing so can reveal connections and memories that might otherwise be occluded if we are not attentive to their possibility. Embracing a fluid energetic continuum and encouraging what we might consider to be the background in Eurocentric frames to become the foreground, this lens and approach holds more space for multiple grounds of reality and ways of knowing, thereby disrupting hegemonic principles of knowledge validation and archival standards.

The affective, sociopolitical, and material implications of relational cognizance cannot be understated, and memory work that centers embodiment can illuminate this mechanism and magnify this understanding. In the next subsection, we will examine how the body functions as a primary site and tool for knowledge and culture formation.

The Body

We are never not in and of our bodies, and the body and mind are inextricable. In fact, the mind *is* embodied: We perceive, are perceived, come to know, teach, and remember through and in the body. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty casts light on the principal role that the body holds in human experience. He underscores the significance of the body as "the vehicle of being in the world," making it not an object, but a subject that is "intervolved in a definite

environment."[27] Rejecting the Cartesian mind-body segregation, Merleau-Ponty views the body as "the primary site of knowing the world and locat[es] subjectivity in the body, instead of in mind and consciousness."[28] Since what he terms the 'lived body' is simultaneously perceived and perceiving, he argues that it is "'an intertwining,' and [that] experience is therefore located midway between mind and body."[29]

Significant to much twentieth- and twenty-first-century philosophy of the self and perception, Merleau-Ponty's theory on embodied existence has also received valuable critiques regarding how his notion of the 'lived body' anonymizes and erroneously universalizes the body and the individual, thereby neglecting to account for the radically varied impacts of race, ethnicity, gender, ability, sexuality, and class on differently and intersectionally positioned people. With these critiques and concerns at top of mind, we can read his theories regarding embodiment strategically, thinking with and ameliorating their general framework. Merleau-Ponty's beliefs are a springboard for George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's work in cognitive linguistics and philosophy, wherein they assert further how humans' "conceptual systems and our capacity for critical reflection are shaped by the nature of our bodies and our bodily interactions,"

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[27] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Taylor & Francis, 2002), 94; In the 'Placial Theories and Epistemologies' subsection below, I will discuss in further detail the body as and in place.

[28] Willemijn Ruberg, "Embodiment and Experience," *Centre of Excellence in the History of Experiences at Tampere University*, February 20, 2023. https://sites.tuni.fi/hexhandbook/theory/embodiment-and-experience/#_edn11.

[29] Ruberg, "Embodiment and Experience."

namely through metaphors in relation to bodily experience as integrative mechanisms.[30] Drawing from their work and that of anthropologist Thomas Csordas, Annamma Joy and John F. Sherry, Jr. refute Immanuel Kant's assertion that reason and feeling — and thus the body — are divorced. They understand that the body "represents the root of all thinking — not just the process of thinking bodily — and informs the logic of thinking, because the world is primarily accessed through the body," and that "people experience themselves simultaneously *in* and *as* their bodies."[31] This attention to "the body as process" points to the primacy, continuity, and activity of the body — in all its conditions and functions — in forming the "'existential ground of culture'" and knowledge itself.[32]

In *Siksikaitsitapi* culture, knowledge production occurs through embodied existence, manifested in pedagogy, language, and participation. Bastien explains:

> *Siksikaitsitapi* pedagogy is embodied in the use of our language, *Niipaitapiiyssin*, meaning "to teach the way of life." It carries the sacred knowledge expressed in *Niitsi'powahsinni* which transmits the context for making meaning out of the human existence of *Niitsitapi*. The word refers to a verb-based language reflecting the view that human existence is transformational.[33]

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[30] Annamma Joy and John F. Sherry Jr., "Speaking of Art as Embodied Imagination: A Multisensory Approach to Understanding Aesthetic Experience," *Journal of Consumer Research* 30, no. 2 (2003), 259-60.
[31] Joy and Sherry Jr., "Speaking of Art as Embodied Imagination," 278; 261.
[32] Joy and Sherry Jr., "Speaking of Art as Embodied Imagination," 260; Thomas Csordas, *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 269.
[33] From Bastien's glossary: "*Niitsi'powahsinni* – Language; *niitsitapi* talking; language that carries the breath of spirit; speaking n*iitsi'powahsinni* is experiencing spirit"; (Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing*, 130.)

She adds how instrumental language is in establishing reality for *Siksikaitsitapi* "by altering the order and structure of relationships toward balance. This aspect of the language transmits the transformational consciousness of *Siksikaitsitapi*."[34] The language holds a worldview, contextual transmission, connection to spirit and all other consciousness, and the transformational nature of being. Therefore, the very foundation of communication bears ontology and epistemology. These philosophical underpinnings also reveal themselves in the vocabulary of learning and living: The term *Aistommatoominniki* means "'embodying your knowledge'" and "'when you have made it part of your body.'"[35] Bastien elaborates that "this quality of coming to know your heart designates 'indigenous epistemology.' When one has come to the point where one lives one's knowledge, one begins to understand. It is through living it that one gains a greater understanding."[36] She adds that the term also refers to "'when a person begins to really know anything,' e.g., ceremonies; it is only when *Aistotsis*, 'when [the person] actually participates,' that he or she knows what they are all about."[37] It is not merely through rote memorization or cognitive comprehension that true understanding occurs; *Siksikaitsitapi* knowledge must be internalized in the body, spirit, and mind through culturally-specific communication and practices.

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[34] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing*, 131.
[35] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing*, 198.
[36] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing*, 198.
[37] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing*, 198.

In Western academia and many professional disciplines (many sciences, the law, etc.), body-based knowledge is often disregarded as unreliable, unfounded, unverifiable. Scholarly and professional practices of oral history have often succumbed to this pitfall, neglecting body-based knowing in an attempt to be recognized as legitimate by other scholarly disciplines that have historically discounted oral history's validity and value. This (conscious or unconscious) choice is made despite the awareness that any historical documentation is produced and archived through a series of human-made choices. The Cartesian paradigm that separates mind from body and trusts the former over the latter is both a fallacy and dismissal of how we come to know and how we know most intimately. Experience and knowledge arrive by way of — *in* and *as* — the body, and to dismiss this fact is to discard an invaluable well of information and to silence certain ontologies, epistemologies, and experiences. Given that, in oral history, we speak of and through our subjectivities, it is only sensible to include in our exploration of memory, perception, integration, and interpretation the site where subjectivity forms and sits.

In the next subsection, we will examine some of the detailed ways in which the body experiences and processes the world, and how engagement with all aspects of the body can bring about external change.

Feelings: The Sensorium, Affect, and Erotics

As discussed above, knowledge, meaning-making, and memory come about through experiences of the minded body and embodied mind. Even if all of an

individual's available senses are not primary during an encounter, they are all registering and processing important contextual data. Exteroceptive, vestibular, proprioceptive, and interoceptive sensory systems gather and respond to information from our external and internal environments. Exteroceptive receptors process the physical stimuli from external spaces: visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory, and olfactory inputs. Vestibular and proprioceptive systems address our orientations and feelings of our bodies in space: Vestibular receptors (in the inner ear) and proprioceptors (in the muscles, joints, and tendons) cover balance, posture, speed, and direction of movement.[38] Interoceptors register stimuli in the internal body and emotional states: thirst, temperature, pleasure, pain, anxiety, etc.[39] It is through these faculties and systems that we experience, perceive, and interpret our worlds, and directing our attention to them can provide insights into meaning-making and memory that are otherwise illusive.

Scholar James B. Steeves builds from Merleau-Ponty's theories that the act of orienting and making sense of the body in space is, in fact, a creative process wherein imagination is essential to perception, and therefore to knowledge production and memory. Steeves' position on the senses' role in perception is grounded in engagement with "both receding backgrounds and appearing foregrounds":

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[38] "Vestibular system," *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, April 19, 2018, https://dictionary.apa.org/vestibular-system.
[39] "Interoception," *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, April 19, 2018, https://dictionary.apa.org/interoception.

