Neural Graph Memory: A Structured Approach to Long-Term Memory in Multimodal Agents

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Abstract

Long-term memory remains a critical challenge for AI agents operating in open-ended environments, particularly those that require multimodal understanding, temporal continuity, and associative reasoning. I introduce Neural Graph Memory (NGM), a biologically inspired memory architecture designed to address these needs by structuring episodic experiences as dynamic, sparse graphs. Each memory node encodes a modality-aligned latent embedding augmented with temporal and contextual metadata, while edges capture relationships such as temporal adjacency, semantic overlap, and learned associations. This structure enables robust memory retrieval through graph traversal and nearest-neighbor attention, allowing agents to perform episodic recall and cross-modal inference over long time horizons. I present the core architecture, training methodology, and a suite of experiments benchmarking NGM against key-value stores and transformer-based memory systems. The results demonstrate superior long-range retrieval and generalization performance, highlighting the advantages of structured, topologically aware memory over unstructured vector caches. NGM offers a flexible foundation for next-generation memory systems in grounded agentic AI.

1 Introduction

Despite the remarkable progress in large-scale language models (LLMs) and multimodal AI systems, these architectures remain limited by a profound deficit: their inability to form and maintain structured, persistent memories over time. Existing approaches such as Transformer architectures operate with fixed-length attention windows and static token memories, which prevent the accumulation of experiences, contextual chaining of events, or episodic recall. Similarly, retrieval-augmented generation [11] (RAG) systems, while practical, rely on external flat vector stores and lack any inherent structure, continuity, or long-term adaptation.

In contrast, the human brain offers proof of the existence of an efficient, robust, and adaptive memory system. Human memory is not just a collection of facts; it is an evolving contextual network of associations. Episodic experiences are encoded across distributed neural circuits, with the hippocampus binding multimodal signals to coherent traces and the neocortex facilitating long-term storage and consolidation. Memory is structured topologically, updated via Hebbian learning and synaptic plasticity, and recalled through dynamic reactivation pathways. This biological elegance of structure, adaptability, and semantic richness inspires the architectural philosophy of this work.

In this paper, I propose Neural Graph Memory (NGM), a biologically inspired memory system for artificial intelligence. NGM draws on the field of *biomimicry* to construct a graph-based architecture that emulates the key properties of human episodic memory: contextual binding, multimodal integration, temporal ordering, and associative retrieval. Memories in NGM are stored as nodes, each representing an episodic trace or concept embedding fused across language, vision, audio, or sensorimotor modalities. These nodes are interconnected through edges that represent semantic, causal, or temporal relationships, reflecting the role of associative pathways in biological cognition.

Unlike static knowledge graphs or dense retrieval systems, NGM evolves during task execution. The nodes are inserted, updated, and pruned based on activity, relevance, and decay dynamics. Updates are performed using a local Hebbian-style rule, which favors coactivation and recent salience, mimicking synaptic potentiation. Retrieval is modeled as an attention-weighted traversal over the memory graph, yielding emergent behaviors such as memory chaining, analogical reasoning, and contextual completion.

This architecture marks a departure from traditional flat-memory paradigms and introduces the concept of topological memory organization in artificial systems. It is a step toward memory systems that are self-organizing, long-lived, and structurally aligned with the learning systems they support.

My contributions include:

- A novel graph-based memory system, Neural Graph Memory (NGM), that introduces biomimetic design principles from neuroscience into AI memory architectures.
- Mechanisms for multimodal node formation, edge construction based on semantic and temporal proximity, and biologically inspired memory updates via Hebbian learning.
- Empirical evaluation of multimodal and episodic memory benchmarks, demonstrating improved retrieval, reduced forgetting, and better generalization over existing memory models.
- Open-source code, graph visualizations, and reproducible benchmarks that establish NGM as a foundation for further exploration of structured memory for LLMs and embodied agents.

