

MEMORY DIALOGUE

TO PRESERVE MEMORIES

WE HAVE TO SHARE THEM



“ That
may or may not
have existed.

But what is important is
the connection.”

Dedicated to my grandmother, Gertrud,
and in memory of my grandfather, Klaus.



People, with whom we spend time, become witnesses of our life. If two people share an experience, both keep their very own memory of this experience. These memories are subjectively different – yet, both are each other’s mutual reassurance that this experience did actually happen. If the relationship ceases, for any reason, the memories become isolated from one another. The reassurance disappears, and it may feel as if the experience didn’t take place.

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INTRODUCTION

This study aims to investigate the experience of artefact-based memory sharing, focussing on the multi-perspectiveness of different memories as a result of different experiences on the same subject. Participants were asked to create a physical or digital record of their memory about a specific experience they had together, share it, and reflect on their process of sharing.

QUESTIONS

Questions of interest included: What experiences would people want to share with each other? Would potentially problematic memories be shared or mainly “beautiful” ones? What would it be like to create an artefact representing a memory, to be shared with the person one had the original experience with? How would they want to share their memories? What would it be like for them to have someone else’s version of a memory presented to them in this way? How would another’s memories of an experience affect the way an individual remembers it themselves? How might different form factors of the

mediating device / technology influence the experience? How would memories of a shared experience, expressed by another person, be valued? Would they be accepted unquestioningly, or questioned? Would they appear authentic and credible?

SHARED MEMORY

Different aspects towards shared memories seem to be estimable and might emerge during the study:

Range: Some individuals might want to share memories only with themselves, others with a close friend, a group or a whole community.

Multi-perspectivity: As individuals have different experiences with a person or a situation, they also have different memories linked to that person or situation.

Polysemy: The same object might carry diverse meanings for different people, particularly in the context of artefact-based memory sharing as it is practiced in this study.

Priority: What is important to one person, might be less important to another person. Different people remember different details of an experience.

Uncertainty: The level of recall or confidence of subject's memory may vary.

Enhancement: Different individual memories may enhance each other's memory retrospectively. Details that subjects might have forgotten or misremembered would be filled out through the process of sharing.

Individuality: Memories are personal and unique. They are specific towards a certain person, situation, or place.

Release: An artefact representing a memory may stay sealed for a certain time before it is opened; or it may be accessible only during certain times.

Shift: Perceptions of experiences may shift over time, for example due to changes in relationships between people.

METHODOLOGY

The study, investigating the experience of artefact-based memory sharing, combines Research through Design and Research for Design: it aims for a contribution to knowledge as well as the creation of design artefacts.¹

1. Golsteijn, C.; Hoven, E. van den; Frohlich, D., and Sellen, A. (2014). Reflections on Craft Research For and Through Design. Proceedings of the NordiCHI '14, Helsinki, Finland

Initially, cultural probes² were distributed to participants to introduce the topic and to initiate the process of recording and sharing a memory. Participants were interviewed individually before exchanging their created artefact, then interviewed again when face-to-face with the other participant. Individual and shared interviews resulted in a rich source of material for helping understand the memory sharing practices that participants engaged in.

2. Gaver, W.; Dunne, A., and Pacenti, E. (1999) Design: Cultural probes. Interactions, Vol 6, Issue 1.

Interviews were audio-taped and pictures were taken of all participants both individually and during the exchange of artefacts in order to build a rich record of the study.

WHAT YOU SEE HERE

For this study it was crucial to observe the process of individuals choosing, recording and sharing an experience with another, and for that experience to be personally meaningful. In order to encourage selection without filtering, participants have been reassured that

highly personal aspects of content they have shared would not be published. In this document, therefore, recorded memories are intentionally not shown in detail and the nature of the artefacts that each subject created has been obscured. Instead, content focusses primarily on the subject's reflections on the impact, process and outcomes of sharing with others.



“Memory is dialogic and arises not only from direct experience but from the intercourse of many minds.”

Oliver Sacks, 2013



Cultural probes, that were handed out to participants

LEGEND

Artefacts that were created by participants.

