

### Thinking Memory: Reflections Three

In this space and time  
I'd like to invite you to think about memory with me  
To reflect on memory  
And how we think about it,  
and think *with* it  
The ways in which we create and make with memory

I'd like to ask you to think about three ways we often construe or frame memory  
And how we might *extend* our understanding of how memory supports our  
thinking and making  
By recognizing the *converse* or *reflected side* of each of these framings



**Reflection 1\_ detailed and near to experience**

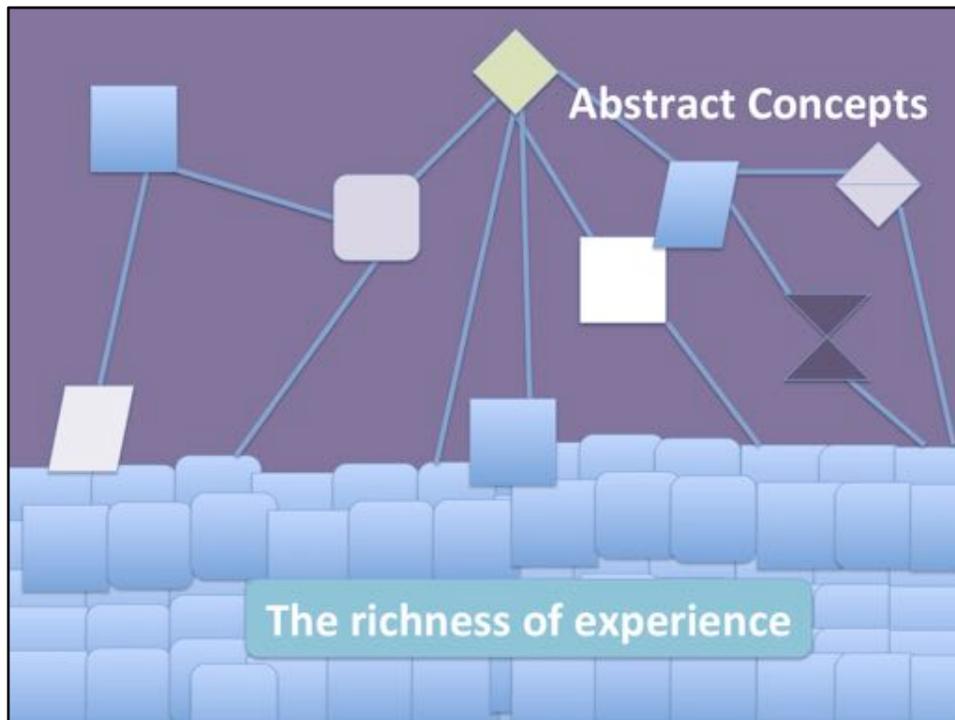
When we ask "is memory true?"

We tend to think of memory as detailed and near to experience

As rich and specific and vivid—a record of what happened in a particular time and place

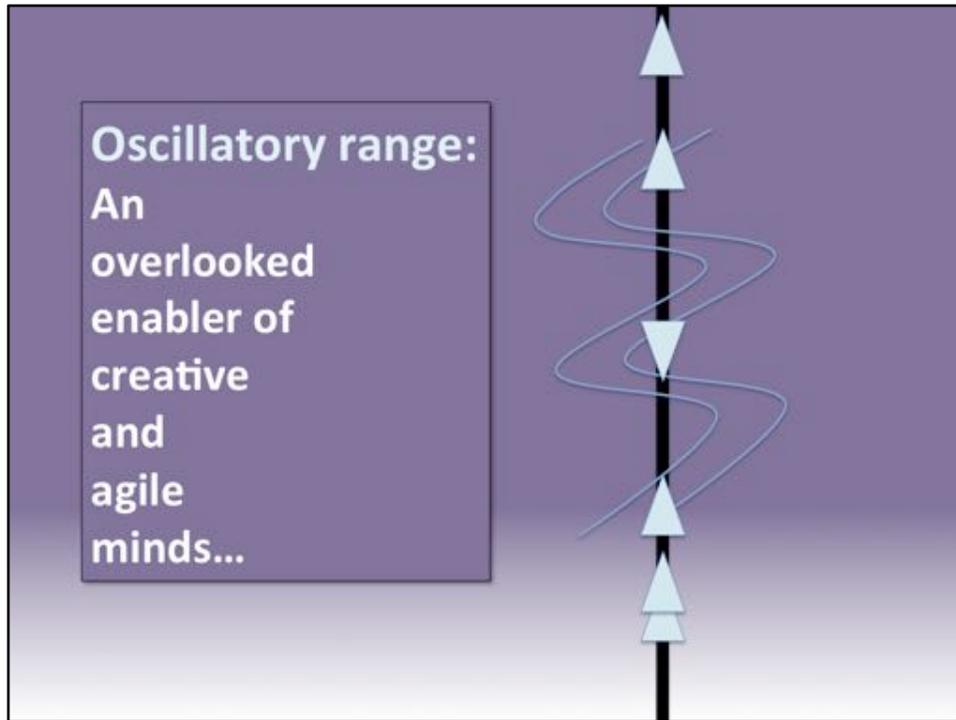
But though that is a part of how we experience our memories