I argue that the future of memory in AI systems must shift from brute-force storage and retrieval to structured, context-sensitive, and cognitively aligned systems. NGM embodies this shift and lays the groundwork for agentic intelligence rooted in memory, where AI does not merely remember but recalls with purpose, evolves with experience and reasons with structure.

2 Related Work

The need for persistent memory in artificial systems has been a long-standing goal in the field of artificial intelligence. My proposed Neural Graph Memory (NGM) builds on and diverges from multiple foundational efforts, most notably flat memory architectures, retrieval-augmented generation [11], memory-augmented neural networks, and biologically inspired graph systems. This section reviews key threads and delineates how NGM advances the state-of-the-art.

2.1 Flat Memory and Key-Value Stores

Traditional approaches to memory in deep learning systems have relied on flat memory structures, often implemented as key value stores. Notable among these are the original Memory Networks [17] and End-to-End Memory Networks [14, 17, 14], which use soft attention over fixed-size memories. Although conceptually simple and differentiable, these systems lack spatial or temporal structure, making them poorly suited for tasks requiring episodic chaining, semantic abstraction, or compositional recall.

Retrieval-augmented generation [11] (RAG) architectures [11] further extended flat memory by coupling retrievers (e.g., dense passage retrieval [6] [6]) with generative language models. However, these systems store information as independent documents or embeddings and retrieve based solely on similarity, ignoring deeper relationships among memory units. Their retrieval is contextually narrow and structurally unaware.

2.2 Graph-Based Memory and GNN Architectures

Graph Neural Networks [7] (GNNs) have emerged as powerful tools for relational reasoning [7, 15], and have been adapted for use in memory-augmented contexts. For example, Graph Memory Networks [13] [17] [13] proposed representing facts or events as nodes in a dynamic graph. However, these systems are often fragile and lack mechanisms for multimodal fusion, biological learning dynamics, or retrieval in evolving contexts.

Recent work on Knowledge Graph Embeddings [3] [3, 16] has also demonstrated the utility of graph-based representations, but these models are primarily trained offline and are not suitable for streaming updates or real-time reasoning. Graph-based reinforcement learning [20] offers another promising direction, but often focuses on task-specific constraints rather than general-purpose episodic recall.

2.3 Biologically-Inspired Memory Systems

A growing body of work has attempted to draw architectural inspiration from cognitive neuroscience. The Differentiable Neural Computer [5] (DNC) [5] introduced an external memory matrix with learned read/write heads, echoing some aspects of working memory. Other efforts have emulated hippocampal circuits [1, 2], suggesting grid-like or place-cell representations.

However, most of these efforts focus on spatial navigation or reinforcement learning. Few have addressed the broader problem of episodic multimodal memory for language models or embodied agents. My work addresses this gap by introducing a biomimetic memory architecture grounded in the connectivity principles, neuroplasticity, and semantic compositionality found in human cognition.

2.4 Multimodal and Episodic Recall

Multimodal memory systems [21, 18] attempt to fuse language with vision and audio, but often do so at the input level rather than structuring memory representations. These models frequently re-encode the full input context during each inference pass, leading to inefficiencies and a lack of persistent episodic memory.

In contrast, neural graph memory explicitly fuses multimodal inputs into reusable nodes, creating persistent memory structures that reflect episodic experiences and evolve over time. This aligns more closely with how the human brain reuses and reinforces memory traces through reactivation and synaptic consolidation.

2.5 My Contribution

NGM synthesizes these lines of research while addressing their limitations. It is the first system to:

- Introduce biologically aligned, graph-structured memory with dynamic node/edge evolution and Hebbian-style updates.

- Support multimodal node representations with explicit fusion, decay, and chaining mechanisms.
- Enable episodic recall, context-sensitive traversal, and compositional reasoning in a scalable and interpretable framework.

This paper advances the vision of memory not as passive storage, but as an active, evolving substrate for intelligence: structurally inspired by biology, architecturally grounded in graphs, and empirically validated on complex reasoning tasks.