PHYSICAL RECORDS



3D OBJECT



PICTURES



PRINTED TEXT



HANDWRITING



PUZZLE



DRAWING

DIGITAL RECORDS



E-MAIL



DOCX / TEXT



VIDEO



AUDIO

THE PILOT

DAVID DESIGNER, 33, IRELAND

AND BOB DESIGNER, 32, IRELAND

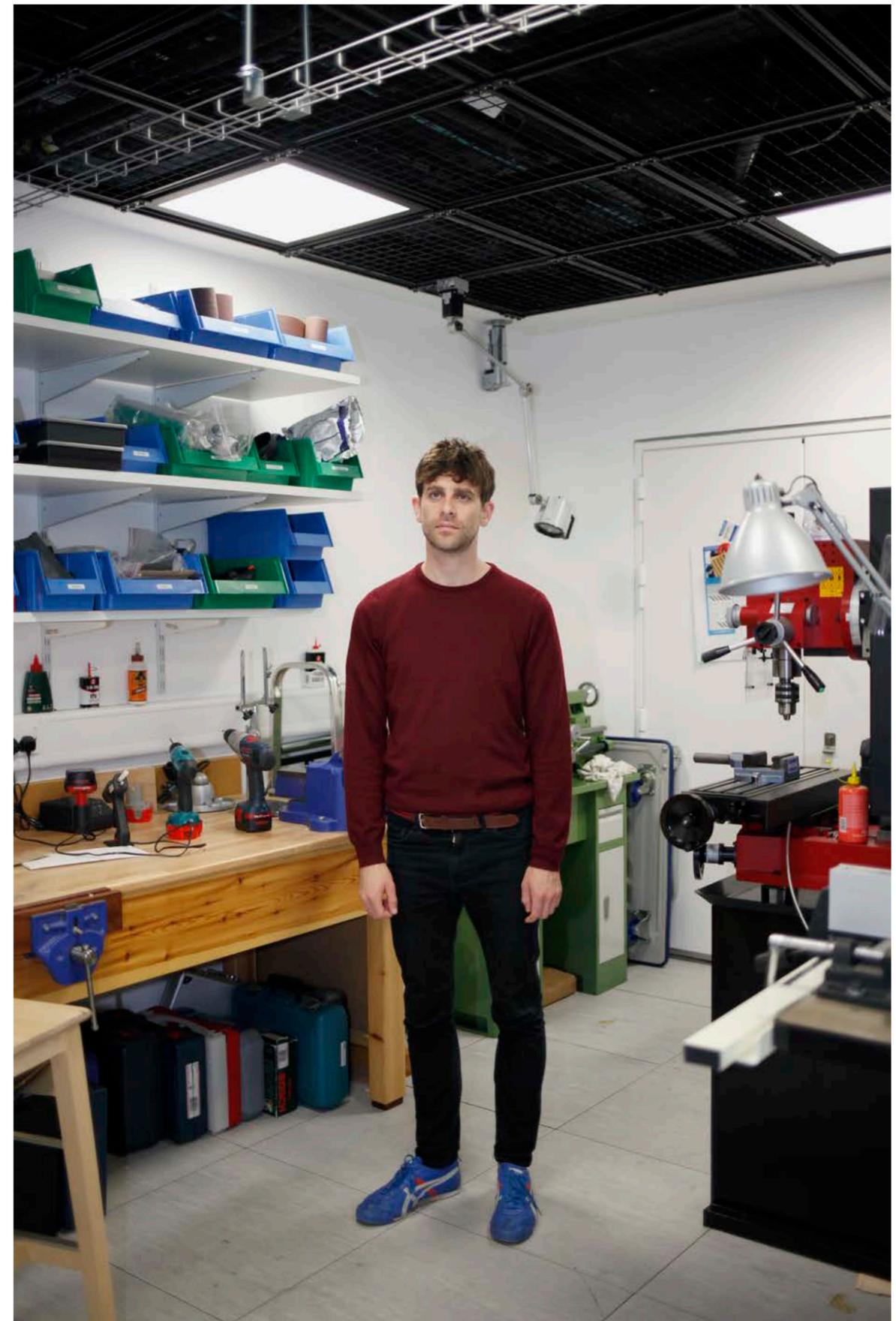
ARE FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES, AND FLATMATES

CHOSEN MEMORY: 10 YEARS AGO



“I don't think that it's necessary
that your memories are the truth,
you know, that's
not the point
of communicating memories.
You know the phrase: 'Never
let the truth get in the way of a
good story.' It's two developed
narratives that may or may
not have existed. But what is
important is the connection.”

Sharing memories





“When I’m taking photos in particular, I don’t think of them as generating memories at the time. Even though that’s very much what they tend to be as time goes by. It’s just like what it is and then they become something later as time goes by.”

“Even negative memories tend to take
in a positive stand over time when
people remember them, I feel. They got
better, fonder memories from the past when
they did, when they were in the past.

I think that’s a
universal thing actually.

We are always
rushing to get out
of the present, but
have fond memories
in the past.

So it’s kind of a strange paradox.”

—
Present & Past





“The way we
do it, more often, is we make a reference to
something, rather than sit down and talk about a time. Because
we are so familiar with each other. It's not like:
now we are catching up.

So the concept of reminiscing kind of seems to me
like that's the whole process. That's the event. That night.
Reminisce time.” – David

„I think, as well, so probably friends that
don't see each other”
as much, tend to reminisce more. – Bob

How we reminisce together

“It’s a two way process communication. You have to imagine your user, your customer at the end (laughs). You have to imagine what they like before you can probably engage with them. It’s an interesting concept, where I’m remembering memories but in the context of another person’s memory as well. So there is an influence there about the things I’m choosing to remember of creating some image of yourself.”

—
Way of sharing memories





D: “To think about putting two things together, creates

something new, that didn't
exist before.

I think that artefact would remind us of this moment instead of that one (the original memory).”

B: “But even now the memory is been changed. Because we talked about it now.”

D: “But yeah, true... No, probably not changed.”

B: “Not changed, just... in 10 years time again and we'll remember 10 years ago from now... We'll also say... remember when Stephanie was there and she did the thing with us.”



B: “It's funny, that they are both kind of the same thing.”

—
Combining artefacts



“Now I wonder
if this event now of recalling
and focussing on that specific event
will then in future
affect my
recollection
of that same event.”

—
Sharing experience

I

ALEX MECHANICAL ENGINEER, 27, FROM GREECE
AND **DILEN** MECHATRONICS ENGINEER, 30, FROM MAURITIUS
ARE COLLEAGUES AND FRIENDS
CHOSEN MEMORY: 3 MONTHS AGO



“So, it was
memory on the
memory.

Because if you think about it, the
incident itself was not that strong as
the thoughts, that were stirring inside

in each and one of us and we shared the emotion. So actually
Dilen proposed this memory, because we understand, that

this is a milestone to our

friendship. And that first of all we
want to see what the other one was thinking about it.

And also because it's something, that

we treasure and we want

to keep it as alive
as much as possible.”

Motivation for the chosen memory





“It’s a mixed feeling because we were all a bit sad and happy, so it’s a mixed feeling.”

“We never took a picture and there were things that I was not sure if I was
imagining them or if
they actually happened.”

