Memory in a Mediated World

Remembrance and Reconstruction

Edited by

Andrea Hajek

Christine Lohmeier

and

Christian Pentzold
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. These factors have contributed to an intensification of public discourses on our past over the last 30 years. Technological, political, interpersonal, social and cultural shifts affect what, how and why people and societies remember and forget. This groundbreaking series tackles questions such as: What is ‘memory’ under these conditions? What are its prospects, and also the prospects for its interdisciplinary and systematic study? What are the conceptual, theoretical and methodological tools for its investigation and illumination?

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Memory in a Mediated World

Remembrance and Reconstruction

Edited by

Andrea Hajek
University of Glasgow, UK

Christine Lohmeier
Universität Bremen, Germany

and

Christian Pentzold
Technische Universität Chemnitz, Germany
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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

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.

*Astrid Erll*

Professor of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures,
Goethe-University Frankfurt am Main

**References**


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.
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Andrea Hajek,
Christine Lohmeier
and
Christian Pentzold
Notes on Contributors

**Ivan Darias Alfonso** holds a PhD from Birkbeck, University of London and a Masters from Cardiff University’s School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies. His research focuses on Cuban émigrés in Western Europe and constructions of identity. From 1994 to 2004, he worked in Cuban media (print, broadcast and online) as a journalist and editor. He is also an award-winning fiction writer and is currently working on a book project on Media Representation and Cultural Memory in the Cuban diaspora.

**Michael Arnold** is Senior Lecturer and Head of Discipline in the History and Philosophy of Science Programme in the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, at the University of Melbourne. His ongoing teaching and research activities lie at the intersection of contemporary technologies and our society and culture. His recent publications include *Online@AsiaPacific: Mobile, Social and Locative Media in the Asia–Pacific* (2013), ‘Selfies at funerals: Digital commemoration, presencing and platform vernacular’, *International Journal of Communication* (in press); and ‘#Funeral and Instagram: Death, social media, and platform vernacular’, *Information, Communication & Society*.

**Manuela Farinosi** is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Udine, Italy. Her academic interests include social and cultural aspects of digital technologies, participatory media and sociology of disaster. She teaches courses in sociology of communication, theories and techniques of digital media and economic sociology. Among her most recent publications is ‘Challenging mainstream media, documenting real life and sharing with the community: An analysis of the motivation for producing citizen journalism in a post-disaster city’ (with Emiliano Treré), *Global Media and Communication* (2014).

**Sarah Florini** is an assistant professor in the Department of Communication and Theatre Arts and in the Institute of Humanities at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, USA. Her work focuses on the intersection of technology and racial politics in US culture. Her recent publications include ‘Tweets, tweeps, and signifyin’: Communication
and cultural performance on “Black Twitter”, *Television and New Media* (2014) and ‘Recontextualizing the racial present by retelling the past: Intertextuality and the politics of remembering online’, *Critical Studies in Media Communication* (2014). She is currently working on a book manuscript titled *Blackness. There’s an App for That: Racial Politics and Black Digital Cultures*.

**Rolf Fredheim** is a postdoctoral research fellow on the Conspiracy and Democracy Project, hosted at the University of Cambridge. As a member of the Memory at War Project, he analysed a large database of texts to explore how symbols and historical events were mobilized in Russian political rhetoric, and to pinpoint the hallmarks of Russian opposition discourse as manifested in news outlets. Research interests include Russian politics, automated content analysis and modelling information flow on social media. His most recent publication is ‘Filtering foreign media: How Russian news agencies repurpose Western news reporting’, *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* (in press).

**Joanne Garde-Hansen** is Associate Professor of Culture, Media and Communication at the University of Warwick. From 2009 to 2013, she was Director of the Research Centre of Media, Memory and Community (University of Gloucestershire, UK). She has co-edited *Save As … Digital Memories* (Palgrave 2009) with Andrew Hoskins and Anna Reading, authored *Media and Memory* (2011), co-edited *Geography and Memory* (Palgrave 2012) with Owain Jones and co-authored *Emotion Online: Theorizing Affect on the Internet* (Palgrave 2013) with Kristyn Gorton. She leads the academic research on a number of community projects focused on media, memory and local cultural heritage. She was co-investigator on the ESRC Sustainable Flood Memories Project.

