

Editorial: Cultural memorial forms

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Memory Studies
2021, Vol. 14(1) 3–9
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DOI: 10.1177/1750698020976455
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Recently, Amanda J. Barnier and Andrew Hoskins (2018) reraised the question of the equivalence and traceability between ‘memory “in the head” and “in the wild”’ (p. 386), between individual memory on the one hand and social, cultural, and collective memory on the other. If there has been little doubt about the existence of individual memory, the existence, nature, and location of collective/social/cultural memory has been a constant point of contestation in the humanities and social sciences. A scattered, but for us significant, line of research in memory studies and narrative studies that has tried to locate and capture the movement between experiences and their individual and collective articulation and remembering has revolved around what we in this special issue propose to call **cultural memorial forms**.

There is a long tradition that acknowledges the ways in which individual experience and its articulation always take shape in cultural webs of meaning. Individual processes of experiencing and meaning-making are mediated through cultural forms that regulate how we make sense of our being in the world. This applies to memory too. Memory is not merely an individual, psychological process that takes place in our ‘heads’ but always already mediated by culturally and socially shaped memorial forms. That we remember in ‘social frameworks of memory’ (Halbwachs, 1925) has been a crucial premise of the study of collective/social/cultural memory since the early 20th century. In his work on ‘memory schemata’, Frederic Bartlett (1995 [1932]) was critical of the notion of collective memory but emphasised that ‘social organisation gives a persistent framework into which all detailed recall must fit, and it very powerfully influences both the manner and the matter of recall’ (p. 296). While the notion of collective memory has been seen to risk reifying the collective into a quasi-autonomous realm detached from individuals, the concept of cultural memory has been hailed as a way of foregrounding the interplay between the cultural and the individual (see e.g. Erll, 2008). In recent years, scholars have sought to conceptualise in various ways the cultural forms that mediate the dynamics of remembrance of individuals and communities.

In *History, Memory, Forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur (2004 [2000]) observes that ‘it is always in historically limited cultural forms that the capacity to remember (*faire mémoire*) can be apprehended’ (p. 392). In a similar vein, Ann Rigney (2005) has drawn attention to the gap between

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historical experiences and the memorial forms that are available for their articulation in any given historical and cultural moment. Due to their scarcity, memorial forms are borrowed from other contexts and older forms are recycled (p. 23). Jeffrey Olick and Astrid Erll have written about 'genre memories' and 'memory genres' that respectively help to script subsequent commemorative practices through path-dependency (Olick, 1999: 382) and function as 'conventionalized, generic schemata for the coding of versions of the past' (Erll, 2011: 74). Studying digital memory, Hoskins (2009) has developed the concept of memory schemata of new social media that, in contrast to the media templates of 'old' media such as newspaper and television, are developed on the 'interstitial' level by the interaction of individuals with one another and with institutionalised memory schemata. In scholarship that brings together narrative studies and memory studies, narrative schemata (Bruner, 1990), 'schematic narrative templates' (Wertsch, 2008), 'narrative forms of life' (Brockmeier, 2015), and 'cultural narrative models of sense-making' (Meretoja, 2018) have been seen as important cultural forms for mediating memory.¹

In conceptualising the mediating cultural filters between experiences and their articulation, all these concepts seem to hover in an indeterminate space between the individual and the collective, between cognitive, cultural, and social memory. In one way or another, they revolve around the dynamics of memory in which individual processes of remembering are culturally mediated and collective practices of cultural memory involve the use, interpretation, and negotiation of general forms, models, or templates in specific contexts by individuals engaged in these interpretative processes. Approaches to memorial forms vary in whether they lay more emphasis on the enabling or limiting aspects of these mediating forms. Whereas Erll and Hoskins emphasise the cognitive necessity of memorial forms for understanding and articulating experience, Lucy Bond (2015) uses her Halbwachs-inspired concept of 'frames of memory' to draw attention to the remediating and homogenising qualities of memorial forms which 'are not neutral instruments, but often function as vehicles of normative preconceptions and conventions that shade and, to some extent, determine the shape of the memory articulated therein' (p. 11).

