

Dispersal and redemption: The future dynamics of memory studies – A roundtable

Memory Studies

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Introduction

Pieter Vermeulen and Stef Craps

Ever since Pierre Nora's (1989: 7) paradoxical statement that '[w]e speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left', memory studies, the area of inquiry Nora helped to inaugurate, has been a discourse of crisis. Emerging in the humanities in the 1980s, though with roots going

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back to the early 20th century, memory studies has predominantly studied the representation and mediation of memories and their circulation in society. Its focus has gradually moved from the study of how memories were shaped and refracted by certain privileged texts and artefacts to an investigation of the ways in which memories circulate and migrate in and between cultures (Rigney, 2008). One result of this is that memory studies has become one of the few truly interdisciplinary enterprises that travel easily – if never entirely comfortably – between the humanities and the social sciences (even if, as Ortwin de Graef reminds us in his contribution to this roundtable, this leaves unaddressed the issue of its relation to the life sciences, which have come to establish an even stronger claim on the object of memory studies). This broadening scope has only exacerbated the sense of crisis that was already implied in Nora's statement, as memory studies has not ceased to be aware of itself as a mediator of memory in its own right – an institution that may very well end up deepening the sense of disconnectedness from the past it sets out to remedy. In an authoritative assessment of contemporary memory culture, Andreas Huyssen (2003: 10) noted the paradox that 'memory discourses themselves partake in the detemporalizing processes that characterize a culture of consumption and obsolescence', as 'the imagined past is sucked into the timeless present of the all-pervasive virtual space of consumer culture'.

These concerns about historical continuity and critical distance are not the only ones preoccupying the field today. They are closely connected to the insight that the dynamics of cultural memory cannot be studied within the bounds of one culture or society, but rather migrate between and across such boundaries in a way that requires the development of new models and concepts – one can think here of recently coined notions such as 'global' (Assman and Conrad, 2010), 'cosmopolitan' (Levy and Sznajder, 2005), 'multidirectional' (Rothberg, 2009), or 'prosthetic' memory (Landsberg, 2004). The recognition of the 'transnational' (the term used by Andreas Huyssen in the position paper that opens this roundtable) dissemination of memory has also led to increasing attention being devoted to the articulation of the study of memory with the spheres of law (especially human rights) and migration policies. This tendency is often formulated as a concern for the 'future of memory' or for 'memory and the future' (Crownshaw et al., 2010; Gutman et al., 2010), to invoke the titles of two recent volumes that signal rather than collapse the sense of paradox, and thus of crisis, that seems to be the fate of memory studies.

It was in order to interrogate this critical condition that the Centre for Literature and Trauma (LITRA) at Ghent University convened a roundtable on 'The Future of Memory Studies' in February 2011. Noting that memory studies is, in the words of the announcement for the event (with which Vivian Liska directly engages in her contribution), an 'incoherent and dispersed field, characterized by a host of different terminologies rather than a common, generally-agreed-upon conceptual foundation', the roundtable did not aim to resolve the question of whether this incoherence is to be seen as an embarrassment or a critical opportunity; instead, it aimed to trace this dispersal in order to discover figurations of possible futures for memory, and for the academic field nominally dedicated to it. The pieces gathered here are slightly revised versions of the position papers presented by the roundtable participants, which we felt deserved a wider audience, followed by a response to these preliminary statements especially commissioned for this publication.

Some of the contributions to the roundtable strongly suggest that in the shifts from static sites of memory to the social dynamics of memory and from national to transnational contexts, some uninvestigated assumptions remain firmly in place. For one thing, these approaches perpetuate the idea that we – the individuals doing memory work, or belonging to the groups doing memory work – are essentially citizens of the world, or of nations of the world. Some of the papers suggest that

it is possible to dig *deeper* – rather than, say, travel more widely, which is what global, cosmopolitan, multidirectional, or prosthetic inflections of memory studies seem intent on doing – and to recognize the full implications of the fact that, apart from citizens, we are also human beings or even human animals. David Miller's contribution recalls Erich Auerbach's work on Dante in order to provocatively connect memory's constitutive 'melancholy' concern with a past 'it seeks but cannot name' to the structure of allegory, which 'await[s] the opening of the future healed existence' that it is equally unable to name. Miller suggests that memory serves as a placeholder for 'all that has gone wrong and all that was left behind', and that this concern resonates with a religious heritage that memory studies has only begun to explore. He calls for an acknowledgement rather than a methodological exploration (which threatens to turn into a relentless reduction) of this ulterior dimension. In a similar vein, Liska refuses the lure of a unified methodology for mapping and mobilizing the past, and insists on the importance of what she calls 'unusable pasts' that resist ideological recuperation or cognitive mastery.

