Memory

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The ascent of memory during the 1990s as a key concept in the humanities was initially seen as a reaction to the upcoming millennium and the dawning of a new era. Scholars stepped back to retrieve what cultures had lost or threatened to lose before entering the new millennium with all its unforeseeable political, social, and technological challenges. Cultural memory was seen as fighting a rearguard action against the future. Furthermore, the idea of an epochal shift was supported by the fact that the last of the surviving victims and eyewitnesses of the catastrophes, wars and genocides of the 20th century were about to die. To secure their knowledge, the shift towards testimonies, individual recollections of experiences, that is a shift towards memory seemed inevitable (Nünning 2013, 180). Thus, memory was conceptualized as an act to construct the identity of a specific group or nation. It spawned monuments, symbols and memorial events to commemorate events in the past that the group still considered important to its current self-image.

However, in contrast to the identity model in a globalised world with its uncontrollable flow of information and migration, the concept of memory changes. Rather than forming a 'new' collective body, more recent artistic practices act as a 'counter-memory' (Foucault 1980, 160) to official or group-specific commemorative practices. According to Foucault, counter-memories resist the search for origins and 'transform history into a totally different form of time' (160). These artistic practices enact research into the fissures and cracks, the gaps and holes that re-member losses and deaths, a stop gap, a dis:connection between past, present and future. These processes are ongoing and puncture the present with loss, absences and the longue durée of the dead. The notion of memory and the act of remembering as an ethical act are based on the forgetting of those lives left behind. Those who are remembered are those who do not count and whose lives cannot be mourned in the sense proposed by Judith Butler (2006).

Types of Memory

As early as 1925, French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs pointed out that individual memory only ever exists within the horizon of a collective memory that gives it meaning. Individual memory is made possible by a socially constructed frame of perception (Halbwachs 1992). In 1988, Egyptologist Jan Assmann took up Halbwachs' concept of a collective memory and expanded on its implications. His canonical definition reads: 'By the concept of cultural memory we come to understand for each society and epoch their peculiar collection of texts to be re-used,

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images and rites they cultivate and by means of which they stabilise and communicate their self-image. It is a knowledge preferably of the past (but not exclusively) that is collectively shared and on which the group bases the consciousness of its unity and specificity.' (Assmann 1988, 15; my translation) Assmann enlarged the notion of collective memory by distinguishing between everyday 'communicative memory' and abstract 'cultural memory'. Communicative memory spans the lifetime of three generations or one hundred years. It depends on oral communication, the living tradition of passing on knowledge by storytelling and rituals that are still considered relevant to families or communities. After the last living exponents of these traditions have passed away, the continuity of memory and, by extension, the identity of the community, threatens to be ruptured. This is where cultural memory sets in. Cultural memory tries to remember the past by collecting documents, erecting monuments, and establishing institutionalised communication that is removed from the practices of everyday life. The past has to be reconstructed, which also marks the entry point for the writing of history or historiography.

Whereas history takes its cue from the fragmentation of the 'unity of individual and collective memory' (Osborne 2013, 191) and the need to, consequently, construct a collective meaning of the past on the basis of exterior sources, memory insists on the particular that makes history available as experience. As philosopher Peter Osborne expands, history has been severed from individual experience and individual subjects to construct what is independent of subjectivity. It relies on the utopian 'unity of the human' (194). Memory gives space for individual or group experiences to 'draw attention to the legitimate existence of such communities and their histories' (192). Classical cultural memory studies aim at creating or safeguarding group identities based on communal experiences and value systems. Remembering the German genocide of the Herero and Nama people in Namibia between 1904 and 1908, tribes of Herero people annually gather near the site of the 1923 funeral wake for the last Herero chieftain that fought in the war. Theatre scholar Pedzisai Maedza analyses the commemorations as a 'mnemonic device for genocide memory' (2023, 219) and 'a creative memory bridge for contemporary Herero generations' (217) Maedza continues: 'Through performance, Red Day Events form and reaffirm the Herero people as a nation.' (225)