So it was interesting because with that process we actually can tune, also
get both versions and also distinguish what’s imaginary and inside our brains and
what is actually happening.” – Alex



D: “There is a stronger bonding to know, what we actually
felt. Because we didn’t talk much about it after...”

A: “Never.”

D: “Yeah, not at all.”

A: “I think we burried it a bit as well. (...) We felt awkward,
I think. Because everybody felt exposed. So he didn’t
want to bring it up because he was thinking about his
part of the story and how he was exposed as well.”

D: “Yeah. Because it was a deep experience.
So we never talked about it. Until today.”



“You can actually see it in detail when you tune back in that moment. You don’t think about these things every day. But I guess, because it’s meaningful you actually remember a lot of things in detail.”

That’s what I felt. And you live this moment like how you are feeling, and it comes back naturally.”

Experience when exploring the received artefact

“It’s amazing, because when you read for example text that is not written by you but about the memory that you have – you have no control of what’s in. And you have to face the fact – that it’s actually true.

Because, as Dilen said, you have memories coming back, but from a different perspective. And it’s quite good because sometimes we... I’m very self-centered, so I’m missing things.”

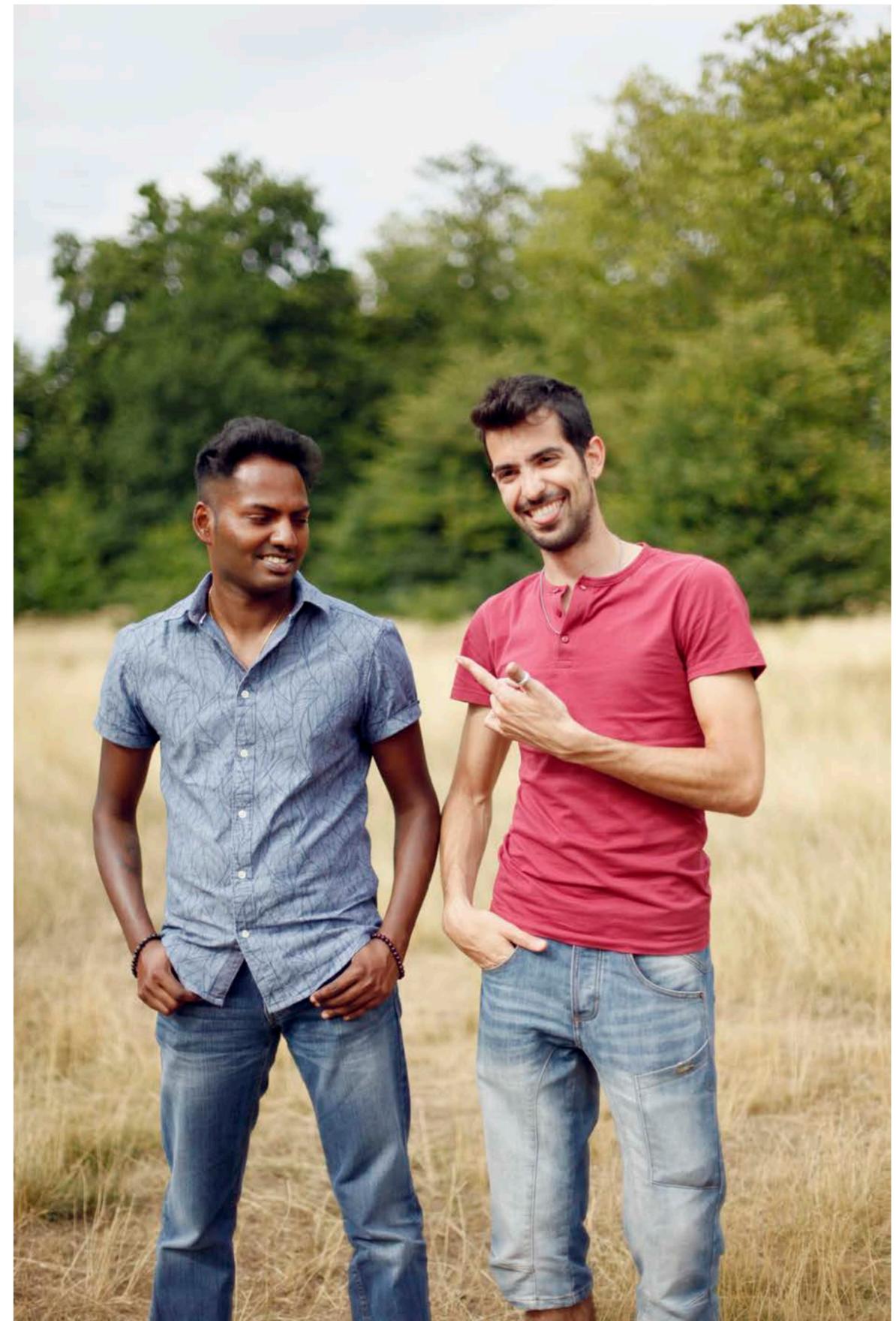
“It’s not about you. I think everyone is self-centered. And then, when you share it, or read it, you see different things. It’s not self-centered, it’s...”

“...normal.”

“Yeah!”

“Thanks.” (laughing)

Experience when exploring the received artefacts



“ — pause

From: Diagarajen
Sent: 09 August 2015 15:58
To: Alexandros
Subject: Lisbon

Fado night in Lisbon

There [redacted] night our
purpose was [redacted] city
a lot [redacted] hentic Por-
tugu [redacted] dium sized
tables [redacted] caricatures
portrait of the [redacted] when
Alex [redacted] studied Por-
tuguese [redacted] grilled cod
and sard [redacted] kes which
we devou [redacted] rted
singing [redacted] ormally sad
and ro [redacted] nd was try-
ing to k [redacted] t from the
conversation [redacted] and
music. [redacted] ming more
intense [redacted] was strugg-
ling to k [redacted] d that this
cosy and hom [redacted] s the
first ti [redacted] and Vassia
bough [redacted] lling along
the sea. [redacted] ust before
reaching our [redacted]. We
then [redacted] ture plans.
[redacted] e are going.

and rethink
where we
are going.”

