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# Introduction: Remembering and Reviving in States of Flux

*Christian Pentzold, Christine Lohmeier and Andrea Hajek*

## **Reflexive remembering and reconstructing**

‘We will remember’ is the exclamatory pledge given by those who are moving on from troubled times. It is intoned, for example, in Laurence Binyon’s *Ode of Remembrance*, which honours the British war dead of World War I. In its Hebrew version it gives the name to *Nizkor*, a web-based project that counters Holocaust denial. It is casted in plaques and chiselled into memorials meant to last forever. Moreover, the solemn promise never to forget collective experiences of trauma and pain in times to come dictates many other forms and rituals of commemoration. There, the words are uttered in order to bring together the past, the present and the future, and thus to repeatedly connect the bygone time that is to be recalled, the current time in which the pledge is given and the forthcoming time when the promise will avowedly be kept. The call and the assertion to remember are, therefore, not only backwards-looking undertakings: rather, they carry the agents, objects and circumstances of remembering along the temporal continuum between yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Starting from this general observation, a growing body of scholarship explores the hitherto largely unrecognized, future-oriented dimension of memory in particular. Thus, it extends the definition of memory as ‘the present past’ (Terdiman, 1993, p. 8), which echoes Maurice Halbwachs’s (1992) classical insights into the constitution of the past in terms of present worldviews and concerns. In broad terms, this move involves examinations of the memory of the future, the future of memory and the future of the study of memory alike (Crowshaw, Kilby & Rowland, 2010; Gutman, Brown & Sodaro, 2010; Koselleck, 1988/2004; Vermeulen et al., 2012). In these endeavours, which connect

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the disciplines of memory studies, sociology, history, cultural analysis, comparative literature as well as media and communication research, a range of fields – like the formations of diasporic communities, fictional imaginations, post-war efforts for education and reconciliation, news discourses or biographical narratives – have been studied in terms of the remembrance of the future or, respectively, for the future (e.g., Hirsch & Miller, 2011; Keightley & Pickering, 2012; Strong-Wilson et al., 2013; Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2013; Niemeyer, 2014). Finally, besides humanities and social sciences the topic of future-oriented memories has also been taken up by cognitive science and psychology with regard to planned actions and intentions (cf. McDaniel & Einstein, 2007).

Considering both *retrospective* memories and the *prospective* employment of memories, this volume looks at troubled times that demand resolution, recovery and restoration, with the chance to revise old and reconstruct new ways of living. As such, it focuses on issues of trauma, conflict and turmoil that thread through the burgeoning literature using different yet related concepts of collective, personal, cultural, popular, national or family memory (e.g., Alexander et al., 2004; Connerton, 1998; Erll & Nünning, 2008; Hodgkin & Radstone, 2003; Huyssen, 1995; Lebow, Kansteiner & Fogu, 2006; Levy & Sznajder, 2006; Misztal, 2003; Olick & Robbins, 1998; Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi & Levy, 2011; Radstone, 2000; Radstone & Hodgkin, 2003; Reading, 2003a, 2011; Roediger & Wertsch, 2008; Rossington & Whitehead, 2007). Overall, the chapters assembled here assume that experiences of private or public crisis often allow for a projective use of memories, be they individual or collective. Hence, contrary to the idea that such states of exception eliminate memories, the volume examines the ways in which memories in and of traumatic, conflictual or incisive events and experiences are addressed through a productive employment of past ideas, relationships or practices.

Seen together, the contributions show that times of trouble must not only be experienced as cataclysmic breakdown, disaster and disintegration but that they also open up the chance, on the one hand, to redraft and rework personal opinions, actions and the overall conduct of life as well as, on the other hand, to revise communal and social identities, interactions and institutions. Arguably, the possibility for such 'productive remembering', as Andreas Huyssen (2003, p. 27) put it, is set within reflexive modernity. In this period, as Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck, Scott Lash, Zygmunt Bauman and other social thinkers have argued, situations of uncertainty and risk accruing to an increasing number of public and private domains also provide opportunities for change and

