A few years ago, a colleague of mine, Alison, and I learned we shared a belief in the potential for students to use memory to compose personal essays and to view themselves as meaning makers. We met a few times to talk informally about teaching writing and the canon of memory, and I observed class meetings where Alison tried to bring attention to memory in the context of a personal essay assignment. An example of what I identify as a problem of definition took place when I observed Alison’s students discuss the following prompt in response to Patricia Hampl’s essay “Memory and Imagination:” ‘For Patricia Hampel, ‘writing memoir is not a form of transcription.’ What does the author mean by that?” This classroom activity was intended to expand the ways students used memory to compose a personal essay. Listening in on the discussion, I heard students say “memoir is not word for word” and that the writer “adds what one wants to get what they want to have happen.” A student in a Detroit baseball cap added that she learned in psychology class that “there is no such thing as memory triggers” and a young man in a red shirt pointed out that “eyewitness memory is fallible. It is not just like a recording.” Comments like these developed a conversation about memoir writing as more than a matter of recording stored memories on paper. However, when composing their own essays, these students returned to more limited notions of memory. Alison’s students struggled with memory, invention, and genre because they tried to recapture exact memories and report them in chronological order.

Despite the students’ insights about the role of imagination and invention in response to Hampl’s essay on memoir, it became clear that they continued to equate memory with memorization and transcription when it came to their own writing in their composition class. They needed more sustained...
discussion of the differences among memory, memorization, and memoir than we could offer at that time. To redefine memory as a strategic, contextualized process of interpretation requires a new version of classical rhetoric’s fourth canon, memoria. A contemporary canon of memory that I call rememoried knowing attends to the relationships among history, literacy, and invention to reconceive memory as a way to make knowledge.

**History, Literacy, and Invention: Rethinking Treatments of the Canon of Memory**

Edward P. J. Corbett’s deliberate neglect of rhetorical memory in his well-known text Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student exemplifies the typical response to rhetorical memory as uninteresting, particularly for a literate society:

> of all the five parts of rhetoric, memoria was the one that received the least attention in the rhetoric books. The reason for the neglect of this aspect of rhetoric is probably that not much can be said, in a theoretical way, about the process of memory; and after rhetoric came to be concerned mainly with written discourse, there was no further need to deal with memorizing. (38)

Despite recent recovery work such as Frederick Reynolds’s collection Rhetorical Memory and Delivery, Corbett’s idea that “not much can be said” about the canon of memory still needs to be challenged. The assumption that using memory means memorizing remains common and reflects a narrow perspective on the canon’s history and outmoded beliefs about literacy and invention.

The description of the artificial art of memory in Rhetorica ad Herennium, the oldest surviving rhetoric manual, is one often used to define the art of memory. According to this text, the art of memory involves placing different images in standard backgrounds. An orator chooses images based on points of an argument or facts of a case that need to be remembered and relies on a stock set of architectural spaces, like a house or intercolumnar space, to serve as backgrounds. Speakers “imprint,” or mentally place, images in the backgrounds to “easily succeed in calling back to mind what we wish” (Rhetorica ad Herennium 3.20.34, 215). When a speaker needs to recall something, he simply moves through the background in his mind’s eye and mentally retrieves the image that stands for the thing or words to be remembered, recalling both what to say and the proper order in which to say it. Backgrounds then serve as an organizing principle for the speaker to store and retrieve representative images. This system for remembering, also described in Institutio Oratoria and in De Oratore, is the most familiar historical depiction of rhetorical memory.
and is clearly affiliated with contemporary impressions that rhetorical memory is oral memorization.

Instead of embracing this ancient description of memory, scholars might look to Italian humanist Giambattista Vico in the eighteenth century for an alternative. Vico’s tripartite concept of memory is important to examine for its emphasis on memory as inventive and imaginative. Vico writes that “memory thus has three different aspects: memory when it remembers things, imagination when it alters or imitates them, and invention when it gives them a new turn or puts them into proper arrangement and relationship” (New Science par. 810, 313-4). Reclaiming this moment in the history of rhetorical memory reintroduces memory as a process of imagination and invention.

However, because Vico describes this use of memory to imagine and invent as a preliterate or oral way of knowing, this approach to memory is presented to his literate readers as part of their past history rather than a potentially generative present or future practice. This alignment of memory with orality in opposition to literacy remains a contemporary problem that plagues rhetorical memory, as the emphasis on memorization implies. The Great Divide approach to literacy and orality links literacy with so-called higher order thinking and memory with supposedly less-developed oral cultures. This approach has been challenged, for instance, by Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole’s ethno-graphic research on the Vai culture, which notes that the “metaphor of a ‘great divide’ may not be appropriate for specifying differences among literates and nonliterates under contemporary conditions” (70). Ethnographic explorations of oral and literate practices that include attention to ideology and culture, like Scribner and Cole’s, rule out either/or representations of literacy and orality and, by extension, literacy and memory. When literacy and orality are not viewed within a dichotomous framework, then memory is no longer separate from literacy. A starting point for reconsidering the art of memory depends on the recognition that an obvious connection between orality and memory does not negate a relationship between memory and literacy.

