

Memory in a Mediated World

Remembrance and Reconstruction

Edited by

Andrea Hajek

Christine Lohmeier

and

Christian Pentzold



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The nascent field of Memory Studies emerges from contemporary trends that include a shift from concern with historical knowledge of events to that of memory, from 'what we know' to 'how we remember it'; changes in generational memory; the rapid advance of technologies of memory; panics over declining powers of memory, which mirror our fascination with the possibilities of memory enhancement; and the development of trauma narratives in reshaping the past.

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978-0-230-23852-7 (paperback)

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Selection, introduction and editorial matter © Andrea Hajek,
Christine Lohmeier and Christian Pentzold 2016
Foreword © Astrid Erll 2016

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2016 978-1-137-47011-9

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First published 2016 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited,
registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke,
Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies
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ISBN 978-1-349-56640-2

ISBN 978-1-137-47012-6 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9781137470126

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully
managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing
processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the
country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Memory in a mediated world: remembrance and reconstruction /
Andrea Hajek, University of Glasgow, UK; Christine Lohmeier,
Universität Bremen, Germany; Christian Pentzold,
Technische Universität Chemnitz, Germany [editors].

pages cm — (Palgrave Macmillan memory studies)

Based on a digital memories seminar hosted by the Centre for Media and
Culture Research at London South Bank University in July 2012.

Includes bibliographical references.

1. Mass media and history—Congresses. 2. Mass media and culture—
Congresses. 3. Collective memory—Congresses. I. Hajek, Andrea,
1979— editor. II. Lohmeier, Christine, 1978— editor. III. Pentzold,
Christian, 1981— editor.

P96.H55.M46 2015

302.23—dc23

2015023530

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Foreword

Prospective – projective – progressive. This collection’s agenda turns on its head what many people think about memory: retrospective – nostalgic – regressive.

Both descriptions of memory are accurate, of course, and there are many nuances to be found in-between. Backward-looking memory versus forward-looking memory, it seems to me, are *options* – for both rememberers and scholars; options which will inescapably bear political implications. For memory studies, ‘prospective memory’ as theorized and investigated in this collection means a reorientation of the field’s predominant focus of research. While it is certainly true that nostalgic, backward-looking and little-productive memories are, unfortunately, all over the place in memory culture, this volume shows that there are *also* materials available which tell a different story of remembering, a story of the production of forward-looking, socially progressive and sustainable memories. The question of which story we tell implies (like it or not) also a normative choice. In that sense, this collection contributes to memory studies not only as an epistemological, but also as an ethical, project.

This collection deals with the complex temporalities of memory. In *Futures Past* and other publications, Reinhart Koselleck addressed similar complexities and proposed terms such as ‘former futures’, that is, the futures that were envisioned in the past, the projections about what has now turned into our present time; ‘present futures’, or the futures that we construct today; but also, to complicate things a bit further, ‘future pasts’, which, bearing this collection’s concerns in mind, I would describe as the specific pasts that we construct today, as we hope them to be remembered in the future (and these include, too, our present as a ‘future past’) (see Koselleck, 2004; 2003, p. 248).

Mediation of memory is another key concern of this collection. The authors combine their reconsideration of the future-oriented temporalities of remembering with the insight into memory’s fundamental mediatedness (see also Erll, 2016), and more specifically, with the question of how ‘new’ digital and connective media have engendered new ways of thinking about time. Andrew Hoskins (2009, pp. 93f.) makes the strong claim that we are dealing with a ‘new digital temporality of memory’ in which memory appears in a ‘continually emergent state’. While Hoskins helps us understand how future memory is already implied in

new media technologies and ecologies, Richard Grusin (2010) shows with his concept of ‘premediation’ how and why futures are mediated in present societies. With ‘premediation’, Grusin describes tendencies of American and global media after 9/11 to anticipate further threats by means of incessant mediations of possible future wars and disasters.

What this volume, then, seems to suggest for further research is taking a fresh look at the idea of ‘premediation’ in a mirror-inverted way, as it were, and studying how not only disaster, but *also* better futures, can be the target of premediation. As I am coming from literary studies, let me introduce to this social science-based collection some examples of historical and cultural imaginaries: Thomas Morus’ *Utopia* (1516), in which a fictional utopian society is remembered and at the same time constructed as an ideal for the future; the *Star Trek* series (1966 ff.), which combines visions of a better, transplanetary future with frequent leaps back into global history; but also the first drafts of the League of Nations, made during the First World War, these were all imaginative investments into the respective futures. They are ‘former futures’, as Koselleck would have it. In varying degrees of fictionality and factuality, playfulness and seriousness, these media products premediated better futures; they were in their times acts of prospective, and progressive, cultural memory.

Such premediations characterize also our present time, as the individual chapters of this collection show with ample empirical evidence, and they often emerge from vehement challenges to human sense-making, such as emergencies, social struggle, death and displacement. Turning our attention to present acts of prospective remembering, as well as excavating the historical archive of mediated ‘former futures’, means an important intervention of memory research into the ongoing discussions about how we understand – and should critically analyse – the various ways in which people understand time.

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Acknowledgements

This volume originated from the Digital Memories Seminar hosted by the Centre for Media and Culture Research at London South Bank University in July 2012. We wish to thank the participants and guests whose comments and ideas inspired us to think about the role memories play in linking the past, present and future in times when most if not all walks of life seem to be mediated. We are especially grateful for the constant support we received from Anna Reading who not only promoted the seminar but also encouraged us to explore the dynamics and tensions of employing memories in prospect and in retrospect. We also wish to thank Philip Hammond, director of the Centre for Media and Culture Research, and Katia Pizzi of the Centre for the Study of Cultural Memory, which is part of the University of London's Institute of Modern Languages Research, for the generous funds that made this seminar possible. Moreover, in November 2014 the Centre for the Study of Cultural Memory hosted a second seminar, entitled *Moving Memories. Remembering and Reviving Conflict, Protest and Social Unrest in Connected Times*, which allowed us to continue the discussion and further develop the ideas set out in this volume. Again we would like to thank all participants and guests as well as the staff at the Institute of Modern Languages Research.

As this volume is a collaborative effort, we convey our thanks and gratitude to the authors who kindly agreed to contribute to this project. They followed us through the book's many stages to address the different dimensions of mediated remembrance and reconstruction from their own research and perspectives. We wish to thank the editors of the Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies series, Andrew Hoskins and John Sutton, for agreeing to add this volume to a great range of publications shaping the discussion in memory studies and beyond. We are also in debt to the anonymous reviewers for their detailed comments and helpful remarks, and of course to the people at Palgrave Macmillan, especially Felicity Plester who took up our germinating idea, Chris Penfold who guided us through administrative matters and Sneha Kamat Bhavnani who saw the book through production. Finally, we are extremely grateful for the editing assistance we received from Charlotte Fischer.

Our academic departments and colleagues at Glasgow, London, Munich, Bremen, Chemnitz and Berlin provided intellectual environments of critical debate and reliable support that were immensely important in accomplishing this endeavour. Besides and above all, we thank our friends and families for their love and help, which we will always remember.

*Andrea Hajek,
Christine Lohmeier
and
Christian Pentzold*