Cultural Memory and Memory Cultures

BIRGIT NEUMANN and MARTIN ZIEROLD

1. Mapping the Field of Cultural Memory Studies

Memory matters. The idea of memory pervades contemporary public life, spurring heated debate in the media, in the political sphere and in academic discourses (see Radstone and Schwarz 2). Over the last two decades or so, memory has emerged in various parts of the world as a key concept for the interdisciplinary study of culture, involving disciplines as diverse as psychology, history, sociology, art history, literary and media studies, philosophy, theology and the neurosciences. As a travelling concept par excellence, memory has contributed to forging new interdisciplinary endeavours not only in the field of culture but also between the humanities, social studies and the sciences (see Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies" 1). What these investigations of the relation between culture and memory are primarily interested in is, broadly speaking, "the importance of acts of memory for the present" (Bal, "Introduction" xv), i.e. the cultural functions that 'memories in the making' fulfil in specific socio-cultural contexts. At stake is the ever-shifting interplay between present and past, "the workings of the past-in-the-present" (Radstone and Schwarz 2), and the manifold and frequently contradictory bearing these workings have on collective identity, politics and social recognition. "Memory is crucial to the understanding of a culture," Marita Sturken notes, "precisely because it indicates collective desires, needs, and self-definitions" (Sturken 2).

Yet while the "contemporary 'presentness' of memory is evident" (ibid. 1), exactly how memory is to be understood remains an open matter. The omnipresence of the term cultural memory in the study of culture cannot hide the fact that the concept denotes quite different things in different disciplines, national contexts and historical epochs. Indeed, the array of terminologies coined to capture the relationship between memory and culture testifies to this diversity: *mémoire collective*/collective memory, *cadres sociaux*/social frameworks of memory, social memory, *ars memoriae*, *lieux de mémoire*/sites of memory, invented traditions, myth, *memoria*, heri-

tage, commemoration, *kulturelles Gedächtnis*, *kommunikatives Gedächtnis*, generationality, cultural trauma, digital memories, and so forth. The relations between memory and culture, which the concepts of cultural memory and memory cultures explore and respond to, are certainly complex, being open to many different terminological interpretations, methodological takes and theoretical perspectives (see Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies" 2–3). The various travels of the concept of memory "between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods, and between geographically dispersed academic communities" (Bal, *Travelling Concepts* 24) certainly yielded a distinct "terminological richness" (Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies" 3), but also a peculiar "disjointedness", sometimes even confusing heterogeneity in the field of cultural memory studies (see ibid.). What is at stake here is not merely a question of different terminologies but of epistemological differences, in some cases incompatibilities, which concern the constitution of the respective research cultures as a whole, including the ways in which they construct and approach their objects. At the same time, however, cooperation among the disciplines and regional research cultures seems vital for the success of cultural memory studies. The study of cultural memory, Nicolas Pethes and Jens Ruchatz have pointed out, is not only a multidisciplinary field of research, but essentially an interdisciplinary endeavour (see Pethes and Ruchatz 9): To come to grips with the complex interfaces between culture and memory co-operation between disciplines is crucial. Elaborating key concepts, revealing their specific structures of differences and overlaps, is a precondition for enabling interdisciplinary dialogues.

The present contribution seeks to capture some of the travels of the concept 'cultural memory' in an exemplary rather than exhaustive manner. What we want to illustrate is the extent to which the journeys of the concept cultural memory are characterised by selective appropriations, productive misunderstandings and discontinuous translations. These discontinuities are largely due to local epistemologies, historically variable norms and the dominant paradigms of a discipline, which direct the researchers' attention to those aspects of the concept that can best be adapted to their present purpose (see the introduction to this volume). Of course, our own tracing of the concept's travels is also influenced by our cultural location, in terms of both our North European provenance and our disciplinary training in the humanities and social sciences, respectively.

2. The 'Invention' of Collective Memory

The sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who published his landmark *Social Frameworks of Memory* (*Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*) in 1925, is commonly credited with the 'invention' of the concept of collective memory (see Harth). Halbwachs's work on memory was inspired by insights from two major thinkers in the late nineteenth century, namely the philosopher Henri Bergson and the sociologist Émile Durkheim (see Apfelbaum 79–81). True, memory has been a key topic for social thinkers since Greek Antiquity. Yet it was only in the early twentieth century that memory was conceived of as a distinctively social and cultural phenomenon, a *mémoire collective*, as Halbwachs put it (see Echterhoff and Saar, "Einleitung" 15–17). In *Social Frameworks of Memory*, Halbwachs took up Bergson's conception of memory as a fluid and changing entity, which is fundamentally responsible for our experience of time, but addressed the issue from Durkheim's sociological perspective (see Olick, "From Collective Memory" 155). Interdisciplinarity thus characterised the study of memory from its very beginnings.

Broadly speaking, Halbwachs's studies follow four main lines of thought, which have to a considerable extent shaped the field of cultural memory studies: first, the creativity of memory; second, the social construction of individual memory; third, the development of collective memory in groups such as the family and generation; fourth, the extension of collective memory to the level of entire societies, including culturally available commemorative symbols and technologies. By thus establishing a link between individual and collective memory Halbwachs provided a sociological framework for the study of memory (see Apfelbaum 77).