Two contemporary composition textbooks that begin with the premise that the art of memory has something to offer a literate and oral society are Winifred Bryan Horner’s Rhetoric in the Classical Tradition (1988) and Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee’s Ancient Rhetoric for Contemporary Students (1999). Both texts focus on external sources of memory, particularly the storage and retrieval of information from print and electronic sources such as books, libraries, and computer databases. Horner’s work extends the classical focus on the individual’s memory as an internal “treasure-house of eloquence” (Quintilian xi.ii.1) to external sites:
Today’s treasure house has been enlarged to include our collective cultural memory—the information stored in libraries and computers. In this text, the section on memory treats the storage and retrieval of information—increasingly complex but important processes that every literate person must know. (Preface x)

Similarly, Crowley and Hawhee point out that “computer programs are now available that serve the heuristic functions of ancient memory” (273). Horner, Crowley, and Hawhee demonstrate how students can use the classical canon of memory to practice oral forms of remembering and to learn forms of electronic and textual memory to conduct research. Both textbooks make significant strides in introducing composition students to the classical canon of memory, particularly in response to developments in print and computer technologies. The emphasis on external memory systems made possible by print and computer technologies leads to important discussions of memory as storage and retrieval in contexts like libraries and databases; however, this emphasis neglects ways people might use memory to make knowledge in the contexts of writing based on past experiences.

Furthermore, the ways these texts define invention affects the availability of rhetorical memory for contemporary uses. Given the notion that the rhetorical canons work “synergistically” (Horner, Introduction ix-x), how one defines rhetorical invention also shapes how one views rhetorical memory (and vice versa). An analysis of Horner’s and Crowley and Hawhee’s texts shows similar understandings of invention that draw on the classical sense of invention as discovery of material to create arguments and on the concept of invention as a heuristic. These renderings of rhetorical invention are appropriate to the texts’ aims, but they also support an identification of rhetorical memory as primarily a process of retrieving stored material from the mind, library shelf, or electronic database as a kind of topical inquiry. Karen Burke LeFevre’s work on invention radically revises this focus on an individual who discovers or uncovers knowledge. According to LeFevre, invention is “the process of actively creating as well as finding what comes to be known and said in the discourse of any discipline” (emphasis added, 33). Considering those groups who have struggled historically to invent adds a revisionist dimension to invention. Women, for example, are among those who contend with traditions that have historically resisted or ignored their contributions—that have denied women a past and determined that they “can’t invent” (LeFevre 85). As a result, invention for many feminists is a creative and social act of making new knowledge often in direct challenge to hierarchical assumptions and oppressions. Invention viewed as social and creative has the potential to support new insights on rhetorical memory as social, creative, and revisionist.
Rethinking these three treatments related to the canon of memory creates a space in which to begin reimagining it. Redefining the canon of memory begins then by choosing a different historical legacy to identify with and recognizing how recent scholarship affects current views on rhetorical memory.

**Redefining the Canon of Memory**

History and life writing are two contexts that encourage a redefinition of rhetorical memory. As in life writing, writing history depends to some extent on the teller’s perspective and purpose in telling. Revisionist approaches, for example, have urged historians to acknowledge that the “facts” of history are better identified as evidence tied to specific, motivated arguments about the past, not unlike some kinds of fiction and autobiographical writing. While these are different kinds of writing with different agendas, I argue that history writing and life writing use related inventive and interpretive processes to explore past events and experiences. For example, my name for this redefined canon, rememoried knowing, comes from Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Morrison's use of the word “rememory” reveals the social and contextual aspects of memory and the generative roles of invention and imagination so important to the process of remembering (99). My variation on this term not only honors Morrison's use of memory to recover and reinvent forgotten and ignored African-Americans, but also recognizes the ways she inspires me to rethink rhetorical memory.

Rememoried knowing has four dimensions:

- memory material
- imagination and interpretation
- context and subjectivity
- transformation.