It is only one aspect



Research shows that if we could only think and remember in such highly detailed and near-to-experience ways  
We would find ourselves always “stuck” or “immersed” in the details  
With few ways for moving away from experience, or placing it into perspective  
Comparing and contrasting it and relating it to other experiences

Yet we also need more abstract concepts that set aside some aspects of our experience and selectively highlight other aspects  
These abstract concepts are *also true* and also form part of our memory – but they are true to our experiences at a *different level*, in the aggregate, or on the whole.



Neither the detailed initial experiences nor our  
abstractions of those experiences  
Are sufficient or uniquely “true”  
We need *both* detail and abstraction  
Together with the ability to *move up and down in  
level of detail*  
This is how we best create, discover, and  
make newness  
in ourselves and in our worlds



**Reflection 2 \_ sealed off and separate**

When we ask “is memory true?”

We tend to think of memory as sealed off and separate

A discrete and self-enclosed record of our earlier  
experience

But research shows that, rather than being sealed off  
and separate

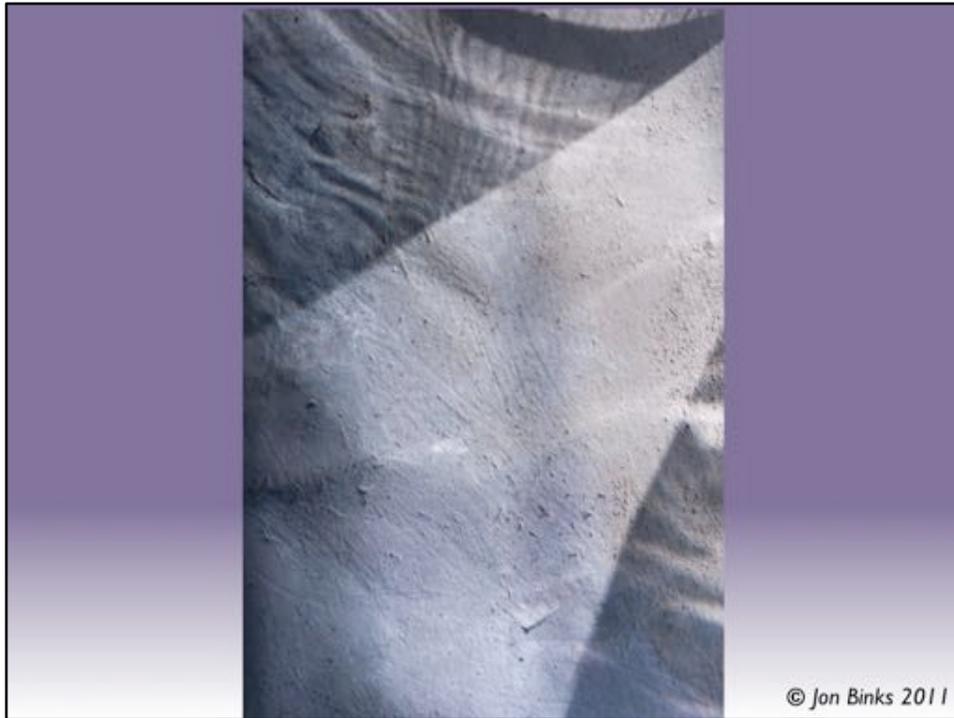
Our memories are changed and updated through the  
very act of remembering