Sent from my [redacted]

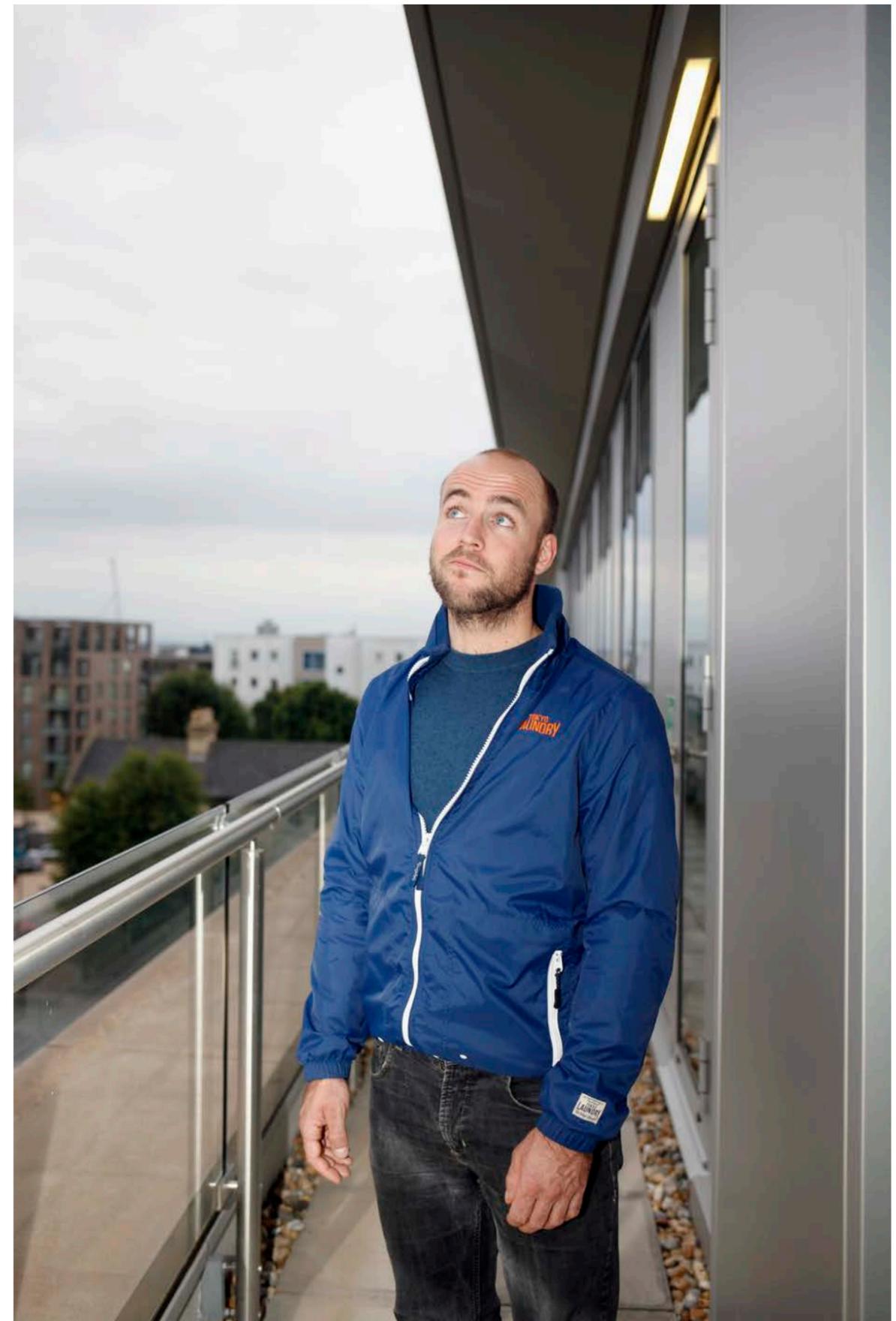
II

LUDOVICA MATHEMATICIAN, 26, FROM ITALY
AND CHRISTOPH ENGINEER, 31, FROM GERMANY
ARE FLATMATES AND NOW FRIENDS AS WELL
CHOSEN MEMORY: 1 MONTH AGO



“I was thinking about it initially. Because we took quite a lot of pictures. But then I got away from that because I wanted to only remember things which I have in my mind rather than using other things.”

How was your process of reminiscence? Did you use any media, social networks etc. to “refresh” your memory?





“I like it a lot. Anytime I leave, I just print photos of me and my friends and maybe behind the photo I write something. It’s like:
remember this
moment together
and all the moments. So I really enjoy
to give someone something related
with our past together. I think I feel that a lot when I’m leaving, or I know it’s not for a long time. And it’s the same for Chris, since I’m leaving at the end of the month.”

What is it like to create a record of your memory to be experienced by the person you had the original experience with?

MEMORY DIALOGUE

SHORT CUTS

What participants mentioned. —

Personal experiences

GOOD TIMES

“With people that I don’t know that well and in a social scenario, usually, I share information mostly, **THINGS I’VE DONE, WHERE I’VE BEEN.** When it’s with some friends of mine, and I have something that was very emotionally intense than I share **EMOTIONS.**”

TRAVEL STORIES

“**EVENTS** that happened, what people said, what people did.”

