According to my English dictionary, memory is “the sum of everything retained by the mind”. Consequentially, very few elements of our ordinary human communication are not closely related to memories or at least to a high degree dependent on our mind’s “ability to store and recall past sensations, thoughts, and knowledge”, which is another of the definitions of memory given by the dictionary (Collins 1995).

From the point of view of narrativ analysis, there is no evidence that the rendering in narrative form of the mentally stored goods that we call memories would follow other compositional rules than the retelling of any other experiences whatsoever for which we have other designations. The explanation is simply that no experience can be conveyed in narrative form until after it has happened. Thus, strictly spoken all narrations of personal experiences should be regarded as retold memories, even if some of them are so fresh as to be told almost as they happen and some may even be the experiences of somebody else than the narrator. Even narrations about events in the future could in a sense be regarded as memory narratives since they retell thoughts and imaginations that precede the telling – even if they concern the future.

However, we are all aware of the existence of the emic genre that could be called retold memories or simply memories, meaning the verbal representation of a certain recollection. Observe that we are dealing with a cultural genre, not a biochemical or psychological phenomenon, perhaps not even a narrative one, but that still remains to be seen. Classifying a personal experience narrative as a memory is a keying (Goffman 1986, 43 ff) that allows the narrator to make use of certain possibilities and informs the audience of how to interpret it. Well known keying formulae are: “I can remember…”, “I have a strong memory of…”, “As far as I remember…” This keying bestows that which is remembered first with a distinct quality of something that is selected and thus important, simply by not belonging to the sad category of forgotten experiences. And as we all know there is a constant process of exchange between the two groups: we forget what we once remembered and we come to remember what had been forgotten and we remember vaguely or we forget in part (cf Ricoeur 2005, 109, 190). Memories presuppose the existence of forgotten experiences.

Second, memories are very personal. We are often astonished of how differently our minds operate, when comparing what we remember of a certain event with other persons’ remembrances of the same situation. This shared experience allows every memory narrator to be extremely personal and subjective when deciding what to tell and how to present it.

This personal quality of the memories actualizes the phenomenon of private ownership to certain stories. Especially personal experience narratives, but also quite a few narratives existent in collective traditions, can become strongly associated with a certain narrator. There are cultural agreements regulating how close to an experience you have to be to be allowed to claim ownership to the narrative about the event. Just as in legal language, in everyday conversations we separate between an eyewitness report and hearsay. We are not supposed to retell other persons’

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1 Paper read at the conference "Memory and Narration", Helsinki, November 16, 2006
experiences and this is especially evident concerning intimate stories keyed as memories. We all have an exclusive privilege to tell our own memories. To suggest a preliminary definition we could regard retold memories as a subgenre of personal experience narratives that are specially selected, often intimate and subjective, and strongly connected to the teller.

In this text it is my purpose to try these ideas when examining two retold memories.

**Example 1**
My first example is a painful memory told by a 73-year-old retired telephone worker, “KS”, from Northern Sweden. This is his story of what happened when he at the age of 18 started working with a telephone line building team. He had been employed by a relative of his, by the name of Larsson, with whom the rest of the workers recently had had a conflict. KS had to go 120 km by bicycle to get to the working place and he was totally unskilled in building telephone lines, since he earlier had been working in a tannery.

His story is transcribed according to ethnopoetic guidelines (Klein 1990) and divided according to the elements of sociolinguist William Labov’s model for narrative elements (Labov 1972, 363).

**Orientation 1 (place)**
1. KS: And when that was over then we were to draw wire between
2. between eh Härnösand and Häggdånger

**Keying**
I remember

**Orientation 1 (continued)**
3. UP: yeah
4. KS: Mm mm

**Orientation 2 (time)**
5. in the fall then

**Orientation 3 (persons)**
6. (audible inhalation) eh since eh
7. you know it was Larsson’s former workers who were eh in this lot here
8. UP: Mm
9. KS: And they had a grudge against Larsson
10. UP: I see
11. KS: So they had a grudge against me too
12. UP: Mm mm
13. KS: ‘cause he was my relative
14. UP: Mm yeah yeah

**Orientation 4 (action)**
15. KS: Mm mm and we were to dance out the wire there
Complication
and nobody (…) told me how to dance out a wire, oh no
16. UP: Mm hm

Resolution
17: KS: So I just had to turn around
18. UP: Mm
19. KS: And they pulled the wire. Dance you bastard! they said. Dance you bastard!
20. (swallows twice)