One name for such an unusable past is 'trauma'. While the emergence and the consolidation of trauma as a decidedly modern category is well-established (Fassin and Rechtman, 2009; Luckhurst, 2008), the contributions of Liska and Miller suggest that it also resonates with the basic anthropological distinction between the profane (or the usable) and the sacred (or the unusable). Connecting memory and trauma to the profane/sacred distinction underlines their resistance to being reduced to merely a 'commodity for symbolic capital' (Liska). The persistence of memory seems to testify to a desire to resist the restless circulation of data in contemporary media culture, a circulation that collapses the distinction between past, present, and future. In his even-handed and clear-eyed assessment of contemporary memory culture, Huyssen wonders whether the fatal commodification of memory has not already happened – whether it is not too late to expect critical leverage from memory and trauma in an age when 'the contemporary media and their organization into large webs' seem to have rendered 'historical consciousness itself obsolete'. Huyssen's salutary caution does not prevent him from advocating an extension of memory studies towards a recognition of transnational mobility and towards novel engagements with legal studies and migration studies, in order to overcome the limitations – the focus on the nation state, the attention to sites rather than dynamics – that have hampered the field in its earlier stages.

This opens up an interesting dialogue between Miller and Liska on the one hand and Huyssen on the other. If Huyssen wonders whether the unpredictability and intractability of the past on which Miller and Liska insist has not been fatally erased in the media-saturated present, Miller's emphasis on the self-redemptive overtones of the human condition and Liska's commitment to the 'fleetingness' of the past in their turn pose the question of what happens to the human need for the unusable or the sacred in our networked societies. Perhaps the cultural currency of memory and trauma points to the persistent need for an indeterminacy that resists commodification, a need that memory studies might do well to factor in in the future.

The last two contributions, by Pieter Vermeulen and Ortwin de Graef, also explore how the field of memory studies fares when it engages with broader contexts. One tension that persists, and that is explicitly thematized by both Huyssen and Vermeulen, is that between the scholarly claims of memory studies and its activist hopes. Somewhat in line with Liska and Miller, Vermeulen's papers notes the shift from memory sites – such as works of art and literary texts – to the social dynamics of memory, only to refuse to surrender the careful study of works of art to a purely sociological perspective. Sharing Huyssen's scepticism about the political efficacy of particular memorial practices and particular scholarly approaches to memory, Vermeulen

proposes the notion of ‘affect’ – which seems to have joined ‘trauma’ at the top of critical and theoretical agendas in the last decade – as a way to combine the close study of texts and artefacts with an interrogation of their circulation between subjects and cultures, without necessarily making grandiose claims for the political effectiveness of memorial practices. Studying the way that forms of memory impact on audiences and constitute subjects as political and historical agents may end up telling us more about the ‘politics of memory’, he suggests, than more explicitly political research agendas.

Vermeulen’s emphasis on affect – a notion that sits on the fence between the intelligible and the sensual, the somatic and the semantic – opens up a more radical transdisciplinarity, which the other contributions also make imaginable: one can think of productive interactions with evolutionary biology, theology, epigenetics, neurology, media studies, etc. De Graef’s papers underline that the study of memory also needs to engage with the ‘truth regime of science’, and especially with evolutionary accounts of how memory, or indeed the human as such, emerged. His contribution is a welcome reminder of the institutional realities in which memory studies functions in the academy, which call for increasing interconnections with, rather than an impotent dismissal of, scientific accounts of memory. De Graef argues that while memory has always served as a stabilizer of identity, through its reliance on writing it also always breaks with the logic of life. This logic calls for the metabolic continuity of life processes, something to which writing’s logic of material inscription does not conform. Hence, memory is something that the life sciences can never fully account for, and this dispels the fear that they will decisively overtake the humanistic study of memory. De Graef’s contribution links up with those of Miller and Liska in that it proposes that memory always serves as a limit to unified theoretical models and refuses to lend itself to aggressively presentist agendas.

De Graef notes that his response was written in ‘the spirit of late poststructuralism’, a spirit that, as Liska points out, also informed the turn to trauma at the end of the 20th century. The papers brought together here seem to share the view that an appropriate approach to memory and trauma requires a recognition that these phenomena resist foolproof programming as well as all attempts at methodological mastery. This does not mean that the dispersal and incoherence that has characterized the field in the first quarter century of its existence must simply be embraced – if only because this would further marginalize the humanistic and sociological study of memory at the expense of the life sciences. However, it at least implies that the desire for a unified method threatens to violate the object that gives the field its name. The methodological hesitations that these papers value are part of the continuing challenge and appeal that memory poses for present and future thinking.

The crisis of success: What next in memory studies?

Andreas Huyssen

In the spirit of Friedrich Schlegel’s aphorism that characterizes the historian as a *rückwärtsgerwandter Prophet*, I would venture to say that, looking at the mechanisms of the culture industry, the wave of memory studies we have experienced in the humanities over the past two decades will eventually diminish, if not fade. This is inevitable in market-oriented cultures, and the academy is

not immune to the market in publishing and dissemination. In addition, early memory studies were energized by a utopian claim: never again, *nunca más*. But then came Bosnia, Rwanda, Darfur. Thus, the question of the future of memory does have a certain melancholy tinge to it. That self-doubt may be the best thing memory studies has to offer. We should ask what new cognitive gain and political effect can be garnered from the ever-expanding field of memory studies. Unless we do that, the often self-interested comments by historians about the 'surfeit of memory' (Maier, 1993), which we already heard in the 1990s, may indeed be fulfilled. But whether history will come out on top is more than questionable.