**Martin Gibbs** is an associate professor in the Department of Computing and Information Systems at the University of Melbourne. His research covers a range of topics associated with the social use of digital technologies. He is currently chief investigator on the ARC-funded Digital Commemorations project. His has written and continues to write about digital memorials and computer games and has a specific interest in the ways game designers and game players use games to commemorate and memorialize the dead. He was the co-editor of *From Social Butterfly to Engaged Citizen*, and he also co-edited the May 2013 special issue of *The Information Society*, on the Death, Afterlife and Immortality of Bodies and Data.
Paige L. Gibson is a PhD student in Media and Communication at Temple University. She holds an MA in Communication from the University of Illinois at Chicago. Her research interests explore the intersection of media technologies, identity and collective memory. Her latest publication, ‘Remediation and remembrance: “Dancing Auschwitz”, collective memory and new media’, published in ESSACHESS, looks at Holocaust remembrance and German and Jewish identity construction on YouTube.

Andrea Hajek is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Glasgow. She is the Managing Editor for the Sage journal of Memory Studies, and she is a founding member of the Warwick Oral History Network. Her research interests include memory studies, Italian social movements, the 1968 protests in Europe, gender and women’s history, oral history methodology and generation studies.

Andrew Hoskins is Interdisciplinary Research Professor in the College of Social Sciences at the University of Glasgow, UK. His research connects multiple aspects of emergent digital society: media, memory, conflict, security and privacy, to explore holistically the interplay of contemporary media and memory ecologies. His latest book (with John Tulloch) is Risk and Hyperconnectivity: Media and Memories of Neoliberalism (2016). He is founding Editor-in-Chief of the Sage journal of Memory Studies and founding Co-Editor of the Palgrave Macmillan book series Memory Studies. His AHRC Research Fellowship, ‘Memory and archival regimes: War diaries before and after the connective turn’ interrogates the intersecting and contesting roles of individual and organizational memory of warfare through an original ethnography of Army Historical Branch in Whitehall (the ‘keepers’ of the official operational record of the British Army), http://archivesofwar.com.

Laura Huttunen is Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Tampere, Finland. Her research interests include transnational anthropology and anthropology of migration, post-war Bosnian development and Bosnia diaspora as well as multi-sited ethnography. She has published in journals such as Focaal: Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology, Journal of Refugee Studies and European Journal of Cultural Studies.

Owain Jones is Professor of Environmental Humanities at Bath Spa University. Previously he was Reader in Cultural Geography, Landscape
and Environment in the Countryside and Community Research Institute, UK. His research is in geographies of nature-society, landscape, place and nature, memory and place, and geographies of childhood. The UK’s ESRC, AHRC and the Rural Economy and Land Use Programme have funded his research and he is published in many peer-reviewed geography journals. He is currently principal investigator of the Hydrocitizenship Project and was co-investigator on the ESRC Sustainable Flood Memories Project.

Anne Kaun is Assistant Professor at the Department for Media and Communication Studies at Södertörn University, Stockholm. Being interested in the relationship between crisis and social critique, her current project concerns historical forms of media participation that have emerged in the context of large-scale economic crises. In 2013, she published Being a Young Citizen in Estonia – An Exploration of Young People’s Civic and Media Experiences. She has also published in peer-reviewed journals such as New Media and Society; European Journal of Cultural Studies; Participation; Communications – The European Journal of Communication Research; Information, Communication and Society; and International Journal of Qualitative Methods.

Emily Keightley is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Social Sciences at Loughborough University. Her research interests include the mediation of memory, time and everyday life. As well as recent articles on mediated mobility, memory and methodology, generational transmission and painful pasts, she has published the edited collection Time, Media and Modernity (2012) and has co-authored The Mnemonic Imagination (2012) with Michael Pickering. Research Methods for Memory Studies, co-edited with Michael Pickering, was published in 2013. She is assistant editor of the journal Media, Culture and Society.