FUN(NY) MEMORIES

—
What kind of memories do you share?

People, I meet Husband
Wife
Mother **FAMILY** Boyfriend
Father Children Girlfriend
CLOSE FRIENDS
Friends that live nearby

—
With whom do you usually share memories?

FACE TO FACE FACEBOOK

Campfire Skype
Projector WhatsApp
Dropbox
E-Mail

analog | digital

—
How do you share memories at present?

As a CONNECTION with people

It FEELS GOOD

To look cool

To feel more like family, even with friends

To say: Hey I'm still alive!

“If it's in a social context, it makes you FEEL GOOD, because you show that you have an experience on something. Also, you feel, by putting all your experiences or your memories in a pool, you LEARN stuff from others as well. And also you give INCENTIVE for someone else to share as well. In a more friendly slash personal context it's about SHARING THE LOAD as well. And SEEKING ADVISE.”

—
What is your motivation for sharing memories?

“Yeah, it’s a very short tiny event but it was a good **GRINDING POINT** in both our friendship and carriers stroke life, that period.”

“I think that day was the most like, how do you say, **INTENSE**, in terms of, it was more friend if compared to just hanging around.”

“I think, normally I don’t care about food so much. But right now I think there is this culture of caring a lot about food. I guess this is know-worthy because I felt like I had a **GLIMPSE TO THAT** part of that culture by having this really good meal.”

“We were new to this city, and we saw: **‘HEY,**
you can have fun in Cambridge as well’.”

—
What is the value of this chosen memory for you?

“It meant something to me... that kind of level of **SOUNDNESS.**”

“The memory we chose was actually the **MOST INTIMATE MEMORY** we have. (...) It was that memory actually and that experience together that brought us **CLOSER.**”

“It’s a good story. It was a **BONDING MOMENT.**
(...) A thing I can joke about later.”

“It was a fresh start of a new phase of life for me... I think it was the very **SIGNIFICANT MOMENT** that we can share together.”

The **MORE** engineer the **SHORTER** the interview.

43 min
Designer

vs

9 min
Mechatronics Engineer

—
Fun Fact

C: “I like the idea with the puzzle and the analogy to that day.”

L: “There is kind of the same match of photos. There is a pineapple, there is a pineapple. This is the Tate, that was in the Tate ...”

C: “The pictures are different but it still says the same thing.”



L: “You don’t have Tom Cruise.”

C: “Yeah, I was trying to focus on

really important
people.” (laughing)

L: “Oooh!”

C: “He was just too small.”

c: “Not really.”

L: “I would say: yes.” c: “Really? Nothing was planned, right?”

L: “Yeah, but it was so good.. On the same day I was thinking: Oh, I’m gonna remember this.”



—
When you had the experience,
did you already know, that it would be
meaningful and memorable for you?

III

EYAL ELECTRICAL ENGINEER, 25, FROM ISRAEL,
AND **LONG** RECOVERING COGNITIVE SCIENTIST, 27, FROM THE UNITED STATES
ARE INTERNS AT MSR
CHOSEN MEMORY: 1 MONTH AGO