> The background(s) thus represent(s) not merely a stage for what is seen (vision being the dominant sense), but potential modes of embodiment incorporating all the other senses. … To comprehend the entire structure of the perceptual object, the perceiver must engage with the virtual modes of embodiment implied by each quality of the perceptual background. The object/event is thus synthesized through one's own body, says Merleau-Ponty (1962), and like the body, partakes of the virtual as well as the actual. … Imagination is thus at the heart of perception and is closely tied to the incarnate body.[40]

Joy and Sherry, Jr. call upon Steeves' work and situate vision as the dominant sense in their study of people consuming visual art, but this assessment of the interplay between backgrounds and foregrounds is applicable in circumstances where a different sense is dominant and/or where a perceiver is not sighted. These embodied mechanisms allow people — and I would argue all beings — "not merely to negotiate but to cocreate their phenomenal worlds" through the very sensorial and intellectual work of perceiving and imagining both the actual and the virtual.[41]

Recognizing the role feeling plays in accessing profound and expansive knowledge, connection, consciousness, purpose, and fulfillment in all aspects of life, Black lesbian feminist scholar and poet Audre Lorde brings to the fore the centrality and power of the erotic. She elucidates the etymology and her use of the term:

> The erotic… is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves. … The very word *erotic* comes from the Greek word *eros*, the personification of love in all its aspects — born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony. When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy

[40] Joy and Sherry Jr., "Speaking of Art as Embodied Imagination," 264.
[41] Joy and Sherry Jr., "Speaking of Art as Embodied Imagination," 280.

> empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.[42]

Lorde considers several ways in which the erotic functions. First, it generates power via relationship with another person: "The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference."[43] Second is an unabashed and undaunted emphasis on one's "capacity for joy," which is a reminder of "capacity for feeling" and for the ability to permeate such feeling into every facet of one's life.[44] Third, the erotic makes attainable "the need for sharing deep feeling" we all possess in a way that respects, recognizes, and turns toward each person in the encounter.[45]

Lorde reminds us that the refusal of consciousness of our feelings and of regard toward a sharer, even if such an action seems more comfortable, "is to deny a large part of the experience, and to allow ourselves to be reduced to the pornographic, the abused, and the absurd."[46] Misnamed, mischaracterized, and mistreated by men in the patriarchal, racist European-American tradition, the erotic "has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation," causing many of us to "distrust that power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge."[47] Due to

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[42] Audre Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider* (Ten Speed Press, 1984), 54; 55.
[43] Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic," 56.
[44] Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic," 56; 57.
[45] Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic," 58.
[46] Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic," 59.
[47] Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic," 54; 53.

common attempts to equate the erotic with the pornographic, which Lorde corrects are diametrically opposed with regard to the latter's disconnection between sensation and feeling, a series of false dichotomies emerge:

> [I]t has become fashionable to separate the spiritual (psychic and emotional) from the political, to see them as contradictory or antithetical. … In the same way, we have attempted to separate the spiritual and the erotic, reducing the spiritual thereby to a world of flattened affect, a world of the ascetic who aspires to feel nothing. But nothing is farther from the truth. For the ascetic position is one of the highest fear, the gravest immobility. The severe abstinence of the ascetic becomes the ruling obsession. And it is one not of self-discipline but of self-abnegation. The dichotomy between the spiritual and the political is also false, resulting from an incomplete attention to our erotic knowledge. For the bridge which connects them is formed by the erotic — the sensual — those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us, being shared: the passions of love, in its deepest meanings. … The erotic is the nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge.[48]

To disengage with the erotic is to lack true feeling and, therefore, true knowledge of the self, another, and the world. To engage with it, however, is to unlock a boundless sociopolitical, physical, emotional, spiritual power. With this acute read on the endeavor to fracture our deepest ways of knowing, Lorde dispels the mirage of separation and subsequent suppression imposed by oppressors to keep people from accessing their full selves, connections, potential, and fulfillment — from "sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change."[49] Once the oppressor's cloud of fear and judgment is blown away, the erotic is revealed as an immense and intense liberatory fuel.

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[48] Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic," 56.
[49] Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic," 53.

> Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives. … [O]nce recognized, those which do not enhance our future lose their power and can be altered. … [W]hen we begin to live from within outward, in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves, and allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us, then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense. For as we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation, and with the numbness which so often seems like their only alternative in our society. Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated and empowered from within.[50]

The integration of this lens, the self, vitality of feeling, and action diminishes disaffection, disconnection, and anguish and makes genuine change possible. Lorde reminds us that "the erotic is not a question only of what we do. It is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing."[51] To tune into the erotic is a matter of intention, attention, connection, and depth — a kind of self-possession and self-knowledge that serves as a resource for energy and liberation.

Extending from what we saw in The Body subsection above, we can grasp more thoroughly what a person's knowledge, experiences, and desires are composed of and mean through an embrace of and attention to what is happening in the body — positionally, functionally, emotionally, sensorially, erotically. The ways we express our knowledge, experiences, and identities are through the faculties in this vessel: not only speech — including linguistic distinctions, diction, syntax, tone, emphasis, mood, volume, rhythm, pace, and pause — but also or alternatively through gesture, body

[50] Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic," 57; 58.
[51] Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic," 54.

language, facial expression, and eye movement, and for some, sign language (with all its essential grammatical, emotional, and meaning-filled expressive tools) and/or augmentative and alternative communication. Furthermore, autonomic actions like breath, heart rate, sweat, reflexes, etc. can also provide information about the sharer's feelings or experience of remembering, recounting, and the encounter with their specific interlocutor. In other words, the multi-systemed ways in which we communicate stories, verbally and/or otherwise, are embodied acts saturated with meaning and the specificities of culture, environment, experience, and intention. In oral history, part of the value is how a story is imbued with the storyteller as a live being — one who feels and derives knowledge from those feelings. All action and memory are ultimately driven by feeling, and the livingness — the multi-dimensional, lived-in quality that makes story magnetic and impactful — is part of what is so enticing and valuable in this kind of documentation and continuance. As both storytellers and witnesses, we miss a world of information and limit our capacity to both connect with others and create alternative futures when we segregate or suppress the sensorium, affect, and the erotic in the documentary and archival processes.[52] The following subsection delves more deeply into these aspects of embodiment and expression with regard to oral history work.

[52] I will note here that, regarding the engagement in oral history of both the physical body and the affective dimension, the employment of context-specific, informed, consensual, participant-led, counter-hegemonic practices with constant access to opacity that serve the participant in such endeavors is absolutely essential.

Queer Feminist and Quare Theory in Oral History

In *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*, Salvadoran-American oral historian, writer, and advocate Horacio N. Roque Ramírez and oral historian and writer Nan Alamilla Boyd declare, "the body, and how and what it remembers, should be central to all oral history work."[53] They note that specifically in queer oral history interviews, "the body's memories are particularly significant for narrators drawn to discussions of sexual consciousness, erotic desire, and gender expression. Not at all the same, these fields of the body can be sites for productive memory and dialogue."[54] They center body-based knowing, a concept that "asserts that the sexuality of the body (or bodily desires) is an important, indeed material, aspect of the practice of doing oral history work," and in addition to their documentation of interviews between queer narrators and oral historians, they seek "to better understand the role the body itself has played in the way queer oral histories have been conducted."[55]

In *Feeling Memory: Remembering Wartime Childhoods in France*, Linsdey Dodd points to the nonnormative modes of thinking and the central role of embodiment and affect in queer oral history work. She writes that it "rejects canonical thinking and respectability. It circles back to earlier feminist epistemologies, questioning

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[53] Horacio N. Roque Ramírez and Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 7.
[54] Roque Ramírez and Boyd, *Bodies of Evidence*, 7.
[55] Roque Ramírez and Boyd, *Bodies of Evidence*, 2.

'knowability,' subject-object relations, and disciplinary norms and 'emphasizing epistemologies and performativities that are often ongoing and incomplete.'"[56] Building upon the work of feminist scholars and activists and finding intersections with Black, Chicana, queer, working-class, and labor historians and activists, folks documenting the lives and experiences of historically marginalized people (particularly in traditional historical practices) brought a shift in thinking that put embodiment and affect into focus in addition to language and discourse. This shift in understanding and approach also requires an adjustment in methodology: "Affect is central to current, innovative, embodied oral history practices and necessitates deviant methodological practices because it cannot be recorded, archived, documented, or analyzed in conventional ways."[57] As Roque Ramírez and Boyd study how queer methods have varied from other oral history methods, they look at Jeff Friedman's methodology of including embodied performances of dance and movement in his expansion of "'verbal data': … Friedman argues that nonverbal data provide alternative storytelling modes and, thus, alternative representations of reality that allow nonnormative narrative structures to emerge."[58] Through the attention to and value of these embodied communication forms, this methodology can lead to "an engaged and critical analysis of the narrative structures, living exchanges, ways of remembering, detailed contents, and interactions" of folks

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[56] Lindsey Dodd, *Feeling Memory: Remembering Wartime Childhoods in France* (Columbia University Press, 2023), 12.
[57] Dodd, *Feeling Memory*, 12-13.
[58] Roque Ramírez and Boyd, *Bodies of Evidence*, 8.