Pause Particles
21. oh yes

Resolution continued
22. and you know I danced till I threw up
23. UP: Did you really?
24. KS: Yes
25. (swallows several times)

Evaluation
26. (in a low voice) yeah it was unbearable, I tell you

Coda
but by and by you learnt the technique
27. how it should be done

This retold memory has the form of a narrative conforming to all the rules. It starts up with four orientating pieces giving accurate information about the place, the time of the year, the participating persons, and the character of the action, although an outsider would probably need to know more about the geography, about why the teller’s workmates had a grudge against Larsson and exactly what it means to dance out wire. The keying is inserted into the first piece of orientation. The complication lies in the fact that the eighteen-year-old boy does not know how to dance out wire, “nobody told me…”. The resolution of the narrative is that his older workmates make the unskilled boy work so hard that he is vomiting. In the coda, the teller concludes by stating that finally he had picked up the technique.

The emotional charge is expressed verbally in the laconic and very restrained evaluation (line 26) with the simple statement “it was unbearable, I tell you”. The strongest expression of emotion, however, is nonverbal. Retelling this humiliating experience 55 years after it happened made the teller so moved that his voice failed him twice (lines 20 and 25) and he was close to weeping.

The narrative style is sparse, almost meagre, with no distracting details and very few pauses and repetitions, only few pause particles and filling out sounds. The narrative is concentrated and is efficiently following one single storyline.

The narrator’s voice is calm and controlled all the way up till the climaxing moment of the narrative, where it becomes fierce and bitter when quoting his malignant fellow workers. Then his voice fails him, he swallows several times and is close to start weeping. During the short narration his attitude changes from spirited and
almost merry in the beginning when recalling his expectations for the new job he is beginning. Soon his voice becomes more thoughtful and hesitating as the story draws him closer towards the humiliating moment. When he retells this, he has lost all distance to his narrative. I get the impression that he is back in 1933, in the forest outside Häggedånger. He can hear the older workers shout at him, he can feel his fatigue, his nausea and perhaps most important, his lack of control, the feeling of being a helpless victim under somebody else’s command. Finally, he gains control over the narrative, as well as over his voice and his feelings and in the concluding coda he returns to the time and the place of the conversation.

There is no question that this retold memory should not belong to this very narrator. Nobody else could tell this story without losing the emotional tension. The story as such is not unique, it could certainly be ordered into a large group of examples of young workers who has experienced being harassed by their older colleagues. But, when placed in such a group the personal, intimate and emotional qualities typical of the retold memory disappears.

This efficiently told memory narrative leaves no space for discussion or questioning. It is absolute, definitive, and self-containing. These qualities imply at the same time that disturbing or contradicting elements must have been left out, disregarded, forgotten or suppressed by the narrator. I can only guess what these completing facts can be: other harassments, perhaps of a more disgraceful quality? Or, examples of empathy, assistance, or solidarity that would make the story less one-sided and thus less efficient?

**Example 2**
In my second example a sixty-one-year-old woman tells about her arrival to Visby 35 years earlier as newly married.

**Connecting Particles**
1. And eh mmm

**Abstract**
2. then

**Keying**
what I remember as, as I think the VERY very best memory

**Abstract (continued)**
here from Gotland

**Orientation**
3. it was when we stood
4. on top
5. of the boat
6. (…)

**Orientation**
7. and it was a WONDERFULLY pretty morning
8. (…)

4
Orientation
9. and the sun was just pouring down here ov, over the city you see

Observation/Impression
10. and I saw this
11. city just like,

Intertextual Comment
well just like I wrote to you

Observation/Impression
as if rising out of the ocean just there (sighs)

Reaction
12. (whispering) no, ooh how beautiful it is
13. OH, HOW BEAUTIFUL IT IS

Metaphorical Comment
14. this is a fairytale

Prediction
15. this is going to be good

Reaction
16. I am FREEE

Interpretation
17. I am on my way to MY home
18. MY very own home

Complicating Action
19. and as we step off the boat

Resolution
there is an old
20. an old man from Pelle's (her husband's) job (swallows)
21. and he comes up to us and
22. and wishes us welcome

Orientation
23. he had heard that we were coming, you see
24. and he was, he used to walk down in the mornings at the bo, to the boat to have a look you know many did so, Visby citizens, in those days
25. (breaths) just like they used to walk down to wave good-bye when,
26. (laughs) in the evenings, you know

Emotional Evaluation
27. and I felt SO good
Orientation
28. here was a human being WELCOMING me at once as you stepped off the boat and wished you good luck and that we were going to have a good time and so on

