

PERSONAL REFLECTION EXERCISE

Research Methods: Personal Reflection

HSC Core: Society and Cultural Continuity and Change

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Syllabus Links

The nature of social and cultural research methods

Students develop knowledge and understanding of research methods by examining:

- the features of primary and secondary research
- the nature and characteristics of quantitative and qualitative research
- **the characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of the following research methods:**
 - personal reflection

Syllabus Outcomes

H6 evaluates social and cultural research methods for appropriateness to specific research tasks

Rationale

Personal reflection is an aspect of the HSC core syllabus which, as a research method, students would not have explicitly covered in the Preliminary course.

Personal reflection can be somewhat difficult to comprehend. It is not just a matter of writing a few personal thoughts about how one feels about an issue; rather it involves statements, commentary and analysis of tangible qualitative evidence related to personal encounters such as journals, diaries, essays, blogs, poems, photos, memoirs, mind maps and so on. In this way, it is a systematic research method. In the *HSC Core: Social and Cultural Continuity and Change* unit, students are asked to examine its characteristics as well as its strengths and weaknesses. Within the *HSC Core: Personal Interest Project (PIP)*, a student may also use personal reflection as a primary research method.

The following exercise aims to provide students with the opportunity to deconstruct and apply the research method of personal reflection.

Personal Reflection: The use and evaluation of personal experiences and values to demonstrate analysis and interpretation of data in the context of the research focus.

(Society and Culture Syllabus, Glossary, (2013), NESA, p.56)

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Sample Personal Reflection

Read the following extract and answer the questions that follow

“If there is one thing that COVID-19 has taught us, it is that what we expect to be ‘normal’ can well be very subjective. My preferred hobby - traveling overseas - was stymied indefinitely, so the next best thing seemed to be unearthing old photo albums and travel diaries.

Better than the very few indistinct photos that were actually taken, were the clear and evocative images manifestly real in the scribblings of my travel diaries, all 70 of them. (One day I am certain that they will find their way into a museum.)

What follows is my recollection of my very first trip to Rome and its environs. It is not only an insight into a past holiday, it is more a reflection on a different way of life – that of the mid-1970’s - which reminds me of days of staying at home as a teenager, not doing too much: something that society recently has realised during its lockdowns.

So, let me take you on a trip back to January 1977. A land of refreshing Blue Bow Lemonade and crunchy Chokito chocolate bars. At that time, when you asked someone the inevitable summer question, ‘what are you doing in the holidays, mate?’ you certainly didn’t get the near-contemporary response such as ‘Hawaii’, ‘Bali’ or ‘Fiji.’ It was more like ‘um, Coffs’; ‘um, the Gong’ - or most frequently – ‘um, nuthin.’

I was just about to embark on a six-week trip to Italy: something as rare then as getting a cappuccino that wasn’t powder, hot water and Carnation milk. In 1977 people just didn’t go overseas for a holiday, yet I had just spent a ridiculous \$1800 on a Qantas return flight. Until recently, you would be considered a lightweight if you had to spend this much on a trip to Europe when it typically costs about \$500 cheaper in internet-airfares land. Let’s put things into perspective. I was 20 years of age, doing an Arts course at University, and working two part-time jobs to scrape up this monumental fare. Then, a trip to the movies cost \$2 only. A fish-and-chips lunch was \$3, with an extra 20 cents for a soft drink. I was working two part-time jobs: as a drink waiter by night and as a shirt salesman at a department store every Thursday night and Saturday morning (shops closed at midday!) I had just left a fast-food outlet – originally working for \$2.22 an hour – fed up with the smell of hamburgers.

For a time, I was an usher at the Minerva Theatre, Kings Cross. My father had ‘put on’ a number of live performances: the best one being that of dancer, actor and singer Ginger Rogers. Getting paid to watch a Hollywood icon was even better than watching Bill Collins’ Golden Years of Hollywood on a Saturday night.



It all went into my little bank passbook slush fund (savings fund). The bank teller actually wrote the deposit by hand (and signed it).

