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Time Table

Plywood, maple, and stain

Due to the abundance of romanticism I have applied to my past and whatever lies in my future, I feel as though I have not been present in my current time. When envisioning my Final Project end goal, I thought it best to reimagine/recapture a memory in which I attempted to propel myself into a backwards flip from a coffee table's surface (and was ultimately unsuccessful), through the creation of a table. Through the *Time Table* concept, I strived to display the emotional "release" of the objects from my youth: childhood possessions that have manifested themselves as obsessive, nostalgic memories of which I frequently reminisce. (Can be viewed in the drawer of table).

Through my research, I ventured to discover the impact of nostalgic experiences on the human psyche and stability - to decipher whether or not they facilitate doubt and regret, or growth in our lives. I explored the ways in which we exercise our retrosplenial cortex to associate physical objects not only with the sensory experiences that surround us in our most defining moments, but with the stages of life in which we reside. I have determined that I will never be the exact same individual that I am at this moment. The events that were important or significant to me at a certain point in my life may not reoccur or resonate as strongly with me as they once did, but their impact is lasting. I may no longer believe myself to embody the same values and ambitions as the girl from my youth once did, but I acknowledge that despite my efforts to move on, I will forever be shaped by my experiences, recollections, and object associations in and from difficult, trying, and beautiful periods of my life.

How Are We Shaped

by Memory and Nostalgia?

Associating Sensory Detail with Memory



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OS46

Writer's Note: Through my research, I hope to discover the impact of nostalgic experiences on the human psyche and stability – and learn how they can facilitate doubt and regret, or growth. Throughout our lives we change and evolve; it's the phenomena of human nature, of course. We harness the ability to learn and grow by allowing our past experiences to govern the ways in which we act and react in the present. These experiences inform us about our current surroundings, and serve as the foundation for the general conclusions we draw about the world. The experiences we're afforded throughout our lives are very individualized, and can be perceived in vastly different manners, depending on the perceptions of the audience.

I. What Is Memory?

The term “memory” describes the amount of information we have retained throughout our time. Composed of a “dual-process” theory, memory utilizes two different cognitive behaviors commonly referred to as “System 1” and “System 2”. If you’re able to operate automatically, using your unconscious thought to carry out your intended actions, this can be characterized as System 1. For example, riding a bike or simply speaking. However, when engaging in activity for the first time, we actively take notes and analyze each required action for a specific intended outcome. If you find yourself exercising intention and care towards newly computed knowledge that is not yet solidified, you’re activating the System 2. This might be demonstrated by the act of perhaps learning a new dance combination. These systems operate simultaneously; they are vital in every aspect of our lives because we recall learned behaviors to help us make sense of our current reality and find immediate solutions for pressing issues in the present.

Memory functions by mode of three properties. When you first take in information, you utilize your visual, acoustic, semantic, and tactile senses (Encoding). We explore the qualities of

the textures and sensory details we're presented with, and begin to perceive and make sense of those judgements. After immediate impressions, your brain begins to store and file, (like a table drawer!) in a sense, your experiences using short-term memory. We save our perceptions of the world that surround us, our newly accumulated knowledge, for use of future recollection. If these actions and processes have been retained, proved, and learned through a repetitive process, they are then transferred to long-term memory (in a process called Storage). When we access this stored information, we use the final process: retrieval. We utilize this new information over time, and eventually reach a point at which we're able to think less consciously and cautiously about our actions, and simply carry them out.

II. Sensory Detail Integrated into Memories & Object Association

We navigate this complex world by utilizing knowledge that we've accumulated through our experiences, triumphs and failures, and by using our five senses. But our registration of sensory detail and recollection of memory operate far more similarly than one might presume. Arguably identically; according to the knowledge that neuroscientists around the world have concluded through psychological research and studies, that *“the part of the brain that stores and recalls memories is possibly the same part that integrates experienced sensations (smells, taste, feel).”*

This section of the brain is called the “Retrosplenial Cortex.” The retrosplenial cortex is said to be associated with episodic memories, and sequential records of events (integrated sensations). Essentially, in addition to recording the actual event that has occurred, our brain registers the senses that we encountered during said experience. In an effort to further explain the concept, an example of this might be that when a very significant moment occurred as you walked past a patch of especially fragrant flowers, your mind associates that specific floral scent with that specific

memory. If days/weeks/years pass you by, and you happen to encounter a very similar or identical floral scent, it's likely that that significant moment will be triggered in your mind. Though it doesn't pertain solely to the olfactory sense; your brain has the capacity to associate semantic (meaning), acoustic (sound), tactile (feel), and taste with memory as well.