Remembering begins with memory material—memories made memorable because of thoughts and emotions attendant to images, scenes, or events that a member(s) of a community later calls to mind. Remembering may be a spontaneous or purposeful activity. Toni Morrison describes how her personal and cultural memories often take the form of emotions and questions tied to fragmented images. As a writer she seeks to explore and understand these memories; for example, in “The Site of Memory” and “Memory, Creation, and Writing,” Morrison talks about how the memory of a woman named Hannah Peace informed the writing of *Sula*. Remembering forgotten people and their experiences is also a concern in women's history. According to feminist scholar Gerda Lerner, women's history is the revisionist work of “reconstructing the missing half of history and of putting women as active agents into the center of events in order that recorded history might at last reflect the dual nature of humankind in its true balance, its female and its male aspects” (“Why History
Writing fiction, autobiography, or history means explicitly exploring memory material, even remembering “old” memories in new ways to gain new understandings of the past and present. A willingness to explore memory material, deliberately called to mind or not, is a mark of rememoried knowing.

Memory material is not a static storehouse; it is made up of fluid impressions, associations, and tentative recollections that gain meaning through the second dimension of rememoried knowing, imagination and interpretation. The way Lerner talks about imagination is pertinent to a redefinition of rhetorical memory: “The model created by the historian must not only conform to the evidence, it must also have the power to capture the imagination of contemporaries, so as to seem real to them” (“Necessity” 117). Remembering as a process includes the use of imagination as creativity to explore past lives and experiences in relation to present ones. More specifically, it includes the hermeneutic sense of imagination where making meaning depends on rendering the “strangeness” of one context familiar and understandable to another—using interpretation to make sense of the past from a present perspective. Authors Toni Morrison and Julia Alvarez both provide examples. Morrison uses imagination to reconstruct creatively the lives of former slaves: “on the basis of some information and a little bit of guesswork you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply” (“The Site of Memory” 192). In composing her novel In the Time of the Butterflies, Alvarez uses a similar process of imagination and interpretation. To learn about the Mirabel sisters, three women murdered in the Dominican Republic, Julia Alvarez did traditional archival research, collected oral histories, and let the stories she gathered and her experiences visiting places important to the Mirabels work on her imagination. Morrison’s and Alvarez’s efforts to understand and share the lives of slaves through Beloved and the lives of the Mirabels in In the Time of the Butterflies exhibit those interpretive and creative impulses Lerner values.

The historian seeks to interpret past events and moments, the texts of history, but always attempts this understanding through a mediation of the past and present. Lerner describes the function of this interpretive activity of studying history (or collective memory) as “demand[ing] imagination and empathy, so that we can fathom worlds unlike our own, contexts far from those we know, ways of thinking and feeling that are alien to us” (“Why History Matters” 201). In addition to the creativity of imagination involved in “fathoming” unfamiliar worlds, this activity also has a clearly hermeneutic function. Hermeneutic inquiry makes memory material understandable and usable based on how the rememberer makes the unfamiliar familiar in a given context. At the same time, memory material may seem so familiar that making
new meaning with it requires the rememberer to render the familiar strange, to practice a defamiliarization. The work of shaping memory material is to address gaps in understanding that arise when memories simply do not make sense, or when a new situation asks people to try to remember or even remember differently, in order to create understanding. The ways authors Toni Morrison and Julia Alvarez and women’s historian Gerda Lerner seek to engage “past worlds” through acts of imagination and interpretation reveal common ground between seemingly disparate disciplines (Lerner, “Why History Matters” 201). Rememoried knowing values imagination and interpretation as ways people shape memory material to understand and to communicate with themselves and others as they put another’s perspective in conversation with their own memories.

Rhetorical context, the third dimension of rememoried knowing, is significant to this process of remembering because of the ways context affects how a person or group imagines and interprets. Time, place, and urgency influence what and why people remember. The multiple subject positions a person negotiates within and across different communities also shape the rememberer and his or her choices about what, why, and how to remember. As a black woman writer, Morrison feels compelled to write about the parts of slaves’ lives glossed over in slave narratives, and she emphasizes how she must use memory and imagination to tell these otherwise untold stories (“The Site of Memory” 192). Much of the essay collection Why History Matters locates Lerner’s work as an historian in terms of her experiences as a woman and a Jew who fled Austria during World War II; the way Lerner shapes these past memories informs her study of history. Julia Alvarez’s essays in Something to Declare invoke childhood experiences, like leaving the Dominican Republic and moving to the United States, to identify influences on her writing.

