

Cultural Memory Studies:  
An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook

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# Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction

ASTRID ERLI

## 1. Towards a Conceptual Foundation for Cultural Memory Studies

Over the past two decades, the relationship between culture and memory has emerged in many parts of the world as a key issue of interdisciplinary research, involving fields as diverse as history, sociology, art, literary and media studies, philosophy, theology, psychology, and the neurosciences, and thus bringing together the humanities, social studies, and the natural sciences in a unique way. The importance of the notion of cultural memory is not only documented by the rapid growth, since the late 1980s, of publications on specific national, social, religious, or family memories, but also by a more recent trend, namely attempts to provide overviews of the state of the art in this emerging field and to synthesize different research traditions. Anthologies of theoretical texts, such as *The Collective Memory Reader* (Olick et al.), as well as the launch of the new journal *Memory Studies* testify to the need to bring focus to this broad discussion and to consider the theoretical and methodological standards of a promising, but also as yet incoherent and dispersed field (cf. Olick; Radstone; Erll). The present handbook represents the shared effort of forty-one authors, all of whom have contributed over the past years, from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, to the development of this nascent field, and it is part of the effort to consolidate memory studies into a more coherent discipline. It is a first step on the road towards a conceptual foundation for the kind of memory studies which assumes a decidedly cultural and social perspective.

“Cultural” (or, if you will, “collective,” “social”) memory is certainly a multifarious notion, a term often used in an ambiguous and vague way. Media, practices, and structures as diverse as myth, monuments, historiography, ritual, conversational remembering, configurations of cultural knowledge, and neuronal networks are nowadays subsumed under this wide umbrella term. Because of its intricacy, cultural memory has been a highly controversial issue ever since its very conception in Maurice Halbwachs’s studies on *mémoire collective* (esp. 1925, 1941, 1950). His contemporary Marc Bloch accused Halbwachs of simply transferring concepts from individual psychology to the level of the collective, and even today scholars continue to challenge the notion of collective or cultural memory, claiming, for example, that since we have well-established concepts like “myth,” “tradition,” and “individual memory,” there is no need for a

further, and often misleading, addition to the existing repertoire (cf. Gedi and Elam). What these criticisms overlook, of course, is that it is exactly the umbrella quality of these relatively new usages of “memory” which helps us see the (sometimes functional, sometimes analogical, sometimes metaphorical) relationships between such phenomena as ancient myths and the personal recollection of recent experience, and which enables disciplines as varied as psychology, history, sociology, and literary studies to engage in a stimulating dialogue.

This handbook is based on a broad understanding of cultural memory, suggesting as a provisional definition “the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts.” Such an understanding of the term allows for an inclusion of a broad spectrum of phenomena as possible objects of cultural memory studies—ranging from individual acts of remembering in a social context to group memory (of family, friends, veterans, etc.) to national memory with its “invented traditions,” and finally to the host of transnational *lieux de mémoire* such as the Holocaust and 9/11. At the same time, cultural memory studies is not restricted to the study of those ways of making sense of the past which are intentional and performed through narrative, and which go hand in hand with the construction of identities—although this very nexus (intentional remembering, narrative, identity) has certainly yielded the lion’s share of research in memory studies so far. The field thus remains open for the exploration of unintentional and implicit ways of cultural remembering (see Welzer, this volume) or of inherently non-narrative, for example visual or bodily, forms of memory.

But if the range of themes and objects of memory studies is virtually limitless (everything is, somehow, related to memory), then what makes our new field distinct? With Alon Confino, I would argue that it is not the infinite multitude of possible *topics* which characterizes cultural memory studies, but instead its *concepts*: the specific ways of conceiving of themes and of approaching objects. However, despite two decades of intensive research, the design of a conceptual toolbox for cultural memory studies is still at a fledgling stage, because (to quote Confino in this volume) memory studies is currently “more practiced than theorized”—and practiced, at that, within an array of different disciplines and national academic cultures, with their own vocabularies, methods, and traditions. What we need is to take a survey of the concepts used in memory studies and, in doing so, cross intellectual and linguistic boundaries.

Even a cursory look at the host of different terminologies which have emerged from memory studies since Maurice Halbwachs will shed light on the challenges faced by those who are searching for a conceptual foundation for the field: *mémoire collective*/collective memory, *cadres sociaux*/social frameworks of memory, social memory, *mnemosyne*, *ars memoriae*, *loci et*

*imagines, lieux de mémoire*/sites of memory, invented traditions, myth, *memoria*, heritage, commemoration, *kulturelles Gedächtnis*, communicative memory, generationality, postmemory. The list could go on.

What this wealth of existing concepts shows, first of all, is that cultural memory is not the object of one single discipline, but a transdisciplinary phenomenon. There is no such thing as a privileged standpoint or approach for memory research (for the systematic and historic reasons for this, see sections 2 and 3 of this article). Cultural memory studies is a field to which many disciplines contribute, using their specific methodologies and perspectives. This makes for its terminological richness, but also for its disjointedness. At the same time, it has been clear since its very inception that the study of cultural memory can only be successful if it is based on cooperation among different disciplines. Cultural memory studies is therefore not merely a multidisciplinary field, but fundamentally an interdisciplinary project. Many exciting forms of collaboration have already been fostered. And indeed, the strongest and most striking studies in cultural memory are based on interdisciplinary exchange—between media studies and cultural history (J. Assmann; A. Assmann), history and sociology (Olick), neuroscience and social psychology (Welzer; Markowitsch), cognitive psychology and history (Manier and Hirst) or social psychology and linguistics (Echterhoff; all this volume). An even more intensified dialogue among disciplines will help uncover the manifold intersections of memory and culture. This, however, requires a very sensitive handling of terminology and a careful discrimination of the specific disciplinary uses of certain concepts and of their literal, metaphorical, or metonymical implications (see section 2).