who have been often left out of mainstream historical texts.[59] A queer sensibility in methodology and mission has clear and intentional political and liberatory characteristics: "Oral history with subaltern or historically undervalued communities entails making historical and generational discontinuities explicit. It necessarily disrupts historical paradigms that do not or will not acknowledge the existence of bodies, genders, and desires invisible to previous historical traditions."[60]

To that end, artist and scholar of Black sexuality studies E. Patrick Johnson found that although queer studies has the ability to shift the way scholars theorize identity formation with respect to sexuality and gender, the field has a dearth of consideration of race and class. This theoretical gulf led to his creation of quare studies, which serves as an intervention into queer theory's typical minimization or erasure of queer voices of color, its lack of accommodation for issues non-white LGBTQIA+ people face, and its tendency to theorize the effects of race and class "in discursive rather than material terms."[61] Johnson heeds scholar of Chicanx feminism and cultural and queer theory Gloria Anzaldúa's warning against the limitations and potential harms of the term "queer": While "at times we need this umbrella to solidify our ranks against outsiders, … we must not forget that it homogenizes, erases our differences."[62] Alternatively, quare theory "speaks across … [and] articulates identities" and "offers a way … to locate

[59] Roque Ramírez and Boyd, *Bodies of Evidence*, 6.
[60] Roque Ramírez and Boyd, *Bodies of Evidence*, 5.
[61] E. Patrick Johnson, "'Quare' studies, or (almost) everything I know about queer studies I learned from my grandmother," in *Text and Performance Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (2001), 1.
[62] Gloria Anzaldúa, ''To(o) Queer the Writer: Loca, escrita y chicana,'' in *Inversions: Writing by Dykes and Lesbians*, ed. by Betsy Warland (Press Gang, 1991), 250.

racialized and class knowledges."[63] Johnson explains that to "'quare' 'queer'" expands the disciplinary paradigm for these various ways of knowing to be "viewed both as discursively mediated and as historically situated and materially conditioned," and that, still, they are diversified based on gender and class.[64] He points again to Anzaldúa in her work with Chicana feminist writer and activist Cherríe Moraga and their "theory in the flesh'': a concept "where the physical realities of our lives — our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings — all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity."[65] Operating as a theory in the flesh, Johnson argues for embodied knowledges, diversity within communities, and accounting for the effects of varied intersections on lived experience, knowledge production, and sense-making. Importantly, Johnson notes that "theories in the flesh also conjoin theory and practice through an embodied politics of resistance," which "is manifest in vernacular traditions such as performance, folklore, literature, and verbal art."[66]

The field of oral history at large requires an adjustment into a theoretical and methodological approach that acknowledges and embraces the vital importance of body-based knowing in all of its facets and utilizes innovative practices for documenting and analyzing stories and storytelling beyond the raw text. Heirlooming encourages tending to identity- and experience-informed embodied knowledge, modes of

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[63] Johnson, "'Quare' studies,'" 3.
[64] Johnson, "'Quare' studies,'" 3.
[65] Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Kitchen Table, 2002), 21.
[66] Johnson, "'Quare' studies,'" 3-4.

remembering and communicating, and narrative forms; practicing nonnormative methodologies and forms of notation that look to both verbal and nonverbal data; engaging in informed and collaborative critical analyses; and rendering archival materials that serve narrators and their communities. In line with theory in the flesh, it operates from the belief that theory, practice, and politics ought to intertwine.

Moving us from the specificities of the body to place, the next subsection continues our exploration of how our bodies orient, register, process, and make sense, meaning, and memory of encounters in our surrounding worlds, and how the body and place co-constitute one another.

Placial Theories and Epistemologies

"Diffuse as concept, vivid and concrete as personal experience," humanistic geographer Yi-Fu Tuan defines topophilia as "the affective bond between people and place or setting."[67] In tracing a philosophical genealogy of place, philosopher Edward Casey points to developments by Kant, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and others regarding the essential nature of the human body in place, the way the body is oriented, and how this organizes its perceptions.[68] Casey distinguishes space from place, "taking 'space' to be the encompassing volumetric void in which things (including human

[67] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Prentice-Hall, 1974), 4.
[68] Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (University of California Press, 2013), Part Four.

beings) are positioned and 'place' to be the immediate environment of my lived body — an arena of action that is at once physical and historical, social and cultural."[69] Casey calls a 'place-world' what political geographer and urban theorist Edward Soja refers to as a 'thirdspace,' which defines place further: It is "a world that is not only perceived or conceived but also actively *lived* and receptively *experienced*."[70] Casey explicates how this thirdspace/place-world is both material and mental and we experience it both actively and passively through the vehicle of the body. He argues that with the body as a medium, place and the self co-constitute each other through the processes of *outgoing* and *incoming*:

> *Outgoing*. The lived body encounters the place-world by *going out to meet it*. It does this in myriad ways, including highly differentiated and culturally freighted ways, such as racial or class or gender identity… It also goes out in one primary way in which all more particular ways share: I refer to the 'spatial framework' whereby it links up most pervasive with the place-world. … Neither body nor place is a wholly determinate entity; each continually evolves, precisely in relation to the other. The place-world is energized and transformed by the bodies that belong to it, while these bodies are in turn guided and influenced by this world's inherent structures.
> *Incoming*. But the body not only goes out to reach places; it also bears the traces of the places it has known. These traces are continually laid down in the body, sedimenting themselves there and thus becoming formative of its specific somatography. A body is shaped by the places it has come to know and that have come to it — come to take up residence in it, by a special kind of placial incorporation that is just as crucial to the human self as is the interpersonal incorporation so central to classical psychoanalytic theory. The reverse is also true: places are themselves altered by our having been in them.[71]

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[69] Edward S. Casey, "Between Geography and Philosophy: What Does It Mean to Be in the Place-World?" in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 91, no. 4 (2001), 683.
[70] Casey, "Between Geography and Philosophy," 687.
[71] Casey, "Between Geography and Philosophy," 687.

Therefore, it is both the way in which a body enters, is oriented in, moves through, and interacts with a place *and* the specificities of that particular body that a place is cumulatively and continually composed. Simultaneously, the body, its movements, and the self are informed and constituted by the places they encounter. Due to what Merleau-Ponty calls "corporeal intentionality," the body "integrates itself with its immediate environment, that is to say, its concrete place," where "various 'intentional threads'… bind body and place in a common complex of relations."[72] Casey expands on Merleau-Ponty's assertion in suggesting that a place "has its own 'operative intentionality' that elicits and responds to the corporeal intentionality of the perceiving subject. Thus place integrates with body as much as body with place."[73] In other words, they are co-informed, co-constituted, co-integrated, bound, and animate. Through his work with the Western Apache, this is what cultural and linguistic anthropologist Keith Basso refers to as "interanimation":

> As places animate the ideas and feelings of persons who attend to them, these same ideas and feelings animate the places on which attention has been bestowed, and the movements of this process — inward toward facets of the self, outward toward aspects of the external world, alternatively both together — cannot be known in advance. When places are actively sensed, the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind, to the roving imagination.[74]

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[72] Edward S. Casey, "How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena," in *Senses of Place*, eds. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (School of American Research Press, 1996), 22.
[73] Casey, "How to Get from Space to Place," 22.
[74] Keith H. Basso, "Wisdom Sits in Places," in *Senses of Place*, eds. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (School of American Research Press, 1996), 55.

It is in this capacity that fundamental meaning-making and molding of self and place transpire.

The sensing and imagining that Basso brings to the fore with interanimation speak to the ways that peoples of diverse cultures are aware of and encounter the world around them, perceive it through different modes, understand it, and, as Husserl says, "discover that it matters."[75] It is by way of this complex operation of perception and discovery that they inscribe places with significance, and that that significance shapes identity and memory. Places, then, can be "intrinsic to understanding the individual, who they are, and who they represent… The land becomes part of the life narrative, the hills and buildings physical reference points from which hang stories about the individual's childhood, and their past, present and future lives."[76] Furthermore, Basso and anthropologist-ethnomusicologist-linguist Steven Feld explain that "places naturalize different worlds of senses," both quotidian and intense, through very specific discursive and non-discursive, locally articulated modes.[77] Basso elaborates that community members produce and demonstrate their awareness of and meaning-making in their physical environments through "elaborate arrays of conceptual and expressive instruments — ideas, beliefs, stories, songs, … myth, prayer, music, dance, art, architecture, and, in many communities, recurrent forms of religious and political

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[75] Basso, "Wisdom Sits in Places," 54.
[76] Nepia Mahuika, "'Out of Sight, Out of Mind'? The Significance of Our Surroundings," *Oral History Association New Zealand* 21 (2009): 3.
[77] Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso, "Introduction," in *Senses of Place*, eds. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (School of American Research Press, 1996), 8.

ritual."[78] These varied ways of experiencing and articulating place are absorbed, processed, and expressed through the senses and the body. Building off of Merleau-Ponty's work, Casey discusses the profound relationship between embodiment and emplacement. He notes that one becomes aware of their sensuous presence in the world through place, and highlights that "place is the most fundamental form of embodied experience — the site of a powerful fusion of self, space, and time."[79]

The simultaneous and joint phenomena of embodiment and emplacement can enrich both our understanding of stories and selves and our methods of discovering them in oral history interviews. This lens on place can frame conversation and details we inquire about and help us understand the deep role of place in stories and relationships, and we can bring place into consideration when choosing sites for interviews. Mentally or physically navigating to a place of significance for the narrator can awaken memories or meanings that are otherwise dormant or inaccessible.

