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# *On Media Memory*: Editors' Introduction

## **Defining the field of Media Memory**

The title of this volume, *On Media Memory*, echoes, of course, Maurice Halbwachs' seminal work *On Collective Memory* (1992/1925, 1980/1950), but it also denotes the uniqueness of this volume: alongside the numerous works that are devoted to the systematic exploration of 'collective memory' and the increasing prevalence of this concept (or, at times catchphrase) in public discourse, this book brings 'Media' and 'Mediation' – both with capital Ms – to the forefront of the scholarly inquiry of collective recollecting. While memory researchers often look at media outlets in order to explore the field of collective memory, and media scholars increasingly investigate the role of collective memory in shaping the news, films, new-media contents and more, this book wishes to offer a comprehensive and integrative view of this theme. That is, this collection conceptualizes and probes Media Memory – not merely as a channel or process but rather as a phenomenon in itself.

Hence, Media Memory – the systematic exploration of collective pasts that are narrated by the media, through the use of the media, and about the media – deserves particular scholarly attention. Investigation, such as is proposed in this volume, introduces the manifestation of Media Memory's multichannel outlets, its multiple approaches and research designs, and the various challenges it poses both to current research in the broader fields of memory studies and media studies and to future investigators of the conjunction between communication and collective recollection.

Media Memory studies are a 'descendant' of both media research and memory scholarship – two multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary fields of study. Therefore, in this volume we wish to position the term

## 2 *On Media Memory*

'Media Memory' (Kitch, 2005: 175–84) as a salient theoretical and analytical concept while presenting its multilayered and complex nature. This multidimensional field of inquiry studies how the media operate as memory agents (What kinds of versions of the past are shaped by different media? What is the 'division of labor' between local and global media or between commercial and public media?); the cultures in which these processes take place (Media Memory as an indicator for sociological and political changes); and the interrelations between the media and other realms of social activity (such as the economy and politics). In other words, focusing on the interface between media and memory enables us to explore each of these fields by using the insights gained from the other; utilizing the study of media in order to probe the field of collective memory research and vice versa – to investigate old and new questions concerning the operation of the media, by means of insights gained through the study of collective memory.

Beyond addressing these fundamental themes, this volume probes current trends and changes that pose new challenges for scholars of Media Memory: the intertwined globalization and localization of the media, numerous technological developments, and the audiences' ever-widening access to media texts dealing with the past, all call for an up-to-date discussion of the significance and implications of Media Memory. Phenomena such as the increasing use of YouTube as an accessible archive of popular and elite/establishment memory, the unprecedented availability of online databases offering media-based documentation of the past (see in this volume the chapters by Katriel and Shavit, Ashuri, Reading, Hoskins, Pinchevski, and Dekel), the ease with which conflicting representations of the past can now be evaluated and compared, alongside the ease with which distorted or even fabricated versions of the past can now be created and disseminated – all require a comprehensive inquiry into the ever-changing relations between mass media and the recollection of the past.

The term 'Collective Memory' was first coined by Hugo Van Hofmannsthal in 1902 (Olick and Robbins, 1998: 106), but French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs is generally recognized as the founder of collective memory research. As a devoted follower of the Durkheimian school, Halbwachs' work identified individual memories and collective memories as tools through which social groups establish their centrality in individuals' lives. Since the publication of Halbwachs' seminal work *On Collective Memory* (1992/1925, 1980/1950) this field has been researched by scholars in various academic disciplines, who have at times disagreed with many of his initial observations. Yet his

basic argument still serves as a guideline for collective memory studies: social groups construct their own images of the world by constantly shaping and reshaping versions of the past. This process defines groups and enables them to create boundaries that separate them from other groups that share different memories of the past, or perhaps, different interpretations of the same occurrences.

Collective memories do not exist in the abstract. Their presence and influence can only be discerned through their ongoing usage. There can be no 'collective memory' without public articulation hence so many memory studies focus on various forms of public expression such as rituals, ceremonial commemorations, and mass media texts; in short, collective memory is an inherently mediated phenomenon.

The media present an essential and uniquely relevant field for studying questions regarding mediation and social construction. The prime reason for this is the dominance and omnipresence of the mass media in everyday life (Silverstone, 1994, 1999) and their decisive role in shaping current collective recollections (Huyssen, 2000). This notion was clearly defined in Gary Edgerton's (2000) introduction to a special issue of *Film & History* entitled 'Television as Historian':

Television is the principal means by which most people learn about history today... Just as television has profoundly affected and altered every aspect of contemporary life – from the family to education, government, business and religion – the medium's nonfictional and fictional portrayals have similarly transformed the way tens of millions of viewers think about historical figures. (7)

Earlier, in her analysis of the role of American journalists in shaping the public memory of John F. Kennedy's assassination, Barbie Zelizer addressed the role of journalists in 'making history':

The story of America's past will remain in part a story of what the media have chosen to remember, a story of how the media's memories have in turn become America's own. And if not the authority of journalists, then certainly the authority of other communities, individuals and institutions will make their own claims to the tale ... It is from just such competition that history is made. (Zelizer, 1992: 214)