Memory, for Halbwachs, is first and foremost socially constructed and constructive. In his 1925 publication, *On Collective Memory* (orig. *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*), Halbwachs argued that each individual memory is also a collective memory in so far as memory is not only mediated but also structured and shaped by social arrangements. Due to the intimate interplay between social frameworks and individual memory, the distinction between the individual and the social components of remembering ultimately becomes blurred: Memories, according to Halbwachs, "are recalled to me externally, and the groups of which I am a part at any time give me the means to reconstruct them" (38). Social contexts, social materials and social cues are thus intrinsically part of what we usually consider to be 'individual' memories (see Olick, "From Collective Memory" 156).

According to this view, individual and collective memory are closely, even dialectally related. The *mémoire collective* is not to be understood as a group mind, it is not an anti-individualist memory (see Echterhoff and

Saar, "Einleitung"). Rather, it is the sum of experiences and knowledge relevant to the self-understanding of a particular group. Collective memory, in this scheme of things, provides the frame within which individuals make sense of their experiences: "We can remember only on condition of retrieving the position of past events that interest us from the frameworks of collective memory" (Halbwachs 172). Collective memory emerges through constant social interaction, i.e. through shared experiences and actions, as well as through ongoing communication about the group's past. Memory, according to Halbwachs, is therefore closely tied to the formation of collective identities (see Echterhoff and Saar, "Einleitung" 18). What makes recollections important to social groups, then, is not the past as such, but its creative mnemonic appropriations in the light of the group's present needs and imagined futures (see Apfelbaum 85).

Halbwachs's emphasis on the relation between memory, identity and storytelling has considerably influenced subsequent investigations of memory (see Apfelbaum 87; Olick, "From Collective Memory" 156). The importance of memory and narrative to the formation of identities, individual and collective, is extremely well documented (see Brockmeier and Carbaugh; Eakin; Hinchman and Hinchman; Straub; Welzer). This emphasis, however, has frequently led to a disregard of unintentional, implicit and non-narrative forms of cultural remembering (see Öhlschläger and Wiens). Moreover, it is questionable whether in complex modern societies, in which collective memories are typically communicated through media, processes of remembering necessarily go hand in hand with the formation of collective identity (see Zierold).

Halbwachs's studies of collective memory put emphasis on the multiple social frameworks of individual memory, arguing that memory is always shaped by collective contexts. According to this view, collective memory is inherently plural, because each individual is always part of several groups, each of which has its own memories (see Neumann, *Erinnerung, Identität, Narration* 79). Yet Halbwachs also lay the ground for a collective conceptualisation of memory (see Olick, "From Collective Memory" 157), thus shifting attention from the social constructedness of subjective categories of meaning to a radically different concept of culture, namely as "patterns of publicly available symbols objectified in society" (Olick, "Collective Memory" 336). In addition to a "socially framed individualist approach to memory" (Olick, "From Collective Memory" 157), Halbwachs drew attention to the importance of culturally circulating symbols, rituals, customs and media to the construction of collective memory. In *La topographie légendaire* (1941) he focuses on religious communities whose collective memory is structured around topographical aspects and

reaches back thousands of years, thus illustrating how the past is brought into the present (see Apfelbaum 91).

Halbwachs's contention that there is a dimension of collective remembering that does not rely on individual acts of memory provoked controversy almost immediately. The historian Marc Bloch (1925), who was Halbwachs's colleague in Strasbourg, accused Halbwachs of falsely transferring concepts from individual memory to the level of the collective, thus falling prey to a typical Durkheimian strategy (see Echterhoff and Saar, "Einleitung" 24). Even though scholars today continue to question the validity of the concept of collective or cultural memory, arguing that it is a metaphor at best, Halbwachs's contention that collective memory relies on the transmission of mnemonic symbols is the starting point for many fruitful investigations of the relation between memory and culture, most notably of Jan and Aleida Assmann's theory of cultural memory.

In contrast to Halbwachs, who might currently be "the best remembered founding father of memory studies" (Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies" 8), the contributions of German Jewish art historian Aby Warburg to the study of memory have, at least in some disciplines, been somewhat marginalised. Warburg can indeed be considered as an early proponent of an interdisciplinary study of culture. He emphatically argued that scholars should cross disciplinary boundaries to gain deeper insight into the complex workings of cultural memory (see ibid.). Rather than putting forward a full-blown and coherent theory of memory, Warburg initiated several memory projects which illustrate the complex and contradictory workings of memory. His unfinished *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1924–29), fundamentally an attempt to combine philosophical with image-historical approaches to memory cultures, documents the history of pictorial memory from antiquity up to the twentieth century, including such various visual materials as postal stamps, photographs and illustrated newspapers. The atlas is structured around so-called 'pathos formulae' (*Pathosformeln*), which travel through various historical periods, art works and regions. 'Pathos formulae' are best understood as visual, highly mythic symbols, which encode emotionally intense experiences (see Weinberg 235) and serve mnemonic functions. Due to their enormous affective potential they allow for variable, culturally-specific decodings and structure cultural memories in an implicit, often hidden manner.

Hence, whereas the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs is often credited with laying the theoretical foundations for the study of the social and cultural dimensions of individual memories (see Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies" 9), Warburg's most important legacy to today's memory studies is his empirical insistence on the relevance of pictures—and thus media in a

broader sense—to the construction and continuation of collective memory (some scholars therefore even consider Warburg as a founding father of visual studies; see Horstkotte in this volume).