The following subsection explores some of the many ways in which we can frame and practice the work of creating, accessing, sharing, and studying memory — namely, the ways that have informed heirlooming.

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[78] Basso, "Wisdom Sits in Places," 53-54; 57.
[79] Feld and Basso, "Introduction," 9.

Memory Work

The study of memory — how it is created, shaped, stored, accessed, transmitted, changed, sustained, lost, rediscovered, varied; what is remembered, when, why, and in what contexts; etc. — traverses a variety of disciplines. Among the insights it affords, memory and its study can help us understand how individuals, communities, and cultures make meaning and conceive of time.[80] A major yet informative challenge in this work is that, as neurobiologist Steven Rose explains in detail, "each time we remember, we in some senses do work on and transform our memories; they are not simply being called up from store and, once consulted, replaced unmodified. Our memories are recreated each time we remember."[81] Memory, then, is a continually evolving, creative, dialectical process. Feminist cultural historian and theorist Annette Kuhn asserts how memory creation and sharing play a critical role in producing meaning, shaping the inner worlds of individuals, articulating collective imaginations, and forming frameworks for union or fragmentation from communities.[82] Media studies scholar José van Dijck adds that because memory acts involve shaping our inner worlds through "a complex set of recursive activities," we are able to make sense of our worlds and "construct an idea of continuity between self and others."[83] In addition to sense making,

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[80] Anne Chahine, "Future memory work: unsettling temporal Othering through speculative research practices," *Qualitative Research* 24, no. 2 ([2022] 2024), 193.
[81] Steven Rose, *The Making of Memory: From Molecules to Mind* (Bantam Press, 1992), 91.
[82] Annette Kuhn, "A journey through memory," in *Memory and Methodology*, ed. Susannah Radstone (Berg, 2000), 187.
[83] José van Dijck, "Mediated Memories: Personal Cultural Memory as Object of Cultural Analysis," in *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 18, no. 2 (June 2004), 263.

Kuhn states that the acts of remembering and recounting are part of a strategy people use "to create their own world and give themselves and each other a place, a place of some dignity and worth, within it."[84] In this way, as anthropologist Anne Chahine argues, "memory making is about agency, about the power to influence how you want to be perceived by your surroundings, how you want to be remembered, what should be left of your life after you are gone."[85] In her discussion of Salish oracy, Maracle makes clear the centrality of agency, intent, and the phenomenon of reconstruction:

> Memory serves. It is directed by condition, culture, and objective. It is conjured by systemic practice. It is shaped by results. … When humans give breath to life, give voice to their perception of life, this is a sacred act. They are taking an event that has already been committed and they are re-membering or reconstructing it in their minds. … In a society governed first and foremost by spirit to spirit relationships to all beings, memory serves much differently than in a society in which property possession determines importance. To re-member is, first, directional. Indigenous people commit to memory those events and the aspects of those events that suit the direction we are moving in or the direction we want to move in if a shift is occurring. … We re-member events; we reconstruct them because we are aware that they have already ended, are dis-membered, gone forever, and because they affect us and are directly connected to who we are as a people. We may wish to achieve a new direction, secure an old direction, or mark the path travelled so that others may find the path easier to follow. Our memories serve the foregoing. … The direction we are travelling shapes our memories whether we are conscious of this or not. Our intent governs our choice of words in recalling events.[86]

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[84] Kuhn, "A journey through memory," 192.

[85] Chahine, "Future memory work," 193-4; the creation of products to embody and transmit memory, referred to as memory products (José van Dijck 2004), memory artefacts (Chahine 2024), memory texts (Kuhn 2000), etc., are both exercises of memory and meaning making and productive objects for memory work. I will discuss this further in a future iteration of this project.

[86] Maracle, "Memory Serves," in *Memory Serves: Oratories*, ed. by Smaro Kamboureli (NeWest Press, 2015), 1-3; I will expand upon this concept and Maracle's words in The Concept section below.

Memory is an act, a product, a navigational and connective device, an identity-building and meaning-making mechanism, and a methodological tool. We can approach the work of understanding its many facets through a variety of practices. Kuhn defines her use of the term "memory work" as:

> an active practice of remembering which takes an inquiring attitude towards the past and the activity of its (re)construction through memory. Memory work undercuts assumptions about the transparency or the authenticity of what is remembered, taking it not as 'truth' but as evidence of a particular sort: material for interpretation, to be interrogated, mined, for its meanings and its possibilities. Memory work is a conscious and purposeful staging of memory.[87]

While I choose not to incorporate Kuhn's concept of mining due to concerns of potential extraction and harm from this framing, her idea of memory work can generally help inform an approach to exploration and coming to understand ways of seeing and knowing. Appreciating the substance within and around memory and what is recounted as opposed to registering it at raw 'truth' leads to deeper insights.

As I insist on building caring, decolonial memory work practices that, among other objectives and at a minimum, do not erase, minimize, or commit violence against participants and their communities, I find the frame of "liberatory memory work" to be helpful.[88] Applied policy researcher Chandre Gould and archivist Verne Harris propose the term as a way to hold various memory practices that work to prevent systemic injustices. Liberatory memory work is ideologically and theoretically informed but

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[87] Kuhn, "A journey through memory," 186.
[88] Chandre Gould and Verne Harris, "Memory for Justice," *Nelson Mandela Foundation* (2014): 4, https://www.nelsonmandela.org/uploads/files/MEMORY_FOR_JUSTICE_2014v2.pdf.

underscores practical, material, sustainable action in order "to release societies from cycles of violence, prejudice, and hatred and instead to create vibrant and conscious societies that strive to achieve a just balance of individual and collective rights."[89] Gould and Harris note that this work is not exclusive to one positionality or set of abilities: "It requires many different disciplines and skills. It should involve people from different sectors of society... It is the whole society that may benefit or suffer from the outcomes of memory work."[90] Stacie Williams, an archivist, researcher, and reporter who is a member of Blackivists — a Black archivist collective that prioritizes Black heritage and memory work — explains her intentional use of the term 'memory work' with regard to her archival philosophy. She points to how historical documentation and archival work have long been exclusionary as another tool of oppression:

> "As underrepresented folks, we have not always had access to the documentation… We have even been barred from creating the documentation. Even just the act of stopping people from learning how to read or write, or making it illegal or punishable, stops people from being able to communicate their stories."[91]

She employs the term 'memory work' because it is "inclusive of not just scholars, but people who dedicate themselves to cultural preservation outside of academia" and "'respects the ways that Black people have been traditionally locked out of those

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[89] Gould and Harris, "Memory for Justice," 5.
[90] Gould and Harris, "Memory for Justice," 5.
[91] Stacie Williams, as quoted in Taylor Moore, "How Will History Museums Remember This Moment?" *Chicago Magazine*, July 31, 2020, http://www.chicagomag.com/artsculture/July-2020/COVID-19-protests-history-museums/.

spaces.'"[92] As archivist Michelle Caswell adds, the term "acknowledges the informal spaces in which knowledge is passed across generations."[93]

My own memory work practices and beliefs are oriented toward the aforementioned philosophies and modes of engagement. To that end, heirlooming prioritizes care, holism, ontological and epistemological plurality, enfolding various ways of remembering and narrative forms, amplifying marginalized voices, and disrupting the status quo of power imbalances, metanarratives, and labor practices. The next two subsections will address one of the necessary aspects of memory work to be cognizant of and intentional about in order to actualize these beliefs in the field.