Hence, sixty years after *On Collective Memory* was first published, and more than eighty years after Halbwachs' ideas were initially articulated

in ‘Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire’ (‘The Social Framework of Memory’, 1925),<sup>1</sup> we propose to view the shift from *On Collective Memory* to *On Media Memory* as part of the larger process of expanding the scope of memory studies and tracing the ways in which memory studies interface with related fields of scholarship. Therefore, the goal of the *On Media Memory* volume is to provide new perspectives on old dilemmas pertaining to the field of Media Memory, and to advance the field by posing new questions regarding the interrelations between the shaping of collective memories and the role of mass media in changing cultural, political, and technological contexts.

### Media Memory premises

Throughout the last two decades a number of scholars have advanced and developed Halbwachs’ work in numerous ways that connect the guiding assumptions of collective memory studies to the realm of media research (e.g. Kitch, 2005; Olick and Robbins, 1998; Schudson, 1995; Zelizer, 1995). As mentioned, the concept of ‘collective memory’ rests upon the assumption that every social group develops a memory of its past; a memory that emphasizes its uniqueness and allows it to preserve its self-image and pass it on to future generations.

The fundamental role of mediation and the dominance of social construction lie at the heart of these two fields and tie them together. As a result, both fields are demarcated by similar themes regarding issues of representation, socio-cultural power relations, and the role of narrativity in the process of the social construction of meaning. This fundamental interconnectivity between the two fields enables us to point at key concepts, questions, and characteristics that bind these two realms of inquiry in order to look at each of them through the prism of the other. ‘Collective memory’ defines relations between the individual and the community to which she belongs and enables the community to bestow meaning upon its existence. Following this basic assertion, we can summarize the main features of the concept of ‘collective memory’ through five characteristics that illuminate its complexity:

1. **Collective memory is a socio-political construct:** As such, collective memory cannot be considered as evidence of the authenticity of a shared past; rather, collective memory is a version of the past, selected to be remembered by a given community (or more precisely by particular agents in it) in order to advance its goals and serve its self-perception. Such memory is defined and negotiated through

changing socio-political power circumstances and agendas (Edy, this volume).

2. **The construction of collective memory is a continuous, multi-directional process:** Such a process is characterized and defined via an oppositional yet complementary movement from the present to the past and from the past to the present. Current events and beliefs guide our reading of the past, while schemes and frames of reference learned from the past shape our understanding of the present (Schudson, 1997). The process of shaping collective memory is neither linear nor logical, but rather dynamic and contingent (Zelizer, 1995: 221).
3. **Collective memory is functional:** Social groups commemorate their past for different purposes, chiefly to define and chart the boundaries of communities, enabling their members to define group membership in contrast to the 'other' and to reaffirm the group's core convictions and inner hierarchy. And so, social groups may recollect and commemorate their past in order to set a moral example or to justify failures (Sturken, 1997; Zerubavel, 1995).
4. **Collective memory must be concretized:** Collective memory is a theoretical concept that deals with abstract ideals, but in order for it to become functional, it must be concretized and materialized through physical structures and cultural artifacts such as commemorative rituals, monuments (Young, 1993), historical museums (Katriel, 1997), educational systems, the Internet and more.
5. **Collective memory is narrational:** Memory must be structured within a familiar cultural pattern. In most cases, it takes the well-known narrative form, including a storyline featuring a beginning, a chain of developing events, and an ending, as well as protagonists who are called upon to overcome obstacles and so forth. Moreover, the adoption of a narrative structure enables creators of accounts that address the past to charge these tales with lessons and morals that guide and instruct mnemonic communities in the present.

The five above-mentioned features addressing the characteristics, flexibility, and complexity of collective memory can also serve us in pointing at the intrinsic connection between memory scholarship and media studies: Halbwachs described collective memory as 'a reconstruction of the past that adapts the image of ancient facts to the beliefs and spiritual needs of the present' (1941: 7; see also Halbwachs, 1992 [1925]; Douglas, 1986; Schwartz, 1991b). This process of (re)construction requires sites that serve different agents as the ground on which they



build their ideas and versions of the past that are mediated to wider audiences. In modern societies the mass media is the most prevalent site for such construction. Moreover, a basic premise for understanding media operation and investigating it is the social construction of reality (Adoni and Mane, 1984). Thus, questions regarding the ability of dominant meaning-making social agencies to construct media contents as well as common perceptions of the past stress the interconnection between these two fields.

Another fundamental theme connecting the study of collective memory and the investigation of the media is that in both fields the final outcomes/products that are probed by scholars are the result of processes of selection and construction; i.e. the shaping of both mass media products as well as mnemonic signifiers are fundamentally activities that entail (overt and/or covert) decision-making dynamics determining the salience of presentation of various events. This process is coupled with the relative dismissal of other events, the pacing of events through a storyline, the infusion of social morals and lessons into the narrative and so forth.