Each time we “recall” or “retrieve” an earlier experience

We also create a new memory for that act of  
remembering



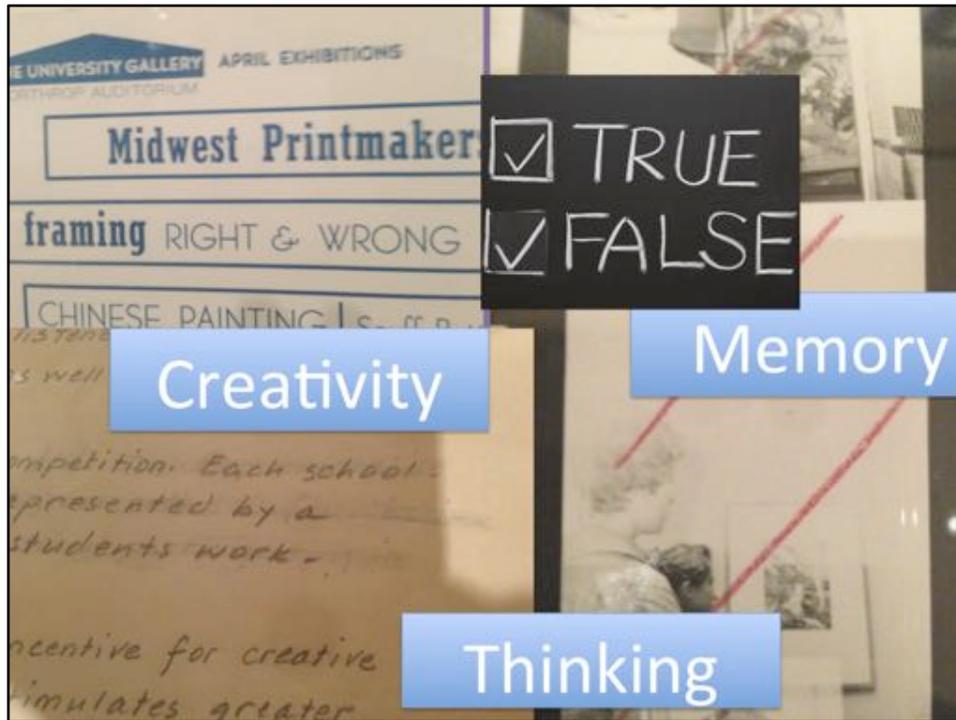
We may have multiple, composite, overlapping,  
inter-penetrating memories of an event  
Memories are, in part, memories of past occasions of remembering,  
Of, also, the prompts or spurs to our memory  
Photographs, letters, recorded notes



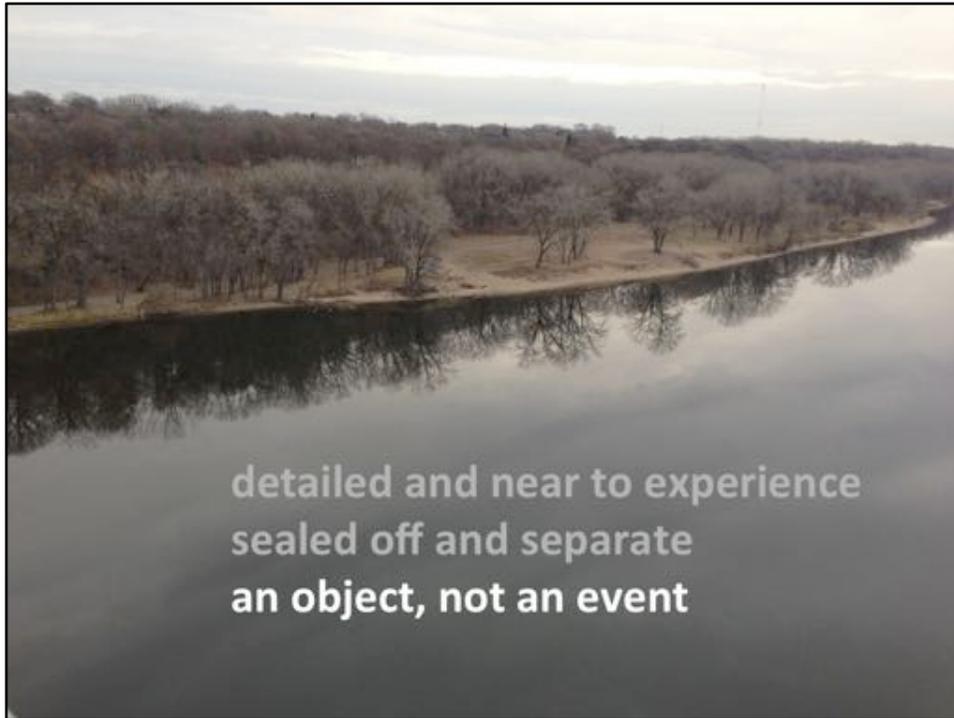
A photograph for example “refers” to an original event, but photographs are also reflected and re-reflected and re-re-reflected in each of our subsequent acts of remembering and re-telling and re-experiencing



© Jon Binks 2011



This is also true for how we remember as groups and as organizations  
Our collective remembering is also permeable, and reshaped  
Changing, reframing, and creatively responsive to new needs, new aspirations  
Connecting and reconnecting ourselves to our past



detailed and near to experience  
sealed off and separate  
**an object, not an event**

**Reflection 3 \_ an object, not an event**

When we ask “is memory true?”