This special issue explores the relationship between different dimensions of this dynamics of memory and focuses on cultural memorial forms that, as it argues, illuminate the movement of memory between individuals and groups and provides a way of overcoming the dichotomy between memory 'in the head' and memory 'in the wild'. It studies different cultural memorial forms such as genres, media, narrative templates, tropes, and conventionalised images in their transnational circulation and appropriation. It pays particular attention to the aesthetic media of memory that have a specific mode of circulation and are therefore uniquely situated between the individual and the social and cultural.

Outline of the articles

In contrast to the above-mentioned conceptions that stress the importance of memory schemata and narrative templates in articulating and representing less familiar events multidirectionally through more familiar ones, **Ann Rigney**, in her contribution to this special issue, is interested in how something can emerge that is impossible to put into pre-existing schemata of prior knowledge and how it can become collectively memorable through artistic form. In exploring the emergence of the memory of colonial soldiers from India and Africa in the European armies during WWI, she shows how artistic form contributed to unforgetting this aspect of the war through defamiliarisation and experiential modes of storytelling that slow down perception and unsettle and deregulate the senses. Without overemphasising the role of the arts or assuming that a novel or film can single-handedly overturn the silencing of certain aspects of the past, she stresses the ongoing multiscalar

movement between individual experiences of reading and viewing on the one hand that involve both imagination and affect, and large-scale social frameworks of memory in making and changing collective memories on the other.

In her article, bringing together memory studies, narrative studies, and philosophical hermeneutics, **Hanna Meretoja** proposes a model of non-subsumptive memory. In both cognitive psychology and research on narrative schemata in memory studies, it is usually assumed that with the help of cognitive frames and memorial forms understanding and remembering take place by subsuming the singular under the general, the new under the familiar. Meretoja, in contrast, explores the possibility of non-subsumptive understanding and remembering in which the new and the singular have power to transform the familiar, general models of understanding, including received cultural memorial forms. Such non-subsumptive memory has potential to function as a resource for other-oriented empathy based on a dialogical process of learning. Meretoja underscores the interplay between individual and cultural memory and takes the notion of cultural memorial forms to signal how individual processes of meaning-giving are ‘culturally mediated by (narrative) models of sense-making’. The model of non-subsumptive memory addresses the need to articulate the affordances and risks of cultural memorial forms and to evaluate their use and abuse in practices of narrating particular experiences and events.

As important as the role of cultural memorial forms in mediating between individual and cultural memories is the work they do in transnationally linking up the memories of different individuals and groups and making memories travel. From Andreas Huyssen’s (2003) idea of the Holocaust memory as a trope for other traumatic histories and Michael Rothberg’s (2009) work on multidirectional memory, scholars of memory have, in the past decades, drawn attention to how past experiences need the support of other memories in order to be voiced. Further, Alison Landsberg’s (2004) work on prosthetic memory has highlighted how memories travel across vast geographical and historical distances with the help of technologies of mass culture and are adopted by people and communities with whom they do not have any experiential link. This special issue explores how cultural memorial forms and schemata developed in one cultural context of violent histories have contributed to the representation of other histories of war, suffering, and political conflict, but also what the problems that arise from multidirectional and prosthetic remembering (mediated through transcultural memorial forms) may be.

In her contribution, **Eneken Laanes** proposes viewing transnational circulation and appropriation of cultural memorial forms as a process of translation that may both enable the public articulation of peripheral experiences as well as facilitate the travel of those memories within transnational languages of memory. She asks what is gained and what is lost in this translation. By drawing on world literature studies and translation studies, she explores these memories as ‘born translated’ and inquires into their domesticating and foreignising effects. By focusing on war rape, she shows how the representation of specific histories through transcultural memorial forms may raise serious ethical and political questions of homogenisation and dehistoricisation.