Thus, White (1973) famously argued that historians focus on traumatic events and transfer them into defined genres that make those events more accessible to the readers, and Tuchman (1973) demonstrated how journalistic processes of routinizing the unexpected 'convert' everyday events into news stories. These two definitive works illuminate the similarity between historical research and media studies. Accordingly, scholars of both history and journalism have exposed the socially constructed nature of their fields and elaborated on the ways in which routine practices connect narrative and authority. Furthermore, it is clear that in these two fields of cultural production even if a specific individual or a group of individuals are responsible for the creation of a given product (a news item, a commemorative monument, etc.) these identified meaning-makers are operating within larger cultural and political contexts that shape and inform their interpretive work of narrative construction.

Within this context, one of the essential differences of opinion among researchers of collective memory concerns the question of construction versus selection in the process of shaping social recollections. The first approach can be traced back to Halbwachs' work, contending that the process of creating collective memories is an absolute one: the need to reconstruct the past and the social group's ability to utilize it are so great that the actual origins of past events are of secondary importance. That is, the facts of the past have only limited significance in the process of

shaping collective memories so as to suit current needs (Halbwachs, 1992 [1925]: 46–51). In contrast, according to Barry Schwartz (1982: 395–6), the main activity in the process of creating collective memories is not construction but rather selection. The past is not flexible in a way that enables us to create, or even invent, historical facts, and thus social memories change mainly via the process by which some events are emphasized and others are concealed. We choose factual elements that fit our larger master-narratives, and ignore or minimize the importance of others.

The selection/construction process of shaping collective memory is ongoing and it involves political, cultural, and sociological confrontations, as different interpreters compete over the place of their reading of the past in the public arena (Sturken, 1997). The media have a distinctive role in this competition: on the one hand, they present themselves and are perceived by society as a platform for socio-cultural struggles. On the other hand, they are also players in the same competition and perceive themselves as authoritative social storytellers of the past. Beyond the sheer overreaching presence of the media stands the multiplicity of venues, storytelling strategies, and modes of operation that characterize the field: the multitude of existing media channels and outlets offer a variety of genres that address the construction/selection question in different and often opposing ways.

In contrast to memory agents such as academia or historical museums which are, by and large, committed to a common ethos of depicting the past according to agreed-upon, publicly known conventions, the divergence among media genres is tremendous. Within this context, it might be useful to first look at different genres and their proclaimed truth-value: from fictional dramas at one end to documentary and news at the other, and docudramas in between. While fictional outlets were considered more closely related to imagined collective memory (influenced by cinema studies: Loshitzky, 1997; Rosenstone 1994; Zemon-Davis, 2002), news (Lang and Lang, 1989; Teer-Tomaselli, 2006), journalism (Edy, 1999; Kitch, 2008; Zelizer, 2008), and documentary (Rosenthal, 1999) were considered closely related to 'true' historiography. Thus, though the discourse on collective memory arose earlier in fields like cinema studies, with regard to journalism, as Zelizer (2008: 80) pointed out, no main theorists of the field of collective memory included 'news making' as an important component in their work that explored the field. Highlighting the variety of media genres illuminates the socially constructed nature of both concepts of historiography and collective memory and similarly the socially

constructed nature of the genres. It also enables placing history and memory across the spectrum of media outlets.

There are, of course, other ways of classifying media outlets with regards to the shaping of shared pasts. One typology addresses media ownership: the seminal question here is what are the characteristics of collective recollections that are manifested via publicly owned media, in comparison to recollections that are mediated via commercial outlets? Rather than a clear-cut binary public/commercial distinction, studies in the field (Lowenthal, 1988; Meyers, 2009; Meyers, Zandberg, and Neiger, 2009) illuminate the complexity of the situation. Hence, when it comes to collective recollection all media – both public and commercial – are influenced by common themes such as ratings, professional norms, legal restrictions, and the socio-cultural environment.

Another classification can be made by type of media: press (Kitch, 2002; Meyers, 2007; this volume: Kitch, Berkowitz; Tenenboim-Weinblatt; Kligler-Vilenchik), television (Edgerton and Rollins, 2001; Shandler, 1999; this volume: Frosh; Ben-Amos and Bourdon; Rueda Laffond), radio (Kaplan, 2009; Meyers and Zandberg, 2002; Neiger, Meyers, and Zandberg, forthcoming), cinema (Rosenstone, 1995; this volume: Sheffi), and new media (Garde-Hansen, Hoskins, and Reading, 2009; this volume: Reading; Hoskins; Pinchevsky; Dekel). Within this context, a comparison between the operation of advertisers and journalists as Media Memory agents seems especially telling: a recent study of the construction of the past via advertising revealed that in some instances, advertisers and marketers operate as ultimate Halbwachsian ‘inventors of memory’ manufacturing nostalgic appeals toward a non-existing past (Meyers, 2009).