I had at one saintly light-bulb moment thought of Rome as a possibility in 1975: the official ‘Holy Year.’ The eventual catalyst to going to the Eternal City was that our local priest – and good friend – Father T was studying in the Vatican, and offered to do the ‘From Rome with Love’ deal. He was the original Trip Advisor.

The Minerva Theatre, Kings Cross in the 1940s.
Source: https://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/the_minerva_theatre_and_metro_kings_cross

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My brother Tim was my Roman Holiday partner. My preferred guidebook was 'Europe on \$10 a Day' by American Arthur Frommer who obviously didn't do too well at sums to come up with this figure.

True, at the time, a pleasant Roman 'pensione' (hotel) – a room with bed only - cost 500 lire: about \$5, but a Roman meal with primo, secondo, dolce and vino cost twice that. We have always loved the idea: better to sleep in humble surroundings than go without a good Italian nosh-up (meal).

Because there was so little information other than our next-door neighbour's photos, this was the quintessential play-it-by-ear trip. This is really another way of saying that we didn't have a clue.

In terms of packing, we purchased 'lumber jacket' coats, oversized shoes, and took lots of travellers' cheques, all ready for the Banco di Spirito Santo (what else would Rome's main bank be called?) We eschewed beanies and earmuffs, by virtue of having a very healthy head of seventies-style hair. We only needed a visit to the barber every six months.

There were no 'wheelie' suitcases; in fact, our carry-on luggage was what was ambiguously called an 'overnight bag', which was appropriate for a 30-hour trip. We took 'long-johns' to wear under our trousers: to put them on was the equivalent of getting into a wet suit. They did keep our skinny legs warm, so long as we didn't forget to take them off at night with the central heating, otherwise, our legs would feel as if they were pushed into some industrial-type toaster.

A visit to the airport to farewell somebody was a very special outing: one had to 'dress up'. There was even an open observation deck with a makeshift telescope that faced the tarmac: not sure how that would go these post - 9/11 days.

Checking in was very streamlined: the big question was 'smoking or non-smoking?' It really didn't matter, as in-flight the waft of cigar smoke would find its way to your seat and wake you up. Other than making sure that you didn't take weapons on board – I'm thinking 'Airport' and the follow-up film 'Airport 1975' where the air hostess flew the plane – there was no security as such.

Onboard, the service was very attentive. Food – in plates and with cutlery – and drinks – even including cognac glasses – was abundant and plentiful. I was so excited with the first lunch that I put cottage cheese in my coffee instead of sugar.

In-flight entertainment was another thing. I use the word 'entertainment' very loosely. Passengers were issued with a stethoscope-like attachment which was inserted into the very pit of one's eardrum that gave a fairly limited array of music and humour, punctuated by lines such as, 'sit back and relax, not that you can go too far.' After the last of the after-dinner mints, a steward deftly flipped a screen in each section of the cabin to reveal the flight's one-and-only movie. To be fair, I say 'movie', because the next time the steward-usher did the same thing, we entertainment-starved passengers only got a TV show ("I Spy" and "Colombo" were favourites)

The stopover in Singapore was to be our first stop, but we took so long organising ourselves that we missed the chance. "Stopovers" did not mean a change in aircraft: it meant that the plane was just like a bus – you hopped off for a drink and got back on. We were a bit quicker with the Bangkok whistle-stop: meaning that stepping onto Thai soil makes Thailand the first "official" country I've visited; my next visit there would be four years later where I would buy my famous Thai tie.

For anyone who has travelled overseas, the most mystifying experience surely must be the carousel. Even now, I am perplexed as to the lax arrangements in security: rarely does anyone check that the crunched-up piece of paper on one's pocket matches the flimsy bag tag. Who's to stop someone running off with a much more attractive bag? (Actually, this did happen to me in Frankfurt in 1979)

'Welcome to Rome', lyrical words from Father T. Within 24 hours the advice was, 'write a travel diary.

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Otherwise, it will become a *mélange* of events.'