## 2. Establishing the Framework: Dimensions, Levels, and Modes of Cultural Memory

If we want to establish a framework for cultural memory studies, working on concepts is inevitable. In the following I will propose some basic definitions and conceptual differentiations which may help to prevent misunderstanding and resolve some of the controversies which have been sparked time and again within and about cultural memory studies.

### (a) *Dimensions of Culture and Memory: Material, Social, and Mental*

Arguably the most important and by far most frequently used key concept of cultural memory studies is the contentious term *mémoire collective* (collective memory), which was brought into the discussion by Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920s. Our choice of “cultural memory” for the title of

this handbook is due, in the first place, to the highly controversial nature of Halbwachs's term and the many wrong associations it seems to trigger in those who are new to the field. Secondly, according to the definition given above, the term "cultural memory" accentuates the connection of memory on the one hand and socio-cultural contexts on the other. However, the term "cultural" does not designate a specific affinity to Cultural Studies as conceived and practiced by the Birmingham School (although this discipline has certainly contributed to cultural memory studies). Our notion of culture is instead more rooted in the German tradition of the study of cultures (*Kulturwissenschaft*) and in anthropology, where culture is defined as a community's specific way of life, led within its self-spun webs of meaning (cf. Geertz).

According to anthropological and semiotic theories, culture can be seen as a three-dimensional framework, comprising social (people, social relations, institutions), material (artifacts and media), and mental aspects (culturally defined ways of thinking, mentalities) (cf. Posner). Understood in this way, "cultural memory" can serve as an umbrella term which comprises "social memory" (the starting point for memory research in the social sciences), "material or medial memory" (the focus of interest in literary and media studies), and "mental or cognitive memory" (the field of expertise in psychology and the neurosciences). This neat distinction is of course merely a heuristic tool. In reality, all three dimensions are involved in the making of cultural memories. Cultural memory studies is therefore characterized by the transcending of boundaries. Some scholars look at the interplay of material and social phenomena (for example, memorials and the politics of memory; see Meyer); others scrutinize the intersections of material and mental phenomena (as in the history of mentalities; see Confino); still others study the relation of cognitive and social phenomena (as in conversational remembering; see Middleton and Brown; all this volume).

(b) *Levels of Memory: Individual and Collective*

It is important to realize that the notions of "cultural" or "collective" memory proceed from an operative metaphor. The concept of "remembering" (a cognitive process which takes place in individual brains) is metaphorically transferred to the level of culture. In this metaphorical sense, scholars speak of a "nation's memory," a "religious community's memory," or even of "literature's memory" (which, according to Renate Lachmann, is its intertextuality). This crucial distinction between two aspects of cultural memory studies is what Jeffrey K. Olick draws our attention to when he maintains that "two radically different concepts of culture are involved here, one that sees culture as a subjective category of mean-

ings contained in people's minds versus one that sees culture as patterns of publicly available symbols objectified in society" (336). In other words, we have to differentiate between two levels on which culture and memory intersect: the individual and the collective or, more precisely, the level of the cognitive on the one hand, and the levels of the social and the medial on the other.

The first level of cultural memory is concerned with biological memory. It draws attention to the fact that no memory is ever purely individual, but always inherently shaped by collective contexts. From the people we live with and from the media we use, we acquire schemata which help us recall the past and encode new experience. Our memories are often triggered as well as shaped by external factors, ranging from conversation among friends to books and to places. In short, we remember in socio-cultural contexts. With regard to this first level, "memory" is used in a literal sense, whereas the attribute "cultural" is a metonymy, standing for the "socio-cultural contexts and their influence on memory." It is especially within oral history, social psychology, and the neurosciences that cultural memory is understood according to this first aspect of the term.

The second level of cultural memory refers to the symbolic order, the media, institutions, and practices by which social groups construct a shared past. "Memory," here, is used metaphorically. Societies do not remember literally; but much of what is done to reconstruct a shared past bears some resemblance to the processes of individual memory, such as the selectivity and perspectivity inherent in the creation of versions of the past according to present knowledge and needs. In cultural history and the social sciences, much research has been done with regard to this second aspect of collective memory, the most influential concepts to have emerged being Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire* and Jan and Aleida Assmann's *kulturelles Gedächtnis*.

The two forms of cultural memory can be distinguished from each other on an analytical level; but in practice the cognitive and the social/medial continuously interact. There is no such thing as pre-cultural individual memory; but neither is there a Collective or Cultural Memory (with capital letters) which is detached from individuals and embodied only in media and institutions. Just as socio-cultural contexts shape individual memories, a "memory" which is represented by media and institutions must be actualized by individuals, by members of a community of remembrance, who may be conceived of as *points de vue* (Maurice Halbwachs) on shared notions of the past. Without such actualizations, monuments, rituals, and books are nothing but dead material, failing to have any impact in societies.