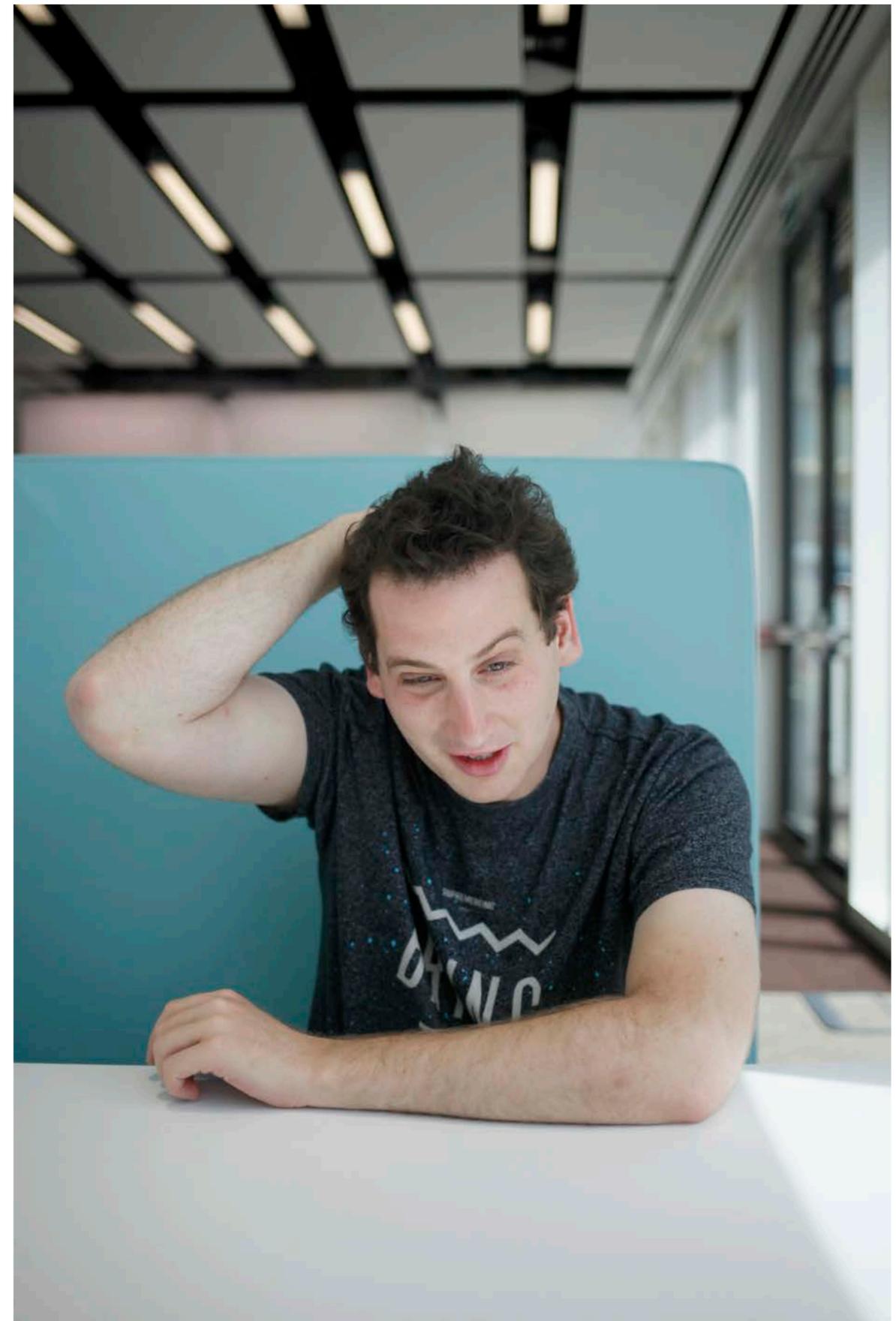


“I’m not very picky on who
I share memories with.
Depends on the memory...

Part of it to look
cool, part of it
to actually share.

’Cause I mean it’s my stories
and I kind of like them. I kind of
want people to experience also
through my stories. I don’t
know if they do.”

—
Motivation for sharing memories



“Long has such a...
It's like a nice short story.”



“But that's probably
bad in a way
because this distorts
it, right?”

“Hm. I mean, what's distorting, right?
It's all about distorting.”

Memories are
all about distor-
ting, you know.”

“This is a little bit cynical but I feel like oftentimes people bring up memories as a way of showing off and this is kind of why I don’t post to social media and I’m actually very sceptical of pictures. I feel like nowadays we live in this age where people take pictures as a way of not even documenting their life but actually constituting their lives.

Like ‘I’m a happy person’ because there is a lot of Facebook photos depicting me doing happy stuff. So it’s like a way of creating some image of yourself. So if anything it might be like a little bit of that. ‘Oh look at this, I got this cool memory of me.’ Yeah.”

Motivation for sharing the chosen memory



IV

MACRAE ARCHITECT, 52, FROM CANADA
AND YULIA PSYCHOLOGIST, 43, FROM TATARSTAN
ARE A MARRIED COUPLE
CHOSEN MEMORY: 3 YEARS AGO





“I think it’s social bonds that we build with people. And in the case of somebody that you don’t see that often like my really old friend... we talk about things that are new in our lives but we always come back to at least a few old memories as well.

I think it helps to frame existence, almost.”

—
Motivation for sharing memories

M: “In my story I basically invited myself along for your trip and you said that you invited me, which is very nice actually.”

Y: “I invited you, dear, I remember it...”

M: “’Cause I thought, I kind of pushed my way into your trip.”

Y: “No, I made you an offer, I remember it. And it was important, what you would say to me. For me it was important.”



The other version

M: “No... yeah... ’cause what happened when we were on our way up,

we were going through some little town, and we pulled up behind some big truck. We thought it just stopped at a light.. And all of a sudden it started backing up. And it was a big, big lorry and he couldn’t see us. And I’m driving a new motorcycle that had different controls than mine, and I was trying to find the horn. And in the meantime I was like this, going backwards as fast as I could. There was this big truck coming towards us. And I managed to get the horn just at the last minute and then the guy stopped.”

Y: “I even don’t remember it. I remember that you were nervous. That’s all.”

M: “My heart was going bunk bunk bunk bunk.

Don’t you remember?”

Y: “Absolutely not.”

M: “And I think it’s interesting that you made the comment about this art gallery.”

Y: “It was a strong feeling.”

M: “I remember it now afterwards. I had forgotten about that.”

Y: “Really?”

M: “Yeah.”

Y: “I nearly cried. How could you forget?”





“In a way I think it’s
really sweet that
she doesn’t
remember the big
dangerous moment, where
we nearly died.””

—
Sharing experience



“I think, for a couple that has some problems, this is a good therapy..

I think... it's very, very helpful for family history... To share it.

It makes people more close to each other. And I think this is the best result of this process.”

Thoughts on this memory sharing process

V

MARCO MATHEMATICIAN, 25, FROM ITALY
AND MAX ENGINEER, 28, FROM ITALY

ARE FRIENDS

CHOSEN MEMORY: 1 1/2 MONTH AGO





“It’s a way of keeping connected with a person, especially when you share things of your own life. So by giving and receiving a memory, which you normally don’t have because of the distance. And when you are close and you share memories, it’s a way to keep the relationship fun and genuine, I guess.”

Motivation for sharing memories

“As I’m abroad... not to lose contact with my friends. That’s one motivation. So I’m talking now about me sharing memories with friends back in Italy.

As I’m studying in Denmark I haven’t been there for three years. So it’s a way to say: Hey I’m still alive!

And then... just to create a group. I think It’s nice to share memories, to feel more like family, even with friends.”