In a series of articles, Victoria Fareld, Charles Armstrong, and Anja Tippner explore transnational remembering and the role of transcultural memorial forms in this process in different historical contexts. In her contribution about the impact of Frantz Fanon’s work on Jean Améry’s articulation of his memories of torture and Nazi concentration camps, **Fareld** argues that the widespread public discourse on colonial violence and torture in French Algeria in the 1960s offered an impetus for Améry to record the memories of his own victimisation in the hands of the Nazis. In showing how Fanon’s trauma was ‘transposed and translated’ into Améry’s testimony as a Holocaust survivor, Fareld claims that Fanon’s account of his colonial trauma offered Améry a culturally mediated memorial form for articulating his own experiences. Moreover, Fareld

shows – as do many contributions in this special issue – how the boundary between individual memories and shared collective memories is blurred and culturally mediated memorial forms often offer support for individual remembering.

Armstrong takes up Michael Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory and explores the references to World War II in Irish poetry that deals with the Troubles in Northern Ireland. He shows how in poetry the multidirectional parallels are fluid and ambivalent, oscillating between explicitness and vagueness, universalism and historical particularities. He argues that poetry, as a reticent cultural memorial form that embraces silence and discretion of ellipsis rather than an easily summarised narrative, offers a critique of explicit historical comparisons.

In her study of the entangled memory of the Holocaust, expulsion of Germans, and communism in contemporary Czech literature, **Anja Tippner** shows how a new generation of writers has invented a new memorial form for remembering these aspects of Czech history that are still largely undiscussed in this entangled form both in Czech historiography and the national politics of memory. The new memorial form is partly the result of the pressures and concerns of transnational memory culture and is characterised by an extended time frame, a spectral vision of the past, and reliance on different kinds of written and material memory traces. Even if the new memorial form developed in literature advances Czech memory culture in voicing hitherto silenced aspects of the past, Tippner also argues that the entangled form emerging through subjective individual stories of simultaneous perpetration and victimhood results in an equalising simultaneity that risks dehistoricising particular events.

This special issue concludes with **Anna Reading's** article that develops a political economic approach to memory and explores cultural memorial forms in relation to mnemonic labour. In analysing the collaborative and participatory art project, *Moving Hearts*, that took place in London in 2016–2018 and engaged with memories of migration and belonging, Reading argues that we need to look at the labour of remembering and the accumulation of mnemonic capital in the global digitalised world to understand how memory forms are changing from individual embodied memories to collective living archives, objectified memory forms, institutional memories, and back again.

Memorial forms in the pandemic era, in a globalised story economy

In the current, globalised world, cultural memorial forms travel across national and cultural borders and circulate from one medium to another. They are part of a global story and image economy in which contesting narratives and icons are linked to economic interests and relations of power. Although many of the examples discussed in this special issue revolve around European memory of violent histories, it seeks to show the transnational and transcultural dynamics in which European cultural memorial forms are entangled. Several of the articles analyse narratives of forced migration in which, with people, memories and cultural memorial forms travel across borders and enter into new relations of dialogue and contestation. We will end this editorial with some reflections on the ways in which cultural memorial forms always exist in relationships of power and on how addressing this issue could be a productive point of dialogue between memory studies and narrative studies.²

In her study of master and counter-narratives, Meretoja (2021) introduces a distinction between 'explicit narratives' and 'implicit narratives'. Master narratives typically remain implicit, that is, they are not fleshed out in a textual form as narrative accounts of particular events and they only become articulated when they are contested by counter-narratives. Just like individual narratives exist in narrative environments shaped by the dynamics of master and counter-narratives, cultural memorial forms exist in memorial environments in which some memorial forms are dominant and

others marginalised. Dominant cultural memorial forms can be so self-evident that they are simply taken for granted, often only becoming visible when they are contested and brought to critical light by counter-memories. The dominant public memory of colonialism, for example, has become more acutely visible only after counter-memories challenged it through postcolonial counter-narratives.

The dynamic of master and counter-narratives is only one example of how narrative studies and memory studies may enter into a productive dialogue. We hope that in the future, cultural memory studies and cultural narrative studies might engage in more intense dialogue since they share many similar interests and concerns, including the issue of how cultural forms mediate our processes of sense-making. As Jerome Bruner (1990) summarises, memory largely functions through narrative: 'The typical form of framing experience (and our memory of it) is in narrative form, and . . . what does *not* get structured narratively suffers loss in memory' (p. 56). Hence, it is hardly surprising that cultural memorial forms often have a strongly narrative dimension, in addition to being coalesced into tropes and icons. If we think of how the Holocaust, for example, functions as a cultural memorial form that allows the articulation of other mass atrocities but may also block or distort them, then at stake are the affordances and limits of culturally dominant narratives and images of the Holocaust.