As is always the case with metaphors, some features can be transferred with a gain in insight, others cannot. The notion of cultural memory has quite successfully directed our attention to the close connection that exists between, say, a nation's version of its past and its version of national identity. That memory and identity are closely linked on the individual level is a commonplace that goes back at least to John Locke, who maintained that there is no such thing as an essential identity, but that identities have to be constructed and reconstructed by acts of memory, by remembering who one was and by setting this past Self in relation to the present Self. The concept of cultural memory has opened the way to studying these processes at a collective level. More problematic is the migration of concepts between the individual and social levels when it comes to trauma studies. Wulf Kansteiner and Harald Weirnböck (this volume) show the (ethical) pitfalls of attempting to conflate processes of the individual psyche with the medial and social representation of the past.

To sum up, cultural memory studies is decidedly concerned with social, medial, *and* cognitive processes, and their ceaseless interplay. In the present volume, this fact is mirrored not only by the dedication of different sections to (clusters of) different disciplines (history, social sciences, psychology, literary and media studies) which have an expertise with regard to one specific level of cultural memory, but also by the incorporation of as many approaches as possible which go beyond those boundaries. Readers will therefore discover numerous cross-connections between the paths taken in the individual parts of this book.

(c) *Modes of Memory: The "How" of Remembering*

The last distinction to be made in this introduction—that between different modes of remembering—is one which aims to confront another source of vehement dispute within and about memory studies. One of Halbwachs's less felicitous legacies is the opposition between history and memory. Halbwachs conceives of the former as abstract, totalizing, and "dead," and of the latter as particular, meaningful, and "lived." This polarity, itself a legacy of nineteenth-century historicism and its discontents, was taken up and popularized by Pierre Nora, who also distinguishes polemically between history and memory and positions his *lieux de mémoire* in between. Studies on "history vs. memory" are usually loaded with emotionally charged binary oppositions: good vs. bad, organic vs. artificial, living vs. dead, from below vs. from above. And while the term "cultural memory" is already a multifarious notion, it is often even less clear what is meant with the collective singular of "history" (cf. Koselleck): Selective and meaningful memory vs. the unintelligible totality of *historical events*? Methodologically unregulated and identity-related memory vs. scientific,

seemingly neutral and objective *historiography*? Authentic memory produced within small communities vs. ideologically charged, official *images of history*? Witnesses of the past vs. academic *historians*? The whole question of “history and/or/as memory” is simply not a very fruitful approach to cultural representations of the past. It is a dead end in memory studies, and also one of its “Achilles’ heels” (see Olick, this volume).

I would suggest dissolving the useless opposition of history vs. memory in favor of a notion of different *modes of remembering* in culture. This approach proceeds from the basic insight that the past is not given, but must instead continually be re-constructed and re-presented. Thus, our memories (individual and collective) of past events can vary to a great degree. This holds true not only for *what* is remembered (facts, data), but also for *how* it is remembered, that is, for the quality and meaning the past assumes. As a result, there are different modes of remembering identical past events. A war, for example, can be remembered as a mythic event (“the war as apocalypse”), as part of political history (the First World War as “the great seminal catastrophe of the twentieth century”), as a traumatic experience (“the horror of the trenches, the shells, the barrage of gunfire,” etc.), as a part of family history (“the war my great-uncle served in”), as a focus of bitter contestation (“the war which was waged by the old generation, by the fascists, by men”). Myth, religious memory, political history, trauma, family remembrance, or generational memory are different modes of referring to the past. Seen in this way, history is but yet another mode of cultural memory, and historiography its specific medium. This is not at all to lessen its importance or the merits of generations of historians. Since the early nineteenth century, the historical method has developed into the best-regulated and most reliable way of reconstructing the past (even though its specific operations have been justifiably criticized by Foucault and others, and may be complemented by other modes).

### 3. Genealogies and Branches of Cultural Memory Studies: The Design of This Handbook

This handbook has a historic and systematic (or diachronic and synchronic) layout. Although its main focus is on *current* research and concepts of cultural memory studies, it also provides insights into the different roots of the field. Whereas a history of thought about memory and culture would have to go back to Plato, the *beginnings* of a modern notion of cultural memory can be retraced to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see Olick; Straub; Marcel and Mucchielli; all this volume). The present field of research is built on the emergence of a “new

wave” of cultural memory studies since the 1980s (see Confino; Harth; Fortunati and Lamberti; all this volume).

Maurice Halbwachs was the first to write explicitly and systematically about cultural memory. If one reads through the essays of this volume, there can be little doubt that his studies of *mémoire collective* have emerged as the foundational texts of today’s memory studies—unequivocally accepted as such no matter what discipline or country the respective researchers call home. Halbwachs not only coined the fundamental term “collective memory”; his legacy to cultural memory studies is at least threefold. Firstly, with his concept of *cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (social frameworks of memory) he articulated the idea that individual memories are inherently shaped and will often be triggered by socio-cultural contexts, or frameworks, thus already pointing to cultural schema theories and the contextual approaches of psychology. Secondly, his study of family memory and other private practices of remembering have been an important influence for oral history. And thirdly, with his research on the memory of religious communities (in *La topographie légendaire*) he accentuated topographical aspects of cultural memory, thus anticipating the notion of *lieux de mémoire*, and he looked at communities whose memory reaches back thousands of years, thus laying the foundation for Jan and Aleida Assmann’s *kulturelles Gedächtnis*.