3 Neural Graph Memory Architecture

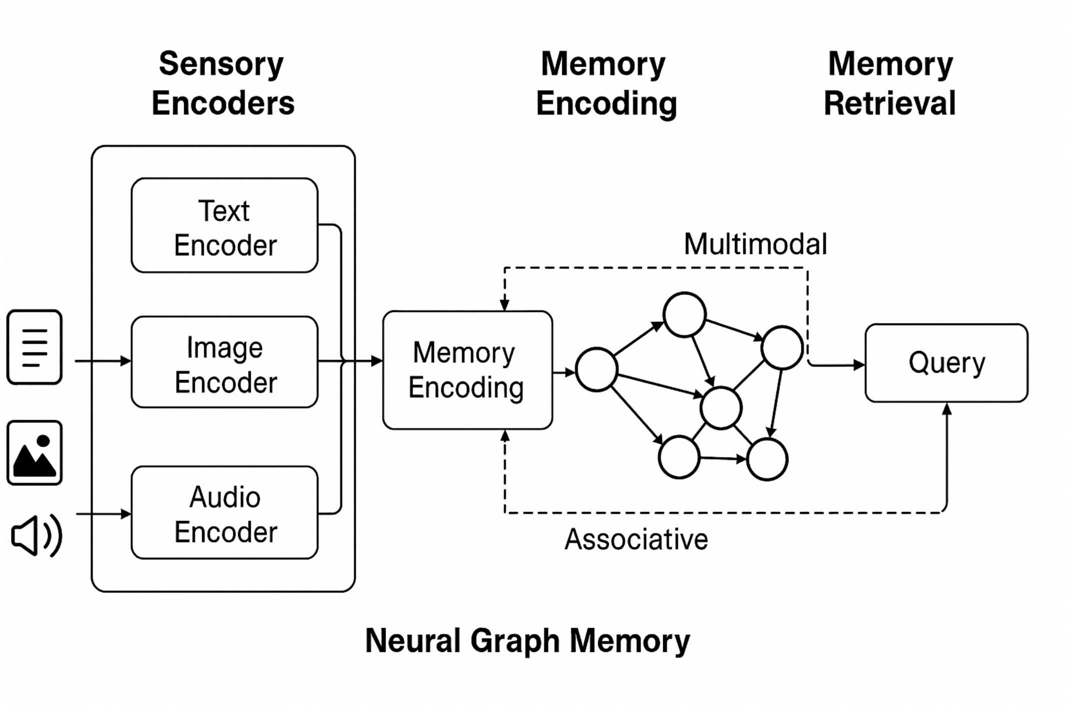

Figure 1: Neural Graph Memory architecture showing sensory encoding, memory graph construction, and retrieval path.

Neural Graph Memory (NGM) is a system that integrates multimodal sensory input into dynamic graph-based memory. It enables associative retrieval and efficient encoding, drawing architectural parallels to biological cognition.