Motivation for sharing memories



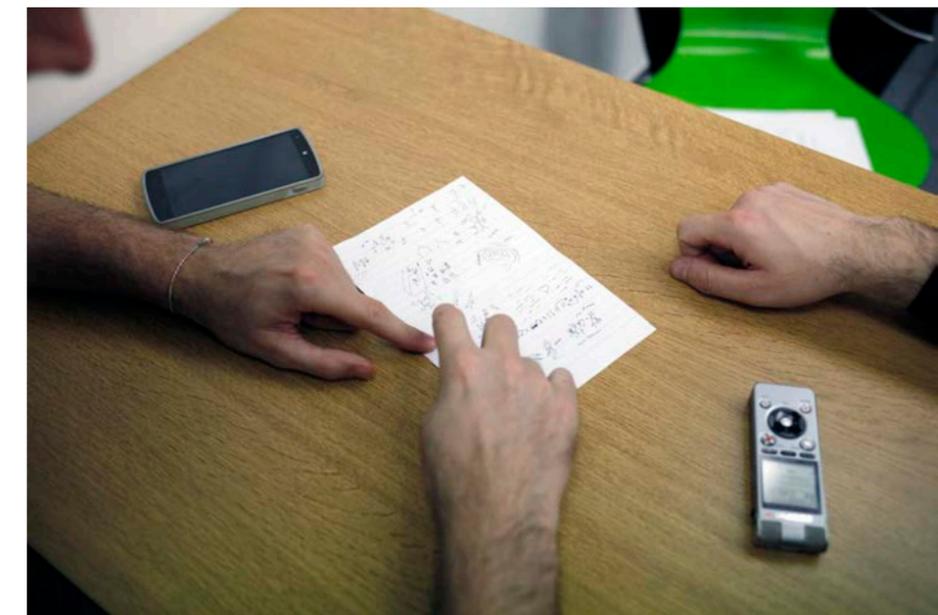
“ It’s very energetic.
I can feel
his smile while
typing. ”

– Max



“ When I saw this drawing, I actually could
remember
the whole day and also
compare to what I wrote. ”

– Marco



Max: “I think in a way they are complementary.
One can read and look at the picture.”

Marco: “I would like the idea of the text, that you
could lift the piece of paper and find the figure.”



“He has a different perspective. I mean for him it was the day he met Dori.”

“I didn't remember this:
it was a fight between
two drunk people.
I remember it clearly now but
when I was writing it... no.”

– Marco

“We biked home while
the sun was about to rise. I kind
of skipped the going home part.

How did we even
get back home?”

– Max

Things forgotten



INSIGHTS

GENERAL

12 participants (6 pairs) took part in the study and 18 interviews were conducted in total. The following are key insights that emerge from these discussions:

Participants share memories usually when they see each other face to face and on Facebook. Since many of the subjects are geographically distributed from their friends, digital ways of sharing stories, pictures, and videos were particularly emphasised, including Skype, Dropbox, E-Mail and WhatsApp: “I have several groups with people – one with my classmates from the high school, one with my close friends, one with my basketball team I was playing with.”

Participants share many personal experiences including good times, fun(ny) memories, travel, “events, that happened, what people said, what people did.”. One participant said: “With people that I don’t know that well, and in a social scenario, usually I share information mostly, things I’ve done, where I’ve been. When it’s with some friends of mine, and I have something that was very emotionally intense, than I share emotions.” Sharing sad memories was not mentioned and if raised by the interviewer, dismissed.

Photography was often mentioned as a favourite way of sharing memories with one another. “Anytime I leave, I just print photos of me and my friends and maybe behind the photo I write something. It’s like, remember this moment together and all the moments: So I really enjoy to give someone something related with our past together. I think I feel that a lot when I’m leaving or I know it’s not for a long time.”

Participants mostly share memories with family, life partners and close friends or to help someone out with a memory that refers to a similar experience. People decide what memory, and to what depth they share, depending on the audience. People who see each other often tend to reminisce in a more casual way.

The main motivation for sharing memories is to establish a connection with people and because it feels good. One participant distinguished his motivations for sharing memories: “If it's in a social context it makes you feel good because you show that you have an experience on something. Also, you feel by putting all your experiences

or your memories in a pool, you learn stuff from others as well. And also you give incentive for someone else to share as well. In a more friendly slash personal context it's about sharing the load as well. And seeking advice.” Another motivation mentioned by a participant was “to look cool”.

CHOOSING

Participants did mostly choose positive memories, although two participants shared a memory with mixed feelings. Remarkably, all shared memories were described as “bonding experiences”. Participants emphasized this by describing the chosen memory as “a grinding point”, “intimate”, “intense” or “significant”. One participant commented: “The memory we chose was actually the most intimate memory we have (...) It was that memory actually and that experience together that brought us closer.”

The motivation to share the chosen memory with a selected person was mostly to get a different perspective on the experience, to “keep it alive” or to reconstruct the remembered event. Interestingly, 7 participants commented that they knew at the moment when the experience took place that it would be memorable to them in the future.

CREATING

Participants created artefacts in a range of media, both physical and digital. In total there were 7 physical artefacts (1 3D-model, 2 papers with pictures on, 1 hand written note, 1 printout of text, 1 puzzle, 1 drawing) and 7 digital artefacts (5 written documents, 1 audio, 1 video).

To create their artefact representing a memory most participants reminisced using only their own memory: “I have it here in my mind. Just through like internal pictures if you can call it so, and feelings I guess. No media.” A few participants looked through their pictures, e-mails, websites or WhatsApp to refresh their memory, even if the experience was a month ago: “I looked on our conversation on WhatsApp of the day to see how we started the day.”

Participants predominantly chose a form for their artefact that was most comfortable for them to create. One said for example: “I guess writing it down is like the easiest for me.” Besides the comfort other aspects were considered as well: “I wanted to do something that was appropriate to what the thing was, that we originally made together.”

One participant did decide to choose a form that was unusual for them: “I guess since I’m working with texts and words for so long, I just decided to have a picture, because it was kind of refreshing and nice to think in pictures instead of words.” When it comes to analog vs digital: “I didn’t handwrite it because my handwriting is terrible. First of all. Second, the online document actually, I can have a copy, just in case I forget. And the video was an addendum... to make it a little more personal, I think.”