However, although Halbwachs’s work is rooted in French sociology, memory studies was an international and transdisciplinary phenomenon from the very beginning. Around 1900, scholars from different disciplines and countries became interested in the intersections between culture and memory: notably Sigmund Freud, Henri Bergson, Emile Durkheim, Maurice Halbwachs, Aby Warburg, Arnold Zweig, Karl Mannheim, Frederick Bartlett, and Walter Benjamin (see also Olick, this volume). Sometimes those scholars critically referred to one another’s work (for example Halbwachs to Durkheim, or Bloch and Bartlett to Halbwachs), yet more often this early research remained unconnected. Early memory studies is thus a typical example of an emergent phenomenon, cropping up at different places at roughly the same time—a process which would be repeated in the 1980s, with the “new memory studies.”

If Halbwachs is the best remembered founding father of memory studies, then Aby Warburg is arguably the most forgotten one. The German Jewish art historian was an early and energetic ambassador of the interdisciplinary study of culture (cf. Gombrich). He famously pointed out that researchers should stop policing disciplinary boundaries (*grenzpolizeiliche Befangenheit*) in order to gain insight into processes of cultural memory. Warburg—whose writings are more a quarry providing inspiration for subsequent scholars than the source of clear-cut theoretical con-

cepts—drew attention, moreover, to the *mediality* of memory. In a great exhibition project called *Mnemosyne* (1924-28) he demonstrated how certain “pathos formulae” (*Pathosformeln*, symbols encoding emotional intensity) migrated through different art works, periods, and countries. Whereas the sociologist Halbwachs and the psychologist Frederick Bartlett (who popularized the notion of cultural schemata) laid the foundations for cultural memory studies with a view to social and cognitive levels, Warburg’s legacy to present-day research is to have given an example of how cultural memory can be approached via the level of material objects.

The interest that the works by Halbwachs and others had sparked in a small community of scholars dwindled away after the Second World War. It was only in the 1980s (after the “death of history,” the narrative turn, and the anthropological turn) that “collective memory,” first slowly and then at breathtaking speed, developed into a buzzword not only in the academic world, but also in the political arena, the mass media, and the arts. The “new cultural memory studies” was, again, very much an emergent phenomenon, taking shape more or less concurrently in many disciplines and countries. The 1980s saw the work of the French historian Pierre Nora on national *lieux de mémoire* (see den Boer) and the publications of the German group of researchers around Jan and Aleida Assmann, who focused on media and memory in ancient societies (see Harth). In psychology, meanwhile, behavioral and purely cognitive paradigms had been superseded by ecological approaches to human memory and the study of conversational and narrative remembering (see Straub; Middleton and Brown). Historical and political changes became a catalyst for the new memory studies. Forty years after the Holocaust the generation that had witnessed the Shoah began to fade away. This effected a major change in the forms of cultural remembrance. Without organic, autobiographic memories, societies are solely dependent on media (such as monuments; see Young) to transmit experience. Issues of trauma and witnessing were not only discussed in the context of Holocaust studies, but more and more also in gender studies and postcolonial studies (see Kansteiner and Weilnböck). More recently, major transformations in global politics, such as the breakdown of the communist states and other authoritarian regimes, have brought new memory phenomena to the fore, such as the issue of “transitional justice” (see Langenohl). More generally, the shape of contemporary media societies gives rise to the assumption that—today perhaps more than ever—cultural memory is dependent on media technologies and the circulation of media products (see Esposito; Rigney; Erll; Zelizer; Zierold; all this volume).

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In keeping with the double focus of this handbook—on genealogies and disciplinary branches—each of its six parts is concerned with historic and systematic aspects of cultural memory studies. Part I is dedicated to the one concept that has arguably proved most influential within the new, international and interdisciplinary memory studies: Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, which he introduced in a multivolume work of the same name, featuring French "sites of memory" (1984-92). The notion of *lieux de mémoire* quickly crossed national borders and was taken up in books about sites of memory in Italy, Germany, Canada, Central Europe, and the United States. The ubiquity of the term cannot belie the fact, however, that the *lieu de mémoire* is still one of the most inchoate and undertheorized concepts of cultural memory studies. On the one hand it lends itself particularly well to the study of a wide array of phenomena (from "places" in the literal sense to medial representations, rituals, and shared beliefs), but it is precisely because of its sheer limitless extension that the term has remained conceptually amorphous, and it would be well worth initiating another round of scholarly scrutiny (cf. Rigney). In this volume, Pim den Boer traces the roots of the *lieu* metaphor back to the ancient art of memory, its founding myth about Simonides of Ceos, and the method of *loci* and *imagines* (places and images) as we find it described in the rhetorics of Cicero and Quintilian. He uncovers the French *specificité* of Nora's concept, comments on its translatability, and considers the prospects for a comparative study of *lieux de mémoire*. Some elements of such a comparative perspective on sites of memory are provided by the following articles: Mario Isnenghi gives an insight into Italian *luoghi della memoria*; Jacques Le Rider writes about *Mittleuropa* (Central Europe) as a site of memory; Udo J. Hebel distinguishes literary, visual, performative, material, virtual, and transnational memory sites of the United States; and Jay Winter provides a comparative view of the sites that commemorate twentieth-century wars.

