
Lucy Bond, Stef Craps & Pieter Vermeulen (eds.), "*Memory unbound: tracing the dynamics of memory studies*"

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REFERENCES

Lucy Bond, Stef Craps & Pieter Vermeulen (eds.), *Memory unbound: tracing the dynamics of memory studies*, New York/Oxford, Berghahn, 2017, viii + 293 p.

- ¹ *Memory Unbound* is an outstanding volume of essays that represents an indispensable reference point for all scholars of memory studies. It brings together the very latest in memory studies scholarship from a diverse range of perspectives that together showcase the ways in which the field can and should traverse borders of various kinds. The twelve essays and introduction that constitute this volume are immaculately edited and well written, and combine theory and practice in exemplary ways.
- ² In their introduction, Lucy Bond, Stef Craps and Pieter Vermeulen sketch the ways in which memory and memory studies are "on the move". It is a strength of the volume that its conceptualisation of "mnemonic mobility" (2) goes beyond a focus on movement across borders. Instead, the book aims to trace "memory's unbounded properties" (21) by examining four different forms of mobility: transcultural, transgenerational, transmedial and transdisciplinary. The authors then go on to sketch the state of the art in the theoretical framing of these four types of movement, highlighting at the same time the ways in which they are interwoven and connected.
- ³ The remainder of the book is divided into four sections, each containing three essays grouped according to their focus on one of the above-mentioned aspects of "mnemonic mobility". In the first section, focusing on transcultural memory, Max Silverman

explores the transcultural encounters staged in the film *Je veux voir* (2008, directed by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige) and the novel *L'Empreinte de l'ange* (1998, written by Nancy Huston). Silverman argues that these works point towards a new ethics of transcultural memory that demands an open-ended and ambivalent engagement with the "other". Also exploring a filmic staging of memory, Rosanne Kennedy turns her attention to Joshua Oppenheimer's documentary *The Act of Killing* (2012) and the ways in which it stages memory of the mass killings of suspected communists in Indonesia in 1965-1966. A key aspect of *The Act of Killing* is its use of perpetrator testimony alongside re-enactment in a "fusion of the gravitas of genocide, Hollywood spectacle, and Indonesian vernacular codes, conventions, and references" (36). This fusion means that the film does not match the expectations of audiences familiar with the norms of Holocaust testimony, highlighting some of the limitations of memory's transcultural mobility. The final essay in this section – written by Aleida Assmann – considers the role of the media in transnational memories. Assmann notes that the breaking of the link between the nation state and memory depends on the "connectivity of digital technologies and media, which construct, enable, and exploit connections between people" (67), as well as on transnational agents and networks. She argues that scholars exploring the transnational movement of memory have tended to focus on one or the other of these aspects. Assmann demonstrates the implications of this through a detailed discussion of Andrew Hoskins' concept of the "connective turn" and an analysis of the transcultural travels of the recent German TV miniseries *Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter* (2013, produced by Nico Hofmann). She argues persuasively that we must not allow the focus on seemingly unbound media to efface the concept of memory as bound to identity, including national and cultural.

- 4 The second section of the book considers how memory travels not across space, but across time, that is, between generations. Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer consider what "postmemorial response" (86) would be appropriate to the poetry of Sonja Jaslowitz, a young woman deported to Transnistria and killed by shrapnel from Allied bombs in 1944. Hirsch and Spitzer present such a response by offering an introductory essay, which combines Jaslowitz's individual story with the broader history of the brutal ghettos and concentration camps in Transnistria, and a reading and translation of her poetry. Astrid Erll also examines literary memory in her contribution, the second in this section, albeit of a very different kind. She explores intergenerational transmission of memories of migration in texts by black British authors, with a focus on Caryl Phillips's *In the Falling Snow* (2009), Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004) and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000). Erll argues that generation and memory is a new theme in writing by authors of Caribbean descent in the UK – one which highlights what she terms the "double logic of *generatio*" (111). This "double logic" brings together the concepts of "generationality" (contemporaneity) and "genealogy" (transmission) to offer a more complex understanding of what transgenerational memory might entail. In the final essay in this section, Joyce van de Bildt turns to a quite different medium. She explores the use of Facebook pages to express "vernacular memory" (133) of the late Egyptian president Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser. Van de Bildt examines a selection of such pages to show how memory of Nasser is constructed to relate closely to social and political objectives in the present and by a generation who for the most part had no direct experience of Nasser's rule. In so doing, she also reflects on whether and how a study of Facebook and other social media can contribute to our understanding of collective memory in a (limited cross-section of a) given society.