Most participants only marginally considered the other person in their pairing when planning what form their artefact should take: “I guess, I just wrote it more for myself in a way.” / “I think I’ve done it in a more spontaneous way without thinking. So now that I think about it ... he will not understand anything of that picture.” (Note that the “he” referenced here actually did understand the picture quite well.)

4 of the participants did however reflect on the role of the other person in the creation of their artefact: “The text I’m writing, even though it’s just my thoughts pouring into the text, surely is being affected by my relationship with him as a result to be the format in the way I’m writing and the way I’m expressing myself, it’s directed to him, is affected by our relationship and him.”

Asked if there were facets of the relationship with the other person that surfaced in the created artefact, one participant answered: “Well every single detail. So I understand what he likes. A lot of decisions when I put this together were just about, you know, keep it minimal, keep it kind of pure to the original idea.” Another one said: “I think the puzzle (...) he loves games. (...) So I know he loves to do something. So it was kind of a game for him.”

These individuals also considered that their artefact would vary depending on the memory and the person they would create it for: “I mean, if I would make it for somebody else, who might appreciate classical piece of design, it would be a little bit more expressive. This is expressions through functions.” Another participant said: “Depends on the memory. The amount of time that you are investing is relative to the significance, I think.” And another participant said: “For each different person and each different memory it might have been an entirely different thing.” Another participant said: “I think I would have chosen same media... (...) I think I’m a visual person. That’s how I remember things. In terms of the way how I present it I might have adapted that depending on the audience. (...)

You try to get an idea about how people will perceive what you will give to them. And of course that will have an impact on. If I would have had someone else, I would have done that differently, yeah. In which way would depend on who it would be.”

In addition, they considered that creating their artefact required selectiveness, choosing what to include or not in terms of detail: “I mean as I don’t know what he thinks about that stuff with X. for example, I didn’t put so much detail into it. Because maybe it would be embarrassing for him to see my point of view. I didn’t feel like being too detailed.” Another said: “It’s an interesting concept, where I’m remembering memories but in the context of another person’s memory as well. So there is an influence there about the things I’m choosing to remember of creating some image of yourself.”

SHARING

After exchanging artefacts participants would reflect on what they had received before starting the joint discussion. Participants usually felt the need to immediately discuss their thoughts. Often they had similar feelings towards the memory as the other subject. When reflecting on the received artefact they would recall details that the other subject forgot or misremembered: B: “These are the images that you did for me. I remember that night you went home and..” D: “What! Really?” B: “You don’t remember them? You made them (..)” D: “No you must have done those.” B: “No you did them. You did all that.” D: “What was I thinking.. I didn’t know about..”

Besides differences in details some participants had different focuses in their recollection. In one case, for example, priorities were evidently different: one participant couldn’t remember a dangerous situation that had occurred for both during the period of their shared memory. Both remembered significantly different details of the experience that they had had together.

Participants observed how their individual memories enhanced that of the other, and vice versa: “It does enhance. There is a stronger bonding to know what we actually felt.” Another said: “For me it does fill in a logic of how we ended up going to a restaurant that had only bad reviews.” Sometimes one had a different scope than the other: “It had in perspective all three of us, while my version had only us two.”

Although the shared experiences in the study ranged from 1 month to 10 years in the past this seemed to have little impact when it came to similarities or differences between participant’s recall. Some participants reflected on how this process of recalling and sharing the memory with another would influence the recollection of the same experience later. Overall, participants found the experience of the memory sharing process to be a positive one.

Participants were often surprised about how complimentary their artefacts were. Some were very similar, like a puzzle of pictures from one subject and a collage of pictures from another. In some cases the artefact would become more a conversation starter than a stand-alone record. This was especially the case when a physical object was created, as it was harder to “read” than a written document. These items are subtle in what they imply about the shared memory and contain no inherent chronology about it. Compared to memoirs and diaries they are not composed linguistically and therefore not directly readable by others. How a received artefact is interpreted, then, depends on many things, including the closeness of the relationship between participants or the specificity of the chosen memory.

COMBINING

The possibility of a joint artefact created by both participants was considered, but dismissed as potentially problematic. Some participants could imagine a record that would combine elements of their individual records, but most participants didn’t wish for a joint item: “I personally feel that it’s better that they stand by themselves.. Because it should be each person’s perspective on things. It doesn’t necessarily have to be merged to be more authentic” or “because it’s a new thing that you are putting together, a new event, a new piece of creativity. To think about putting two things together creates something new, that didn’t exist before. I think that artifact would remind us of this moment instead of that one (the original memory).”

CONCLUSION

Exploring artefact-based memory sharing led to reflect on many things, both general as well as specific. Hopefully, insights outlined earlier are of interest to others when designing applications or services for sharing memories.

The process shown in “Memory Dialogue” also has value as a tool for uncovering and reflecting different memories from multiple participants of the same experience. While it might set up tensions over things that had been forgotten about or remembered differently, overall it can be a useful vehicle to share cherished memories, as well as those that are complex, tricky or buried. As one participant, a psychologist by training, pointed out, the process could be used to explore family history or as a form of therapy. It might help to playfully create a way to talk about things that are ordinarily hard to discuss.

As a next step it would be interesting to explore how this process of artefact-based memory sharing could be developed without the need of facilitation by a third person. It may also be interesting to explore a broader space for different form factors as well as how technology might influence the experience. How might a person’s artefact combine both physical and digital elements? Could it be portable, carried with the subject, as a mobile memory or should it be kept in a private place?



“You know, I’m jealous of your ability to be sentimental about the past.

I’m not able to do that. I remember
things as they were.”

Trudy, Mad Men



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