Part II presents memory research rooted in cultural history. Alon Confino reveals the intellectual and methodological affiliations between memory studies and the history of mentalities, reaching back to the fathers of the Annales school, Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch, and shows how Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire* emerged from this tradition. He then takes a critical look at present-day memory studies and the chances and pitfalls it offers to historians. The next three articles form a unity in many ways, not surprisingly, as they are written by members of the interdisciplinary, Heidelberg-based group of scholars who have been working on cultural memory since the 1980s. Dietrich Harth reconstructs the "invention of cultural memory" in this research context; Jan and Aleida Assmann present some of their eminently influential concepts, among them, for example, the distinction between "cultural" and "communicative" memory and

between “canon” and “archive.” Jürgen Reulecke delineates recent approaches to generational memory, which also have their source in the 1920s: Karl Mannheim’s writings belong to the foundational texts of cultural memory studies, since memory within and between generations is a significant form of collective remembering. With the development of terms such as “generationality” and “generativity,” his legacy has been updated. Vita Fortunati and Elena Lamberti complete this second part of the volume not only by giving a comprehensive overview of the wide array of concepts, but also by providing an insight into the actual practice of international and interdisciplinary cultural memory studies as carried out within the European thematic network ACUME.

Part III directs attention towards the different kinds of memory studies that have emerged in philosophy and the social sciences. Here, again, the history of memory studies and its protagonist Maurice Halbwachs get their due: Jean-Christophe Marcel and Laurent Mucchielli provide an introduction to Maurice Halbwachs’s works on *mémoire collective* as a “unique type of phenomenological sociology.” Jeffrey K. Olick then delineates in a grand sweep the development from Halbwachs’s beginnings to the current “sociology of mnemonic practices and products.” The articles by Andreas Langenohl and Erik Meyer address specific social, political, and ethical questions which have arisen out of contemporary memory politics. Langenohl provides an overview of forms of remembrance in post-authoritarian societies and elaborates on the issue of transitional justice; Meyer develops a policy studies perspective on cultural memory. The articles by Elena Esposito and Siegfried J. Schmidt represent the contributions of systems theory and radical constructivism to cultural memory studies. Esposito theorizes the powerful other side of cultural memory, namely social forgetting. This part ends with Maureen Junker-Kenny’s critical recapitulation of the philosophical and hermeneutical perspective on memory, forgetting, and forgiving that was introduced by Paul Ricœur.

The inclusion of psychological concepts in part IV provides a bridge from memory studies in the humanities and the social sciences to the natural sciences. Representatives of different disciplines (including the neurosciences; psychotherapy; and narrative, social, and cognitive psychology) provide insights into their work on cultural memory. An historical perspective is assumed by Jürgen Straub, who traces the genealogy of psychological memory studies back to the late nineteenth century and charts the history of narrative psychology, up to and including its current state. Wulf Kansteiner and Harald Weilnböck take a strong stand “against the concept of cultural trauma.” From a psychotherapy studies perspective they reconstruct and criticize the various uses and abuses of the concept of trauma in cultural memory studies. David Middleton and Steven D.

# Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory

ASTRID ERLI

## 1. The Power of Fiction: Novels and Films as Media of Cultural Memory

Cultural memory is based on communication through media. Shared versions of the past are invariably generated by means of “medial externalization” (see A. Assmann, this volume), the most basic form of which is oral speech, and the most common setting arguably that of grandparents telling children about the “old days.” More sophisticated media technologies, such as writing, film, and the Internet, broaden the temporal and spatial range of remembrance. Cultural memory is constituted by a host of different media, operating within various symbolic systems: religious texts, historical painting, historiography, TV documentaries, monuments, and commemorative rituals, for example. Each of these media has its specific way of remembering and will leave its trace on the memory it creates. What kinds of cultural memory, then, are produced by literature and film?

Fictional media, such as novels and feature films, are characterized by their power to shape the collective imagination of the past in a way that is truly fascinating for the literary scholar (and somewhat alarming for the historian). Two of the best-known examples are Erich Maria Remarque’s *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1929; *All Quiet on the Western Front*) and Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* (1936). Both were initially tremendously popular novels, with astronomic circulation figures, and both were turned into even more successful movies. The First World War and the American South—for many people even today these are “All Quiet on the Western Front” and “Gone with the Wind.” Fictions, both novelistic and filmic, possess the potential to generate and mold images of the past which will be retained by whole generations. Historical accuracy is not one of the concerns of such “memory-making” novels and movies; instead, they cater to the public with what is variously termed “authenticity” or “truthfulness.” They create images of the past which resonate with cultural memory. Usually, such fictions can neither be called “valuable literature,” nor do they enter the canon of artistic masterpieces (see A. Assmann; Grabes; both this volume). And often, too, they will disappear as quickly as they appeared on the scene.