More specifically, Julia Alvarez’s discussion of the historical novel In the Time of the Butterflies demonstrates how context and subjectivity contribute to her “rememory” and composing process. In “Chasing the Butterflies,” Alvarez writes:

Years later, doing research for the novel I was writing, I dug up that Time article. I stared once again at the picture of the lovely, sad-eyed woman who stared back from the gloom of the black-and-white photo. As I read the article, I recovered a memory of myself as I sat in the dark living room of our New York apartment, secretly paging through this magazine I was forbidden to look at. (197)

Alvarez’s father was a member of the same underground as the women but had escaped with his family to the United States four months before their murder. I read Alvarez’s use of this remembered image of herself as a homesick child...
sneaking a look at the forbidden article about the murders as an example of rememoried knowing. Alvarez composes a picture of herself as a researcher driven by an image of her younger self and the remembered feeling that the “three sisters and their husbands stood in stark contrast to the self-saving actions of my own family and other Dominican exiles” (“Chasing the Butterflies” 198). This memory situates Alvarez’s personal and political motivation to understand the sisters and to “bring acquaintance of these famous sisters to English-speaking readers” (Postscript 324). Here, remembering is a purposeful act of meaning making Alvarez shares with readers.

It is no coincidence that Morrison, Alvarez, and Lerner write out of non-patriarchal, non-dominant cultural contexts. Because of this emphasis on rhetorical context and subjectivity, rememoried knowing is a kind of knowledge making that less empowered groups or group members may take up to counter master narratives and to offer different perspectives. The reasons, motives, and choices (conscious or not) people have for remembering arise from and reveal the ways they live and think in the present and the ways they interpret the past and future.

The process of shaping memory material through interpretation, imagination, and rhetorical context leads to transformation, the fourth dimension of rememoried knowing. The art of memory defined as memorization and transcription is mere repetition or rote recording of information; it is a static and passive knowledge transfer. Redefining the art of memory as rememoried knowing means the potential to transform understanding. The notion of remembering as a process includes potential for change because movement from one site of understanding to another is implicit—process is about learning, and learning is change. The idea that a person interprets and imagines memory material within contexts emphasizes its power. For example, Gerda Lerner’s narration of why she is a historian shares with readers the importance of remembering the past and of attending to how that remembering takes place. This process of remembering can be used to explore new perspectives that lead, in turn, to the creation and sharing of new knowledge. Toni Morrison’s Beloved demonstrates this transformation because it recovers, rewrites, and empowers African-Americans by rewriting cultural history from the perspective of the former slave, Sethe. The book teaches readers about the legacies of slavery—that Beloved’s story, for example, is one to share precisely because “it is not a story to pass on” (Morrison 174). It also teaches readers about the political and epistemic functions of memory. This revision of rhetorical memory teaches people to recognize consciously how they make new knowledge through memory material and need to share this remembering with others to affect their own and others’ ways of participating in the world. Rememoried knowing intervenes in the ways people define and use the art of memory.
Using rememoried knowing can be seen as an “intervention into existing conditions and a means for the invention of new possibilities” (Atwill 189). The potential of this redefined art of memory is not only the power to compose using memory in new ways; it is the power to intervene in—to change or challenge—how people engage in acts of remembering and what they do with that activity. Those who practice this art of memory as a motivated activity rather than a passive retrieval can do so with purpose and commitment to create new understanding.

**Imagining Possibilities in the Composition Classroom**

This redefined canon of memory offers a theoretical approach that teachers can use to rethink tacit assumptions about memory and its place in the composition classroom. Teaching the art of memory as rememoried knowing has the potential to help students, as readers and writers, understand genres drawing on memory to be more than exercises in transcription. Students like Alison’s might learn to compose personal essays by shaping memory material rather than transcribing stored memory. Below, I offer ways to teach the four dimensions of rememoried knowing and encourage teachers to develop these brief, hypothetical suggestions into practices for using this redefined canon in the composition classroom.

In the context of a personal essay assignment, composition students can begin with invention activities aimed to facilitate their efforts to call to mind compelling emotions and images for further exploration. Making memory maps, like Thia Wolf’s example in *The Subject is Writing*; building clusters that start with a charged cultural memory as the central term, like September 11th or the Challenger disaster; or using “smell tests” to evoke individual memories through scent are three ways to help students generate memory material. While these invention activities may be familiar ones, the theoretical framework is new. The focus is on the uncertainty and pull of memory material as well as the social, creative dimension of remembering in affiliation with others. Students are not asked, implicitly or explicitly, to recover stored, exact memories. The teacher offers students opportunities to bring to mind memory fragments to shape through interpretation and imagination.