In a certain sense, the battle to develop memory studies as a legitimate academic field has been won. But then victories pose problems too: things are taken for granted, the initial drive to develop the field is lost, the publication of fat readers spells the end of a challenge to the profession. Thus I'd be more interested in exploring why there indeed seems to be an impasse in memory studies at the present time and how one might exit from it. Clearly the field of historiography has been expanded if not transformed by memory studies (one can think of the subfield of mnemohistory here). And these effects will not disappear. But there are broader political issues at stake: acknowledgement of the past, apologies for the past, memory contests, and recognition of identities in the present have proliferated in contemporary culture at a time when social justice and economic equality have been eroded to an unprecedented degree in western societies. While the claims to recognition have led in some cases to restitution, and while recognition of some minorities in some countries has made undeniable progress, none of this has prevented an economic appropriation of social wealth at the top of an increasingly pyramid-like socioeconomic structure. The shape of the pyramid always characterized the relation of western industrialized societies to the Third World, but it has now invaded western societies themselves; another 'boomerang effect', to quote Hannah Arendt (1994: 155). Clearly we need more than memory of past injustices. But what? This is where things get difficult and the past can offer only limited guidance.

To return to the more limited area of our academic work, I will offer just a few suggestions that we may want to discuss in more detail:

1. Memory studies has to push beyond certain discursive frames and their limiting effects: collective memory, trauma theory, or national history of the *lieu de mémoire* model.
2. Memory studies should become much more transnational and pay attention to transnational effects of discourses: think of Holocaust discourse in Latin America, Nuremberg in South Africa's post-apartheid discussions, or rape-in-war discourses from the Second World War to Bosnia and Darfur. The expansion of the European Union into Central and Eastern Europe poses yet another memory problematic: in Eastern Europe and the Baltic states the Soviet occupation and the Gulag may be more in the foreground than the Shoah. But even among western European EU members, there clearly is not one European memory culture that could provide a basis for some future European cultural identity. Memory contests wash across national borders: think of the issue of the German expellees from Poland and the Czech Republic, the question of French proactive complicity with Nazi deportations, or the role of Stalinism in Russia vs. the Ukraine.
3. Memory studies should develop stronger links with legal studies. The key issue here is the relation between memory and human rights. Of course there are those who say that memory incites violence and that human rights are a mere imperialist western ploy. At the very least, we need better histories of human rights from the natural law tradition via the United

Nations (UN) Declarations to contemporary non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as a better understanding of how rights have been handled in 'non-western' societies. Which rights are we talking about: social, economic, cultural rights? Each of these is a can of worms ...

4. Memory studies needs to develop a relationship with migration studies in the context of widespread attacks on human rights today in order to better understand links between statelessness as analysed by Arendt and what is happening now in immigration detention and deportation both in Europe and the USA. This obviously requires closer cooperation between humanists and social scientists.

But even if these linkages between the humanities, legal scholarship and the social sciences can be further strengthened through cooperative research, and even if this can strengthen activism in the political sphere, I'm deeply sceptical about the hope that what we do in the humanities can have much impact in the world. On the contrary, the current economic crisis seems to make anti-immigrant sentiment ever stronger in Europe as well as the USA. The danger is that fundamental and long-standing positive rights are being dismantled as a result (asylum laws, habeas corpus, birthright citizenship, judicial representation).

Let me return from the political to a more speculative philosophical question. Another reason to be sceptical about the future of memory is that older distinctions between past, present, and future have been slowly but significantly altered by the contemporary media and their organization into large webs of culture-industrial production. Alexander Kluge (1985), whom I like to cite in this context, once spoke of the attack of the present on the rest of time. What status does the past, or even temporality itself, have on the internet? When I get pessimistic about the status of memory culture, I turn Kluge around and suggest that there might rather be *an attack of the past on the rest of time*, especially on some as yet unarticulated vision of an alternative future. But then maybe Kluge was right after all: the media, from TV to the internet, to Facebook and Twitter, exhibit an ever more voracious present (do we really need to tell the world what we had for breakfast today?) that cannibalizes all manner of pasts and pulls them into the orbit of the present. Ultimately this not only destroys the temporal difference that is preserved, despite all fragility, in public and private memory, but it makes historical consciousness itself obsolete. Henry Ford, who once said that 'history is bunk', would rejoice. At the time, in the 1920s, this seemed a very American statement; today it may well describe a global condition.

The purgatory of memory studies

David Miller

The first thing I would like to say is that the mild sense of stalled or arrested progress in trauma and memory studies may be the result not of methodological or hermeneutic shortcomings and difficulties, but rather of an inherent resistance in the situation of the subject itself. That is to say, a certain repetitious fixity or even conceptual petrification is inherent in the subject that we take as our site of interest and work. We know that one result of catastrophic trauma is the compulsive repetition or replaying of the painful scene, as memory attempts to disentangle its shocked resources. It may

well be the case that memory and trauma studies are being more rather than less true to their subject by virtue of their sensitivities and limitations. I suggest that the halting and stuttering progress that memory studies displays is simply an inherent and quiet recognition that any outright claim to progressive and generalized methodological recuperation could well be a betrayal of the subject matter itself. It could well be that we need perspectives that incorporate and acknowledge the brittle and fractured nature of the site of inquiry as intrinsic to our approaches. Rather than seeing the apparent limits and resistances as simply an academic or intellectual problem, I want to suggest that we can in fact extract and deploy these fragile resources as part of our encounter with trauma, testimony and memory.