Tamara Kohn is Associate Professor of Anthropology in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne. Her current research and teaching interests include the anthropology of the body, senses and emotion, death studies, identity and personhood, and methods and ethics in ethnographic practice. Her publications include ‘Crafting selves on death row’ (2012), in Davies and Park, eds, Emotion, Identity and Death; and ‘Facebook and the Other: Administering to and caring for the dead online’ (2012), with Nansen, Arnold and Gibbs, in Hage and Eckersley, eds, Responsibility.
Mia Lindgren is Associate Professor and Head of the School of Media, Film and Journalism at Monash University, Australia. She is co-author of two books about broadcast; *Australian Broadcast Journalism* is now in its third edition (2013) and *Den Självkörda Radioboken* (Liber, 2005). She has been a chief investigator on three competitively funded research projects examining journalistic approaches and storytelling in public health and history. A former radio producer, she is also interested in practice-led research. Her recent work has focused on the reinvention of radio and changing forms of audio storytelling.

Christine Lohmeier is Professor of Communication and Media Studies at the University of Bremen. Her research interests lie at the intersections of identity and belonging, media and communication, migration and memory studies. She is the author of *Cuban Americans and the Miami Media* (2014). She has also published in *Media, Culture & Society*, *M/C Journal* and the *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics*. Current research projects focus on the intertwined relationships between memory objects, mediated memories and family histories and the development of innovative qualitative methodologies.

Lindsey McEwen is Professor of Geography and Environmental Management at the University of the West of England. She was the principal investigator (with research interests in flood histories and flood risk management) on the ESRC Sustainable Flood Memories project. In this, she works with Jones and Garde-Hansen as co-investigators to understand the creative, mediated and archival methods used by communities prone to environmental crises in order to share local knowledge and promote resilience. She is co-investigator on the AHRC Multi-story water project (2012/13), which is exploring how flood narratives and situated performance can be used to engage ‘hard-to-reach’ urban communities around changing flood risk. She led the AHRC funding for a Living Flood Histories project in 2010/2011 and has published widely in geography and pedagogic journals.

James Meese is a research fellow at the University of Melbourne, working on the Australian Research Council-funded project Digital Commemoration, which investigates contemporary practices of digital commemoration and their wider social and cultural implications. He has also published work on copyright law, post-broadcast television, privacy law, media regulation and sports media.
Alessandra Micalizzi has a doctorate in Communication and New Technologies, and is a researcher at GPF where she is responsible for the web division. She was a Postdoctoral Researcher at IULM University and collaborates with the Department of Psychology at the Catholic University of Sacred Heart in Milan. She teaches courses in communication at Afol Sud Milano and she is referent for the Department of Studies and Research at CNOP (National Council of Psychologists). Her primary area of research interest is the practice of sharing emotion in online environments. Her recent work includes #Shameonline: Twitter and the blushing practices in the Digital Age, presented at the Shame and Writing Symposium at University of Warwick.

Florence Millerand is a professor in the Department of Public and Social Communication at Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) and chairholder of UQAM Research Chair on Digital Technologies Uses and Changes in Communication. She is the co-director of the Laboratory of Computer-Mediated Communication and member of the Interuniversity Research Center on Science and Technology. Her academic interests include social and cultural aspects of communication technologies, digital infrastructures and social studies of technology. Her recent publications include ‘Web social: mutation de la communication’ (2010); ‘Towards information infrastructure studies: Ways of knowing in a networked environment’ (with Bowker, Baker and Ribes), in International Handbook of Internet Research (2010); and ‘Participatory science: Encouraging public engagement in ONEM’ (with Heaton, Liu and Crespel), International Journal of Science Education (2014).