The best advice ever. If I had relied on photos for a recollection, I would have had very blurred memories. Taking photos then was a matter of aiming a camera and waiting for the results from the chemist who processed photos as well as scripts.

What follows is an excerpt of each of the 70 diaries. My memories could be fading, but not the words from my Bic biro.

Italy and environs: 16 January – 3 March 1977

"Roma e Roma e basta". Rome is Rome: enough said.

Imagine discovering for the first time - and experiencing them all at once – all that one now takes for granted: pizza, gelato, mineral water, cappuccino, blood-red oranges, artichokes, pastries such as profiteroles and cheese such as gorgonzola. And any bread that wasn't sliced white. Then, add the specialties such as spaghetti with clams, roast kid, and a fanciful pasta such as bombolotti.

Imagine going from St Mel's Campsie (I still don't know who St Mel was or is) to St Peter's Basilica.

Imagine studying First Level Art in Sixth Form with a love of Renaissance art and seeing Raphael's 'Transfiguration' in the extravagant Vatican Museums (I was transfixed by gazing at it for 40 minutes).

Imagine being a monolingualist, and then going to sleep with phrases just as 'posso avere un mezzo litro di vino bianco' and 'mi chiamo e Stefano Fornaio' percolating in my espresso machine of a mind.

Imagine being a movie buff, and seeing Fellini's 'Amarcord' at an intimate cinema in Rome – the Pasquino – albeit in a cinema full of locals puffing and commenting on every scene.

Let's not detract from the other places visited outside of Italy: the south of France and Switzerland. Yet, despite these charms and wonders – and that of the rest of Italy – it is Rome that will also be associated with 'viaggio numero uno.' I have to agree with Audrey Hepburn when she declares that Rome is the highlight of her 'Roman Holiday'.

Three Roman experiences, in particular, stand out.

Seeing the Tomb of Raphael at the Pantheon with its epitaph is the sort of final wording that most people would die for.

"When he was born, Mother Nature feared to be outdone. When he died, she too feared to die."

Slurping spaghetti and clams, before the main course of roast kid and then gooey cake and ice cream was enough for me to 'souvenir' (take) the menu and later laminate it.

Da Ciceruacchio was a prison in Trastevere – across the Tiber River – where waiters donned striped prison garbs. Our favourite was prison waiter number 5001. Not sure if you could get away with it nowadays. A group of minstrels did the rounds whilst one was chomping on grissini; we always requested the song 'Vecchia Roma', the Roman equivalent of Tommy Leonetti's 'My City of Sydney' (the song the routinely closed Channel 7 each night of the end of transmission).

Listening to music at a 'salotto musicale' in an intimate space, seated next to the pianist, featured an array of musical items starting at 10 pm, accompanied by a gin and tonic (which we sipped for four hours).

The person behind the microphone – performer, songwriter, poet, linguist, philosopher – was Enzo Samaritani. Enzo deftly captivates a small audience with his philosophies of life with his profound lyrics

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and serene guitar. Every now and again there is someone who touches your life and the mere thought of such a person brings a radiance to your everyday life. Enzo Samaritini is such a person.

Truly quintessential experiences.

The diary entry for Friday 21 January 1977 reads as follows:

“Took a trip to the Bank of the Holy Spirit for reimbursement.

Down main street to see the Pantheon – listened to its description – saw Raphael’s tomb, signed the Pantheon’s book.

Along the Templi Repubblicani (cats roam the ruins) to Teatro Marcello – ‘mini Colosseum’ with houses actually constructed against the monument’s walls!

Long walk to St John Lateran’s, along with Via S Giovanni. What a cathedral! Marvellous rendition of the apostles in statue form flank the 2 sides of the nave. Apse includes Byzantine mosaic. Transept includes some of the Last Supper’s table. Bronze door from a Senate building from early Rome, forms the main entrance.

Visited San Clements. Original Roman rooms. Maze of underground excavations.

Then, the best meal I’ve ever eaten! Bombolotti al modo mio; turkey and French fries; ice-cream cake; superb red wine (a first) and still mineral water (also a first) at Da Giovanni at Hadrian’s Bridge!”