We tend to think of memory as an object or an entity  
that already exists

But memory is more like a process or an *event*

You make a memory anew each time

You construct or reconstruct each time

So it may be similar or alike in various ways



But to say it's true  
That's not really the way memory works  
It's not completely arbitrary or random  
But it's not identical each time  
It's not the same each time

Memory is similar  
And we don't think of similar things as true or not  
Rather, memory is about whether something is a good likeness or not—whether it  
faithfully captures  
most of the important parts



What prompts our remembering may also change

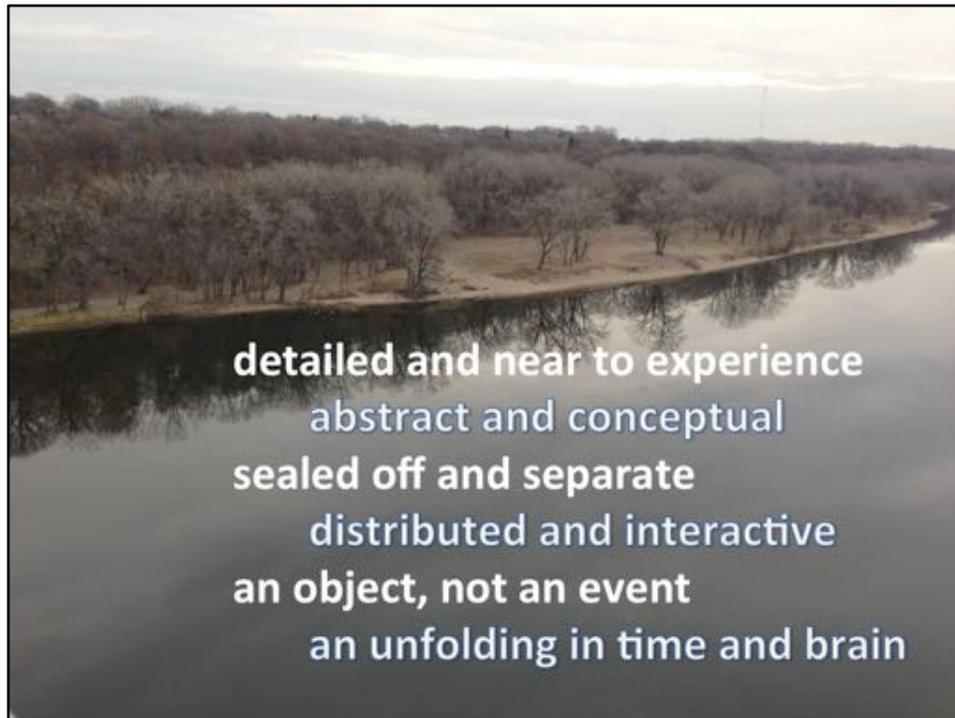
On one occasion we may *deliberately* try to remember  
an event or situation

And our deliberate conscious effort to remember *then* brings back  
sensory-perceptual  
and other details to our mind,  
such as what we spoke about, and how we felt

But on another occasion, we may find that we *spontaneously* remember the event  
– without any apparent effort –  
prompted by something we happen to see or hear



Our memories are not just in our brains,  
separate from our selves in the world and how we interact with one another and our  
environments,  
Memories are prompted and realized in our environments,  
and our environments themselves change,  
including what they ask of us —  
and the opportunities and challenges  
they place before us



Yes, memory may be detailed and near to experience, yet it may, too, be abstract and conceptual  
and our abstractions provide us with powerful ways  
to make newness in ourselves and in the world

Yes, memory may (in some ways) be sealed off and separate,  
but most often it is distributed and interactive, responsive to our changing goals —  
individual and collective.

Yes, memory may sometimes be seen as an “object” but is more often akin to an  
event,  
an unfolding in time and brain,  
taking a slightly new journey and  
unfolding differently each time.