More generally, some of the most significant features of collective recollection can be illuminated through the study of representation of the past via advertising, due to the extreme, or rather ‘pure’ circumstances of such commercially motivated communication: in advertising, it is always clear who the agent is, sponsoring the specific marketed version of the past, or, at least, the motives are clear, since there is nothing ambiguous about the final, profit-driven goals of advertising; therefore, the logic of advertising offers one of the most ahistorical conceptualizations of the past. At the same time, advertising is also a cultural site that highlights the abstract/concrete paradox which is embedded within the process of collective recollecting: advertising seems to best demonstrate the process by which abstract, or even spiritual, meanings are bestowed upon concrete artifacts (see also Carolyn Kitch’s chapter in this volume in regard to the manufacture of journalistic ‘memorabilia’

after the inauguration of President Obama). Within the scope of Media Memory studies journalism seems to occupy the opposite pole on the construction/selection spectrum. Since factuality and objectivity stand at the core of the guiding ethos of professional news reporting (Neiger, Zandberg, and Meyers, 2010), the straightforward invention of past occurrences by journalists seems improbable, and it is most certainly censured by journalistic communities.

But this is only a partial interpretation of what a comparative look at advertising and journalism as Media Memory agents can tell us about the construction/selection theme. Advertising's seemingly total lack of commitment to historical accuracy enables it, in principle, to present an infinite array of varying pasts. Yet, studies show that the vast majority of advertisements that turn to the past, do so through the implementation of a singular approach, based on nostalgic appeals (Hetsroni, 1999; Unger, McConocha, and Faier, 1991); since advertisers do not for the most part want to question or challenge consumers' perceptions of the past, they tend to present a limited, almost uniform rosy picture of the way things were. In contrast, journalists might be confined, in principle, by the decree to narrate factual accounts about the past, 'exactly as they happened'. Still, their ability to select the past events through which they choose to depict the present and their 'cultural license' to explain how exactly this past is relevant for the understanding of the present, grants them significant interpretive freedom. And so, through the last two decades a growing number of Media Memory studies explored the multifaceted ways by which facts-only-driven, objective journalists manage to interpret and reinterpret the past in a manner that corresponds with the culture in which they operate while it also reinforces their professional-communal status (Meyers, 2007; Zandberg, 2010).

## Media Memory: key questions

As mentioned, the interrelations between media and collective memory have led researchers from both fields to follow similar trajectories. Earlier, we examined these proximities through the prism of five characteristics in the dynamics of the shaping of 'collective memory' as a (1) multidirectional process of (2) concretizing a (3) narrative of the past into a (4) functional, (5) social-political construct.

Embarking from these characteristics, we would like to touch upon this process/dynamic through key questions in the field of Media Memory that spring from two fundamental cultural studies concepts – *agency*

and *context*. We would like to elaborate on these themes as they serve as an essential axis throughout the contributions to this volume:

### A. Media Memory and agency

Questions of ‘agency’ in regard to Media Memory focus on the capacity and authority of individuals and organizations to operate as memory agents. Such explorations are, of course, related to more general queries concerning the role of the media in shaping collective (national, regional/local, sectarian, global/cosmopolitan) identities.

**A1. The question of authority:** Who has the right to narrate collective stories about the past? That is, what is the source of authority of the media in general, and of specific media outlets, to operate as memory agents?

The fundamental role of collective memories in the formation of modern national identities, the rise of mass culture and mass politics, and the development of new communication technologies have all led to the current state, in which the right to narrate the past is no longer reserved for academic and political elites. Nowadays, major historical events gain their public meaning not only through academic and state-sponsored interpretations but also through television, films, and the press (Edgerton and Rollins, 2001; Zandberg, 2010; Zelizer, 1992).

This brings to the fore the question of the cultural authority of the media as narrators of the past; that is, how the media work through, or rather reconcile their role as a public arena for various memory agents with their own role as memory agents and readings of the past. Within the contest for authority to narrate the past and infuse it with meaning, the media are uniquely positioned: on the one hand, they provide a public arena for various agents (political activists, academics, local communities and more) who wish to influence the ways in which collective pasts are narrated and understood. On the other hand, specific media outlets as well as individual media professionals act as salient memory agents who aspire to provide their own readings of the collective past. Such a reading is always anchored in individual or institutional experiences of the past and the present while professional, commercial, and ideological inclinations affect the role of the mass media in the narration of the past.

**A2. The question of defining the collective:** What is the role of the media in defining the boundaries of collectivities and how do such definitions interact with the operation of the media as memory agents?

Many concepts related and connected to ‘collective memory’ have emerged in academia and gained a place in scholarly discourse: ‘imagined

communities' (Anderson, 1983), 'state rituals', 'civil religion' and 'invented traditions' (Bellah, 1967; Hobsbawm, 1983). All of these concepts point to a paradox: although we are referring to the members of modern nations as a concrete community, these members do not have personal relationships with most other members of the nation. The solution of this paradox, the bridging mechanism between individuals and communities, could be found in the mass media. Anderson (1983) refers to Hegel's observation that the newspaper serves modern man as a substitute for morning prayers. Carey (1998: 44), referring to the same claim, argues that 'the line dividing the modern from the pre-modern was drawn when people began their day attending to their state and nation rather than to their God'. The collective aspect of the 'reading the paper ritual' is explained by Anderson in the following way: 'It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion' (1983: 39). Therefore, the role of the media in such processes gives rise to many veteran questions and poses new tensions to the social sciences.