The second point leads on from the first. An approach that would recognize and incorporate the brittle, fragile and almost circular nature of memory and trauma would have to relinquish its claim to be a hermeneutic or critical method as such, and would better be called a 'mode'. What I wish to do today is tentatively and haltingly sketch some outlines of the terms and concepts of this mode – a mode that will do justice to critical insight, interpretative coherence, and the 'poetics' of memory. (I say the 'poetics' of memory, because it is my contention that any mode that fails to account for the formal dimensions by which memory enacts its figural evasions and metaphorical substitutions would be a version of cultural history as such, and thereby miss certain essential qualities that differentiate the field and the subject.)

First, I wish to try and elaborate what I think may be useful in what may be termed 'realist' allegory. By realist allegory I intend that form of allegory after Dante that Erich Auerbach (1961) in his early book *Dante Poet of the Secular World* (*Dante als Dichter des irdischen Welt*) termed a new 'earthly' mimesis. It seems strange to us who have been schooled in the viability of the symbol, and who have learnt to think of allegory as didactic, religious and medieval, that Auerbach argued plausibly for Dante as a radical figure who enacted a change in our conception of reality equivalent to that enacted by Hegel. Allegory, at least since Dante, is a figural relationship between signs that gestures to a higher reality beyond the boundaries of its own signifying chains. It seems to me that allegory therefore lends itself to memory and trauma studies inasmuch as it always implies a redeemed condition at the other side of its emblems and symbols. So while allegory exists in the non-time of purgatory awaiting the opening of the future healed existence, it cannot name this condition and is therefore overcast with melancholy for that which it seeks but cannot name. Here we see how allegory, melancholy and redeemed history might coincide for a thinker such as Walter Benjamin.

For Dante, our allegory of hope begins not in metaphysical abstractions but in the fallen and degraded human conditions of the present. The reality of allegory and melancholy that Dante inaugurated seem to me to demand a return to the stalled time of the present. Perhaps it is not beyond conjecture that we are in the end stuck in our own time of purgatory and that memory studies is one of the symptoms rather than the cure for this condition. A reanimation of all that Dante and Auerbach wanted to teach us may just offer a miniature emblem of a critical method and a disposition reliable enough to offer some hope of both recuperation and escape from the purgatorial nightmare of which memory and trauma studies are signatures. Adorno (1998: 7) once said that critique hearkens back to philosophical traditions that today lie in ruins, and allegory is one ruined form in the dead storehouse of our past that we can reanimate as a tool for breaking open the present. That Dante, allegory and melancholy appear old or archaic is merely a sign of their redundancy. But this redundancy is not to be scorned, for it can become, in the moment of its apparent outmodedness, an emblem of all that has gone wrong and all that was left behind in the haste for bright new things.

Elusive pasts

Vivian Liska

The announcement of the seminar of which this roundtable was a part appears to deplore the fact that cultural memory studies, though blooming, is ‘more practiced than theorized’ and continues to be an ‘incoherent and dispersed field, characterized by a host of different terminologies rather than a common, generally-agreed-upon conceptual foundation’. I am impressed by the vitality of this field and by its inspiring impact on the humanities, which is confirmed again by this event. I would, however, like to challenge the aims of this endeavour as suggested by the announcement:

1. *Fleetingness*: Walter Benjamin, an eminent precursor in memory matters, might have trouble with the aim of establishing ‘a common, generally-agreed-upon conceptual foundation’ for cultural memory studies, and maybe even with this term altogether. To use Benjamin’s words (1980: 695): ‘The true image of the past whisks by’ (‘Das wahre Bild der Vergangenheit huscht vorbei’). Benjamin compares our encounter with the past with a flash of lightning: it is as unpredictable and fleeting as the ‘Now-Time’ (‘Jetztzeit’) in which it occurs. What and how we remember arises out of a necessity imposed upon us by the moment of danger to which our respective presents are exposed. The constellation between the present moment and a specific past therefore hardly lends itself to the establishment of consensual and consolidated theoretical foundations. The future of cultural memory studies must guard itself against treating memory as a commodity for symbolic capital. This counts even for the good inter-, multi- and transcultural versions of this activity, in which crossing borders and overriding distinctions strives to unite us all in a big net woven of equatable traumas, consensual methodologies, and good intentions. A challenge to cultural memory studies in the future may lie in having to live with its lacks and insecurities, and maybe even embrace them lest it suffocate the fragile or petrify the dangerous stuff that makes up both individual and collective memory.
2. *Unusable pasts*: cultural memory studies, unlike historiography, taps the powerful trope of memory to introduce *Unverfügbarkeit* – that which escapes our and every grasp – into its approaches to culture. It thereby subverts the master’s grip and the arrogance of a scientific ‘ordering of things’, of which traditional historiography is often accused. But this may very well be the price historiography pays for its authority, a price cultural memory studies may not want to pay if it wants to remain true to the uncontrollable nature of memory. The successes of cultural memory studies emerged in part from a reconciliation between deconstruction and cultural studies, with trauma studies as a kind of mediator between them. Trauma studies was indeed one of the manifold manifestations of the ethical turn of deconstruction, but it still retained the latter’s awareness of our lack of a firm foundation in dealing with the past, identity and culture. Andreas Huyssen (2003: 12–14) has shown the complexities as well as the dangers of turning historical events into providers of a common denominator, measuring stick or negative ‘regulative ideal’ for other atrocities. Although often overdone and sometimes irritatingly bordering on sublime unsayability, trauma studies understood that memory cannot be wholly chartered and used. Cultural memory studies in the future may have to give room to unusable, untranslatable memory if it is to invoke this word.