Of course, Halbwachs and Warburg were far from being the only scholars interested in the interplay between memory and culture in the early twentieth century (see Olick, "From Collective Memory" 155). One might just as well start the history of cultural memory studies with quite different thinkers: French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep, British psychologist Frederik Bartlett, cultural psychologist Lev Vygotsky, the philosophers Henri Bergson and Walter Benjamin, the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, to name but a few, made important contributions to the field of cultural memory studies at the beginning of the twentieth century (see Leslie; Terdiman). For although most of these thinkers were interested in the workings of individual memory they also showed how culture, social constellations and the materiality of things, respectively, often unconsciously, mould acts of remembering. Occasionally these scholars took notice of another's work; more often, however, their research into the field remained largely unconnected (see Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies" 8). The concepts that were shaped for the study of memory in this early phase did not travel well. Memory studies around 1900 are an example of "an emergent phenomenon, cropping up at different places at roughly the same time" (ibid.), i.e. a transdisciplinary shift of critical perspective with only few intentional acts of conceptual translation and interdisciplinary exchange.

3. The Rediscovery of Memory in the 1980s: The Second Phase of Cultural Memory Studies

After promising beginnings in the 1920s, memory studies were marginalised and eventually disrupted with the beginning of the Second World War. It seems that after the Second World War the works of Halbwachs and Warburg, but also of Bartlett and Vygotsky, were largely forgotten and that interest in memory had ceased (see Apfelbaum 78). It was only at the beginning of the 1980s that the concept of collective memory came back on the scene again, quickly moving centre stage not only in the academic world, but also in political discourse, the mass media, the arts and popular culture. In this context, the seminal works of Halbwachs and, eventually, Warburg were rediscovered, so that they are currently considered as major inspirations in the field of cultural memory studies. Yet even in the 1970s, when Pierre Nora spelled out the premises of the history of mentalities, he was convinced that this historical orientation was largely

inspired by contemporary intellectual preoccupations. It is only recently that he has come to acknowledge the theoretical debts his approach owes to Halbwachs's conceptions of history and memory (see ibid.).

Various reasons may have contributed, in one way or another, to the 'memory hype' that set in over the course of the 1980s. Historical and political developments were certainly conducive to the rekindled interest in memory and its interdisciplinary study. The 1980s saw the gradual extinction of the generation that had witnessed the Shoah and the Second World War (see Echterhoff and Saar, "Einleitung" 13). This development caused major mnemonic disruptions. Gradually, these horrifying events ceased to be part of any lived, autobiographical memory and, consequently, their remembrance came to rely on memory media, on monuments, museums, films, books, and so on (see Radstone and Schwarz 3). Forty years after the Holocaust, the question of how this traumatic event could and should be publicly remembered pervaded political debates (see Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies" 9). Moreover, major transformations in international politics and the increased forging of international bonds, for instance through the perspective of a European union, put the focus on national but also international sites of memory. Pierre Nora's project of inventorying the French *lieux de mémoire* is clearly marked by the concern for the disappearance of national memory through the increasing internationalisation of political discourses: "The rapid disappearance of our national memory cries out for an inventory of the sites where it [national memory] was selectively incarnated" ("Présentation" vii, our translation).

Last but not least, crucial developments in global history and politics, such as the breakdown of authoritarian regimes, forced migration, genocides and ecological catastrophes, contributed to an increasing "politicization of memory" (Radstone and Schwarz, "Introduction" 2), so that public debates about memory were taking on more complex, often interculturally inflected forms (see Klein et al.). Memory is frequently invoked in the public sphere to acknowledge various acts of violence and injustice, present and past (see ibid. 3), thus adding an ethical dimension to the concept of memory (see Margalit). In these contexts, issues of trauma and witnessing have played an increasingly large role, pointing to the culturally disruptive effects of memories and calling into question conventional, narrative forms of remembering. This development was clearly spurred by 9/11 and ensuing debates about appropriate ways of remembering: Whose version of the past should we remember and to what political ends? Is memory aimed at educating the next generation, at expiating guilt or at enabling self-aggrandisement? Under what memorial aegis and according to whose rules do communities remember their misdeeds and barbarities? What the debates around these questions have shown is that memories are

never shaped in a political vacuum (see Langenohl; Young). They always reflect both the past experience and current needs of communities. It seems that ongoing public debates about appropriate forms of remembrance have added a self-reflexive dimension to cultural memory, driven by the awareness that power dynamics as well as questions of responsibility and justice are inevitably implicated in memory processes.

Furthermore, new theoretical developments served as a catalyst for memory studies in the 1980s. Theoretical approaches such as deconstruction, social constructivism, gender theory and postcolonialism, the history of mentalities and *nouvelle histoire*, deeply affected conventional notions of history as a 'master narrative' and brought new memory phenomena to the fore (see Echterhoff and Saar, "Einleitung" 13–14). The 'narrative turn' in numerous disciplines concerned with the study of culture revealed the constructive and necessarily selective dimension of historiographic discourse, ultimately calling the clear-cut boundary between history and memory into question. In psychology, too, emphasis was put on the social contexts of memory processes and the influence that communication and storytelling had on individual memories (see ibid. 27–28). Against the background of these historical, political and theoretical developments, in the 1980s a second phase of memory studies began with the publication of several innovative contributions to the field of cultural memory studies, among which Nora's concept of national *lieux de mémoire* as well as Jan and Aleida Assmann's concept of cultural memory probably proved to be the most influential.