We are writing this editorial in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. It is clear that various cultural memorial forms function as models of sense-making in efforts to understand the pandemic. Memories of previous pandemics have been recounted in the media, but the most powerful frame that has been mobilised in narrating the pandemic has been the trope of war. This master narrative is problematic in many ways, for example because it posits patients, healthcare professionals and the public as a whole in the role of soldiers, although none of these are – and most do not want to be – soldiers at war. The trope of pandemic war has shown how affectively powerful is the collective memory of a nation coming together to fight a joint enemy. In general, we should acknowledge that comparison is inevitable (see Rothberg, 2017): when a new phenomenon emerges, we try to make sense of it by comparing it to something with which we are familiar. But we should be able to reflect on the similarities and differences between the familiar and the unfamiliar in order to do justice to the particularity and complexity of the new. Dominant narratives carry with them normative, legitimising force. In war, sacrifices are inevitable and justified. Most doctors and nurses, however, would rather receive improved pay and personal protective equipment than be elevated to the status of war heroes. The narrative of war also means that we lose the opportunity to use other memories of collective efforts to foster solidarity in the present and as a resource for imagining a better, more just and sustainable post-pandemic world based on acknowledging our fundamental connectedness and mutual dependency on this shared planet.³

The strained relationship between the particular and the general pervades the dynamics of the use and abuse of cultural memorial forms in different social contexts. Like cultural (narrative) models in general, cultural memorial forms do not elicit meaning all by themselves; they become actualised only when they are used, interpreted, and applied in certain social and cultural contexts. This is a process of dialogue, interpretation, translation, and negotiation in which individuals always have the possibility of interpreting differently – even if this is easier in some situations and for some subjects (such as privileged ones) than in other circumstances and for other subjects. Critical reinterpretations, in turn, keep the cultural memorial forms in a process of change and transformation. It is through such dialogue that we can evaluate the affordances and limits of various cultural memorial forms and envisage new directions in which cultural memory could develop to better serve a more just and sustainable future.

Since cultural memorial forms participate in shaping and performatively constituting intersubjective reality, we have a responsibility as narrative agents and memory agents, that is, as subjects who participate in perpetuating and challenging culturally dominant narratives, tropes, and icons. The narratives we share on social media, for example, participate in perpetuating and challenging certain

forms of public memory. In the current era of social media, in which cultural narratives are increasingly significant in shaping politics and economies, it is important to reflect on questions such as these: To the circulation of which memories and narratives do we contribute? Which cultural memorial forms do we take for granted and which ones are in need of critical questioning? We hope that this special issue, for its part, will contribute to such reflection on the possibilities and limits of cultural memorial forms and on the dynamics between individual and collective memory.

Acknowledgements

The idea for this special issue was conceived in the research network ‘Narrative and Memory: Ethics, Aesthetics, Politics’, which was funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers through the Nordic Summer University in 2017–2019. The first symposium of this network, Transcultural Memorial Forms, took place at Tallinn University in March 2017. We are grateful to the members of the network for stimulating discussions and feedback on earlier versions of these articles. We would also like to thank Avril Tynan and Timo J Kalliokoski for their help in copy-editing this special issue.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclose receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and publication of this article: This special issue is part of the project ‘Translating Memories: The Eastern European Past in the Global Arena’ that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No 853385). It is also part of the project ‘Instrumental Narratives: The Limits of Storytelling and New Story-Critical Narrative Theory’ that has received funding from the Academy of Finland (Project No 314769).

Notes

1. For a more comprehensive overview of the attempt to conceptualise cultural memorial forms, see Laanes’s article in this special issue.
2. The research network ‘Narrative and Memory: Ethics, Aesthetics, Politics’, under the auspices of which the idea for this special issue emerged, seeks to bring together memory studies and narrative studies.
3. For a more detailed analysis of the problems of narrating the pandemic as a story of war, see Meretoja, 2020.

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