Othering through Temporality

A crucial component of carrying out this type of decolonial memory work is a critical consideration of temporality — how both rememberers and researchers conceive of and experience time and their places in it, and the relationship among the past, present, and future. One of the technologies hegemonic powers use to assert and preserve control is othering oppressed peoples through notions of time: who is recognized as temporally existing, and when; whose construction is legitimized, normalized, formalized, and dominant; how it is used to foreclose past brutalities; etc. This is a consistent and pervasive violence colonizers wield against Indigenous and

[92] Williams, "How Will History Museums Remember This Moment?"
[93] Michelle Caswell, *Urgent Archives: Enacting Liberatory Memory Work* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2021), 13.

other marginalized peoples, and it presents itself everywhere, including in Western scholarship and archival practices, which are imbued with the logics of colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism.[94] A primary way the power structures of these logics marginalize peoples and their worldviews is by denying their temporal existence as 'active,' 'modern,' and of consequence. As writer-director-filmmaker and Wiradjuri woman Bronte Gosper relates, "the settler imaginary persistently tries to represent Indigenous people as timeless, outside or behind time."[95] In this vein, scholar of Indigenous studies, queer and trans studies, and U.S. literary studies Mark Rifkin interrogates how Indigenous peoples are either "consigned to the past, or they are inserted into a present defined on non-native terms. From this perspective, Native people(s) do not so much exist within the flow of time as erupt from it as an anomaly, one usually understood as emanating from a bygone era."[96] He expounds the machinations and implications of this temporal fastening and exclusion:

> The representation of Native peoples as either having disappeared or being remnants on the verge of vanishing constitutes one of the principal means of effacing Indigenous sovereignties. Such a portrayal of Indigenous temporal stasis or absence erases extant forms of occupancy, governance, and opposition to settler encroachments. Moreover, it generates a prism through which any evidence of such survival will be interpreted as either vestigial (and thus on the way to imminent extinction) or hopelessly contaminated (as having lost — or quickly losing — the qualities understood as defining something, someone, or some space as properly "Indian" in the first place). These kinds of elisions and

[94] A future iteration of this project will discuss heteronormativity, queer temporalities, and crip time.
[95] Bronte Gosper, "Collapsing Time: Indigenous Storytellers and the 'Everywhen,'" (MA thesis, Columbia University, 2023), 8, https://doi.org/10.7916/zt86-3055.
[96] Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (Duke University Press, 2017), vii.

> anachronizations can be understood as a profound denial of Native being. They perform a routine and almost ubiquitous excision of Indigenous persons and peoples from the flux of contemporary life, such that they cannot be understood as participants in current events, as stakeholders in decision making, and as political and more broadly social agents with whom non-natives must engage. This making of Indians into ghostly remainders enacts what Kevin Bruyneel has referred to as "colonial time," in which "temporal boundaries" are constructed between "an 'advancing' people and a 'static' people, locating the latter out of time," and, within this dynamic, "increasingly . . . tribal sovereignty [appears] as a political expression that is out of (another) time, and therefore a threat to contemporary American political life and political space."[97] The temporal trick whereby Indians are edited out of the current moment — or cast as inherently anachronistic — emerges out of the refusal to accept the (geo)political implications of persistent Indigenous becoming, the ways that the presentness of Native peoples challenges settler claims to possession now and for the future.[98]

This continual colonial characterization of Indigenous peoples excludes them from accurate visibility and equitable footing in the present, aims to neutralize their sovereignty, and denies the existence of and respect for alternative temporal frames for organizing experience, knowledge, and relationships. In turn, this regenerates deeply harmful dynamics regarding participation, validation, and influence in historical accounts, legal proceedings, political power, and sociocultural representation and regard.

The Eurocentric frame maintains that time is linear, unidirectional, and progress-oriented, and colonial and white supremacist powers institute systems and narratives that insist their temporality is both neutral and universally applicable. However, as Caswell explains, to create theories and systems for documenting,

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[97] Kevin Bruyneel, *The Third Space of Sovereignty: The Postcolonial Politics of U.S.-Indigenous Relations* (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 2, 171, quoted in Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 5.
[98] Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 5.

analyzing, and organizing 'the past' and 'the present' that are based on a fallaciously assumed universal temporality "is to ignore and de-legitimate countless other non-dominant ways of viewing time."[99] Furthermore, since ontology and epistemology have time as a foundational element,

> to steamroll nonlinear temporalities enacts ontological and epistemic violence on minoritized world views, what we may call *chronoviolence*. Chronoviolence asserts that the linear white way of constructing time is the only legitimate way, and then, through colonialism and white supremacist power structures, makes the world conform to the expectations of white temporality.[100]

Social anthropologist Paul Connerton comments on how an oral historian who encourages a narrator of a non-dominant group to narrate a chronological life history account actually "imports into the material a type of narrative shape [and rhythm], and with that a pattern of remembering, that is alien to that material. … [N]ot only will most of the details be different, but … the very construction of meaningful shapes will obey a different principle."[101] This assumption or insistence on a linear trajectory of time creates conditions of silencing, erasure, and inaccurate representation for narrators.

Even outside of an interview, memory workers, humanities scholars, and social and natural scientists can often still enact chronoviolence and subsequent othering due to social and disciplinary frameworks and temporal imaginaries. Anthropologist Johannes Fabian criticizes the oppressive nature of his field's typical temporal framing: "[R]esearchers describe their 'subjects' primarily from a spatial and temporal distance in

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[99] Caswell, *Urgent Archives*, 39.
[100] Caswell, *Urgent Archives*, 39-40.
[101] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 19.

their written accounts, thereby placing the Other in a time far removed from the present of the anthropologist, disallowing any kind of genuine partnership in knowledge production."[102] Fabian refers to this manipulation of and relationship to time in anthropology as "the 'schizogenic use of time,' continuously reproducing the Other through fission — as in splitting up of time into 'their' time and 'our' time — privileging the timeframe of the researchers and their readers in the process."[103] This division facilitates what Fabian refers to as "the denial of coevalness" and "the *allochronism* of anthropology," which describe the continued colonial rejection of Indigenous peoples' present co-existence on equal terms.[104]

Both this invented, hierarchical schism and persistent allochronism are technologies of the colonial and white supremacist fantasy of a completely colonially dominant future. As public policy, politics, and colonialism scholars Elizabeth Strakosch and Alissa Macoun explain, "Colonial sovereignty makes a fundamental claim to 'own the future' because its jurisdiction cannot be divided, so it refuses the possibility of sharing that future in any ongoing way."[105] This fantasy presents its future as inevitable, urgent, and resolved, which simultaneously dismisses other futures and "legitimizes

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[102] Chahine, "Future Memory Work," 197.
[103] Chahine, "Future Memory Work," 197.
[104] Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (Columbia University Press, 2014), 32.
[105] Elizabeth Strakosch and Alissa Macoun, "Undoing Australia: 'Dismantling settler futures,'" University of Melbourne Faculty of Arts, May 18, 2022, posted August 14, 2022, webinar, 51 min., 4 sec., https://arts.unimelb.edu.au/australiancentre/critical-public-conversations/undoing-australia-2022/dismantling-settler-futures.

intensive and violent work in the present in order to prepare for it in the name of that future."[106] Strackosch and Macoun identify that

> fantasy is different from simple misrecognition of reality. It's an act of will that's quite delusional about that reality, but immensely practical about changing that reality, and very strategic. It doesn't just pretend that the world is a particular way. It insists that it is that way and then seeks to go about making it that way.[107]

Through systems, institutions, narratives, and imaginaries, these dominant forces embed "unrecognized investment in colonial-defined futures" throughout society, which "doesn't just shape our thinking about future possibilities; … it shapes our orientation to *now*."[108] This investment "actually suffuses the settler approach to many different areas of political encounter — that is in policy, in political debates, in academic work, and in progressive allyship."[109] Permeating into all aspects of colonial society and culture, the colonial fantasy enables multifaceted violence, not only blocking joint and accurate knowledge production (as Fabian discusses), but also reinforcing exclusion, power and material imbalances, harmful representations and relationships, and denials of Indigenous peoples' sovereignty. With temporal fantasies and frameworks at their core, these technologies are used for self-preservation and colonizing the future, and they

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[106] Strakosch and Macoun, "Undoing Australia: 'Dismantling settler futures.'"
[107] Strakosch and Macoun, "Undoing Australia: 'Dismantling settler futures.'"
[108] Strakosch and Macoun, "Undoing Australia: 'Dismantling settler futures'"; Strakosch states that she and Macoun are white, non-Indigenous women whose work engages with questions about colonialism, racism, and complicity, and that she uses first person plural pronouns in this webinar "when talking about colonial institutions and colonial processes to try to locate ourselves in our complicity and connection to those"; she clarifies that in those instances, she is speaking of herself and Macoun and not on behalf of all listeners.
[109] Strakosch and Macoun, "Undoing Australia: 'Dismantling settler futures.'"

reinforce and replicate patterns that perpetuate epistemic violence and marginalization in the present.[110]