To conclude: the relevance of cultural memory studies depends less on finding a common, generally-agreed-upon conceptual foundation than on finding ways of doing justice to that which in memory escapes our grasp of the past and keeps it and our tomorrow open for the future.

Memory, agency, affect

Pieter Vermeulen

The main business of memory studies today is the analysis of how art, literature, and other media shape and reflect the circulation of memories. For all its diversity, the field of memory studies is typically powered by a particular politics and poetics, even if these often remain implicit (Luckhurst, 2008: 87–90). We all somehow know that the proper mediation of memory, especially of traumatic memory, resists monumentalization and premature closure, pre-empts amnesia, and ‘slow[s] down rather than speed[s] up’ our engagement with the past (Huyssen, 2003: 27). The recent popularity of concepts such as ‘global’ (Assman and Conrad, 2010), ‘cosmopolitan’ (Levy and Sznajder, 2005), ‘multidirectional’ (Rothberg, 2009), or ‘prosthetic’ memory (Landsberg, 2004) makes the underlying political investment more explicit, while it continues to advocate non-closure and open-endedness and to oppose uses of memory that are all too monolithic, and that aim to enlist particular memories for the promotion of particular identities. Most memory research aims to disturb, in Michael Rothberg’s (2009: 4) words, ‘the straight line that connects memory and identity in mutual confirmation’.

This ambition to ‘challeng[e] the basic tenets and assumptions of much current thinking on collective memory and group identity’ (Rothberg, 2009: 5) is eminently worthwhile in itself; and even if people are inclined to argue it is *not*, the fact remains that this agenda is nearly unavoidable, as the study of memory shares it with cultural studies, postcolonial studies, comparative literature and other fields with which it overlaps, as well as with the humanities in general. In the rest of this short intervention, I want to register one problem besetting this politics, and to suggest one possible future of memory studies that addresses that problem.

The problem, as I see it, is the relation between the poetics and the politics of memory studies. We all somehow know that there is no one-on-one correspondence between particular artistic choices and laudable political outcomes, and that there is no guarantee that artistic forms that promote, for instance, the multidirectional interaction between different memories will translate into an appropriate politics, or even help sever the knot of memory and identity. Already in the year 2000, Andreas Huyssen presciently noted that the interaction between Holocaust memories and other memories of suffering might ideally end up ‘rhetorically energiz[ing] some discourses of traumatic memory’, but that it might just as well ‘simply block insight into specific local histories’ (2003: 14). Huyssen’s remarks anticipated a criticism that is now increasingly being voiced in response to Jeffrey Alexander’s (Alexander et al., 2009) and Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder’s (2005) momentous claims for the beneficial effects of the globalization of Holocaust memory. The truth, as we all somehow know, is that we just don’t know how particular memory practices translate into political change, or whether the multidirectional interactions between memories will lead to their reciprocal enhancement rather than their mutual destruction. The politics of memory, it seems, will necessarily remain a wager.

Here is a proposition. While memory studies cannot do much more than bet on the political effectiveness of the forms it analyses, many of the more fascinating new departures in the field are beginning to develop a different and more modest focus: not on the link between poetics and politics, but rather on the way form affects political agents – the way the mediation of the past, that is, affects individual and collective subjects. Recent revisionary scholarship on modernism, for instance, applies the insight that remembering certain things in certain ways entails certain affective dispositions (Flatley, 2008; Forter, 2003; Moglen, 2007). Such affective dispositions – dysphoric, resentful, mournful, angry, energized, confused, elated, and so on – are the stuff politics is made of, and describing the way in which particular mediations of memory circulate in the affective ecology of an individual or a group is something memory studies is well-equipped for. The vocabulary of memory studies – I am thinking of master signifiers such as trauma, mourning, melancholia and nostalgia – already names modulations of affective relatedness to the past; work on these concepts can make clear that they refer to particular rhythms and intensities, which interact with other feelings and dispositions that are also part of our affective ecologies.

In order to deliver on this promise, the field of memory studies needs to be enriched in at least two ways. First, there is the fact that memory studies has thus far predominantly focused on a rather restricted range of dysphoric affects. Roger Luckhurst (2008: 210–12) notes that a focus on trauma obliterates the many instances of ‘resilience’ that are observed in response to painful events, and Carrie Hamilton (2010) urges us to reconsider the role of ‘pleasure’ in the work of memory. In order to understand the link between memory and the affective ecologies in which agency is rooted, then, memory studies will need to cheer up. Second, it will need to find a way to account for aspects of our affective ecology that are decidedly *not* memories. Once memorial practices are situated in an affective ecology, they interact with non-memorial affects. It is by making memory studies even more multidirectional – to the point that it also interacts with non-memories – that such an affective opening can tell us more about the ways memory actually functions in society, even while it leaves the future rigorously open.

