



Beyond the Archive: Memory, Narrative, and the Autobiographical Process (Explorations in Narrative Psychology)

Jens Brockmeier

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Our longstanding view of memory and remembering is in the midst of a profound transformation. This transformation does not only affect our concept of memory or a particular idea of how we remember and forget; it is a wider cultural process. In order to understand it, one must step back and consider what is meant when we say *memory*. Brockmeier's far-ranging studies offer such a perspective, synthesizing understandings of remembering from the neurosciences, humanities, social studies, and in key works of autobiographical literature and life-writing. His conclusions force us to radically rethink our very notion of memory as an archive of the past, one that suggests the natural existence of a distinctive human capacity (or a set of neuronal systems) enabling us to "encode," "store," and "recall" past experiences.

Now, propelled by new scientific insights and digital technologies, a new picture is emerging. It shows that there are many cultural forms of remembering and forgetting, embedded in a broad spectrum of human activities and artifacts. This picture is more complex than any notion of memory as storage of the past would allow. Indeed it comes with a number of alternatives to the archival memory, one of which Brockmeier describes as the *narrative approach*. The narrative approach not only permits us to explore the storied weave of our most personal form of remembering--that is, the autobiographical--it also sheds new light on the interrelations among memory, self, and culture.

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