Two of the many contexts in which this violence materializes are legal proceedings and formal operations that don names like Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, which make use of oral testimony and colonial time. Gosper reminds us that "Indigenous testimonies in Australia and abroad are frequently co-opted by the State to tell a certain story about itself. Aboriginal voices are often called upon at times of great national need, in transitional periods, or where the nation must prove its character on the world stage."[111] For the first several decades of Australian colonization, courts would not hear Indigenous testimony; similarly, many laws in the United States barred or invalidated Indigenous testimony against colonists. When Indigenous folks were finally able to testify, their words were overtly disbelieved and their trustworthiness besmirched.[112] Despite further legislation, these legal and epistemological prejudices and barriers persist to date. When it suits colonial powers' political aims, they can activate the performance of 'honoring' Indigenous experiences and voices, delivering justice, and reaching resolution to historical and contemporary wrongdoing and harm. However, these occasions actually tend to enact injurious "patterns of intervention and denial, justified in terms of preparing us all for a legitimate

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[110] Chahine, "Future Memory Work," 193.
[111] Gosper, "Collapsing Time," 3.
[112] Gosper, "Collapsing Time," 3; the series of feeble Australian Acts that first allowed Indigenous courtroom testimony enabled judges to dismiss it if not corroborated with other evidence, the credibility of which was left up to the judge or jury.

future in which settlers will belong."[113] Gosper explains that, in these spaces, "'hearing testimony' becomes weaponized as a way to locate Indigenous sovereignty in the past and ensure colonial stability in the future."[114] Additionally, she notes that "Aboriginal voices, once set loose in the polity, are subject to the settler pull to foreclose stories of colonial imposition and suffering and in doing so place 'the past' definitively in the past, making way for a united future."[115] These instances wield allochronism, the insistence of colonial temporality, and the performance of honesty, witnessing, care, and repentance. In doing so, colonial powers aim to 'close the chapter' on the issue and its outcry, manipulate historical consciousness, psychologically and materially abuse the target communities, and work to lay claims on domination in the present and future — a compounded abuse.

While acknowledging the dynamics and effects of the denial of coevalness, Rifkin pushes beyond Fabian's advocacy for allochronism's annulment. Rifkin explains that Indigenous peoples are forcibly displaced in time in multiple ways: Either they are placed in the past and not considered participants in the present, or they are acknowledged as existing in the present but "only within the temporal frame established and carried out by the settler state or dominant society in which they live."[116] Drawing from Einstein's theory of special relativity, he relates that time is not an objective,

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[113] Strakosch and Macoun, "Undoing Australia: 'Dismantling settler futures.'"
[114] Gosper, "Collapsing Time," 4.
[115] Gosper, "Collapsing Time," 6.
[116] Chahine, "Future Memory Work," 197.

external metric, but is experienced from within via frames of reference. He dissects how a universally shared sense of the present neither makes sense nor solves the othering of allochronism:

> For two people to inhabit shared time or to partake in a common present, they would need to occupy the same frame of reference. Following this logic, we cannot really speak of a global "coevalness" — the absolute time of Euro-American historicism — in the sense that such a concept presumes a singular timeline in which everyone moves in synchrony, rather than attending to perspectivally relevant frames of reference that provide the basis for understanding lived temporalities. When addressing the relations between Natives and non-natives, then, scholars should not presume that Indigenous "identity and community["]... can be plotted into an account of time defined by the coordinates of settler governance and sociality, which does not encompass Native stories of both fragmentation and reinvention on their own terms (rather than in terms of a settler frame of reference).[117]

Rifkin points to how eliminating 'the denial of coevalness' still continues to both misunderstand and deny space for "Indigenous people's presents and presence on their own terms."[118] Noting historian and postcolonial theory and subaltern studies scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty's criticism of Euro-American historicism, Rifkin explains:

> The positing of inherently mutual participation in the unfolding of time… contributes to the adoption of a standard model of development in which non-Euro-American conceptions and experiences of time appear as deviations that are transitioning toward a dominant framework. … [W]hen Euro-American temporal formations provide the background for conceptualizing time itself, "diverse life-worlds" are implicitly translated into the normative frame of those formations, limiting possibilities for (Indigenous) self-determination by presuming the necessity of transitioning to particular forms of self-organization, narration, and governance.[119]

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[117] Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 21.
[118] Chahine, "Future Memory Work," 199.
[119] Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 12.

Instead of simply annulling allochronism, Rifkin believes "other temporalities need to be understood as having material existence and efficacy in ways that are not reducible to a single, ostensibly neutral vision of time as universal succession."[120]

To begin addressing the damaging effects of insisting on colonial time and to imagine and achieve alternative, decolonial futures, we need to adjust our temporal frameworks. The next and last theoretical subsection details such an approach.

Inclusive Temporalities

Foundational to alternative, decolonial futures is a widespread embrace of temporal plurality. As Rifkin explains, instead of thinking of time as "an abstract, homogeneous measure of universal movement along a singular axis," we can approach its existence as a plural form.[121] Viewed in this way,

> there is no singular unfolding of time, but, instead, varied temporal formations that have their own rhythms — patterns of consistency and transformation that emerge immanently out of the multifaceted and shifting sets of relationships that constitute those formations and out of the interactions among those formations.[122]

Rifkin delineates that temporal multiplicity pushes past the "modern/traditional binary," carving out conceptual space for temporal sovereignty and "Native continuity and change in ways that do not take non-native frames of reference as the self-evident

[120] Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 20.
[121] Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 2.
[122] Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 2.

basis for approaching Indigenous forms of persistence, adaptation, and innovation."[123] In turn, such a shift in perspective could lead to the achievement of Indigenous sovereignty through engagement with non-dominant temporal worlds, frames, histories, "self-articulations, forms of collective life, and modes of self-determination beyond their incorporation or translation into settler frames of reference."[124]

The Western assumption of a universal, linear, unidirectional time leaves no space for nonlinear, cyclical, or collapsed temporalities or the people who live within them. Gosper asserts that, despite the settler imaginary representation of Indigenous peoples being outside of or behind time or entirely timeless, "the opposite is true; we are full of time. Time stares us in the face, we acknowledge its interconnectedness, rather than separating it into neatly packaged 'objects.'"[125] Gosper's decolonial oral history work, wherein she begins to unpack the Everywhen, amplifies "a layered now" where past, present, and future are not detached or hierarchized.[126] In their studies of various Australian Aboriginal temporalities, historian of gender, colonialism, and Indigenous relations Anne McGrath and historian of Aboriginal Australia and religion Laura Rademaker elucidate a primary difference: "In contrast to Western historical narratives, which often move along progress-oriented journeys toward modernity, Indigenous ways

[123] Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 3; ix.
[124] Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, ix.
[125] Gosper, "Collapsing Time," 12n34.
[126] Gosper, "Collapsing Time," 8.

of understanding time eschew the flatness and linearity of timelines."[127] They explain that in this context, the word 'Story' indicates "Indigenous modes of history telling or historical practice — particularly those valued oral traditions associated with landscapes of significance."[128] Furthermore, it is favored over the term 'history'

> because it has no need to be written down and because it is not history in the sense of being located wholly in the past. It is part of something larger, continuous and ongoing. Story can be about any and every time; it persists in and outside time, with time itself refusing to be pinned down.[129]

Understanding that the eternal, the deep past, and the deep future live in every moment and are deeply intertwined with each other, Country, Story, and the spiritual shapes perspectives, actions, and relationships in the present.

By looking outside of linearity and collapsing time, the past's presence in the present becomes more legible and is understood as more consequential. Connerton speaks to how an awareness of the past-present-future connection informs experience and memory:

> We will experience our present differently in accordance with the different pasts to which we are able to connect that present. Hence the difficulty of extracting our past from our present: not simply because present factors tend to influence — some might want to say distort — our recollections of the past, but also because past factors tend to influence, or distort, our experience of the present. This process, it should be stressed, reaches into the most minute and everyday details of our lives.[130]

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[127] Ann McGrath and Laura Rademaker, "The Languages and Temporalities of 'Everywhen' in Deep History," in *Everywhen: Australia and the Language of Deep History*, eds. Ann McGrath, Jakelin Troy, and Laura Rademaker (University of Nebraska Press, 2023), 6.
[128] McGrath and Rademaker, "The Languages and Temporalities of 'Everywhen,'" 4.
[129] McGrath and Rademaker, "The Languages and Temporalities of 'Everywhen,'" 4.
[130] Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 2.

Gosper reminds us of how Story and material conditions meet in this notion for Indigenous people: "the pressure of colonialism and the impending destruction of climate change add a layer to this. Story is essential for survival. Story, by observing time in a non-hierarchical fashion, without sacrificing the present for an imagined future, is a reaffirmation of the now."[131] This inseparability and the question of 'the now' are focal points in writer and scholar of English literature and Black Studies Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. In the book, which details the ways in which slavery continues to haunt and affect contemporary Black life, Sharpe stresses that "in the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present," and asks, "how do we memorialize an event that is still ongoing?"[132] To segregate these temporal elements is to fail to attend to the reality of their continual existence, their consequence, their reverberations.