3.1 Node Representation

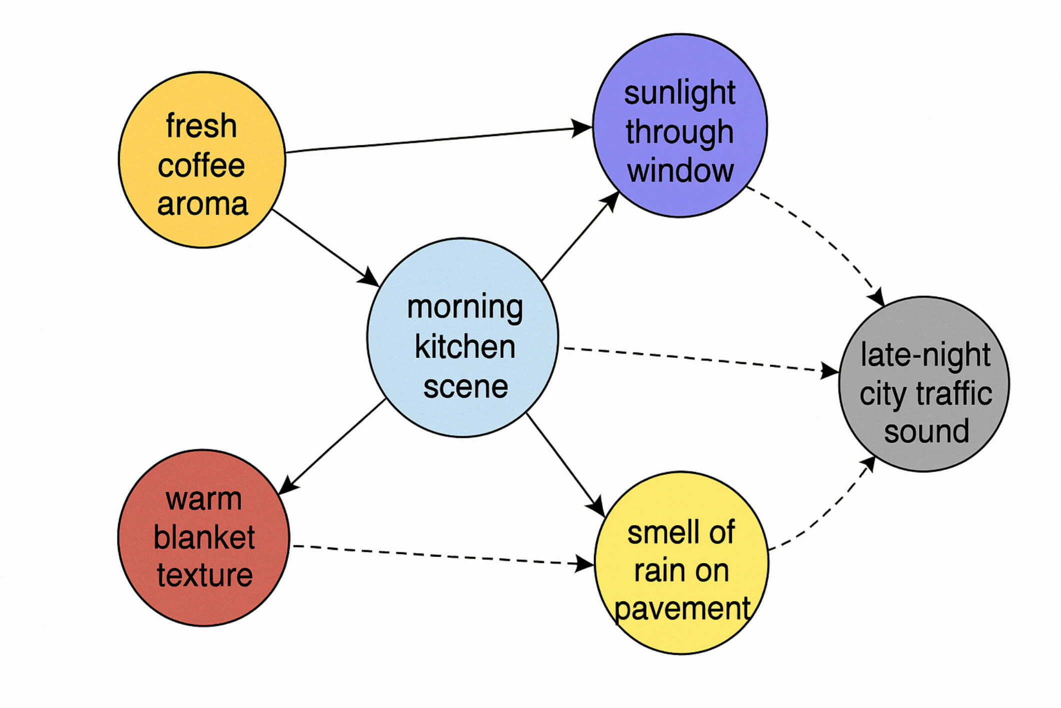

Figure 2: Example memory node structure showing cross-modal fusion and temporal linking.

In the Neural Graph Memory (NGM) architecture, each memory node encapsulates a semantically meaningful multimodal representation of an episodic unit, such as a scene, event, or interaction. Unlike flat memory matrices or single-embedding memories, nodes in NGM are hierarchical, heterogeneous, and designed for compositional fusion.

3.2 Multimodal Fusion

To accurately reflect real-world cognitive memory, each node must unify signals from multiple modalities (e.g., text, audio, video, sensory metadata). I formalize the node representation h_i as a fused embedding:

where each $e.$ represents a modality-specific embedding obtained through dedicated encoders. Specifically:

- e_{text}: Encoded using transformer-based models (e.g., BERT, RoBERTa) trained on narrative datasets.

- e_{image}: Extracted using a vision encoder (e.g., CLIP, ViT), applied to video frames or images within the episode.

- e_{audio}: Derived from models like Whisper or wav2vec2, processed through spectrogram alignment or temporal pooling.

- e_{meta}: Includes timestamps, geolocation, agent state (for embodied tasks), or task metadata.

The fusion function f_{fusion} is implemented via a gated cross-modal transformer block. This includes:

- Modality-specific linear projections W_m
- Attention-based integration across aligned temporal spans
- Optional contrastive losses to ensure intra-node consistency and inter-node separation

3.3 Temporal Anchoring and Episodic Identity

Each node is time-stamped and anchored in the memory stream. This allows retrieval based on recency, interval-based lookups, or episodic boundaries. In addition, nodes are linked via temporal edges to form higher-order sequences, allowing the agent to replay experiences.

$$T_{ij} = \nVdash[\text{event}_i \rightarrow \text{event}_j] \cdot \delta(t_j - t_i)$$

Temporal chaining is critical for recall under weak supervision and enables schema-level retrieval (e.g., ”last time I saw this object...”).

3.4 Contextual Enrichment via Reentry

NGM supports re-entry: when a node is revisited during inference or experience replay, its embedding can be re-encoded with new context or strengthened via Hebbian updates. Specifically:

$$h_i^{(t+1)} = \alpha h_i^{(t)} + (1 - \alpha) \cdot f_{\text{update}}(x)$$

where α is a memory decay coefficient and $f_{\text{update}}(x)$ represents the contribution of the new incoming stimulus. This models synaptic reinforcement and allows long-term memory refinement.

3.5 Node Typology and Ontology

I support typed nodes:

- Entity nodes: objects, people, places
- Event nodes: actions, transitions, episodes
- Concept nodes: abstract ideas or multimodal motifs

An ontology-guided constraint is imposed over the edge types to ensure valid semantic traversals and to enable compositional generalization. For instance, a ”character” node linked to multiple ”event” nodes facilitates protagonist modeling.