This is why it's often that humans forge attachments to inanimate objects. An object does not have to verbally communicate with us, and possess a character of its own, to make us feel as though they are significant and full of life. We imbue them with "*sentimental meaning when they are involved in important events in our lives*" (Sommerfeld, 2022). Objects are symbolic, and have the ability to recall memories of ours, in which they were present. We may additionally associate them with the spectators, or loved ones that were central or connected to the specific moment. Whether hurtful or happy. This is why we rid ourselves of gifts from ex-partners, and people from the past who we have negative affiliations with, "*the objects are symbolic of the person who gave [us] the gift, and to let go of the item is to let go of the person,*" (Sommerfeld, 2022). We can desire to rid ourselves of attachments to specific people that we've intertwined with, and general periods of our life, that we feel the need to let go of in an effort to establish a greater sense of stability, and happiness. In whatever way that happens to occur, depending on the individual.

III. Romanticization of Past Experiences

Though nostalgia is often thought to be lighthearted, at its core, its Greek origin, the term is composed of both positive and negative aspects: "*nostos 'return home,' algos 'pain.'*"

Nostalgia is defined as the "*sentimental longing or wistful affection for a period in the past*" (Oxford dictionary), and can be considered to be the act of recollection and reminiscing of certain memories throughout our time. Nostalgia is often triggered by pleasant or painful moments

from the past, occasionally bringing about thoughts of self-doubt, and questioning existentially. I've found that throughout my limited time on this earth, I've spent a great quantity of my time reminiscing on past events and social groups, opportunities I've had and then missed. Regretting what I haven't accomplished, the laziness I've shown in various aspects of my life, the rude and hurtful musings that have originated in my mind. The musings that I've had the audacity to mutter to those who surrounded me, followed by tremendous guilt and shame. I would consider nostalgia to be multi-faceted, shaped to individual experience, and how it's approached. On a more personal level, memories and nostalgia can serve as authentic learning opportunities/experiences, strengthening our ability to navigate future situations/cope with threats.

But when does their impact and influence come to be too great? When we find ourselves stuck reliving the same regretful and traumatic, even joyous moments, can one truly argue that one's well-being is being improved or stabilized?

When I referred to my father, and spoke of my concept, he confided to me that he felt as though his memories would've kept him from approaching his greatest potential. From a small mill town in Minnesota resting against the border of Canada, he was not amidst a vastly well traveled nor especially ambitious community. He had aspired to be a great hockey player, and had the willingness to delve outside of his immediate comfort zone, and fulfill his dreams. Due to his complicated familial relationships, when he attended a Bostonian prep school and money was tight, communication grew challenging to maintain, and there was not an overwhelming incentive for him to remain especially close to them. When reflecting upon his approach, he occasionally feels regret, but I find that it places emphasis on how greatly *our decisions define the people we are, and the people we become*. Our approaches to reminiscing greatly affect how we operate in our current time. Whether or not we choose to embrace our memories and experiences for all that they

are, or to shun them. Ultimately, regardless of our decision, we find that these moments from our past help to shape the character we embody in the present. They assist the forgery of our identity in all aspects of life.

To further contextualize this concept, my dad spoke to me about the quality of memory. For it isn't always that you intentionally compartmentalize the nostalgic moments of the past, but about the decision of whether or not the quality of those memories make them worthy of reflection. His childhood was trying, and his environment was rugged. Blue collar and stagnant (in terms of politics, values, diversity, and education). He relents that he felt as though his values never truly aligned with his community in Northern Minnesota. I can't say it's particularly proper for me to speak on my dad's behalf, but from what I recollect, he felt that in an effort to pursue his dreams, he had to leave behind his past. To create a division between his past and idealized future. He'd drawn an idea of the person he aspired to be, a city-dweller, thriving in an artistically-rich, diverse, learned environment with culture. He wanted the luxuries in life that his childhood did not and could not provide to him, and to do so, he believed he had to reinvent himself. Despite his attire upon his arrival at Prep School, an ACDC t-shirt and hockey mullet, making him feel distinctly out of place, he was determined to fulfill his reasoning for attendance. He aspired to reflect the intellect, and culture he felt he was surrounded by, and intended to craft and shape a future that subscribed to his values and aspirations. He had his Midwestern resilience, and youthful optimism to attest to that.