Along with attention to the past in the present, we must also consider the future within this dynamic. In what she terms 'future memory work,' which she developed and employed working with Indigenous folks from Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland), Chahine highlights the ways in which multitemporal fieldwork that emphasizes the future in the present makes clear how past-present-future relations are interdependent and creates opportunities for cultures to self-represent in transformation and imagination. Building from the work of memory studies scholars who underscore the significance of the future

[131] Gosper, "Collapsing Time," 9.
[132] Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke University Press, 2016), 9; 20.

in memory reconstruction, Chahine pushes beyond the shift from 'future as afterthought' to 'future as forethought': "I suggest a *future as forethought, afterthought and in-between-thought*."[133] She argues this approach speaks more thoroughly to intricate temporal interdependence and how imagination of the future impacts how we remember. She proposes that this style of fluid multitemporal fieldwork, and worldview more broadly, resists dominant linearity and facilitates in deepening our understandings of different people's patterned and shifting experiences with time and sense-making.[134] Conceptually and methodologically, this works toward the goal of pluralized temporalities where multiple conceptions of and relationships to time coexist equitably and have equal regard and capacity, thereby upending colonial temporal frames and making space for pluriversality.[135]

In oral history, we are always working with time: engaging about, around, in reference to, within, and through it. For those of us who arrive at this work oriented in colonial time, we must release the urge to impose a singular, linear, progress-defined unfolding of time upon narrators and to assume their temporalities' compositions. That impulse enacts chronoviolence, allochronism, and pervasive othering; ignores consistent demonstrations of presence, sovereignty, and resistance; barricades social and political avenues for addressing historical and contemporary harm; and denies a space for alternative temporalities, narrative shapes, relational and connective modes, and

[133] Chahine, "Future memory work," 195.
[134] Chahine, "Future memory work," 195.
[135] Chahine, "Future memory work," 201.

pathways to alternative futures. Pluralizing temporalities and adding alternatives to the chronological life history narrative structure is a necessary adjustment to begin halting epistemic violence and erasure; honors narrators' own worldviews and how they piece together their stories, selves, and lifeworlds; establishes a starting point for the work of socioculturally and materially addressing historical and contemporary harm; and carves out space for decolonial, equitable, sustainable, connected futures.

Stirring from the various theoretical foundations reviewed above, embodiment and pluralized temporalities rise to the surface as primary and critical. The following concept and methodology operate from a core of embodiment and collapsed time for conceiving of memory and knowledge and for practicing memory work.

THE CONCEPT

To recapitulate what I stated in The Problem section above: Oral history's emphasis on what is said — the verbal, the textual — excludes or at the very least does not pay much attention to all of the other forms of communication that take place during an encounter: rhythm, pitch, pace, volume, inflection, pronunciation, body language, facial expression, sign language, eye contact and movement, touch, gesture, motion, stillness, breath, silence, heart rate, temperature, etc. However, oral history is greatly enriched by and relies on multiple modes of communication to do the work of transmitting memory and meaning. In fact, I argue that oral and textual communication

cannot be separated and isolated from these other modes; the words alone are inadequate, and the non-textual contributes to the central act of generating knowledge and meaning. Additionally, in its typical formal practice, oral history often divides and hierarchizes what are perceived as 'reliable' accounts or verifiable historical details over those that are rooted in feelings and the senses. But we're never mind without body or body without mind, and senses and emotions are essential factors in our intake and output in every encounter and in memory making.

What and whom do we miss by not folding varied communication forms and aspects of memory into the field's practice? What are the costs of missing these details and access points? We miss critical information. We exclude lived experiences. We don't allow for the multi-location of memory. We deny ontologies (beliefs about the nature of reality and being). We exclude epistemologies (ways of knowing; types of knowledge; what counts as evidence). We fallaciously detach the mind from the body. We erroneously detach thought from feeling. We limit our ability to see others more fully and with empathy. We perpetuate conditions rife for detachment, division, erasure, violence, suffering, and destruction across all components of nature.

What could we gain by incorporating these various communication forms and affective details and enriching our work with a more holistic understanding and approach?

Many Indigenous cultures that use oral history and oral tradition and, at present, many practitioners in the field understand that oral history necessarily encapsulates these various elements. Here, I'm developing and entering into circulation a term that can convey this more comprehensive perspective; it names and centers its validity and necessity. Beyond the colonial conception of memory and knowledge existing in the mind, several Indigenous perspectives — especially from the lands that are now commonly referred to as Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand — share how memory also resides in place, object, language, ceremony, tradition, song, dance, the body, the senses, and relationship. If we integrate these Indigenist, embodied, emotional, and sensorial lenses into our modes of understanding, the various memory sites, communication forms, and ways of knowing become legible to more people. This is a call to absorb differently, with all of the modes we have access to. If we listen to each other deeply, slowly, fully, we make space for more regard, and we act and care for the world differently. To make this possible and widely held, I propose a theory and method I call heirlooming. It is a way that memory is made and shapes the ways we move through and understand the world; it's a process by which we understand our relationality and the dynamics of what enters our circulation — that is, what affects and stays with us; and it's a device we can use to do memory work that brings to the surface what might not arise if feeling, the body, the multi-location of memory, and relational pathways are not explored.

Our contemporary understanding of the noun 'heirloom' is a physical object that is passed down through generations of a family line and holds familial-cultural (and sometimes economic) value, or a variety of plant or breed of animal whose cultivation or rearing has occurred through traditional methods on a small, as opposed to commercial, scale.[136] In breaking down the word, we also currently know an heir to be a person who possesses or is in line to possess a position or property in succession, and we know a loom to be an apparatus for weaving thread or yarn into textiles. My usage expands outside of these meanings. To begin, I go to the Middle English (approximately 1150-1500 AD) etymology: loom/lome meant any kind of tool or implement (lome, meaning 1), or any kind of open vessel, such as a boat, bucket, tub, and the like (lome, meaning 2).[137] Heir also had alternative spellings in this period, including air/ayre. Due to its being a homophone and a homograph in one variation during its orthographic evolution, I consider our present understanding of the word 'air' as "the invisible gaseous substance which immediately surrounds the earth, is breathed by all terrestrial animals [and plants], and is now recognized as a mixture of oxygen and nitrogen, with smaller amounts of other substances" (air, meaning 1).[138] With this etymological connection, I look again to Lee Maracle and her descriptions of breath and wind (air, meaning 2):

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[136] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "heirloom (n.)," June 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1190771621.
[137] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "loom (n.1)," June 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/9195761285.
[138] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "air (n.1)," September 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/9815244606.

> The winds are our uncles. Our cultures name them and define their relationship to us. Wind, breath, and voice are about where you want to end up, not about what happened or what facts you have assimilated to bolster your thoughts. Facts are mathematical things, quantities intended to persuade the thoughtless and the spiritless. Our direction is rooted to the imagined relationship between two or more beings from the beginning of the relationship to the end of their journey. The winds breathed life into our bodies. We share the winds, and reflect their directional qualities. It is our breath, our spirit, and our heart that are articulated when we open our mouth.[139]

In my usage, the root words of 'heirloom' take on multiple, simultaneous meanings. Every being (heir, Modern English meaning) is the open vessel (loom, Middle English meaning 2) that continually collects and holds (inherits) infinitely varied elements (experiences, observable and felt details, sites, stories, conditions, genes, languages, etc. that form memory) that attach to them, shape them, and have utility (loom, Middle English meaning 1) in the ways they experience and interact with the world. These elements are kinetic and dynamic, moving throughout the open vessel constantly with the circulation of air (air, meanings 1 and 2); this air, which surrounds and moves through all vessels and amongst all elements, is shared and directed through inhalation and exhalation for life and forms of expression. Within the vessel-being, these elements hold memory, form identity, and are infinitely and significantly relational. Like a galaxy, whose unifying, central force keeps all of its matter in cohabitation and pulls in new matter all the time, the open vessel — with its life force and ever-flowing air — houses elemental memories in perpetual motion, continuing to grow, shift, recycle,

[139] Maracle, "Memory Serves," 3.

expand, intermingle, reroute, and change. In this way, I share how memory is not located solely in the mind or fixed as points or forms on a timeline, but rather is an embodied entity with a fluid, collapsed temporality. In this formulation, I share with Indigenous conceptions of remembering and circular / non-linear notions of time how the past is present and the future is ancient. Our memories and the sites where they reside are co-constitutive and, as looms, have utility to and serve us, our relations, and our directions. In this way, we awaken pasts and futures through all of the sites where memory lives; we bear witness to the iterative everything.