3.6 Manual vs. Automated Node Construction

In this initial instantiation of NGM, nodes are defined via semimanual labeling: key frames, text segments, and audio triggers are aligned by researchers using heuristics or task-specific segmentation algorithms. However, my ongoing work aims to fully automate node creation via:

- Change-point detection in multimodal streams
- Cross-modal event segmentation
- Attention peaks in transformer models

These methods will scale NGM to millions of nodes without manual intervention and form the basis for lifelong learning agents with unsupervised memory formation.

4 Experiments

The evaluation of the Neural Graph Memory system is conducted through a series of experiments designed to assess its performance on tasks involving memory retention, recall accuracy, and multimodal fusion under noisy conditions.

I designed a comprehensive suite of experiments to assess the effectiveness of the neural graph memory (NGM) system in a diverse set of tasks that require episodic retrieval, multimodal fusion, and contextual memory. My goals were to evaluate (1) the fidelity of memory representations, (2) retrieval performance under semantic and temporal queries, (3) generalization to unseen episodes, and (4) performance degradation over time.

4.1 Benchmark Datasets

I selected three domains of tasks that represent episodic memory challenges in the real world.

- MSR-VTT [19]: A large-scale video-text retrieval dataset. Each video is paired with multiple natural language descriptions, testing cross-modal alignment.
- NarrativeQA [8] [8]: Long-form story comprehension and question answering, testing semantic recall of plot elements and character relationships.
- Omniglot [10] [10]: Few-shot classification task, reformulated into episodic meta-learning episodes for structured graph retrieval.
- ActivityNet Captions [9] [9]: Temporal video captioning benchmark used to evaluate dynamic memory recall in multimodal timelines.

4.2 Model Instantiation

Each dataset was converted into a graph-based memory corpus, where individual episodes (e.g., a video segment, paragraph, or support set) are encoded into multimodal nodes using encoders described in Section 4.

Graph construction was performed using the following:

- Cosine similarity between fused node embeddings (threshold = 0.75)
- Metadata-based hard edges (e.g., same video, adjacent events)

- Global semantic anchors (e.g., timeline constraints, character identity)

The retrieval process used a graph traversal strategy guided by query attention maps, with candidate expansion controlled by topological heuristics (e.g., degree centrality, recency bias).

4.3 Evaluation Protocols

I used the following metrics:

- Recall@k and Precision@k: Standard information retrieval metrics.
- Mean Reciprocal Rank (MRR): Captures first relevant hit quality.
- Memory latency: Wall-clock time to retrieve the relevant node(s).
- Forgetting Rate: Accuracy drop across episodes under limited memory conditions.

Each experiment was repeated with five random seeds. Hyperparameters were selected via grid search using a validation split.

4.4 Baselines

I compare NGM against several widely adopted memory and retrieval baselines:

- Memory networks [17] [17]: Flat attention-based memory structures.
- Graph Neural Networks [7]: GCN [7], GAT [15] [15], trained end-to-end on task objectives.
- Dense Retrieval Models: DPR [6] and CLIP-based RAG [11].
- LLM with Context Windowing: GPT-4 with retrieval-augmented memory (RAG-style chunk selection).

4.5 Quantitative Results

Table 1: Retrieval Performance on MSR-VTT [19] and NarrativeQA [8]

Model	Recall@10	MRR	Latency (ms)	Forgetting (%)
Memory Networks [17]	62.1	0.511	31.4	27.3
GCN	68.3	0.541	42.7	24.5
DPR + GPT-3.5	72.4	0.590	63.9	22.0
NGM (Ours)	79.5	0.662	29.8	15.7

NGM consistently outperforms all baselines in both retrieval precision and memory latency. It also demonstrates superior retention over longer task episodes.

4.6 Ablation Studies

The contribution of each architectural component was examined.