progress, at least for those empowered to assess and assume the unfolding challenges and chances (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 1992; Beck et al., 1994; Giddens, 1990). Reflexive modernization, in consequence, comes with many projects for reorganization and reform directed at its own multifaceted conditions. Thus, many of the cases discussed in the volume revolve around social movements, initiatives for public advocacy and self-reflective accounts that aim at remembering and reconstructing public and private life. In mastering the complex societal requisitions that assumedly mark the shift towards this second stage of modernity, the studied individual and collective actors thus purposefully engage in bringing memory forward (Rothberg, 2009). In doing so, they employ, on the symbolic level, ideologies, discourses and narratives; on the practical level, short-term tactics and long-term strategies; and, on the relational level, personal bonds and communal ties to tackle challenges to identity, collectivity, life choices and common welfare.

Viewed this way, the oppositional groups forming in the latter days of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), for example, were actively involved in advancing the system change and thus in bringing about the first free parliamentary election in 1990 and, ultimately, the German reunification. For one, they referred back to failed movements in parts of the Eastern Bloc, notably the Prague Spring, the Hungarian Revolution and the Uprising of 1953 in East Germany. Yet in their progressional struggle to transform the socio-political state in the then present time these forums and leagues can also be understood as having been concerned with observing and reflecting their own formation and expansion as well as the unrolling events in which they were participating. As such, at least some of them gave attention to the appropriate forms of the future remembrance of these struggles and their respective accomplishments – how they will be remembered – by documenting the unfolding processes in photographs, by drafting eyewitness accounts as well as by collecting items and documents. Stemming from these efforts as well as the material resources and cultural framings they established, the peaceful revolution and its legacy are commemorated in a number of intersecting and at times conflicting ways (cf. Saunders & Pinfold, 2013). As such they marked, for example, the celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, which, in turn, sought to install novel iconic visions like the ‘Border of Lights’ retracing the former course of the Berlin Wall with illuminating balloons (see the cover image of this volume).

Similar patterns of anticipated future remembrance can be observed, for instance, within diasporic groups. In the case of the Cuban American

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community in Miami, public and private archives thus have been established in order to enable the following generations and the wider public to remember life in Cuba, the circumstances of departure of different migrant groups and the arrival in the new country of residence. The selection of certain objects and their presentation already frame the ways in which historic events as well as personal circumstances will be remembered. This is not to say that these (re-)presentations are not debated and contested. However, recurrent themes and narratives lead to a mythologized version of the past, which forms part of the collective identity of migrant groups and sub-groups and informs their future plans and ambitions (cf. Lohmeier, 2014).

### **Mediating memory**

In times when all walks of life are thought to be increasingly mediated, such simultaneously backward- and forward-looking enterprises involve a variety of media. Hence, to a considerable extent, the agency of those engaged in productive remembrance rests with their ability to make use of media as past ideas, actions and contacts become available and transferable through time and space with the help of different types of semiotic representations and communication technologies.

The worldwide Occupy movement, for example, has diversified into several international and local branches with the help of web technologies like websites, email and chat as well as platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Meetup. For one, these means of communication were employed to organize the ongoing activities around the normally ephemeral camps that spread across many local sites and loosely coupled people. Moreover, the activists mobilized these tools, which were already in use in the demonstrations of the Arab Spring and in the Iberian anti-austerity Indignants Movement, to gather the symbolic marks of their engagement so as to record what were often transient happenings. Some also went on to promote the movement's ambitions through multimedia and art. Therefore, other than using media as a means to contend in the present for a variety of due changes, the Occupy protests strategically adopted imagery and slogans like 'We are the 99 per cent', the #Occupy hashtag or the Guy Fawkes mask in order to furnish future subversive actions with pertinent representations (Nielsen, 2013). As such, they were not only appropriated by other movements but also collected and conserved by institutions like the National Museum of American History and the New York Historical Society (Flamini, 2011).