The *lieux de mémoire* project, started by the French historian Nora in 1977, builds on the importance of localisation and space for memory processes, taking up an idea which goes back to the ancient concept of *loci memoriae*. Yet whereas the *loci memoriae* was, by and large, a necessary and value-free mnemotechnics in a society without modern media, Nora's *lieux de mémoire* are invested with extremely ideological and nationalist meaning (see den Boer 21). The larger part of the French *lieux de mémoire*, such as "Le Roi," "Vichy" or "Le Louvre," are closely tied to the identity politics of the French nation and are designed to serve the remembrance of national history. Nora defines *lieux de mémoire* as any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, that serves as a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of specific communities (see Nora, *Realms* xvii). Hence, such *lieux* include not only material spaces (such as Paris or Versailles) but also historical persons (e.g. Jeanne d'Arc), theoretical texts (e.g. Descartes' *Discours de la méthode*), symbolic objects (e.g. the French flag) as well as ritual actions and public holidays.

The conceptual framework of Nora's project derives from what he identifies as an overarching paradox (see Schwarz 51). According to Nora,

the *lieux de mémoire* no longer constitute a coherent collective memory; on the contrary, they testify to the fragmentation and even dissolution of memory. "Memory is constantly on our lips," Nora argues, "because it no longer exists" (Nora, *Realms* 1). Contemporary (French) society faces a moment of transition in which it experiences the inevitable replacement of memory as embodied in living communities by an anonymous history. Due to the effects of globalisation, democratisation and the disintegration of traditional communities, we are about to enter a period that will be marked by the "reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer" (ibid. 3). According to Nora, it is because of the disappearance of memory that we are presently witnessing such a boom in *lieux de mémoire*. As indicated by Nora's selective inventory of memory sites, the *lieux de mémoire* are extremely pluralised, even atomised, and therefore no longer possess the capacity to forge a shared national memory and to give life and meaning to the national past (see Carrier 141): Where once there had been "order and hierarchy," now there was mainly chaos and a clear lack of any "central organizing principle" (Nora, *Realms* 3: 614). *Lieux de mémoire* are artificial placeholders for a vanishing collective memory, vestiges of 'real' memory *and* simulacra that merely refer to themselves (see Carrier 141.).

Nora's *lieux de mémoire* project is probably the most prominent example of a cultural history, which links theoretical reflections on collective memory to the research of historical memory cultures, a project, which is extremely ideological and sometimes even considered as nationalist (see Carrier 158). Cleary, the memory that pervades *Les lieux de mémoire* is that of old, centralised and culturally peculiarly homogenous France (see Saar 274; Schwarz 54). Indeed, as Nora himself points out, his project proceeds from the special position of France, "a kind of French *Sonderweg* compared to the English monarchy and the German Empire" (den Boer 31). According to Nora, French national memory is distinct from, for instance, German or English memory, for it is simultaneously authoritarian, unified, exclusive and universal. To the extent that the very concept of *lieux de mémoire* bears the traces of French cultural politics, it reveals that—and how—specific historical contexts and political interests shape the conceptualisation of concepts for the study of culture.

The national specificities of the concept of *lieux de mémoire* become particularly evident when comparing it to similar concepts developed in other countries, such as the concepts of 'invented traditions' (Hobsbawm and Ranger), 'imagined communities' (Anderson) or 'theatres of memory' (Samuel). The concept of 'theatres of memory,' for instance, which was coined by the English historian Raphael Samuel, also combines theoretical approaches to cultural memory with historical analyses of memory cul-

tures, in this case, British memory culture. The concept, which is rooted in left-wing, Marxist politics, aims to rediscover everyday experiences of ordinary people. According to Samuel, we live in a vibrant historical culture and the rise of heritage and living history testifies to an expanding and intrinsically democratic sense of history. The project of inventorying 'theatres of memory' pays tribute to popular heritage culture, thus writing a mnemo-history from below, which both reflects and propels the democratisation of history. Hence, whereas Nora's concept is concerned with the nationalisation of the past, considering heterogeneity as a threat rather than positive thrust, 'theatres of memory' are interested in propelling the pluralisation of memory.

Even though Nora's programmatic concept of *lieux de mémoire* is deeply implicated in French identity politics, it did indeed travel far. Nora's project spurred many comparable projects and studies on national *lieux de memoire,* be it in Germany, the Netherlands, Italy or Spain. The fact that many publishers, impressed by the success of an easily accessible mnemo-history, commissioned volumes on the *lieux de mémoire* of their respective nations (see den Boer 22), illustrates the extent to which collective remembering and media of memory are tied to commercial considerations. Yet the travels of the concept of *lieux de mémoire* to different national contexts were far from being smooth. Rather, its travelling posed various problems related to conceptual history, ultimately yielding transformed concepts which, in the words of Edward Said, occupy "a new position in a new time and place" (Said 227). Jay Winter's concept of 'sites of memory,' for instance, takes its point of departure from Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, but refers more narrowly to physical sites where commemorative acts take place. Winter's concept bears the traces of twentieth-century concerns with memory: The concept 'sites of memory' builds on the premise that, in the twentieth century, most sites signal the loss of life in war. Sites of memory are thus inextricably linked to processes of mourning: hence the title of his volume *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (1995).