Positive Prediction (to be matched by future disappointment)
29. of course it had to be GOOD
30. it couldn't be anything else I thought

This narrated memory was told towards the end of a three-hour-long conversation that had been dominated by disappointments. The newly married twenty-six-year-old woman arrived in Gotland full of hope and expectations. A year later she had experienced the loss of her first child, later still she had several serious fits of pneumonia, and during all her grown-up life she suffered from her bad teeth. When arriving in Gotland, she felt liberated after having left her very restricted life with her parents, but later on she discovered that she had difficulties in handling her new freedom. Even as an adult, she had been adapted to living under strong parental guidance. Now, she felt that both her neighbors and her husband’s relatives treated her as an outsider; she felt lonesome in her role as a housewife living very close to her two infant children, but with only few adult contacts. In her marriage, she often felt abandoned by her husband, who, in her opinion, devoted too much time to his friends and hobbies. According to her life history, they never came to experience the beautiful, fairy tale life that she once dreamt of.

It was against this dull background that the happy recollection of the arrival by boat in the early morning 35 years earlier was retold. The dramatic effect – intended or not – is the sharp contrast between her naïve expectations and the somewhat harsher outcome of her life.

Geographically and chronologically, this episode is situated at the very borderline between the old life she is leaving and the new life still in front of her. But in the narrative composition, the episode is placed after she has completed the telling of her life history, when she is considering what she has just finished narrating. In the terms of William Labov, this episode could be regarded as part of the coda of her life history. The episode has the function of connecting the preceding telling with the narrative situation, which is taking place 35 years later in her living room in a modern apartment building in central Visby, her two grown-up children having left home, and her retired husband sitting on an armchair beside her. Or, when seen in relation to the preceding three hours of conversation, this entire episode could be regarded as an emotional evaluation with its dominance of lyrical over epic components. When compared to a comic anecdote, this episode achieves the function of a punch line that at the end of a story suddenly and unexpectedly throws new light on what has gone before it – although this so called punch line will most likely inspire misery rather than laughter. Had it on the other hand been told in the correct chronological order, it would probably have achieved the function of a complicating action corresponding in a logical way with the series of disappointments following it.

The authority she demonstrates in her role as a narrator, as well as the elegance and swiftness of the telling, convinces me that she has retold this episode several times before. She had also related it in a letter to the interviewer prior to their conversation. I do not think it is possible, however, to determine whether she is
retelling a textualization of the event that she made already in 1945, or whether the story was composed at some later point in time. Neither is it possible to know to what extent the story has achieved a set form and wording or if she in each narrative situation recomposes it, based on her recollections of earlier tellings.

Thus, in this example, we are able to discern a dialogue between at least two human minds, the 1945 experiencer and the 1980 recollector and narrator, and maybe many more in between them. My intellectual problem, if I want to focus on the expression of emotions, is where are the – obviously strong – emotions situated? Does the retold memory express the feelings of the young woman of 1945? If so, are these feelings shared by the older woman of 1980? Or, do we have one set of feelings located in 1945 and another one evoked by the emotionality of the 1980 recollection, and to what extent are the 1980 emotions to be regarded as an evaluation of the 35 years in between or at least of her narrated version of them? Or, are the emotional signals to be understood as one last desperate try to evoke repentance and a bad conscience in her husband who has been listening to her life history where she puts a lot of blame on him for her disappointments. Or is she begging for the compassion of the interviewer, who for almost three hours has been listening to her moving life history without much expressions of empathy?

When I applied William Labov’s scheme of narrative components to the transcript of this piece of conversation, I found that out of 30 lines, only four could be identified as core elements of a narrative. Line number 19 contains the complicating action “and as we step off the boat” which receives its immediate resolution in lines 20 through 22: “there is an old, an old man from Pelle’s (her husband’s) job (swallows) and he comes up to us and and wishes us welcome”.

It is obvious that the dramatic impact neither of this simple narrative fragment nor of the telling as a whole lies in its forceful epic composition. The four line epic piece shows only a weak connection between complication and resolution, creating hardly any tension at all. And, as already mentioned, 26 out of 30 lines could not be regarded as narrative or epic at all.

Abstract, orientation, and evaluation in the labovian sense occur in altogether six instances. There is no coda in this part of the transcription, although, as I already mentioned, the episode as such could be regarded to form part of the coda of the entire conversation.

To be able to handle the remaining 20 lines, I have had to add a number of compositional elements to Labov’s model.