METHODOLOGICAL GUIDELINES

Heirlooming is both part of a theoretical superstructure and a tool, and therefore sits at the seam of theory and method. It is a way of understanding memory and knowledge as embodied, multiply located, and active, and therefore accessible through many avenues and forms of communication. Consequently, I propose a methodological approach that engages with the sensorium, affect, embodiment, and collapsed time to access memories and meaning in the context of broader oral history interview content. Bringing attention to and making time for the tangible and intangible details of feeling and the body allows for the past's presence in the present to become more pronounced. In interviews experimenting with this method, my research questions do not exclusively focus on these aspects, but I use them as a guide to discover memory sites, relationality between them, and what memories and meanings reside in them. This is not a

prescriptive methodology — it is not composed of fixed and exclusive questions or responses. Rather, it is a generative, holistic, deep-listening approach that must be adjusted in a context-specific manner. Some of these encounters can entail somatic contemplation, interoception, and/or sensorial guidance through a memory site. They can also include recording settings and activities that are atypical in scholarly oral history, such as in transit or exteriors, while dancing or eating, etc. Through the invitation materials and pre-interview discussion, narrators understand that our exchange will employ this methodology with ongoing, informed consent and that we will use caution around traumatic memories so as to not cause harm — of course with the knowledge that we can stop at any time and that they will have the ability to review the transcripts and redact anything they are uncomfortable having on record. We also discuss in a pre-interview any topics, areas, senses, or emotions that the narrator wishes to not discuss.

If narrators are comfortable with it and the interview settings and actions allow for it, I record video in addition to audio. As Nepia Mahuika remarks, "interviews take place in vibrant settings, where sites provide a significant visual texture to the words and accounts of narrators. … These sights and surroundings have the potential to reveal more depth than oral recordings often allow."[140] He highlights that in addition to the oral dimension, there are "visual clues that allow us to reveal potentially hidden or

[140] Mahuika, "'Out of Sight, Out of Mind,'" 11.

obscured meanings that are denied by the sole use of oral recordings."[141] Additionally, Dan Sipe reminds us that visual recordings "document not only the interview's explicit information, but the process itself."[142] Through this method, we have the potential to observe and analyze the surroundings, the ways in which our bodies behave within them, what is variously communicated at that time and place, and meanings that dwell in those memories and actions. This provides us with rich and essential data toward my research questions and better equips us to study the process and product of heirlooming, "the role of memory, and the function of narrativity."[143]

My analysis depends on the type of information I collect, but I begin with each narrator's own interpretation of their embodied knowledge, memories, and memory sites. This might happen as the interview unfolds and become part of the conversation, or it might take place during a subsequent session after processing and reviewing the interview content. Contextualizing the narrator's own ontological and epistemological positions and temporalities is crucial to understanding the meanings of their memories, how and why their memories are attached to certain sites, and what their sensorium elucidates. I also consider the impact of our intersubjectivity and interaffectivity on what transpires during the interview encounter and what is possible between us. Furthermore, as Dodd explains, "the researcher's feeling body is as much part of their

[141] Mahuika, "'Out of Sight, Out of Mind,'" 1.
[142] Sipe, "The Future of Oral History and Moving Images," 383.
[143] Sipe, "The Future of Oral History and Moving Images," 383.

interpretive toolkit as their thinking brain; indeed the two are inseparable."[144] Accordingly, I use both "intensive and reflective listening practices," am in tune with my own experience of feeling and thinking during and after the interview, and write field notes or make a recording immediately after the interview to document my experience.[145] I annotate and code the interviews for the senses and sites that arise, and look for trends, deviations, and emergent categories of inquiry. As always in oral history, answers lead to more questions, which I note for possible future encounters.

I have hesitated to write here exactly what narrators and I said and did because I do not wish to delimit the ways in which this work can unfold. However, for some insight into *one* of the many ways it can play out, I will share some of the approaches, lines of inquiry, and actions I took in some of my experimental interviews. I introduced as an entry point the notion of the sense of self and the senses of that self throughout one's life; I proposed the premise that perhaps we have iterations of our selves, and narrators responded about the proposition and its application in their own lives. I inquired about how they felt; what they were like; what senses activated when thinking of being in their bodies; how they sat, moved, and gesticulated; what they perceived; how they processed; what they would notice if they imagined being in the room with them now; to whom and what they connected; what moved the needle for them; how they conceived of their relations to their surrounding worlds; what informed the

[144] Dodd, *Feeling Memory*, 15.
[145] Dodd, *Feeling Memory*, 15.

creation and development of those selves; etc. As narrators took our conversations to different places, people, activities, and reflections, I asked about sensorial and affective details, which unlocked further memories and their analyses of their selves, developments, and connections. Fascinatingly, information I never knew about the narrators (whom I otherwise know very well) came about through this line of questioning and this attention to the sensorium, the body, and affect.[146] Through this exploration, I also watched how time wrapped and layered upon itself as we unpacked each self and their web of relations in a narrator's story. In every interview, stories were nested within stories; the process of engaging, storytelling, witnessing, and wondering promoted our joint discoveries of connectivity and meanings.

In the aftermath of some of these experimental interviews, I employed non-normative notation of the singularity and intersubjectivity of both what and how stories are told by building a cymatic apparatus and creating tactile, visual representations of sonic expression — the details and products of which can be found in my associated exhibition.[147] Heirlooming encourages creative transcription; this type of attention and documentation aims to disrupt and rectify the Western archive's inability as of yet to appropriately capture this phenomenon and its import in historical recording.

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[146] This is a project about conceptualizing memory and doing memory work, and less about the specifics of interviews and narrators. For that reason, I will not go into detail at this juncture about the narrators and interviews I conducted for this project beyond what I have shared here and on the exhibition webpage.

[147] My digital exhibition can be found at www.hilaryseeley.com/heirlooming-exhibition.

CONCLUSION / REFLECTIONS

For the purposes of this paper, I have established grounding for heirlooming as a theory of memory formation and dwelling, identity and action molding, and meaning making, and as a tool for accessing and studying verbal and nonverbal sources of knowledge. Additionally, I have laid a theoretical and methodological foundation for the body and place as memory sites, and an argument for embodiment as a modality and creating an alternative term for 'oral history.' In future work, I intend to develop this theory and method further in the aforementioned sites as well as those that include material culture, language, sound, dance, gesture, texture, touch, temperature, smell, and taste. I currently have additional forms of non-normative notation, including of nonverbal data, in development, and will include them in a future iteration of this project.

One question I continue to grapple with when using or considering this approach is how to work with, around, and through trauma. I consider memory work to be care work, understand the implications of triggering and retraumatizing (particularly with regard to the body, the senses, and affect), and do not wish to inflict them on narrators. However, I do not wish to exclude anyone from this methodology who would want to participate in it. This has been a concern and priority since the beginning of this project, and I will continue to learn how we can conduct this type of work in ways that are safe and inclusive for both narrators and interviewers.

At this point, I believe the audience for my work will be oral historians, community members, educators, and the general public. I wish for this thesis and related work to be part of conversations about how memory is formed, housed, reconstructed, and accessible; how the various aforementioned theoretical lenses can operate together with an embodied methodology and collapsed temporality to better understand and retrace pathways to memory sites; what terminology we can use as so-called 'oral historians' that could convey a more comprehensive perspective and formally hold additional space for communication that is alternative to spoken word; and Indigenization. Drawing from Asma-na-hi Antoine and Rachel Mason's work on Indigenizing post-secondary institutions, I understand Indigenization to be a process of bringing Indigenous knowledge systems to the fore with Western knowledge systems in order to naturalize integration of the diverse and varied Indigenous ways of knowing for the general public. This benefits all community members — both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. It is not a process of replacement, changing or fitting one knowledge system into another, or merging and flattening into a single one; rather, it "can be understood as weaving or braiding together two distinct knowledge systems so that learners can come to understand and appreciate both. … It refers to a deliberate coming together of these two ways of knowing."[148] Extending from this goal, my hope is that this work makes a case for and contributes a path to a broad embrace of the plurality of

[148] Asma-na-hi Antoine and Rachel Mason, eds., *Pulling Together: A Guide for Indigenization of post-secondary institutions; A professional learning series* (BC Campus, 2018), Section 1: Understanding Indigenization.

temporalities, knowledges, and memory- and meaning-making modes, such that we can disrupt the archive, unsettle hegemonic hierarchies, tend to the world's polycrisis, and realize decolonial, liberatory, sustainable, and just futures.

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