The right to alienation

Ortwin de Graef

A few years ago, Andreas Huyssen (2003: 2) diagnosed us with ‘a fundamental crisis in our imagination of alternative futures’. We live in an increasingly globalized ‘media and consumer society that ... voids temporality and collapses space’ (2003: 6), and while memory discourse should in principle be able to produce correctives to this condition, much of it appeared to be unwittingly complicit in this process of wall-to-wall virtualization by dint of an excessive investment in trauma, threatening to ‘deny human agency and lock us into compulsive repetition’ (2003: 8). Huyssen called for a renewal that would release the power of memory discourses ‘to imagine the future and to regain a strong temporal and spatial grounding of life and the imagination’ (2003: 6), and specifically indicated an engagement with ‘the transnational discourse of human rights’ (2003: 9) as the way forward. I feel that such engagement may be productively supplemented with a return to the idiot question of what it means to be human – how the human gets to be produced, and how memory is involved in this production process. I also feel that, today, this question cannot afford not to engage with the truth regime of science, particularly in its

evolutionary inflections, even if only to wrest from its grip alternative futures it cannot predict and so fails to imagine.

What does it mean to be human? Here's a bottom-line answer: we're all selfish bastards. At least in a technical sense: we're hard-wired for survival (hence trivially selfish) as problem-solving attention-seeking bastards. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a bastard as 'one begotten and born out of wedlock', and while wedlock wasn't around at the time of hard-wiring, the salient point is that humans are the only hominids who practise cooperative breeding, which boils down to babies being routinely cared for and raised by individuals other than their mother – or father for that matter. None of our closest relatives among what used to be called the great apes exhibit this behaviour: their babies cling to their hairy mothers like limpets, while hominid bastard babies make wide eyes at their relatively unrelated naked conspecifics soliciting and typically receiving alloparental attention – an exercise facilitated by the uniquely generous proportion of white in our eyes. Recent research indicates that this marks a decisive difference in hominid evolution, singling out this particular ape as not only anatomically (big-brained bipedal) and behaviourally (all talk and tools) but also emotionally modern human (Hrdy, 2009: 30–1).

While the jury of evolutionary anthropologists is out on the merits of this case, let us try to do what we dilettante humanitists do best and run with the idea, even if it involves tripping over Mandeville, Hobbes, Smith, a couple of Huxleys, Wilson, and who have you in the process. Alone among hominids, humans are hard-wired for something like the ultra-social behaviour typically associated with insects such as bees and ants. Yet alone among organisms, humans have developed a technology to consolidate this divorce from direct descent, displacing metabolic dependence on live transmission with symbolic transcription ready to morph into radical inscription. The potential here is primordial alienation: notoriously unready as they are, human babies are ready to be read and raised by whoever happens to be, and this readiness has given rise to (or has been caused by, it's anybody's guess) the arch-technology of the trace, which translates intentional dispositions into symbols that are constitutively free from the life that produced them and are as such eminently able to sustain the deterritorialization of affect that is our human bastard birthright.

Yet memory always already kicks in to reterritorialize feeling – pre-eminently trust and sympathy – by grounding it in experience verified with reference to space–time coordinates whose relative irrelevance memory serves to forget. Memory legalizes us: without this operation, our mode of being is only ever self-ish; memory gives us our identity as legitimate selves we 'selvish' bastards otherwise would only vaguely resemble. In this fantasy, an inverted re-run of Derrida's (1981) reading of Plato's *pharmakon*, memory is metabolism's last resort to secure its rule. It rewires the trace into the wet-ware and converts the self's longing for any other into belonging to the same, to families, clans, tribes, peoples and nations, so many reaction-formations against the spectre of unlimited human alienation. There is nothing particularly new or arresting about this scenario: its evolutionary twist here is more a matter of strategy than of substance, responding to the current state of affairs in the conflict of the faculties. Within the humanities, it seeks to supplement Huyssen's call 'to imagine the future and to regain a strong temporal and spatial grounding of life and the imagination' with a reminder of the potential for such a future in our species' past, although the notion of grounding would need to be renegotiated for this reminder to be productive.

Written as it is in the spirit of late poststructuralism, I hope this response will not be received as dismissive of the engagement with transnational human rights Huyssen advances as an alternative to what he diagnoses as the debilitating denial of human agency inhabiting that spirit. For if we really want to face the future of our species and to defend what we feel are its inalienable rights, we must also consider the right to alienation inscribed in our set-up but buried under the make-up of memory. Not as an alternative to the struggle for justice but as its necessary and necessarily

insufficient supplement – a supplement that the ‘sciences of the spirit’ have the duty and the means to transmit to our future, and that literature, in particular, allows us to read even as it also always has contributed to the work of memorial domestication.

With respect to what are increasingly commonly thought of as the only real sciences, my contention is equally unexcitingly conciliatory. Memory studies can only benefit from taking on board what is established at the level of the molecule, or is established as likely only when established at the level of the molecule. Conversely, molecular science in whichever of its disciplines can only benefit from not being carried away by likely suggestions that lack any articulated molecular grounding. As a rule, molecular science does not need this reminder: it is only when it is deployed as a tool to discredit disciplines dealing with semi-metabolic and non-metabolic symbolic (or indeed allegorical) transmission (intentional tracing) that it risks forgetting our shared commitment to first principles in the face of the disasters that are about to befall us.