The German series, to give another example, is called *Erinnerungsorte*; however, the concept is largely stripped of the nationalist nostalgia that lies at the heart of the corresponding French concept *lieux de mémoire*. Étienne François and Hagen Schulze, the editors of the successful series, point out that the concept of 'Erinnerungsorte' is first and foremost a metaphor to describe a shared knowledge of the past that possesses a normative and formative potential for the present (see François and Schulze 18). 'Erinnerungsorte' refer to collective memories which acquire their meaning through ever-changing relations to the present. Other than Nora, François and Schulze aim to present an open, pluralistic history, which can testify to the conflicts, heterogeneity and even ruptures within

German memory culture. The conceptual differences between the concept of 'Erinnerungsorte' and *lieux de mémoire* already become evident on the level of translation (see den Boer 22). François and Schulze as well as Nora (see "Nachwort" 685), in his contribution to the German series, highlight the difficulties in finding an adequate translation of *lieux*, suggesting such different terms as *Mythen* ('myths'), *Topoi* ('topoi'), *Knoten* ('knots'), Herde ('centres'), *Kreuzungen* ('crossings') and *Erinnerungsboyen* ('buoys of memory'). It is clear that all of these terms have different conceptual connotations to the more concrete expression of *Ort* and thus entail new emphases and a new ordering of the phenomena within the complex field of collective remembering.

In Germany, the second phase of cultural memory studies is probably shaped most pervasively by the concept of cultural memory. The concept was developed and elaborated in various publications by Jan and Aleida Assmann (partly in collaboration with researchers elsewhere at the university of Heidelberg; see Harth). To date, the concept of cultural memory has been the most influential attempt to theorise the complex relations between culture and memory. Because the concept of cultural memory is intimately tied to issues of identity politics, power structures, value systems and political legitimation it has proved particularly fruitful for the interdisciplinary study of culture (see Erll, "Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen" 171).

Jan and Aleida Assmann's theory, which is inspired by Maurice Halbwachs's ideas and concepts of the Moscow-Tartu semiotic school (Lotman and Uspenskij), breaks up the concept of collective memory to introduce a basic distinction between two different modes of remembering, two *modi morandi*, namely communicative and cultural memory (see J. Assmann, *Das kulturelles Gedächtnis* 56). This way it becomes possible to distinguish between a collective memory that is based on everyday communication and a collective memory that relies on institutionalised symbolic forms and media of memory, a distinction entailed, indeed, by Halbwachs's broader concept. These modes of remembering clearly differ in terms of their contents, forms, transmission, time frames and carriers (for a summary see Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis* 27–33).

Communicative memory, to some extent equivalent to Halbwachs's concept of collective memory, lives in everyday interaction and communication and therefore only has a limited time-depth, typically encompassing three interacting generations and thus reaching no further back than approximately 80 to 100 years. Communicative memory is implicated in everyday life. Its contents are variable and each member of the community is free to pass on his or her interpretation of past experiences to other members. Traditions of communication, memory talk, and the affective

ties of families, groups and generations guarantee the durability of the collective memory.

Cultural memory, by contrast, is highly institutionalised and relies on exteriorised, objectified symbolic forms, i.e. on both media and performances of memory, which, according to Jan Assmann (see *Das kulturelles Gedächtnis* 56), can be transferred into changing contexts and be transmitted from generation to generation. Because of the ethical importance that groups attach to cultural memory, and because it is based on fixed points in an 'absolute past' (rather than on the moving horizon of communicative memory), its contents are fixed in external objects which can stand the test of time, such as books, monuments and paintings. Specific institutions, such as museums, archives and libraries, i.e. institutions of preservation, are established to grant the continuation of cultural memory. Moreover, cultural memory, in contrast to communicative memory, relies on highly specialised carriers of memory, who frequently act as guardians of memory. These specialists, such as shamans, priests or poets, interpret the messages specific media of memory convey and impart them to the community. Memory and power are thus intimately related: Cultural memory gives meaning to a shared past, shaping collective self-images as well as the values and norms of a community (see J. Assmann, "Kollektives Gedächtnis" 13–15).

Despite the differences between communicative and cultural memory, there are also many dynamic overlaps between them. Both communicative and cultural memory are essentially tied to the making of identities: "Memory," Jan Assmann points out, "is knowledge with an identity-index, it is knowledge about oneself, that is, one's own diachronic identity, be it as an individual or as a member of a family, a generation, a community, a nation, or a cultural and religious tradition" ("Communicative and Cultural Memory" 114). The relationship between memory and identity is reciprocal: On the one hand, remembering is crucial to the formation and cohesion of groups; on the other, groups are defined and held together by a shared past. Remembering, Assmann concludes, is therefore always "a realization of belonging, even a social obligation" (ibid.). Accordingly, memory never preserves the past as such; rather, much of what we remember is an actively designed construct fulfilling current needs for meaning (see Neumann, *Erinnerung, Identität, Narration* 86). Collective memories are highly selective and constructive; they are "permeated and shot through with forgetting" (A. Assmann, "Canon" 103–04). This is why acts of forgetting, whether purposeful or involuntary, inevitably inform and structure the field of politics.