The focus on 'Media Memory' instead of 'Collective Memory' is also derived from technological modifications, especially through the last two decades, the era of the wideband Internet and thereby also the era of 'Digital Memories' (Garde-Hansen, Hoskins, and Reading, 2009). The boundaries of social collectivities are now inseparably connected to the audiences that make use of these same media. From an 'identity politics' perspective, one can manage several identities at once, determining which media to use in order to connect with other community members (e.g. one can watch the BBC as a Brit, read the *Guardian* as a leftist, tune into a local radio station as Scottish, and be part of a few interest groups and forums on the Internet as stamp collector and 'pop-idol' fan). Thus, among various possible memory agents, the media serve as a meta-agent because they constitute the most prevalent and quotidian site of collective recollection in modern national societies (Huysen, 2000; Volkmer, 2006) and serve as an arena featuring the narratives promoted by many other memory agents. Therefore, probing Anderson's analysis we ask whether, in an era in which national media concede to globalized outlets and formats, we are now seeing the dwindling of national memory.

Beyond that, one of the central arguments raised in recent years in the social sciences maintains that more attention should be shifted to

the ‘cosmopolitan turn’ (Beck, 2002; Beck and Sznaider, 2006), the sensitivity of the national society to the transnational arena, or in Beck’s words: ‘cosmopolitanization means *internal* globalization, globalization *from within* the national societies. This transforms everyday consciousness and identities significantly. Issues of global concern are becoming part of the everyday local experiences and the “moral life-worlds” of the people’ (Beck, 2002: 17).

Within this context, we argue that although most of the research devoted to collective memory centers on the construction of national memories, in an era of globalization (Reading, this volume) collective memory and commemoration that exist in a cosmopolitan context (Levy and Sznaider, 2006) do not necessarily promote national values.

This and more, most studies in the field relate to collective memory as a singular and identify a given (mostly, national) collective with ‘their’ collective memory – e.g. the French collective memory with French national community, the commemoration of American presidents with American collective memory, etc. In contrast, fewer studies explore contesting memories within the framework of national (or other) communities.

One can trace this salient characteristic of the collective memory research field to the dominance of the Durkheimian legacy, which implies a particular view of social processes and an increased analytical focus on the construction of social cohesiveness and solidarity and the production of shared meanings. In contrast, some of contributions to this volume address the understudied theme of collective recollecting and inner social conflicts: Katriel and Shavit as well as Ashuri explore oppositional movements operating against the national collective memory; Neiger, Zandberg, and Meyers stress the ways in which contesting memories are shaped through national commemorative rituals; and Bird and Reading investigate the constitution and shaping of contesting as opposed to national-level efforts to silence these dissenting narratives.

**A3. The question of personal/private memory vs. collective/shared memory:** This question focuses on the tensions and mutual relationships between personal/private memories and collective/shared memory, which are being blurred by an increasingly saturated media environment. That is, what separates (and how can we distinguish between) private and personal/first-hand/individual and social/mediated/collective memories? (see also Bourdon, this volume).

Thus, in this volume we propose that the claims regarding Halbwachs’ giant leap from the personal and concrete (how people remember) to

the collective and metaphorical (how societies remember) (Gedi and Elam, 1996: 43; Schwartz, 1991a: 302) ought to be addressed via the consideration of the role of the media in such processes.

On a personal level, as a phenomenon in cognitive psychology, memory is the ability to store, possess, and retrieve information, processes which have a physiological aspect, in a neurological dimension. Thus, people remember personal events – ‘big’ (such as a wedding) or ‘small’ (a mundane chat at the office) – which are part of their everyday life. These events may be jointly remembered by other people (the participants in the wedding, colleagues at the office), who may or may not have a tangible record of the event (e.g. a wedding video), but they are usually classified as personal memories. Nevertheless, people also recall public events, which gain social meaning and are recognized as having cultural value as a collective event. People may be part of such a specific event (participants, witnesses), but to the wider public who does not attend the scenes – and even for the participants themselves – the occurrences can become part of their memory through a process of mediation.

On the one hand, the media serve as the vessel for shared recollections, their distributor, and the ‘place’ – virtual or concrete, in the public arena or in the private domain – where the social ritual of remembering is performed. Moreover, the media are the main ‘mechanisms which determine and sustain mnemonic consensus’ (Schwartz, 1982: 374). On the other hand, the abundance of media outlets and memory versions are also challenging the memory and commemoration of events, leading them to an era of ‘postmemory’ (Hirsch, 2001), when powerful memories are transmitted to publics that have not experienced the events, but nevertheless adapted them due to their traumatic nature. Hirsch relates this notion to life stories of sons and daughters of Holocaust survivors (‘second generation survivors’), but it also serves as a metaphor for the role of the media in large-scale recollection processes.