David Myles is a PhD candidate at the Department of Communication, Université du Québec à Montréal, and a member of the Interuniversity Research Centre on Science and Technology (CIRST). He is a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Fellow and holds the position of Course Lecturer at the Université du Québec à Montréal. His academic interests include internet research methodology, cultural impacts of social media use, citizen policing and the uses of information and communication technologies in criminal investigations. His recent publications include ‘Enjeux éthiques de la recherche sur les forums Internet portant sur l’utilisation des médicaments à des fins non médicales’ (Research ethics in the study of internet forums dedicated to the use of diverted drugs) with C. Thoër and F. Millerand (2012) and ‘Se racon-ter et conseiller les autres sur les forums en ligne: la construction d’une identité d’expert en médicaments détournés’ (Advising others on online
Bjorn Nansen is Lecturer in Media and Communications at the University of Melbourne, and a member of the Microsoft Research Centre for Social Natural User Interfaces. He researches digital media and communications technologies, computer interaction and network culture using a mix of ethnographic, participatory and digital methods of research. His current research projects investigate young children’s use of mobile media, domestic media environments, tangible and hybrid interfaces, and the mediation of death and remembrance.

Christian Pentzold is a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer at the Institute for Media Research at Technische Universität Chemnitz and an associate researcher at the Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet & Society, Berlin. Currently, his projects look at convergent multimodal discourse, internet-assisted cooperation, governance of digitally networked environments, mediated memories and the exploitation of entertainment programmes like television formats and social games. Beyond that, he is interested in applying theories of practice to the study of media and communication and in linking qualitative with quantitative social science methods. His research has been published in journals such as New Media & Society, Memory Studies as well as Media, Culture and Society.

Gail Phillips is Emerita Associate Professor of Journalism at Murdoch University. She spent 14 years working in commercial and public sector radio at local and national levels before joining Murdoch University where she held a variety of leadership roles in teaching and research. She is co-author of Australian Broadcast Journalism (2002, 2006, 2013) and is also co-author of Journalism Ethics at Work (2005). Major research projects include the Reporting Diversity project funded by the Australian government and the Australian Asbestos Network research project funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council.

Michael Pickering is Emeritus Professor in the Social Sciences Department at Loughborough University. His most recent books include Researching Communications (2007, with David Deacon, Peter Golding and Graham Murdock); Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain (2008); Research Methods for Cultural Studies (2008); Popular Culture, a four-volume edited collection (2010); and with Emily Keightley, The Mnemonic Imagination

**Ruth M. Sanz Sabido** is Senior Lecturer in Media and Communication at Canterbury Christ Church University (UK). Her research focuses on memories of the Spanish Civil War, media discourse, anti-austerity protests, conflict reporting and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. She is founder and Chair of the MeCCSA Social Movements Network and convenes the Canterbury Media Discourse Group. She is co-editor of the book series ‘Protest, Media and Culture’.

**Fredrik Stiernstedt** is a lecturer at Jönköping University, Sweden. His main fields of interest are media work and production, music and media, radio and sound studies and the critical analysis of digital culture. He has previously published in journals such as *New Media & Society, Participations, Journal of Radio and Audio Media* and *First Monday*.

**Chiaoning Su** is Visiting Assistant Professor at Temple University, where she received a doctorate degree in Media and Communication in 2015. Her research focuses on disaster journalism, social memory, and media globalization. Her research has been published in peer-reviewed journals such as *Media, Culture & Society, Journal of Asian Communication* and *Asian Cinema*. 
Introduction: Remembering and Reviving in States of Flux  

Christian Pentzold, Christine Lohmeier and Andrea Hajek

Reflexive remembering and reconstructing

‘We will remember’ is the exclamatory pledge given by those who are moving on from troubled times. It is intoned, for example, in Laurence Binyon’s *Ode of Remembrance*, which honours the British war dead of World War I. In its Hebrew version it gives the name to *Nizkor*, a web-based project that counters Holocaust denial. It is casted in plaques and chiselled into memorials meant to last forever. Moreover, the solemn promise never to forget collective experiences of trauma and pain in times to come dictates many other forms and rituals of commemoration. There, the words are uttered in order to bring together the past, the present and the future, and thus to repeatedly connect the bygone time that is to be recalled, the current time in which the pledge is given and the forthcoming time when the promise will avowedly be kept. The call and the assertion to remember are, therefore, not only backwards-looking undertakings: rather, they carry the agents, objects and circumstances of remembering along the temporal continuum between yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Starting from this general observation, a growing body of scholarship explores the hitherto largely unrecognized, future-oriented dimension of memory in particular. Thus, it extends the definition of memory as ‘the present past’ (Terdiman, 1993, p. 8), which echoes Maurice Halbwachs’s (1992) classical insights into the constitution of the past in terms of present worldviews and concerns. In broad terms, this move involves examinations of the memory of the future, the future of memory and the future of the study of memory alike (Crownshaw, Kilby & Rowland, 2010; Gutman, Brown & Sodaro, 2010; Koselleck, 1988/2004; Vermeulen et al., 2012). In these endeavours, which connect
the disciplines of memory studies, sociology, history, cultural analysis, comparative literature as well as media and communication research, a range of fields – like the formations of diasporic communities, fictional imaginations, post-war efforts for education and reconciliation, news discourses or biographical narratives – have been studied in terms of the remembrance of the future or, respectively, for the future (e.g., Hirsch & Miller, 2011; Keightley & Pickering, 2012; Strong-Wilson et al., 2013; Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2013; Niemeyer, 2014). Finally, besides humanities and social sciences the topic of future-oriented memories has also been taken up by cognitive science and psychology with regard to planned actions and intentions (cf. McDaniel & Einstein, 2007).