It has frequently been pointed out that Jan Assmann's concept of cultural memory bears the marks of its disciplinary origin, namely Egyptolo-

gy, and can therefore not easily be applied to the study of contemporary cultures. Having originally been designed to capture the specificities of relatively homogenous high civilisations of the ancient world, the concept of cultural memory presumes the existence of a rather unified memory, which is controlled by only a few, very powerful elites. The notion of a single, homogenous collective memory has only limited validity in contemporary, inherently pluralised and multicultural cultures (see Saar 273).

Numerous researchers have therefore suggested replacing the notion of one cultural memory with the idea of numerous cultural memories vying for cultural recognition (see, e.g. Saar 275). The Collaborative Research Centre "Memory Cultures" (*Erinnerungskulturen*), which was founded at the University of Giessen in 1997, for example, proposes to replace the relatively static and homogenous concept of cultural memory with a concept that puts emphasis on the dynamics, creativity and plurality of cultural remembering. The concept of cultures of memory stresses the heterogeneity of cultural memories and the variability of mnemonic practices that coexist within a conflicted culture and that frequently vie for political hegemony (for a summary see Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis* 34–37; Sandl). Memory cultures, from this perspective, are sites of conflicts, in which the mnemonic interests of different cultural groups and their interpretations of the past are publicly negotiated and discussed in regard to their legitimate validity. Hence, memory does not refer to a simple, reified and knowable past but is best understood as an open process, in which many contrary forces and social demands converge and vie for recognition (see Sturken 1).

The concept of cultural memory entered the circulation process of interdisciplinary constellations in an amazingly short time, persistently shaping the research agenda of numerous disciplines concerned with the study of culture (see Harth 88). The numerous travels of the concept did, once again, yield manifold shifts—in both the receiving disciplines and in the conceptualisation of cultural memory itself.

In line with a pervasive cultural turn, literary studies was particularly eager to adopt the concept of cultural memory. True, memory always was a key topic in literary studies, as, for example, Frances Yates's *The Art of Memory* (1966) and Renate Lachmann's *Gedächtnis und Literatur* (1990; *Memory and Literature*, 1997) amply illustrate. Lachmann understands intertextuality, i.e. references to other texts, as the memory of literature. According to this view, the memory of a text is constituted by the intertextuality of its references. In contrast to these studies, which are primarily concerned with the poetics of literary memory, the eventual import of the concept of cultural memory shifted the focus to the politics of literary memory; furthermore, it expanded the scope of literary analysis

beyond its traditional focus on representations of individual memory to collective forms of memory. In her study *Erinnerungsräume* (1999), Aleida Assmann drew attention to the extent to which literary texts, particularly canonical texts, store and reproduce the cultural capital of a society and can thus function as powerful media of collective memory. Subsequent studies concerned with the interfaces between literature, memory and culture showed that it is not only canonical masterpieces but literary works in general, and not least popular literature, that take an active part in the construction of collective memory (see Erll, "Kollektives Gedächtnis" 170), often giving voice to hitherto forgotten or marginalised memories (see e.g. Birke; Eckstein; Erll, *Gedächtnisromane*; Neumann, *Erinnerung, Identität, Narration*; Rupp): Thanks to their narrativising and aesthetising power, literary texts generate images of the past that resonate with cultural memory, thus providing powerful frames for collective interpretations of the past (see Nünning).

Literary studies has not only imported the concept of cultural memory; it also has some relevant exports to offer to the larger field of cultural memory studies (see Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis* 167). Perhaps most importantly, literary studies has drawn attention to the importance of form, showing the extent to which the 'how' bears on the 'what' of remembrance. Because cultural memory, particularly in its belatedness, is always based on representation (see Huyssen 2–3), the form of memories has an effect on the kind of memory that is produced. In this context, literary studies has stressed the manifold interfaces between narrativity and memory, demonstrating that most collective memories possess a narrative structure. It seems that media of memory—be it films, monuments or museums—derive much of their meaning from some narrative kernel: Narrative structures make events memorable by compellingly organising the past around the specific experiences of human figures, which can engage the sympathies of the reader or viewer (see Rigney 347).

While literary studies often analyses fictional texts in order to generate knowledge about formal and conceptual aspects of the relationship of memory, culture and society, other disciplines like history and social sciences have also made use of the concept of cultural memory in their specific ways. As the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs and the historian Pierre Nora are two of the founding fathers of cultural memory studies, both of their disciplines have a firmly rooted investment in the field and are now among the key contributors to memory studies as an interdisciplinary endeavour.

For many historians the term 'memory' has initially been conceived of as a challenge to the concept of 'history.' The rediscovery of the concept 'memory' in the 1970s and 80s has led to a number of debates about the

relations between memory and history, sometimes defining them in strict opposition to one another. While traditional concepts of history stress the need for an objective search for historical truth in an almost scientific way, the notion of 'memory' highlights the constructive, subjective and ambiguous character of every attempt to reconstruct the past in the present. Even though this perceived fundamental threat to the historical tradition led to heated debates at first, nowadays the concept of memory is firmly embedded in the study of history and has opened up many innovative avenues to the study of the past (see Burke; Fried; Niethammer). Combining empirical with theoretical approaches, the concept of memory also allowed for the integration of cultural theory into the study of history.