Response

Richard Crownshaw

Andreas Huyssen argues that memory studies should be much more transnational, citing examples of the existing transnational memories that belie national templates of remembrance: the significance and resonance of the Nuremberg trials in post-apartheid South Africa, of Holocaust discourse in Latin America, and of rape-in-war discourses from the Second World War to Bosnia and Darfur. Put another way, then, memory studies must keep pace with the transnational movements of memory, but it must also attend to the impediments to those movements, or rather the competitiveness of local memories. So, for example, with the expansion of the European Union into Eastern Europe, memories of the Shoah vie with those of the Gulag and Soviet totalitarianism. Memory, then, is centripetal and centrifugal, territorializing and de-territorializing. In this respect, Ortwin de Graef’s comments about the evolutionary anthropological significance of memory may have more in common with Huyssen’s than at first appearance. As de Graef might put it, memory is a legitimizing strategy that grounds identity (always social and therefore always at a remove from itself because of its social constitution). The remembrance of origins and subsequent orientating experiences, and of their location in space and time, allows, to paraphrase de Graef, the non-identical subject coherence enough to stray into its inherent condition of alienation and sociability, carried and mediated by the realm of symbols, equally unmoored from origins that they can only trace. So memory ‘rewires the trace into the wet-ware and converts the self’s longing for any other into belonging to the same, to families, clans, tribes, peoples and nations, so many reaction-formations against the spectre of unlimited human alienation’. Memory may subject the self to centripetal forces, a return to origins, but it is that subjection that allows the self’s centrifugal being: ‘Memory is metabolism’s last resort to secure its rule’, writes de Graef. However, as Huyssen’s examples above demonstrate, whether memory moves backwards or forwards, to the territorial, as in the memory competitions over eastern Europe, or to the extra-territorial in terms of transnational discourses of human rights and justice, as in the deployment of Holocaust memory in South Africa, memory is never free from its political and ideological mediations (Radstone, 2005). The life sciences may remind us of the anthropological and evolutionary origins and significance of acts of memory, in turn reminding memory studies to render its disciplinary boundaries permeable, but the

social sciences and the humanities can illuminate the ways that memory is always more than a metabolic issue.

That (non-metabolic) politics of memory is addressed by Pieter Vermeulen's contribution. Vermeulen considers the relation between the poetics and politics of memory in addressing the cosmopolitan, global and multidirectional turn in recent studies of memory. Michael Rothberg's argument that memory and identity should not be thought of as mutually constitutive and reinforcing, no matter the identitarian claims on memory made by particular groups, frees memory studies to trace the ways that group memories of modernity's extremes compete, negotiate, intersect with and constitute each other. Where Rothberg's model is multidirectional – the nexus of memories of the Holocaust, slavery and colonialism illuminate and inform each other – other models of memory can be more unidirectional in the way that, for example, Holocaust memory becomes the paradigm by which other traumas are remembered, both framing and eclipsing local histories – at least, such are the charges directed against global and cosmopolitan versions of Holocaust memory (see Assmann, 2010; Huyssen, 2003). Where the poetics of memory may be able to represent its itinerant nature, what needs to be thought through more closely is the political effectiveness of such memorative forms, and how a poetics of memory becomes a politics of memory. In other words, political transformation is not just a matter of how the past is represented. In some ways, then, Vermeulen's concern buttresses Andreas Huyssen's recommendation for a future of memory studies informed by linkages to and cooperative research with human rights and migration studies in academic, and non-academic activist, arenas. Here, for example, Hannah Arendt's exploration of statelessness would be applicable to the current practices of immigration detention and deportation in the USA and Europe. Informed by a historical understanding of statelessness and human rights, memory studies would have the potential of political purchase.

Where Huyssen sees the realization of the politics of memory in willed transdisciplinary research and collaborations that reach outside of the academy, Vermeulen argues that it is the affectiveness of the representation of memory's mediation of the past that could produce the agency needed for a political response to the past. Memory studies, then, needs to be perceptive to the affectiveness of the representation of memory. Recognition of affect or affective disposition, though, need not be governed, argues Vermeulen, by a narrow receptiveness to just the traumatic but must be responsive to a range of emotional tonalities and energies. In turn, the affect of memory can be related to an ecology of affect, not necessarily or wholly memorative, but nonetheless 'the stuff that politics is made of'. Put otherwise, tracking the mediations of memory through affective ecologies that are memorative and nonmemorative, memory studies can also track how responses to the past might be transformed into future political action. Vermeulen is here dealing with potentialities of memory and memory studies. Affect may provide an interface with the political realm, a way of relating to it, and a certain amount of traction in the social network of relations that make up that realm. The recognition of affect may also be a way of recognizing the political nature and implications of one's existing social relations.