The imaginative, interpretive dimension of the art of memory helps students realize that composing a personal essay means shaping their memory material, not achieving perfect recall and transcribing it chronologically onto the page. To teach students to practice interpretation and invention as part of the art of memory, the focus is on activities to aid student efforts to make explicit meaning with their memories—to use them to some end that they determine through this process. Workshop activities that ask students to examine patterns in their clusters or maps, to explore the shaping that they do when they invent,
or to answer meaning-making questions as they compose a brainstorming draft each urge students to create meaning consciously. Guiding questions include: How do you want to represent this memory material on the page? What does this memory material mean to you now? What do you want to use it to say? Teaching students about context and subjectivity can encourage them to realize that historical time, place, social contexts (race, gender, religion, class), and individual interests influence the memory material they call to mind and the ways they interpret and imagine it. Students might begin to consider context by returning to their cultural memory clusters and comparing with peers their different memory material and the choices they made to shape it. While students may not be members of non-dominant cultures or seek to challenge oppressions, they can learn the importance of context to perspective, purpose, and content.

The transformative potential of rememoried knowing rests on students’ new understandings about the use of memory to compose, in this case, a personal essay. For students to learn to resee this genre as an exploration of “past worlds” for the sake of some present impulse is powerful. Evidence of transformation lies in the essay: do students move beyond reporting and transcribing in the final drafts of their personal essays? Asking students to reflect on their use of memory to compose and to write about what they learned from writing the assignment might reveal changes in how students use memory and define the personal essay. Rememoried knowing can transform the way a student uses memory to compose, and it can also help a student to actively engage with his or her memories to create some new understanding of him or herself in relationship to a past self and a present world. In addition to helping students write their worlds, rememoried knowing can help students as readers of genres related to the personal. This redefined art of memory helps students understand that life-writing and historical genres are crafted and purposeful visions of the past authors want to share with readers and that historical texts are informed versions of the past. Practicing this art of memory may not only change how a student approaches a writing or reading assignment; it may help students use their past experiences, identify their own perspectives and commitments, and actively contribute to constructing views of the world.

Rememoried knowing is one approach to teaching students to see themselves as engaged participants. As makers of memory, students can learn, like Lerner, Morrison, and Alvarez, the power and potential of using memory to make (and remake) themselves and their visions of the world. The idea that this art of memory is an active process is a powerful one. Redefining the art of memory as an imaginative, interpretive, contextual process of shaping memory material means the power and potential of telling one’s version of personal and public memory becomes available as a rhetorical practice. It
means individuals must have a stake in and make contributions to the world so that others do not speak for them or discount their perspectives. What would have been forgotten if Toni Morrison had not sought to explore the lost lives of slaves? What do we gain by reading a historical fiction about the Mirabel sisters? How do Lerner's perspectives on history challenge others to write their own histories? What might be left unsaid or undone if students do not learn many ways to compose using memory? Practicing rememoried knowing in the composition classroom offers a possible avenue for encouraging students to become active rhetoricians—as makers and users of memory material—in the writing class and in the global community.

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Notes

1 Frances Yates’s description of the Simonides story in The Art of Memory also helps illustrate this classical art. Simonides of Cleos, a lyric poet in the sixth century BCE, reportedly invented the artificial art of memory (27-30).

2 I use the pronoun “he” deliberately because public orators and students were typically male. Susan C. Jarratt’s article, “Sappho’s Memory,” offers an exploration of the relationship between gender and memory in pre-classical and classical Greece and Rome by exploring the spaces in which and about which Sappho wrote.


4 According to Kintgen et al., the Great Divide approach “suggests that literacy affects the ways that members of a society think: literate thought is conceptual, nonliterate thought, concrete” (xii). In other words, abstract, objective, and analytical thought reflects a literate society, and concrete, formulaic, and mnemonic thinking marks an oral culture.

5 It is disheartening that Horner’s book is out of print and that another text of this type, Frank D’Angelo’s Composition in the Classical Tradition (1999), gives only a brief description of the canon of memory as memorization based on images and backgrounds.

6 For example, in describing memorial composition, Crowley and Hawhee indicate that “a trained memory is always readily available as a source of invention” through the selection, combination, and amplification of appropriate topics for particular occasions (265-66).

7 Life-writing, or writing that “takes life as its subject,”“can be biographical, novelistic, historical, or an explicit self-reference to the writer” (Smith and Watson 3).

8 Traditionally, the study of history has relied on an empirical approach that has meant reporting facts from the past to make a truth claim about that past. Feminist theorists and rhetorical theorists are among those who have revised this traditional definition of history to expose objectivity, neutrality, and universality as illusionary (Gordon 1986; Smith-Rosenberg 1986; Turner 1998).
Toni Morrison offers two reasons for her use of memory in fiction: “One, because it ignites some process of invention, and two, because I cannot trust the literature and the sociology of other people to help me know the truth of my own cultural sources” (“Memory, Creation, and Writing” 386).

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