I would undoubtedly imagine he unwillingly took more from his home than he had anticipated. At least subconsciously. How he interacts with those who surround him, with kindness, humor, and generosity. The way he navigates the world with stubbornness, occasional passive aggression, and utterly raw perseverance in the most arduous of moments. You always

have the power to define and distinguish your values as an individual, regardless of whether they align with your communities or not; that's what Jody Horn of International Falls, Minnesota managed. And given his childhood, and experiences from back home, he felt there was no place for reminiscence in his life. Those moments enforced pain and grief upon his psyche, but additionally served as the ammunition and ambition that pushed him to fulfill his dreams. Nevertheless, the ways in which we behave in our present remain a reflection of our core memories, and what knowledge we accumulate throughout the course of our lives. We wear our past on our sleeves, whether or not it's intentional, the damage and or lessons have already taken their toll.

Different surroundings and periods of our lives force us to reevaluate our identity, and draw distinctions between the people we believe we once were (in our past lives), and who we are in our current reality. On a case by case basis, it has been determined that "*Nostalgia allows individuals to develop a sense of identity continuity (Brown & Humphreys, 2002; Milligan, 2003),*" and that "*Individuals are said to 'derive a stronger sense of selfhood, an increasingly unified self, by putting together pieces of past lives through' nostalgia.*" So essentially, we can conclude that when we corroborate our past experiences, we're able to draw personal conclusions about our essential being, and identity, with a couple qualifiers. The content/quality of the nostalgic memory, and the ways in which we have chosen to move forward, subsequent to the moment's occurrence. When we're faced with traumatic and stressful experiences, reliving them can be especially painful, and moving forward proves to be challenging, whether actively aware of what it is we're moving on from or not. Nostalgia can allow us to come into our own, and define ourselves in periods of uncertainty throughout our lives, but it additionally has the potential to

“stand in the way of individuals moving forward after life transition(s)”. Whether seemingly positive, or negative.

It’s inevitable that we will face challenges throughout our lives. When reflecting on joyous moments, if we find ourselves content, we can reminisce with loving memory. But when one begins to recognize that their current time is not presenting great opportunities for happiness, they can romanticize those periods of time in which, say, they had healthy support systems. They can begin to envy a past entity of themselves, say an active member of the “popular” demographic in high school; in doing this, which in doing so, (overly indulging in the idea of “what once was”) puts us at risk of losing our sense of self. I would argue that it’s possible to develop overwhelming feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction with your current reality, and feelings of loneliness and disconnection from your environment. When looking back, it’s important to define what healthy reflective habits can be. And whether or not by allowing ourselves to be consumed by the concept of “living in the past,” we’re preventing ourselves from being present and making the most of our present.

IV. Conclusion

Our time is fleeting, finite, and I’ve found that a great portion of my life has been lost to reminiscing about periods of my life that I perceived to be more simplistic, joyous, and looking at the future through a heavily romanticized lens. Even periods of time in which I did not exist. This I acknowledge may have the capacity to come across as quite far-fetched, but it’s genuine and I’ve come to find: is a common occurrence throughout generations. But, I think one of the most important and valid conclusions that can be drawn from looking at life through an overly nostalgic lens is that regardless of your generation, your characteristics, your ambitions in life, you cannot reverse the clock and travel back or forward through the ages. It is challenging to cease imagining

the number of ways in which your life could, or might have played out, especially when you're discontented with your present. I have felt regret for the mistakes I've made along the way, and have forgotten to acknowledge that in order to grow and cease dwelling, I have to actively choose to learn and do better. To become the person I want to be, or rather, a better version of the human I already am. We have the capacity to be the best version of ourselves in our current reality, if we continually await great things to occur for us, we will never learn to make the most of all that we've already experienced and been afforded in our lives. Every timeline/era has experienced their triumphs and failures, and it's vital that we begin to recognize the beauty of the age in which we already live.

For my project specifically, I aimed to reflect upon my experiences, recollections, and object associations with difficult and trying periods of my life. Specifically things of which I need to relinquish my tight grasp on.

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