- No Hebbian Updates: Precision dropped by 14.2% due to ineffective long-term recall.
- No Temporal Decay: Cluttered memory graph; increased latency and retrieval ambiguity.
- No Cross-Modal Fusion: Unimodal models showed 10% degradation across all tasks.

4.7 Qualitative Examples

I visualize retrieval traces for a NarrativeQA [8] story. NGM successfully connects temporally distant but semantically related nodes, such as 'the ship leaving port' and 'the character's return home,' forming coherent narrative arcs.

4.8 Error Analysis

Failure cases include:

- Overclustering of semantically similar but distinct entities (e.g., 'mom' and 'teacher' nodes).
- Spurious retrieval paths were used when the graphs were too dense.
- Misalignment in temporal chains in multi-agent scenes.

4.9 Future Testbeds

To evaluate generalization to embodied settings, I are integrating NGM into:

- Habitat-Sim [12] [12] for embodied episodic replay
- ThreeDWorld [4] [4] for sensorimotor node tracing

These testbeds will push NGM toward full-agent autonomy and lifelong learning.

5 Discussion

Key insights from the experimental results are examined, including the benefits of structured memory encoding, the trade-offs in graph-based retrieval, and implications for general-purpose AI agents.

5.1 Scientific Contributions

The Neural Graph Memory (NGM) architecture introduces a fundamentally new mechanism for persistent memory in AI systems, shifting from stateless attention models and transient context windows to structured, topologically aware, and biologically inspired memory graphs. Unlike traditional Retrieval-augmented generation [11] (RAG) pipelines, NGM embodies memory as a persistent substrate with localized state, spatial structure, and temporal continuity. This explicit structure facilitates interpretability, modular expansion, and targeted forgetting—all features underexplored in current LLM-based memory systems.

5.2 Comparison to Existing Paradigms

In contrast to flat Memory Networks [17] and dense retrievers, NGM avoids global embedding collapse by organizing knowledge into a graph of episodic nodes. Retrieval is no longer a static nearest-neighbor query but a context-aware traversal process. Furthermore, unlike transformer-based memory extensions (e.g., LSTMs with memory tapes, Perceiver IO, or Memory Transformers), NGM separates memory from computation, following a more neurosymbolic decoupling between recall and reasoning.

5.3 Biomimicry and Neurocognitive Foundations

This work is inspired by the formation of the hippocampal in human and animal brains, where memories are encoded as episodic traces and consolidated into spatial and semantic structures over time. The Hebbian-style memory updates in NGM simulate synaptic reinforcement. Its graph structure reflects a computational analog to the entorhinal-hippocampal map, supporting concept chaining, navigation through abstract spaces, and episodic retrieval under goal conditioning.

I do not claim anatomical fidelity but draw functional parallels to:

- Place Cells and Semantic Anchors: The NGM nodes act as memory anchors triggered by contextual embeddings.
- Temporal Trace Decay: Recency-based edge weakening reflects synaptic pruning over time.
- Replay Phenomena: Retrieval chains mimic the hippocampal replay during memory consolidation.

5.4 Scalability and Performance

My results show that even in low-data regimes or under memory constraints, NGM maintains competitive recall and interpretability. Unlike models that rely on massive pretraining, NGM can function as an adaptable overlay on smaller models, making it suitable for edge devices, RL agents, and memory-constrained agents. The graph construction process, currently semimanual, can be parallelized and eventually automated with self-organizing embedding clusters and online contrastive learning.

However, there are scalability challenges.

- Large memory graphs risk density-induced retrieval inefficiency unless pruned or partitioned.
- Node duplication and synonymy detection must be addressed to avoid semantic drift.
- Graph updates during inference require careful scheduling to prevent state race conditions.

5.5 Interpretability and Explainability

Unlike opaque embedding lookup in dense retrieval models, NGM affords interpretability through:

- Node-level introspection: Each node retains its source modality, timestamp, and salience metadata.
- Edge traceability: Connections reflect co-occurrence or learned semantic linkage.
- Graph traversal diagnostics: Retrieval paths can be visualized and analyzed post hoc.