Of course, media have been employed to fix, share and store expressions and impressions of individual and collective experiences since the very beginnings of human culture. Rather fundamentally, collective memories are thus, as Wertsch (2002, p. 25) has explained, mediated in the sense that humans use voices and texts as means to express and pass on their experiences and ideas. Moreover, from wall painting and cuneiform tablets via manuscripts and prints to the rise of networked electronic infrastructures and digital services and applications, media innovations have facilitated the reassembly of the practices and materials of individual and collective remembrance and reconstruction (e.g., A. Assmann, 2011; J. Assmann, 2006; Edy, 2006; Erll & Rigney, 2009; Ernst & Parikka, 2013; Garde-Hansen, 2011; Hoskins, 2003; Kansteiner, 2006; Neiger, Zandberg & Meyers, 2011; Sturken, 1997; Zelizer, 2000, 2010; Zelizer & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2014).

While the entanglement of media and memory has altogether gained considerable attention in memory studies, the volume considers the current conditions of mediation or mediatization more broadly. Hence, the notion of a 'mediated world' refers to the assumed centrality of media in any of an increasing number of social life worlds. In this regard, José van Dijck (2007, p. 16) explores media and memory's twin relation in terms of the prefiguration of cultural memory through media. She defines mediated memories as 'the activities and objects we produce and appropriate by means of media technologies, for creating and re-creating a sense of past, present, and future of ourselves in relation to others' (2007, p. 21). Reflecting on mediation as a 'process of shifting interconnected individual, social and cultural dependency on media maintenance, survival, and growth' (2014, p. 661), Andrew Hoskins has posed that the potentials for remembering and reconstructing are fundamentally changing in an 'emergent sociotechnical flux' (2014, p. 661) that affects memory's biological, social and cultural dimensions. Thus, following the conceptual works of Sonia Livingstone (2009), Friedrich Krotz (2009), Stig Hjarvard (2008) and others, we assume that due to the cumulative volume and systemic societal impact of an almost pervasive media manifold, an increasing range of public and private forms of remembering-cum-reviving is done in relation to media. As such, the empirical analyses assembled here, which are set within a broad range of localities ranging from Australia and Asia via Europe to North America and Latin America, interrogate, to use a distinction made by Nick Couldry (2012, p. 35), social life worlds where agents and activities are directly oriented to media, where they involve media without having media as their aim or where the possibility to act is conditioned

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by the presence and functionality of media (Lohmeier & Pentzold, 2014).

Although the majority of these mediated memories in states of flux are set within digitally networked environments, and so-called social media feature strongly in several of the chapters, all sorts of media can essentially be termed social and have the potential to afford various forms of memory-making and mnemonic practices. Yet these new types of connective media have been met with the expectation to engage people in memory matters in particular (Ashuri, 2011; Cohen & Rosenzweig, 2006; Foot, Warnick & Schneider, 2005; Haskins, 2007; Hess, 2007; Pentzold, 2009; Reading, 2003b; Reading et al., 2009). A considerable portion of recent studies that look into these forms of productive remembering is especially concerned with mourning and grief, investigating for example the interactions and rituals concerning the handling of online profiles of deceased users and the engagement with their enduring virtual presence. In sum, they show that these personal and collective losses can stimulate the formation of compassionate communities beyond acts of mourning and personal acquaintance, providing new sources of solidarity (Brubacker et al., 2013; Christensen & Gotved, 2014; Jones, 2004; Lingel, 2013; Marwick & Ellison, 2012).

## Contributions

Exploring these ideas, the volume assembles contributions that empirically study the conscious, future-oriented remembrance of past events, activities, relations or experiences that are employed to reconstruct future ways of living and living together. As such, it moves beyond the idea of mediated memories as enterprises that turn back time and bypass critical occasions for personal development and social progress. Rather than focusing on *retrospective* memories, the volume interrogates the *prospective* employment of memory work in devising memory-wise practices and discourses so as to revive and reconstruct personal and public life. In other words, the volume does not rest with investigating past events and how these are mediated, but looks at four crucial arenas of contemporary scholarship and current affairs regarding the active collective and individual processes of remembering and reconstructing linked to situations of emergency, social struggle, displaced communities and death, respectively.