- 5 Van de Bildt's essay leads neatly into the third section of the volume, which focuses on transmedial memory. Here José van Dijck considers the ways in which Facebook, and in particular the new timeline interface, structures the information that users provide about themselves and their individual pasts. In this context, she explores the rise of "connectivity" and the move away from the database as a model for self-presentation (of individuals and companies) and towards narrative. Amanda Lagerkvist picks up on this idea of connectivity in the second essay in this section. However, Lagerkvist takes a quite different approach, arguing that media memory studies needs to "find ways to bring the body to the fore" (175). Her method for achieving this aim is drawn from sociophenomenology. This perspective conceives of memory as processual, places emphasis on lived experience, is transmedial and yet focuses also on the communal and social. For Lagerkvist this approach to the digital world is essential if we are to fully understand the state of "*being-in-and-with-the digital-world*" (176), that is, to appreciate humans as both agentic and subject to the logic of connectivity. The third essay in this section also focuses on digital memory and introduces the concept of "metaphorical memory" (198) to explore how popular memory of the Crusades has been aligned with memories of the 9/11 terror attacks. Here Brian Johnsrud shows that the very negative response of many traditional historians to this metaphorical use of the past ignores the ways in which such analogies – while open to abuse – may afford a popular "coming to terms with the present" and are not simply "bad history" (198).
- 6 The wide range of approaches taken in the first three sections of the volume shows the potential value of a multi-disciplinary approach to memory studies. This theme is taken up more explicitly in the final three essays grouped under the heading "transdisciplinary memory". With a focus on the small photographic exhibition housed in Regina Mundi Church in Soweto, Frauke Wiegand showcases the potential of Bruno Latour's actor-network theory (ANT) to shed light on the ways in which individuals appropriate objects, sites and texts of memory and, in turn, how these interactions can "feed back into the life and materiality of memories" (223). In this way, non-humans become "memory actors" and mediators (223). The interaction of the human and nonhuman is also the subject of Richard Crownshaw's essay with its focus on memory and the Anthropocene. Crownshaw argues that the challenge posed by global climate change requires of cultural memory studies "a truly transdisciplinary approach" (243) and a reconsideration in particular of scales of time that might be informed by geology. He demonstrates this perspective through an exploration of how memory of the Anthropocene is staged in James Howard Kunstler's trilogy of novels *World Made by Hand* (2008), *The Witch of Hebron* (2010) and *A History of the Future* (2014). Finally, Jessica K. Young tackles one of the methodological challenges faced by memory studies scholars in the digital age by showing how Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic modelling can be used to analyse quantitatively the vast collections of memories housed in digital archives – in her example with reference to 9/11. Young describes this as a form of "distant reading" which can show trends in topics, how memories evolve over time and, importantly, how they "circulate globally, combine with other topics, transform, and die out on a mass scale" (273).
- 7 As will be clear from the above, the contributions to the book are astonishingly diverse in their approach; yet two key strands hold the volume together. Firstly, each essay makes clear that the contemporary world – in its state of global connectivity and the ever-rising importance of digital media – necessitates new ways of thinking, also for

memory studies. Memory is already “unbound” and memory studies must catch up by combining traditional approaches focused on, for example, national memory, with reflections on the ways in which memory actors and objects engage with the “other”. Secondly, memory studies itself must become unbound by opening itself up to approaches from a variety of disciplines. Indeed, memory studies is already a multi-disciplinary field; however, in order to tackle the questions posed by mnemonic mobility and digital ecologies, humanities scholars will have to reach out to disciplines less obviously cognate, including those deploying quantitative methodologies. The volume provides inspiration for how this project of exploration might be begun.

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