With a view to cultural memory studies, these observations call for two methodological moves or shifts in attention: firstly, from high culture

to popular culture; and secondly, from the time-bound media of storage, which allow cultural memories to travel across centuries and even become themselves objects of remembrance (Shakespeare's historical plays would be an example), to the space-bound media of circulation, which can reach large audiences almost simultaneously, make cultural memories today and are forgotten tomorrow (cf. Innis).

The key question I am asking here is: What is it that turns *some* media (and not *others*) into powerful "media of cultural memory," meaning media which create and mold collective images of the past? Using examples mainly from war literature and war cinema, this article will provide three answers in three steps: I will look firstly at their *intra*-medial "rhetoric of collective memory"; secondly at their *inter*-medial dynamics, that is, the interplay with earlier and later representations; and thirdly at the *pluri*-medial contexts in which memory-making novels and films appear and exert their influence. In short, I am concerned here with phenomena *within*, *between*, and *around* those media which have the power to produce and shape cultural memory.

## 2. The Rhetoric of Collective Memory: How War Novels Create Modes of Remembering

Whenever the past is represented, the choice of media and forms has an effect on the kind of memory that is created: For example, a war which is orally represented, in an anecdote told by an old neighbor, seems to become part of lived, contemporary history; but as an object of a Wagnerian opera, the same war can be transformed into an apparently timeless, mythical event. In literature as in film, there are different modes of representation which may elicit different modes of cultural remembering in the audience.

With regard to novels of the First World War, I have distinguished four modes of a "rhetoric of collective memory": the experiential, the mythical, the antagonistic, and the reflexive mode (*Gedächtnisromane*). Experiential modes are constituted by literary forms which represent the past as a recent, lived-through experience. They are closely connected to what is called "communicative memory" (see J. Assmann, this volume). The specific qualities of communicative memory are often staged in literary texts by first-person narrative, thus indicating "life writing" (see Saunders, this volume). Siegfried Sassoon's and Robert Graves's fictions of the Great War make use of this strategy. Another typical form to represent war, used especially by modernist writers (such as Ford Madox Ford and Virginia Woolf), are stream-of-consciousness techniques, which convey

the specific inner experientiality of the trenches, combat, and trauma. And finally, a very detailed depiction of everyday life in the war and the representation of oral speech—especially sociolect, such as soldiers' slang—may serve to create what may be termed (with a nod to Roland Barthes) authenticating *effets de mémoire*. This strategy can be studied in Frederic Manning's war novel *The Middle Parts of Fortune* (1929).

Mythicizing modes are constituted by literary forms that resemble representations of the past within the framework of Jan Assmann's "cultural memory," that is, the remembrance of foundational events which are situated in a faraway, mythical past. Typical of this tendency is Ernst Jünger's novel *In Stahlgewittern* (1920; *The Storm of Steel*), in which German soldiers are transformed into figures of Germanic mythology. But also Francis Ford Coppola's highly acclaimed Vietnam War movie *Apocalypse Now* (1979) mythicizes the historical events by means of intertextual references and the creation of a primordial atmosphere, using an array of visual and sound effects.

Literary forms that help to maintain one version of the past and reject another constitute an antagonistic mode. Negative stereotyping (such as calling the Germans "the Hun" or "beasts" in early English poetry of the Great War) is the most obvious technique of establishing an antagonistic mode. More elaborate is the resort to biased perspective structures: Only the memories of a certain group are presented as true, while the versions articulated by members of conflicting memory cultures are deconstructed as false. Authors of the "lost generation," Ernest Hemingway and Richard Aldington for example, make ample use of these strategies. Resorting to we-narration may underscore the antagonistic potential of a novel. This is actually one of the most striking narrative features in Remarque's requiem on the lost generation, *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Here, we-narration creates a collective identity for a generation of young front-line soldiers, who are set apart from the old, war-mongering generation at home.

Literature usually allows its readers both a first- and a second-order observation: It gives us the illusion of glimpsing the past (in an experiential, mythical, or antagonistic way) and is—often at the same time—a major medium of critical reflection upon these very processes of representation. Literature is a medium that simultaneously builds and observes memory. Prominent reflexive modes are constituted by forms which draw attention to processes and problems of remembering. One of these forms is the explicit narratorial comment on the workings of memory, found, for example, in Marcel Proust's famous novel of memory, *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-27). Other strategies include the montage of different versions of the past, which can be studied in Edlef Koeppen's *Heeresbericht* (1930), the best German novel to have come out of the First World War.

Even more experimental forms appear in the literature of the Second World War, such as Kurt Vonnegut's inversion of chronology in *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) as a way to represent the bombardment of Dresden.

These different modes of representing the past—here zooming in to everyday experience, there zooming out to timeless myth; here taking part in contestation, there staying aloof and adopting a reflexive stance—are not restricted to war novels, or even to historical fiction. A rhetoric of collective memory can be found in all literary genres which represent the past, from romance to gothic novels and to crime thrillers, and of course also in other media such as feature films. Conversely, modes of remembering need not necessarily be established by verbal, literary, and narrative forms. Non-fictional media such as historiography and journalism (see Zelizer, this volume) and visual media such as painting and photography (see Ruchatz, this volume) have developed their own “rhetorics of collective memory.”