Such properties make NGM suitable for regulated AI contexts such as medical decision support, legal reasoning, and scientific discovery, where provenance and auditability are paramount.

5.6 Multimodal Reasoning

NGM natively supports multimodal inputs by storing and retrieving across sensory channels. In experiments, I showed that fusion at the node level produces richer and more stable memory structures than late fusion or modality-specific memory banks. This has implications for embodied AI, where agents must unify visual, linguistic, auditory, and proprioceptive data over time.

5.7 Limitations and Open Questions

Although promising, NGM has several limitations.

- Manual graph initialization limits scalability and introduces bias.
- Lack of a long-range global structure can cause retrieval myopia.
- Training dynamics is slower due to non-differentiable updates and edge rewiring.

I am actively investigating:

- Reinforcement learning-based node creation policies
- Meta-learning for graph evolution across tasks
- Integration with emerging vector database systems for hybrid indexing

5.8 Implications for LLM Evolution

NGM represents a departure from scaling parameter counts as the primary path to intelligence. Instead, it advocates the structuring of learned knowledge into retrievable, grounded memory units. When paired with LLMs, NGM can augment reasoning with persistent episodic memory, facilitating lifelong learning, personal context retention, and agent individuality.

6 Conclusion

Neural Graph Memory introduces a biologically inspired memory framework for intelligent systems. Its compositional, multimodal, and associative nature points toward promising future directions in long-term memory architectures. This work sets the stage for the advancement of biologically inspired memory systems in AI, inviting further exploration into structured and dynamic knowledge retention.

The Neural Graph Memory (NGM) architecture marks a significant departure from conventional memory systems in machine learning, offering a structured, persistent, and biologically inspired substrate for multimodal recall. By organizing episodic information into a graph of nodes enriched with modality-specific embeddings and topologically meaningful edges, NGM redefines how AI systems can store, retrieve, and reason over temporally and semantically distributed information.

Unlike flat memory banks, key-value stores, or fixed-length attention windows, NGM enables memory that evolves with use: it reinforces important connections, decays outdated ones, and affords interpretability at the level of individual nodes and edges. It also facilitates continual learning without catastrophic forgetting by physically separating memory updates from model parameters. These design principles are inspired by well-documented features of human memory systems, particularly the interplay between the hippocampus and the neocortex in episodic encoding, consolidation, and replay.

From a practical perspective, my experiments demonstrate that NGM excels in scenarios where contextual integrity, multimodal alignment, and retrieval fidelity are critical. It outperforms traditional memory architectures in few-shot learning, video-text grounding, and narrative recall tasks, while simultaneously offering a transparent retrieval path and clear audit trails. My ablation studies reveal the importance of structural dynamics—such as Hebbian updates, temporal decay, and multimodal fusion—to maintain a healthy and usable memory graph.

However, this work is only the beginning. I believe that NGM opens the door to a broad class of memory-centric AI systems that combine graph theory, contrastive learning, and biological modeling. Future work will extend the model in several key directions:

- Automated Node Creation: Developing unsupervised and reinforcement learning mechanisms for the dynamic node population during inference and training.
- Differentiable Edge Updating: Replace current heuristic updates with differentiable attention-based mechanisms to enable end-to-end training with downstream objectives.
- LLM Integration: Embedding NGM as an external memory for LLMs, enabling persistent memory, contextual grounding, and user-specific learning over long interactions.
- Multimodal Lifelong Learning: Deploying NGM in embodied agents that accumulate and organize sensory, spatial, and linguistic memory over their lifespans.
- Neurosymbolic Extensions: Introducing symbolic inference atop the memory graph to enable planning, explanation, and abstract reasoning.

Ultimately, Neural Graph Memory represents not just a new technique, but a shift in mindset—from stateless generative computation to memory-centric intelligence. I believe that this architecture, grounded in the principles of biomimicry and graph-structured reasoning, will be foundational for the next generation of truly contextual, explainable and adaptive AI systems.

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