Thus, 'history' and 'memory' are no longer seen as oppositions on the same level of abstraction, but rather as productively related. The historian Peter Burke (1989) has stressed in his seminal "History as Social Memory," that the academic act of writing history in itself is part of social memory, with all its political and cultural implications. However, this does not mean that the specific activities of historians lose their academic standards: Today, following the tradition of historians like Jacques LeGoff, many scholars insist on the relevance of a professional historical discipline striving for objectivity (without ever being able to fully achieve it), which is seen as a specific part of the broader processes of cultural memory, on which history draws for its academic research and to which it at the same time contributes with the knowledge and the stories it generates.

The concept of memory has not only proven to be fruitful in the field of history in terms of theoretical and epistemological reflections, as well as analyses of social memory of historical events, such as the Holocaust. In addition, the advancement of the methodology of Oral History is closely related to the concept of memory. As Astrid Erll points out, early research in the field of Oral History merely accumulated recollections of witnesses to history, but lacked a deeper understanding of processes of memory (see Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis* 51). It was especially in dialogue with concepts of memory that Oral History developed a more sophisticated methodology.

The concept of memory has also proven very productive in the social sciences. At the same time, however, the social sciences are an example of the way that while the term 'memory' has travelled widely, specific concepts of 'memory' have travelled a lot less, especially internationally. Many scholars contributing to 'social memory studies' (see Olick and Robbins) still take Maurice Halbwachs as their primary theoretical foundation, with the more recent contributions, for example by Nora and Jan and Aleida Assmann, taking much longer to gain wide recognition in the Anglo-American discussion, not least because many texts, especially from the

German context, have still not been made available in English translations.

At the same time, scholars in German sociology have developed a very specific concept of memory following the tradition of Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, which has hardly been followed up on internationally (see Esposito). Thinking about social aspects of 'memory' from a perspective of systems theory, the focus of research shifts fundamentally. According to systems theory, the most basic operation for each system is to constantly draw a distinction between the system itself and its 'outside.' Historic events (in a very abstract sense) obviously are a fundamental factor in this process: communication that has been considered as part of the system in the past is likely to be accepted again, whereas communication which has been dismissed will likely be dismissed again in the future. Thus, 'memory' is seen as a fundamental feature of productive social systems. At the same time, if everything were remembered by a system, the load of information would inhibit any processing of present information, let alone of innovation. Thus, successful systems establish a 'memory' which is just as much about forgetting as it is about remembering. It is particularly this stress on the productive dimension of social forgetting which a systems theory perspective has contributed to the broader social memory discourse.

While this tradition is shaped by a primarily theoretical and conceptual interest in the concepts of 'memory' (and forgetting), the Anglo-American social sciences have put a much stronger emphasis on empirical research in the context of social and cultural memory and its political implications. Scholars like Michael Schudson and Barbie Zelizer have contributed seminal empirical analyses of mass media memory of the Holocaust (see Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*), the Kennedy assassination (see Zelizer, *Covering the Body*) or the Watergate scandal (see Schudson), to name only three examples.

An increased focus on traumatic memory has also lead to the development of a discourse about the ethical implications of remembering. An ethics of memory, as formulated by Avishai Margalit and Paul Ricœur, suggests that we have a moral obligation to remember events of radical evil to ensure that they will never happen again. To the extent that ethics names the obligation to remember the hitherto silenced and de-privileged memory can form an arena of resistance to dominant forms of culture. Remembering in this sense is closely intertwined with questions of responsibility: Memory entails caring, a regard for the well-being of others in the present. Memories cause us to reflect upon the past, present and future. They enable us to lead more reflexive and therefore more human lives.

4. A Third Phase of Memory Studies? The Dynamics of Transcultural Memories in Contemporary Digital Media Cultures

In the last decade or so, cultural memory studies has seen a "dynamic turn," which shifted the focus from individual products or 'sites' of memory to processes in which these products are caught up and in which they gain their cultural significance (see Jäger; Rigney). According to Ann Rigney, "this shift from 'sites' to 'dynamics' within memory studies runs parallel to a larger shift of attention within cultural studies from products to processes, from a focus on cultural artefacts to an interest in the way those artefacts circulate and influence their environment" (Rigney 346). The dynamic shift is largely based on the premise that individual products or media are part of the cultural circulation of meanings and that meaning is never fixed once and for all, but is something that is generated, time and again, in the way that texts and other cultural media are appropriated and reinterpreted, always with a difference (see ibid.). Accordingly, the cultural significance of a specific memory does not so much reside in itself; rather it is the result of its creative reception, i.e. its continuous adaptation, reception, appropriation and reinterpretation in a whole range of different media *and* across various cultures (see ibid.; Jäger). Or, to put it differently: The cultural significance of memory is the result of its ongoing transmedial, but also transcultural adaptations or travels (see Crownshaw).