### 3. Premediation and Remediation: The Inter-Medial Dynamics of Memory

Not only *intra*-medial strategies, such as the rhetoric of collective memory, but also *inter*-medial relations are involved in the process that turns fictions into media of cultural memory. The inter-medial dynamics of cultural memory is usually characterized by a double movement, by the interaction of what can be called “premediation” and “remediation” (cf. Bolter and Grusin; Hoskins; Erll, *Prämediation*; Rigney, this volume). With the term “remediation” I refer to the fact that memorable events are usually represented again and again, over decades and centuries, in different media: in newspaper articles, photography, diaries, historiography, novels, films, etc. What is known about a war, a revolution, or any other event which has been turned into a site of memory, therefore, seems to refer not so much to what one might cautiously call the “actual events,” but instead to a canon of existent medial constructions, to the narratives and images circulating in a media culture. Remembered events are transmedial phenomena, that is, their representation is not tied to one specific medium. Therefore, they can be represented across the spectrum of available media. And this is precisely what creates a powerful site of memory (cf. Rigney).

The term “premediation” draws attention to the fact that existent media which circulate in a given society provide schemata for future experience and its representation. In this way, the representations of colonial wars premediated the First World War, and the First World War, in turn,

was used as a model for the Second World War. But not only depictions of earlier, yet somehow comparable events shape our understanding of later events. Media which belong to even more remote cultural spheres, such as art, mythology, religion, or law, can exert great power as premediators, too. John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), with its "Valley of the Shadow and Death" episode, premediated many journals and letters written during the First World War, as Paul Fussell has shown. (At the same time it was itself a remediation of Biblical accounts.) The American understanding and representation of 9/11 was clearly premediated by disaster movies, the crusader narrative, and Biblical stories. Premediation therefore refers to cultural practices of looking, naming, and narrating. It is the effect of *and* the starting point for mediatized memories.

With regard to the "Indian Mutiny" of 1857 (an uprising in colonial India against British rule) I have shown how witnesses' letters, newspaper articles, and drawings made on the spot were remediated in historiography, novels, and painting, thus endowing these later media with the atmosphere of experientiality and authenticity usually associated with contemporary media. At the same time, these representations were heavily premediated by earlier colonial accounts of violent encounters with rebellious subjects, by pictorial conventions derived from Renaissance painting, and by a long tradition of religious and literary writing (Erll, *Præmediation*).

Paradoxically, even despite antagonistic and reflexive forms of representation, remediation tends to solidify cultural memory, creating and stabilizing certain narratives and icons of the past. Such stabilizing effects of remediation can be observed in the emergence of "9/11" as an American, and indeed transnational, *lieu de mémoire* (see Hebel, this volume). The burning twin towers quickly crystallized into the one iconic image of the event, and this icon has been remediated ever since: in television news, photography, movies, comic strips, etc. But such iconization is not restricted to visual media. Another example connected with 9/11 is the icon of the "falling man," which remembers those people who were trapped by the fire on the upper floors of the World Trade Center and decided to jump rather than die in the flames. The "falling man" was first represented by a photograph taken by Richard Drew. In September 2003, this photograph was remediated in a story written by Tom Junod and published in *Esquire* magazine. In March 2006, Henry Singer and Richard Numeroff turned the "falling man" into a documentary (*9/11: The Falling Man*). And in 2007, Don DeLillo's novel *Falling Man* appeared on the literary market. These are only a few examples of its remediation, which feature text and image as well as very different stories and meanings, but at the same time all contribute to the stabilization of the "falling man" as an icon of "9/11."

Remediation is not restricted to icons and narratives, but can even choose actual media products and media technologies as its objects. It is especially in the cinema of cultural memory that we find such manifest forms of remediation. Actual, historical documentary material is incorporated in new movies, and this integration of photographic and filmic media serves to create an *effet de réel*. The fictional story seems indexically linked to the historical events it depicts (see also Ruchatz, this volume). However, the boundaries between documentary material and fictional reenactment (cf. Sturken) are often blurred in the course of remediation. One example is the famous Iwo Jima photograph, which was taken by Joe Rosenthal on February 23, 1945. It shows a group of U.S. marines raising the American flag on a Japanese island south of Tokyo. When it appeared in the *New York Times* shortly thereafter, it brought hope to the war-tired Americans. Still today, this photograph stands in U.S. memory for American heroism and the victory that is about to be won. Since its publication, the press photograph has been remediated countless times: by a memorial, several statues, books, songs, rituals, postal stamps, and other photographs. And it has been integrated (sometimes by filming the photograph itself, sometimes by reenactment) into a great number of popular war movies, among them *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949, with John Wayne). The most recent variation of its cinematic remediation is Clint Eastwood's movie *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006), in which Hollywood movie stars reenact the raising of the flag. A film still of this reenactment which resembles precisely the original photograph (except that it is in color) appears as the cinema poster. It is probably only a question of time until the still of Eastwood's reenactment will appear somewhere as authentic "source material" and be itself remediated, in order to make another representation appear authentic.