Moreover, the media may blur the line between authentic and inauthentic memories. The field of inquiry of ‘flashbulb memories’ (Hoskins, 2009) looks at the interconnections between personal memories, mediated memories, and psychological attributes.

Another close perspective on the role of the media as ‘secondary memory’ relates to what Nora (1989: 14) calls ‘prosthesis-memory’, when he addresses the role of the media archives as one of the realms of memory (‘Les Lieux de mémoire’; Nora, 1984–92), and to the concept of ‘prosthetic memory’ (Landsberg, 2004: 8), that is the capacity of current mass media representations of the past ‘to create shared social frameworks



for people who inhabit, literally and figuratively, different social spaces, practices, and beliefs'. According to Landsberg, mass mediated 'prosthetic memories' generated through films such as *Schindler's List* or mnemonic institutions such as the US Holocaust Memorial Museum undermine the distinction between authentic and inauthentic memories and thus enable heterogeneous audiences to identify with the experiences of people who endured severe traumas and were different in many respects from the current consumers of such representations.

## B. Media Memory and contexts

Questions of 'context' concern the circumstances and venues where representations of Media Memory can be observed, experienced, and researched.

**B1. The question of circumstances:** The most prevalent method of investigating the presence and influence of collective memories explores the ways present perceptions shape understanding of the past. This attitude underlies studies that look at concrete and intended commemorations, those that seek to decode the changing ideological givens that constitute shifting views of the past. The second, less common, method of addressing collective recollections aims to trace movement from the past into the present. This attitude is evident in studies of non-commemorative and unintended influences of past phenomena (Schudson, 1997; see also Vinitzky-Seroussi, this volume).

The increased analytical focus on commemorative memory contributes to the relative understudy of journalists as agents of collective memory. This is because most journalistic work is routine and non-commemorative by nature (see, for example, Nossek, 1994). The ways in which the past and present are continuously constructed via routine journalistic work are harder to track down and to conceptualize than the study of state-sponsored rituals, commemorative museums, or lucrative popular culture productions. These two complementary processes highlight the diversity of the media as memory agents: from presenting state ritual as media events on the one hand, to the percolation of the past through metaphors and symbols in advertisements, popular music, or humoristic television shows on the other.

**B2. The question of venues/outlets:** Although it is hard to separate the questions of 'when' and 'where', for the sake of this discussion we will distinguish between the two. Regarding Media Memory we might ask where we should place our analytical focus in investigating this phenomenon: should we focus on popular or rather elite/establishment venues?

Old or new media? Venues that produce fictional accounts of the past or others that are more concerned with 'truth-value' or factuality?

Questions of research focus also relate to the classic debate over various aspects of the media encoding/decoding process. Communication studies are traditionally conceptualized according to three fundamental research trajectories: studies that focus on the analysis of media texts, studies that focus on the dynamics of mass media production, and studies that focus on the ways by which audiences interpret media contents. An overview of the field of Media Memory research reveals a salient inclination toward textual analyses of sorts (more on this in the next section devoted to the less-traveled trajectories of Media Memory). Hence many of the major contributions to the study of the intersection between media and memory explore themes such as the characteristics, storytelling patterns, or morals embedded in media texts addressing and constructing collective pasts. In fact, this volume is characteristic of this phenomenon as the vast majority of its chapters rely on investigations of various media texts.

Thus, the construction of collective memory is performed across the media and one of the main research trajectories should explore the role of the nature of the media outlet in shaping the memory that is constructed. This calls for comparative research that examines that process across genres (news–documentary–docudrama–fiction), across productions/consumption qualities (popular culture vs. elite culture), and in different media (television, press, radio, new media).

### **Away from the lamppost: The roads less traveled in Media Memory research**

While addressing the aforementioned prevalence of commemorative memory research in comparison to the relative neglect of non-commemorative memory research, Schudson critically commented that the research field of collective memory suffers from the 'drunk-looking-for-his-car-keys-under-the-lamp-post phenomenon' (1997: 3), meaning that researchers tend to look for evidence of the representation of collective memory in the most usual places and times, such as the public sphere during state rituals. Having defined and explored the major tenets of the Media Memory research field, we wish to offer a quick glance at the 'roads less traveled' in the field.

As mentioned, within the context of the three traditional trajectories of communication research (text, production, reception), the vast

majority of Media Memory studies analyze print and broadcast texts that address the past. Scholars who write about collective memory tend, in many cases, to view large-scale, dominant, widely popular media representations of the past as almost straightforward manifestations of the collective understanding of the past. In contrast to this relatively rich textual-analysis-based Media Memory research tradition, a far smaller number of works have probed the mediated memories and 'media biographies' of audiences, or have aimed to assess the role of the mass media in the shaping of 'collected memories' among audiences (Volkmer, 2006). Similarly, very few studies have explored the process by which media professionals construct mnemonic outputs.