One element (occurring in lines 10 and 11) I have termed **observation/impression** “and I saw this city just like, [...] as if rising out of the ocean just there (sighs)”. The sentence expresses the woman’s observation of the city of Visby at daybreak, but at the same time it reproduces her impression or interpretation at that time of what she is seeing and experiencing. My interpretation of this sentence is that it should be understood as a verbal expression of the interplay between a sensual impression and an emotional sentiment. Any of the two can be given the role of cause or effect, but it is also possible that they exist simultaneously and in continuous interplay.

The function of lines 12, 13 and 16: “(whispering) no, ooh how beautiful it is, OH, HOW BEAUTIFUL IT IS” and “I am FREEE” I have termed **reaction**, since it
describes the woman’s response to the combined observation and impression of the preceding lines. Formally, the exclamations are quotations, expressing what she thought, or said, or could have thought or said at the time.

Formally, line 14, “this is a fairytale” is also a quotation, whether it was actually uttered, thought or imagined. It too could certainly be termed a reaction, but since it is a regular metaphorical expression, I have chosen to call it that. In her dissertation for the licentiate degree, Carina Johansson (2006, 4ff) has demonstrated how the image of Visby as a fairy tale city rising out of the sea is an old and widespread tourist cliché.

Line 27, “and I felt SO good” is an evaluation where the speaker for a moment leaves the flow of talk, steps outside the role of narrator to comment upon her own tale. I have chosen to call this an emotional evaluation to emphasize this quality.

Predictions have a narrative function similar to Labov’s complicating action, since they postulate a corresponding element confirming or refuting their correctness. Thus they are efficient narrative tools to illustrate the dialogue between the narrators’ selves in different phases of their lives. The positive prediction of lines 29-30 corresponds with the whole series of disappointments of the rest of the narrator’s married life (which have, in this case, already been told of in the almost three hours of conversation preceding this example).

Line 11, “just like I wrote to you” is an intertextual comment referring to a letter she had written to the interviewer before their conversation and the first line of the transcript contains a series of metalinguistic connecting particles filling out the space between this part of her narration and the one preceding it.

To sum up, this 30-lines-retold-memory consisted of only four lines that could be defined as narrative, while nine were different expressions of emotions. In the terms of literature science, this tale was more lyrical than epic. 17 lines could be termed abstracts, orientations, evaluations, intertextual comments, connecting particles or simply breaks and silences.

Structurally, the tale opens with three orientating elements that could have been taken from any stereotypic success story: the speaker is arriving someplace by boat to begin a new life, at daybreak and the sun is shining. She has the impression that the city where she is going to spend her life is rising out of the sea. Then follows a series of emotional expressions and after that a roughly outlined narrative of a positive meeting. It all ends up with a positive prediction, which is a logical consequence of the composition of the tale, but which in fact is a cruel irony, due to the positioning of this episode after she has told of all the disappointments that actually followed this hopeful occasion.

The narrator accentuates emotions by a very conscious use of her voice, almost like a musical instrument. She emphasizes single words, most often adjectives, she lowers her voice to an almost toneless whispering, she repeats sentences, she makes her voice sound joyful, dreaming, surprised, intense, keen or energetic.

All narrators position themselves in terms of intimacy or distance in relation to their telling. Normally this is achieved by adapting attitudes such as irony, satire, condemnation, admiration, empathy, or compassion. This narrator has adopted a
very close position to her telling. She tells it from the inside, in an intense and intimate mood with several quotations taken out of the actual situation. But, at two points she leaves this insider position to make a remark to the interviewer concerning facts outside her story. This shows that she is not as totally absorbed by her story as she may sound like. Maybe the intimate mood is only the skilled performer’s conscious choice to make the story more efficient?

Summary
In this presentation I have suggested that retold memories could be regarded as a subgenre of personal experience narratives. They stand out as highly marked, not necessarily for formal reasons, but rather because they are being keyed as memories by narrators when starting out to tell them. This keying conveys a set of cultural agreements concerning the quality of what is going to be told:

- it has to be self-experienced,
- for one reason or other this experience has achieved the status of being remembered in contrast to everything the narrator has forgotten,
- the fact that it is remembered bestows this recollection with a sense of certain importance,
- the fact that it is self-experienced allows the narrator to demonstrate a high degree of intimacy and subjectivity without running the risk of being questioned,
- this in turn makes retold memories a rewarding channel for expressing emotions,
- these emotions can be communicated formally and verbally by applying more lyrical than epic means of expression, or non-verbally through the use of different voicings or modalities.

Literature