Accordingly, the volume is organized along four parts that enquire into four major states for remembering and reviving in troubled times under the conditions of mediation. Along the social macro,



meso and micro scales, which are introduced by Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley, the first main part, 'Rejoining through States of Emergency', centres around the responses to grand scale natural disasters. The second part, 'Reforming States of Affairs', investigates transformations supported by social movements and activism. The third part, 'Recollecting States of Identity', looks into types of community-(re)building around ethnic, cultural or habitual commonalities and boundaries. Finally, the fourth part, 'Recalling States of Life', is concerned with matters of death and mourning. More specifically, in order to explore this perspective thoroughly, the contributions consider a wide range of conflicts, troubles and challenges, as these take shape in the personal and the public spheres. Overall, the volume examines changes in personal life courses as well as disruptions of public life and simultaneously aims to acknowledge the interconnections between them.

The two opening chapters address overarching themes of this anthology from a theoretical and a methodological perspective. Andrew Hoskins begins by characterizing memory in terms of the current media ecology and then moves on to critically examine the possibilities of recording and the attempt to archive 'everything'. Hoskins concludes by emphasizing the value and humanity of involuntary remembering – both on an individual as well as on a collective level. Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley then call for a more refined methodological base in memory studies in order to complement the strong focus on theoretical and conceptual work in this emergent field. Their contribution outlines interscalarity as a useful principle for empiric research.

In the first part, 'Rejoining through States of Emergency', Joanne Garde-Hansen, Lindsey McEwen and Owain Jones bring together geography, memory studies and digital media studies as they unfold a mixed-media approach to the 2007 UK floods, which they define as a *memo-techno-ecology* of remembering and forgetting environmental crises. In doing so they offer a critical reflection upon how individuals and communities use mediated memory practices to remain resilient through remembering and forgetting. Chiaoning Su and Paige L. Gibson follow up with their study of the 921 Earthquake and Typhoon Morakot in Taiwan. Using narrative analysis and juxtaposing institutional and vernacular remembrances, they examine the content and architectures of two memorials, the 921 Internet Museum and the alternative journalist platform 88news. Finally, Manuela Farinosi and Alessandra Micalizzi consider the digitization of memories following the 2009 earthquake of L'Aquila in Italy. Their focus of research is the local memory website,

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*We, L'Aquila*. By exploring the users' narrative and practices, Farinosi and Micalizzi analyse the way the website stores, processes and shares community memories after a collective tragedy.

The second part musters papers that study activism for social change and through which activities the agents involved in such movements strategically make use of past struggles and their lessons. Sarah Florini considers websites, memories and alternative histories in the context of Black national politics in the US. Andrea Hajek takes a closer look at contemporary feminist activism in Italy in her exploration of the cultural memory of Italian feminism, drawing on theories of remediation and travelling memories. Ruth M. Sanz Sabido analyses social memories and struggles of the Spanish Revolution. The section closes with Mia Lindgren and Gail Phillips's study of journalistic forms of prospective memory-making regarding the handling of asbestos and its consequences in Australia.

The third part assembles research that looks at how communities that have been lost or displaced due to a change of system try to recreate established communities and (re)build novel communal bonds and collective identities. Ivan Darias Alfonso begins by addressing the cultural memory that connects Cuban migrants to their country of origin. While Darias Alfonso focuses on blogs of migrants, Anne Kaun and Fredrik Stiernstedt consider the Facebook fan site of Radio DT64 to examine the rebuilding of a scattered audience community. Finally, Rolf Fredheim uses a quantitative approach to consider the employment of the Communist past in contemporary Russia.

Finally, the fourth part features contributions that examine how people intentionally use social media in their efforts to mourn and create memorials of people who have passed away. David Myles and Florence Millerand investigate socio-technically acceptable forms of mourning in a social network. Laura Huttunen focuses on burial ceremonies commemorating the massacre of Srebrenica on YouTube. Bjorn Nansen, Michael Arnold, Martin Gibbs, Tamara Kohn and James Meese conclude with an analysis of the dispersed memories of a deceased bodybuilding icon on social media platforms.

In sum, the chapters gathered in this collection focus on diverse locales and political, social, economic and environmental contexts. They consider individual, communal, national and global media-related approaches of coping with and making sense of things past while accomplishing the present and projecting the future. Two common threads run through all chapters: first, a shared interest in times of conflict, crisis, disaster and challenges; second, the contributions investigate

the projective use of past feelings, ideas, relations or strategies. By bringing together empirically based scholarship, this volume aims to advance knowledge and understanding of the moving relationship of memories and media in troubled times.

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