A review of Media Memory reception studies yields relatively few results. This area of study bears great significance for memory scholars in general, and especially for researchers focusing their attention on Media Memory. That is because one of the core debates delineating the field of memory studies deals with the interrelations between collective memories and collected memories (Olick, 1999): that is, the interface between the aggregated memories of many individuals as opposed to common public representations of the past. Connerton's famous work explains 'how societies remember' (1989); it is clear that a society, as a whole, cannot 'remember' the way individuals do, yet individuals construct public representations of the past, and individuals utilize personal memories in order to promote specific public understandings of the past; moreover, Halbwachs and many of his scholarly 'descendants' have claimed that personal memories of the past are mediated, or even shaped, through the representations and narratives that are prevalent in the public arena.

Survey studies enable empirical investigation of these aforementioned relations between 'collective memories' and 'collected memories'. A series of studies conducted by Schuman and his colleagues tracked the actual aggregated repertoire of 'collected memories' mentioned by members of societies across the world (Schuman and Corning, 2000; Schuman, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Vinokur, 2003; Schuman and Rodgers, 2004). However, since the media play such a fundamental role in the shaping of collective memories, reception-focused Media Memory studies could illuminate the dynamics by which collective memory influences and shapes individual memories, and vice versa.

A salient example of such an approach can be found in Volkmer's (2006) analyses of 'media biographies' of audiences in nine countries that aim to assess the role of the mass media in the shaping of 'collected memories' among those audiences. One of the most intriguing aspects

of this research project was its exploration of the relations between past events and their 'original' media. That is, the study linked the characteristics of specific media through which past events were consumed for the first time and long-term recollection patterns. The findings pointed to a clear generational distinction: members of the oldest studied cohort had lucid memories of the media (mostly radio or newspaper) through which they first learned about defining memories such as the attack on Pearl Harbor. In their minds, the specific media presentation of the event was integrally related to the event itself. In contrast, members of the youngest studied cohort, who grew up in a multimedia world, could rarely indicate the media technology through which they learned about significant events such as 9/11.

Another important contribution to the somewhat limited corpus of Media Memory audience studies can be found in Neta Kligler Vilenchik's study appearing in this volume. In her study, Kligler Vilenchik combined the 'collected memories' survey method first used by Schuman et al. with media content analysis, in order to trace the ways in which media representations of the past shape, in real time, the importance audiences assign to various past events.

A similar consequence of the heightened focus on textual Media Memory analysis could be found in the relative absence of production studies. Such studies probe the ways in which media organizations operate as well as 'the way structures of power within institutions of society insinuate themselves into the work of elements of the mass media institution' (Turow, 1991: 222). Implementing such an approach toward the study of Media Memory is significant because it enables us to position collective recollecting within the larger scope of the production of culture (Peterson and Anand, 2004); it assists us in addressing – within the specific context of Media Memory production – questions regarding the ways in which media professionalism is defined and negotiated by members of relevant communities of practitioners; and what inter-relations exist between the values and norms of media professionalism and the norms and values of other cultural agents that surround and interact with these media organizations (Meyers, Neiger, and Zandberg, forthcoming, 2011).

A salient example that demonstrates the contribution of this production-focused approach toward the investigation of Media Memory can be found in Ashuri's (2007) study of the dynamics of international co-productions of historical television documentaries. Her analysis shows that the current discussion of the role of mass electronic media in the transformation of national collective memories into globalized

memories tends to overlook the actual production dynamics that frame the work of media professionals.

This volume probes production-related themes in several chapters: Elizabeth Bird writes about the effort to assist the construction of the memory of the Asaba massacre; Ashuri, and Katriel and Shavit explore the establishment of testimonial projects that aim to produce and to spread Israelis' particular experience in the occupied territories. All of these studies integrate moral, political, social, and technological questions regarding Media Memory in the twenty-first century.

### **The structure of the book**

This volume is divided into five sections that represent different perspectives on the multiplicity and complexity of the concept of Media Memory.

The first section, 'Media Memory: Theory and Methodologies', focuses on a meta-level discussion of the topic at hand. This section illuminates the epistemological questions that stand at the core of Media Memory research through a discussion of key concepts, methodological advancements and concerns, and new analytical points of view. In her essay, Barbie Zelizer suggests the concept of 'cannibalizing memory' as she explores the ways in which the international media covers national traumas within the context of the global flow of news; Jill A. Edy explains how Media Memory contains democratic potential as various narratives that depict the same event are sprouting and inducing multiple voices that spread within a saturated media environment; Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi discusses the concept of 'banal commemoration' that proposes new 'sites of memory' for future investigation of the field. Finally, Jérôme Bourdon considers the benefits of 'importing' key concepts and methodologies from the life-stories research tradition toward the investigation of Media Memory. The second section of this volume, 'Media Memory, Ethics, and Witnessing', deals with the ethical role (or the ethical burden) of Media Memory and the ways in which this concept interacts with the concept of witnessing. It is interesting to note that all three chapters in this section are dedicated to the role of ICT (information and communication technology) in the construction of memory; moreover, all three essays address the ways in which new media enable and expedite the exposure of distant suffering and the breaking of the silence concerning various atrocities. Tamar Katriel and Nimrod Shavit explore the testimonial project of Israeli soldiers who served in the territories occupied by Israel in the West Bank and the