One reason for the increasing interest in new perspectives and concepts that can more profoundly embrace the dynamics of memory, is evident in the dynamics of contemporary (digital) media cultures. While on an abstract level, the close relation between media and memory have very often been stressed (see Borsò, Krumeich, and Witte), few scholars in the first two phases of memory studies put media technologies at the very centre of their theoretical and empirical research interests. However, the notion that our modes of memory are being transformed by changing media (and, although probably less obviously, vice versa), can be found in many concepts of memory, starting from Plato's famous *Phaidros* dialogue on the relation of writing and memory.

Thus, it is not surprising that the rise of digital media technologies has led to fundamental debates about the future of memory, with both utopian and dystopian scenarios being debated (for a more detailed overview and critique, see Zierold 59ff.). For example, Aleida Assmann has published widely her fears that "the [...] systems of the mass media culture [...] shut out the past and create an absolute present. [...] In the world of mass media, the consciousness of a past silently evaporates in the cycles of continuous production and consumption" ("Texts" 132). On the other hand, some scholars have claimed that digital media will allow for a 'total

recall,' a complete memory of everything, as Microsoft's Gordon Bell and Jim Gemmell have labelled their book claiming to explain "How the E-Memory Revolution Will Change Everything" (see Bell and Gemmell). Today, the once seemingly utopian hope for a complete digital memory has itself turned into a dystopia, with scholars concerned about data privacy and security, such as Viktor Mayer-Schönberger, striving to reintroduce the 'virtue of forgetting' into digital culture (see Mayer-Schönberger).

Even though it might be too early to judge just *how* exactly digital media will transform cultural and social memory, it seems to be an undeniable fact *that* it will change the ways in which we remember our past. Memory studies increasingly try to come to terms with these recent, ongoing and rather ambiguous developments, which increasingly call for an even stronger focus on trans-medial, trans-national and processual perspectives and concepts. Currently, there seem to be at least two different approaches trying to conduct empirical research on the relation of digital media and memory.

A growing body of work, predominantly in the German language, takes 'classical' topics of memory studies, i.e. memory of the Holocaust, the role of museums, etc., and analyses the impact of digital media in this context. It is not only the research questions that stress continuities. The results also suggest that, while digital media play an important role, they do not replace 'old' media in many contexts. For example, Dörte Hein has demonstrated in her research about the memory of the Holocaust on the World Wide Web that relevant Internet formats are usually closely connected to traditional forms of remembering, like archives and museums (see Hein 254). A recent edited collection on 'memory cultures 2.0' also connects rather traditional fields of memory studies with aspects of new media, for example analysing representations of the Second World War in digital games or digital forms of remembering destroyed synagogues in Germany (see Meyer).

While this line of research focuses on continuities, another approach stresses fundamental transformations, trying to map a new research field that might be called 'digital memory studies,' together with new theories and methodologies of memory research. In an edited collection on 'digital memories,' the editors stress this perceived need for innovation in memory studies in relation to digital media:

> [T]he existing paradigm of the study of broadcast media and their associated traditions, theories and methods, is quickly becoming inadequate for understanding the profound impact of the supreme accessibility, transferability and circulation of digital content on how individuals, groups and societies come to remember and forget. (Garde-Hansen, Hoskins, and Reading 3)

Research in this context addresses questions like the individualisation of group memory (see Neumann, "Digital Memories"), i.e. through media formats like Facebook or the ubiquitous text messages and photo archives, which mobile phones provide today. With this shift towards an increasing plurality and individuality of social forms of memory, memory studies seem to be moving in a new direction in terms of media technologies. At the same time, this line of research also takes up questions that were raised by Maurice Halbwachs's early research on the relation of social and individual memory.

More recently, the concept of memory has also travelled into the wide field of popular culture studies. It was commonly assumed that popular culture is mainly characterised by its interest in the present moment and thus prone to amnesia. Yet empirical phenomena like 'retro'-trends, 'sampling,' 'cover versions,' etc. bring this conception into question. Recent years have seen a growing number of studies introducing the concept of memory into research on popular culture (see Jacke, Schwarzenegger, and Zierold), with Simon Reynold's widely discussed monograph on *Retromania* being a culmination of this trend (see Reynolds).

Combining research on popular culture with memory studies has proven to be productive for both research traditions. Research on popular culture has gained a much stronger awareness of the multiple temporalities of popular culture and the high relevance of various forms of remembering ranging from practices of collecting to processes of re-production based on older material, e.g. in samplings and cover versions. But memory studies also have a lot to gain in dealing with popular culture: As described above, traditional theories of memory tend to be rather static, focussed on national (high) cultures and insensitive to the specificities of modern/ digital media cultures. Against this backdrop, dynamic, processual, often global and always mediated popular culture is a true challenge to established concepts of memory. While memory studies has often been criticised as being too focussed on the national and on high cultures from a purely *theoretical* standpoint, any initiative to do research on memory and popular culture makes it an *empirical* necessity to further develop concepts of memory to be able to better grasp dynamic and paradoxical structures, and global as well as purely local phenomena.

The challenges of digital media, the intercultural and international dynamics of memory, and the relation of global popular culture and memory, will likely remain some of the pressing and complex issues for memory studies for the foreseeable future. Although some scholars, like Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, have predicted a declining interest in memory studies, the concept of memory still seems to be at the centre of many lines of

research, and is not likely to stop its productive travels into various disciplines and cultural contexts in the near future.

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