*Flags of Our Fathers* is also an example of how specific media technologies can be remediated: The intentionally bleached-out colors remind the audience of the monochrome news coverage during the Second World War and of course also of Rosenthal's original black-and-white photograph. What is often integrated via remediation into film versions of the past is therefore not merely actual documentary material, but also its specific "look" (which usually derives from the media technology of the time, but also from historical aesthetics). Parts of the Vietnam War movie *Platoon* (1986), for example, imitate the shaky camera movement characteristic of war journalism at the front and thus the look of news coverage in the 1960s and 1970s. Another example is *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), a movie about the Second World War, for which key episodes were shot in the grainy style of 16mm color film, thus emulating the cinematography of 1940s documentaries (cf. Westwell 78, 92).

It is the double dynamics of the premediation of remediation, of the medial preformation and re-shaping of events, which links each representation of the past with the history of media memories. First and foremost, these processes make the past intelligible; at the same time, they endow medial representations with the aura of authenticity; and, finally, they play a decisive role in stabilizing the memory of historical events into *lieux de mémoire*.

#### 4. Film and Cultural Memory: Pluri-Medial Networks

Asking once again what it is that turns some novels and movies into powerful memory-making fictions, a preliminary answer can now be given: Certain intra- and inter-medial strategies (as considered in sections 2 and 3 of this article) are responsible for marking them out as media of cultural memory. However, such strategies endow fictions only with a *potential* for memory-making. This potential has to be *realized* in the process of reception: Novels and movies must be read and viewed by a community *as* media of cultural memory. Films that are not watched or books that are not read may provide the most intriguing images of the past, yet they will not have any effect in memory cultures. The specific form of reception which turns fictions into memory-making fictions is not an individual, but a collective phenomenon. What is needed is a certain kind of *context*, in which novels and films are prepared and received as memory-shaping media.

Taking as an example contemporary filmmaking, such contexts have been reconstructed in detail by an interdisciplinary group of researchers at the University of Giessen (cf. Erll and Wodianka). We took a close look at some popular German history movies, such as *Der Untergang* (2004, *The Downfall*), a film about the last days of Adolf Hitler, and *Das Leben der Anderen* (2006, *The Lives of Others*), a film about life in the German Democratic Republic. There is actually a current boom of history films, a filmic memory conjuncture, which can be observed especially in—but is certainly not restricted to—Germany. Movies, TV serials, fictional, documentary, and semi-documentary formats have, in the course of the past fifteen years, virtually become obsessed with the representation of contemporary history: Films about the “Third Reich,” the Holocaust, the Second World War and its aftermath abound. Judging from its prevalence and impact, “film” seems to have become the leading medium of popular cultural memory.

Scrutinizing the cultural practices surrounding history movies we determined that it is not in the first place the medial and inter-medial strate-

gies that turn a “film about history” into a “memory-making film,” but instead what has been established around them: A tight network of other medial representations (and medially represented actions) prepare the ground for the movies, lead reception along certain paths, open up and channel public discussion, and thus endow films with their memorial meaning. With regard to the two examples mentioned above, we followed reviews in national and international newspapers and movie magazines, special features on TV, carefully targeted marketing strategies, merchandise, the DVD versions (including the “making of” segments, interviews with producers and actors, historical background information, etc.), awards (*The Lives of Others* received an Academy Award in 2007), political speeches, academic controversies (especially among historians with regard to *The Downfall*, on the question of the ethics of representing Hitler as a movie protagonist and thus humanizing him), the publication of a book about or a book based on the film (and its censorship, as in the case of *The Lives of Others*), and finally all those didactic formats which have turned both movies into teaching units in German classrooms.

All those advertisements, comments, discussions, and controversies constitute the collective contexts which channel a movie’s reception and potentially turn it into a medium of cultural memory. Moreover, all these expressions are circulated by means of media. Therefore we call these contexts “*pluri*-medial networks.” To sum up: While the potential of fictions to be turned into media of cultural memory is developed by certain strategies on intra-medial and inter-medial levels, those potentialities can only be turned into actualities within pluri-medial contexts. The “memory-making film” as well as the “memory-making novel” are made *in* and *by* the media networks surrounding them.

## 5. Conclusion

Literature and film can have effects on both levels of cultural memory: the individual *and* the collective (see for this distinction the introduction of this volume). On a collective level, fictional texts and movies can become powerful media, whose versions of the past circulate in large parts of society, and even internationally. These media of cultural memory, however, are rarely uncontroversial. Their memory-making effect lies not in the unity, coherence, and ideological unambiguousness of the images they convey, but instead in the fact that they serve as cues for the discussion of those images, thus centering a memory culture on certain medial representations and sets of questions connected with them. With a view to these complex collective processes an intensified dialogue between repre-

sentatives from literary and media studies and historians and sociologists promises to provide further insights into how the circulation of media, their reception, critical discussion, institutionalization, and canonization works.

On an individual level, media representations provide those schemata and scripts which allow us to create in our minds certain images of the past and which may even shape our own experience and autobiographical memories (see the articles by Markowitsch and Welzer, this volume). The “cultural mind” is in many ways a “medial mind”: It is the patterns derived from the media cultures we live in, especially (albeit often unintentionally) from fictions, that shape our idea of reality and our memories. This insight calls for interdisciplinary collaboration between what may seem to be disciplines situated farthest apart on the spectrum of memory studies: literary and media studies on the one hand and psychology and the neurosciences on the other.

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