Gaza Strip. Specifically, the authors inspect the role of the creation of Internet archival memory as moral activism. S. Elizabeth Bird's chapter focuses on the memory of the 1967 Asaba massacre. The essay explores the ways in which new media contributed to the formation and dissemination of narratives that were silenced by the traditional media. Tamar Ashuri probes the tension between collective memory and collective amnesia through an analysis of the use of ICT by a group of Israeli women who bear witness to the activities taking place at military check-points, positioned between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. All three chapters use interviews as a leading research methodology as they explore the process of the constitution and production of Media Memory by politically active memory agents. By doing so, the three works not only contribute to the understanding of Media Memory ethics and witnessing but also enrich the somewhat limited body of scholarly works devoted to Media Memory production.

The third section of the book is devoted to the construction of Media Memory via various popular culture venues. Paul Frosh looks at the British television series *Life on Mars* in order to discuss the interrelations between memory and imagination and the ways in which television utilizes the imagination of memory to reconstruct a historical period. Avner Ben-Amos and Jérôme Bourdon explore the Israeli version of the television show *Such a Life* in order to take on one of the fundamental themes addressed in the first section of the introduction – the tensions between personal and national memories. Na'ama Sheffi probes different (visual and written) versions of an eighteenth-century European historical life story that was represented and reproduced time and again through the centuries. These changing representations are studied via a four-phase research scheme in which each phase reflects different media and memory contexts. Neiger, Zandberg, and Meyers offer an exploration that focuses on the tension between national memory and local memory studied via a four-phase investigation of popular music and verbal interpretations that are aired during radio broadcasts on Israel's Memorial Day for the Holocaust and Heroism. In the last essay of this section, José Carlos Rueda Laffond provides a four-axis tool to analyze the representation of memory and history in television and uses it to close-read a reality show and TV series that are set in Spain of the 1960s.

The fourth part of this volume, 'Media Memory, Journalism, and Journalistic Practice' observes different ways in which journalism, seemingly always focused on the 'here and now', is concurrently engaged in the construction of the past. Carolyn Kitch looks at 'keepsake journalism' – special issues and other items produced by the news media in

commemoration of Obama's inauguration – and the function of these 'Obamabilia' artifacts in the preservation of the interpretive authority of veteran media. Dan Berkowitz conceptualizes collective memory as a journalistic device in a changing media environment through the analysis of two case studies. Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt highlights a novel aspect of mediated collective memory, as she examines the role of the media as a social reminder of the things 'we' (as a society) should do. Neta Kligler-Vilenchik probes audiences' perceptions of the past and the effects of mediation on collective remembrance.

The concluding section of the volume, 'New Media Memory', highlights the relationships between innovative technologies and collective recollecting. Anna Reading develops an epistemology required in order to organize digital media and global memory by analyzing the mediation of the death of Neda Agha Soltan, a young Iranian woman who was shot dead on the streets of Tehran (2009). She shows how, within a few hours, through pictures taken by cell-phones and transmitted by emails and uploaded to various websites, her image became etched in public memory as a potent symbol. Amit Pinchevski discusses the archive as a means of communication by looking at the video archive of Holocaust testimonies at Yale University. In a closely related manner, Irit Dekel examines the new media sources and artifacts used in the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Berlin. This analysis emphasizes the role of museums in the crossroads between 'memory' and 'media' and the different functions of new media in establishing and shaping the museum's narrative. In the final essay of the volume, Andrew Hoskins deals with various new phenomena and changes discussed in previous chapters and proposes a conceptualization of the shift from collective to connective memory as a way of reflecting a 'new memory ecology'.

Through these various sections, *On Media Memory* provides new perspectives on old dilemmas delineating the field of Media Memory, and advances the field by posing new questions regarding the interrelations between the shaping of collective memories and the operation of the mass media in changing cultural, political, and technological contexts. The above-mentioned chapters, which combine provocative theoretical contribution with close readings of various case studies, present a multiplicity of venues and contexts and set a common ground for further investigations into and evaluations of the field of Media Memory.

## Note

1. Halbwachs first formulated the concept of 'non-individual memory' in his book *The Social Framework of Memory* (*Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, original

publication in French in 1925, second edition in 1952); yet the book does not use the term 'collective memory'. Sections of this book were translated into English and published as part of a book entitled *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, trans. and ed. L. A. Coser). Halbwachs did define and discuss the concept of 'collective memory', but he only did so in a later book – *The Collective Memory (La mémoire collective)*, published posthumously in 1950, and translated into English in 1980 by F. J. Ditter and V. Y. Ditter [New York: Harper Colophon Books].

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