Transnational and global memory

In his seminal text *Les lieux de mémoire* (1989), Pierre Nora claimed that the dissolution of experienced or lived *milieux de mémoire* in modern globalised societies leads to the establishment of ever more spaces of memory that act as replacements for the lack of interpersonal and intergenerational communication of value in local communities. Memory spaces, i.e. official memorials or cenotaphs, are symptoms

of a loss. They provide anchors for a society that has consigned itself to oblivion due to societal and economic processes of acceleration. In this sense, traditional memory studies defined landscapes such as battlefields as sites of memory, i.e. as static phenomena, in which historical events that are crucial for the identity and self-image of a nation or a group are remembered through monuments or commemorative plaques.

In recent memory studies, this static model has been contested. Memories go on journeys; they travel (Erll 2011). In a world that is determined as much by mass media and digital networks as by migration, cultural and national borders lose their relevance. 'The form in which we think of the past', Andreas Huyssen writes, 'is increasingly a memory without borders. Modernity has brought with it a very real compression of time and space' (Huyssen 2003, 4). In our conception of reality the horizon has shifted 'beyond the local, the national, and even the international' (4).

In contrast to this, Aleida Assmann emphasises in her concept of 'global memory' (2010) the necessity of national cultures of memory in order to observe and evaluate global movements with greater sophistication. It is only against the backdrop of national traumas, absences, and memories that processes of globalisation and migration and their effect on local memory cultures can be adequately analysed and understood.

As early as in 2008, Assmann introduced a differentiation in connection with Nora's *lieux de mémoire*. Besides official identity-shaping commemorative sites, Assmann claimed, there exist spaces where 'history was experienced and remembered'. In her specification, Assmann aims at the inclusion of a range of different and often conflicting histories and memories that are connected to these spaces while also being determined by them. Assmann simply calls these locations *Orte*, i.e. places or sites. While spaces are shaped, transformed, appropriated or planned, places have already experienced action. In them 'history becomes a sediment in the *longue durée* of its ruptures and heterogeneous layers' (2008, 17). Spaces are geared towards the future due to their formative potential. Places, on the other hand, are defined by their 'past perspectives' (17) and as locations of memory become part of history again. Spaces as Places 'lead to a splintering of homogeneous narratives and a multiplication of experiences, memories, and perspectives' (18).

The concept of performativity is only a recent addition to the field of memory studies. Max Silverman presents ideas on the performative production of memory, i.e. of memory as an event, in his concept of 'palimpsest memory' (2016). Memory as a palimpsest performatively creates itself in an act of exchange that is an intersectional combination and overlap of heterogeneous memories of people from different cultural and national backgrounds, which in turn becomes represented by artistic means.

Amanda Lagerkvist reminds us of the body in the field of Memory Studies in her 'sociophenomenological' approach, one that, deriving from Media Sociology, is not initially geared towards works of art or performances (2016). Nonetheless her ideas provide impulses for related questions. For Lagerkvist, memory always manifests itself in a transmedial way via bodies. Memory 'is seen as transmedial and forged across bodies, artifacts, and different forms of media and mediation' (175; on the medialisation of memory, see also Erll 2009). Since discussions of commemoration and memory are inevitably framed by political and social processes and power relations, 'memorative discourses [. . .] provide the foundations for global human rights regimes' (2016, 5), as Stef Craps, Lucy Bonds and Pieter Vermeulen summarise their attempt to understand memory as a transcultural phenomenon.