Vermeulen's recognition of the futural potential of memory and memory studies, though, raises further questions. An affective relation to the past can remain just that, without political effect. Political engagement may be an affected and affective activity, but affect characterizes politics and political behaviour in certain ways; it is not the same as politics. What memory studies needs to think through more closely is the way that affect may lead to the agency and authorization needed to enact political change. Thinking along those lines, memory studies needs also to address the local inflections of affective disposition, and how they might be activated. For example, as Wulf Kansteiner has pointed out, there is often a discrepancy between the intentions of a memory text (of its maker/author or makers/authors), the expectations that its materiality and mediality will be read

in a certain way, the discourses that mediate and render the text meaningful in the public sphere, and the way the text is actually received and interpreted as an object of supposed memory. Memory studies needs to pay increasing attention to the hermeneutical triangle of object, maker and consumer (Kansteiner, 2002: 197), and increasingly so because implicit in many versions of memory studies is the assumption that memory texts and objects can be universally affective. Alison Landsberg's (2004) conception of 'prosthetic memory' is cited by Vermeulen as a way of tracking the trajectory of memories as they move, thanks to mass media technologies of the museum and cinema, beyond the social groups that claim them as a means of self-identification. That others may claim and act politically and ethically upon borrowed memories often depends on the traumatic affectiveness of historical representation, which in turn is informed by the means and location of memory's transmission and the lived contexts of those presumably affected. Traumatization is not a given.

It seems, though, that the future of memory studies is in many ways invested in the trauma paradigm. This is particularly the case with Vivian Liska's thoughts on the subject. Liska's argument, inspired by Walter Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', suggests that recent notions of memory's (transcultural and transnational) mobility lend themselves to a reification of memory as so much cultural capital, the exchange of which would render the historical differences between the different pasts remembered in dialogue simply fungible. The future of memory studies should resist canonizing particular theoretical directions (for example, the recent turn to the transnational), and without such foundations it is better placed to maintain the fragile and the fleeting, the untranslatable and unsayable nature of certain pasts. Here Liska mobilizes a particular version of trauma studies, one that would seek to avoid the paradox of holding up the ineffable or the negatively sublime as the yardstick by which atrocities may be measured, and one that would defer definitive historical understanding. Much ink has been spilt over the proclivities found in trauma studies and the way it has been charged with confusing the experience of a disrupted and disruptive trauma text with the experience of trauma itself, universalizing the category of victim (see Hungerford, 2003: 81–83; Leys, 2000: 290–97). Without rehearsing those debates here, Liska's comments are a reminder of the need to scrutinize just how the unsayable is mediated, how it ought to be articulated by memory studies, and how memory studies might locate those who remember the unsayable. Liska's comments prompt a related question: must the unsayable be traumatic to remain unsayable? To suggest so risks a return to perhaps an undifferentiated realm of traumatic affect, in which the positionality of those who remember the unsayable – for example, victim or perpetrator, or those who subsequently would relate to their experiences vicariously from a variety of political, ideological and cultural perspectives – becomes obscured (see, for example, LaCapra, 2001: 23–4, 37, 2004: 115–27). To suggest otherwise necessitates thinking through the differences between the historical significance of silence and the unsayable, and what might motivate the former (see, for example, Ben-Ze'ev et al., 2010). However, to yoke trauma to the unsayable also raises questions about the definition of trauma itself. Trauma studies has traditionally privileged definitions of trauma as event-based, unprecedented and defiant in the face of representation, characterized by the Holocaust, at the expense of, for example, the chronic, enduring and quotidian extremes of colonial subjection. Recent work has redressed the imbalance (see Craps, 2010; Craps and Buelens, 2008), and illuminated the implicit and explicit politics of trauma studies. This redress does not make different traumas 'equitable', as Liska might suggest, but rather brings eclipsed and differentiated pasts to light, which was one of Liska's concerns in the first place.

If Liska finds in trauma studies a deconstructionist logic that might prevent memory studies mastering its objects of enquiry, maintaining unsayable and unusable pasts, then David Miller develops the idea of the sayable in the unsayable rather than a perpetual melancholy state of unsayability. As Miller comments, 'allegory, at least since Dante, is a figural relationship between signs

that gesture to a higher reality beyond the boundaries of its own signifying chains'. Allegory might therefore emblemize a halting, critical method for the future of memory studies – the historicizing impulse of which is not abandoned but maintained by its deferral rather than its totalizing and redemptive realization – as well as describe the stranded materials of memory themselves shorn of meaning but that compel interpretation. In allegorical terms, a claim on the historical remains within the purview of memory studies.

By way of conclusion, I want to turn to a challenge to memory and indeed memory studies identified by Huysen: the proliferation of acts of memory facilitated by digital and new mass media technologies. The way in which our daily lives are mediated by technologies does make it easier to record and represent the past; put another way, quotidian, technologized and digitized activities are inherently commemorative. This may create a surfeit of memory in technologized and digital cultures; it may threaten to collapse the past and the present, to make 'historical consciousness obsolete', and to render the imagination of a better future informed by that consciousness increasingly difficult. Surely, though, this is a challenge that memory studies must meet, particularly in light of the recent spate of uprisings in the Arab world. Where digitized social networking was and is able to operate under authoritarian regimes, it has served to coordinate political dissent and to archive, for the purposes of political change, the memory of state violence. Valuable work is being done on digitized memory (Garde-Hansen et al., 2009; Hoskins, 2011; van Dijck, 2007), and it seems the future of memory studies would entail the continuing mapping of power and agency within the digital world of memory, and the distinction between the ephemeral and the political.

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