Other than Roma, we were fortunate enough to have visited Firenze, Assisi and Venezia. We had one specific reason to see Venice: to find the elusive Dwarfie Lady.

Previously, we had seen a film entitled ‘Don’t Look Now’, a 1973 Nicolas Roeg film. In it, –spoiler alert – the villain of the piece is a diminutive woman wielding a long knife who stalks the canals, and is mistakenly confused as the dead child of Donald Sutherland.

As a result of this preoccupation, we set about scouring the canals of Venice, closely examining every smallish person who was clad in red.

This added a spooky dimension to a captivating situation. It was almost as if we really expected the Dwarfie Lady to appear.

Eschewing the overpriced and extravagant gondolas, at least we were able to crisscross the Grand Canal on a more humble version to the markets each day to buy an ‘etto’ of cheese, salami and olives. A bit different from my routine peanut butter sandwich for lunch.

Florence – Firenze sounds better – was notable for the first pair of boots that I owned: I liked them so much that I went jogging in them (all good practice for my second City-to-Surf race that year).

Assisi featured the hospitality of a convent’s accommodation and the rose bush without thorns where Francis was tempted; Milan the feast of Da Vinci’s The Last Supper; Aosta the snow-covered Monte Bianco (better known as Mount Blanc) and Sienna a cathedral so beautiful that I actually drew it in my diary.

Meeting Father T’s relatives in Piedmont was a chance to experience Italian hospitality at its finest. The food was so fresh that even the trout was awakened from its daze in a little pool to be unceremoniously clobbered before it sizzled in time for lunch.

Outside of Italia, we ventured to Switzerland for a day trip for lunch, and to the south of France: little did we know that Tim would be writing crime fiction very near Nice one day!

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It was the quintessential travel experience: visiting France by day and staying in Italy at night. The city of Ventimiglia was perfect for gnocchi and bed, whereas the city of Nice was perfect for art and culture.

Here is my diary entry for Monday 21 February 1977:

'Departure for Ventimiglia – the border town between Italy and France. We left Turin at about 10 and had a real madcap trip on the way day down to Savona (we were extremely high-spirited, perhaps it was the Piedmontese food). We waited a while at Savona, then picked up another train that would give us our first glimpse of the Mediterranean Sea. Hopped on a German compartment (this was hooked onto the train: second class and red interior) The coast trip was wonderful because we got a great view of the majestic Mediterranean lapping up against the beaches (90% desolate – rock and pebble – hardly any sand)

Arriving at about 3pm, we checked into a very economical and worthwhile hotel. We changed and I tried the squirting shower but with no results. There was no shower curtain and no drain, so the water seeped out and into the bedroom! After the mess was cleaned up, we made tracks to the border, which I thought was very exciting. We went through passport control into the French section of the platform (technically still in Italy though), caught the train, went through a tunnel, and 'viola': France! The first view of the French Riviera (by night) through another long tunnel and, Monaco – what an impression! Dreamy lights adorned the water. The walk around Monaco and down to the casino was pure magic. Dined at the Louisiana Bar and tried terrene and a pepper steak. Took the train back across two borders to Italy once again.

After a customary trip to the Trevi Fountain, being given an Enzo record from Father T and hearing the same in-flight program and seeing the same movies on Qantas, it was back home with an Italian accent.

I started planning for my next trip as soon as I returned'

Consider the following question in relation to the personal reflection:

1. In terms of personal reflection, how does the passage qualify as a valid example? Why?
2. How does the author indicate a 'reflection within a reflection'?
3. What conclusions does the author arrive at upon reflecting?
4. In terms of change over time, what aspects does the author indicate are most prominent? What do you think are society's main changes as indicated in this passage?
5. What aspects of continuity are prevalent? Are there similarities with what you have experienced in terms of travel?
6. How are references to popular culture utilised? Is it effective?
7. Have you ever written a travel diary or journal? If so, has it been a useful exercise? Why or why not?
8. What advantages and disadvantages exist in today's methods of recording memories of travel experiences?