Memory dis:connect

Taking both the shift towards a transnational memory and its practices of multidirectional remembering and the performative construction of memory within diverse media formats into account, artistic practices come into play. Performances and theatre and dance productions rely on embodied knowledge, techniques of the body and physical tools to remember movement and to reproduce and change action as 'restored behaviour' (Schechner 1985, 36–37). In this sense, the notion of memory has been widely discussed in dance studies. To counter the traditional notion of dance and performance as ephemeral phenomena, artists and scholars alike investigated possibilities to reproduce movement of historical performances in reenactments (Franko 2017). Reenactments tested the relation to a supposed 'original' performance and laid claims to the transformative dimension of mnemonic practices. Reenactments also played a role in the discipline of history where the restaging of historical battles, for instance, by means of embodied performances offered possibilities not only to keep history alive, but to produce additional information about the event (Schneider 2011).

Memory in the context of a dis:connection opens up a time in between, a 'meantime', as Rebecca Schneider puts it in her analysis of *Hamlet*, that suspends the linear construction of time of past, present and future in favour of a syncopation of time, a rhythm that gives and produces time by creating a 'form' (Schneider 2011, 88). What is remembered is that which is no longer present, what is absent in a phenomenological sense, removed from the senses and only accessible to consciousness as remembering. But what is remembered can no longer be subsumed under a coherent narrative. Counter-memory and artistic practices are connected by their search for and giving of form.

Thus, memory and performative acts of commemoration can be seen not only as moments of identity formation, but rather as instances of disruption, dissolution,

of disconnection of an otherwise seemingly frictionless flow of commodities and human beings, the fulfilling of a preestablished protocol of behaviour, remembering, and of how to make and frame art.

In his project *Necropolis*, the Belarussian-Israeli-Belgian choreographer Arkadi Zaides documents the graves of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees that are scattered across the landscape of Europe. In several of his projects, Zaides is concerned with borders and the policing of borders that interrupt the movement of people, that control passageways to refuse their entry into Europe. For various reasons, their flight cost them their lives, and as a note in the programme indicates, 'Europe has only allowed entry as corpses'. In collaboration with an international human rights organisation *UNITED for Intercultural Action* in Amsterdam that since 1993 lists the names of those who died at Europe's border, Zaides' team uses the list and finds the graves of these victims and documents them on a map (Stalpeart et al. 2021). In the actual performance, excerpts of this ongoing research and commemorative visits to the graves are presented. The visits to the graves are documented by mobile phone cameras that are directed in front of the visitors. Their bodies, therefore, are absent from the images. Only their steps and their breath can be heard. The subjective camera wavers as the visitors approach the graves, only to capture another absence (→ **Absences**): the absence of the body itself framed by a grave and, in some cases, even the absence of a tomb stone, or a plaque that would remember their names.

The concept of memory is radicalised with view to the notion of trauma. In his piece *Séancers*, Afro-American/Ghanaian performer Jaamil Olawale Kosoko remembers his family members who have fallen victim to racist violence. The absent bodies of the deceased are remembered in their absence through the actions in the performative setting of the stage: pictures, objects and props, light and sound that create an uncanny atmosphere. Even when one speaks of 'traumatised bodies', the experience of traumatic events is absent as 'unclaimed experience' (Caruth 1996) and unavailable to the subject. Although the trauma is 'known', especially in cases of intergenerational or structural trauma such as racism, the trauma cannot be emotionally worked through, since the power of the event or the experience of lasting racist discrimination prevents the trauma from actually being experienced (Craps 2013). The theatrical event thus attempts, as in the case of Kosoko, to retro-actively catch up with the experience in order to work through it emotionally. The theme of memory in the context of theatre, dance, and performance thus itself becomes a detour (→ **Detours**). The performance marks a moment of cessation in the course of time and things by enabling us to return to an already abandoned place and an already past time. As in Zaides' project, it chooses a familiar path and thereby becomes a kind of return, a going back in time and space in order to avoid the omission of the victims in the here and now, in the present of the performance.

On the one hand, the performances interrupt both the aesthetic and the political representation of globalised processes and their bodies by making use of strategies of absence and detour. On the other hand, they forge a new connection between past, present and future, history and memory, bodies, their existing and possible states across national borders by retrieving loss in the very performances themselves, thereby creating, prospectively, a space for mourning or even healing.

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