Considering both retrospective memories and the prospective employment of memories, this volume looks at troubled times that demand resolution, recovery and restoration, with the chance to revise old and reconstruct new ways of living. As such, it focuses on issues of trauma, conflict and turmoil that thread through the burgeoning literature using different yet related concepts of collective, personal, cultural, popular, national or family memory (e.g., Alexander et al., 2004; Connerton, 1998; Erl & Nünnen, 2008; Hodgkin & Radstone, 2003; Huyssen, 1995; Lebow, Kansteiner & Fogu, 2006; Levy & Sznaider, 2006; Misztal, 2003; Olick & Robbins, 1998; Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi & Levy, 2011; Radstone, 2000; Radstone & Hodgkin, 2003; Reading, 2003a, 2011; Roediger & Wertsch, 2008; Rossington & Whitehead, 2007). Overall, the chapters assembled here assume that experiences of private or public crisis often allow for a projective use of memories, be they individual or collective. Hence, contrary to the idea that such states of exception eliminate memories, the volume examines the ways in which memories in and of traumatic, conflictual or incisive events and experiences are addressed through a productive employment of past ideas, relationships or practices.

Seen together, the contributions show that times of trouble must not only be experienced as cataclysmic breakdown, disaster and disintegration but that they also open up the chance, on the one hand, to redraft and rework personal opinions, actions and the overall conduct of life as well as, on the other hand, to revise communal and social identities, interactions and institutions. Arguably, the possibility for such ‘productive remembering’, as Andreas Huyssen (2003, p. 27) put it, is set within reflexive modernity. In this period, as Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck, Scott Lash, Zygmunt Bauman and other social thinkers have argued, situations of uncertainty and risk accruing to an increasing number of public and private domains also provide opportunities for change and
progress, at least for those empowered to assess and assume the unfolding challenges and chances (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 1992; Beck et al., 1994; Giddens, 1990). Reflexive modernization, in consequence, comes with many projects for reorganization and reform directed at its own multifaceted conditions. Thus, many of the cases discussed in the volume revolve around social movements, initiatives for public advocacy and self-reflective accounts that aim at remembering and reconstructing public and private life. In mastering the complex societal requisitions that allegedly mark the shift towards this second stage of modernity, the studied individual and collective actors thus purposefully engage in bringing memory forward (Rothberg, 2009). In doing so, they employ, on the symbolic level, ideologies, discourses and narratives; on the practical level, short-term tactics and long-term strategies; and, on the relational level, personal bonds and communal ties to tackle challenges to identity, collectivity, life choices and common welfare.

Viewed this way, the oppositional groups forming in the latter days of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), for example, were actively involved in advancing the system change and thus in bringing about the first free parliamentary election in 1990 and, ultimately, the German reunification. For one, they referred back to failed movements in parts of the Eastern Bloc, notably the Prague Spring, the Hungarian Revolution and the Uprising of 1953 in East Germany. Yet in their progressional struggle to transform the socio-political state in the then present time these forums and leagues can also be understood as having been concerned with observing and reflecting their own formation and expansion as well as the unrolling events in which they were participating. As such, at least some of them gave attention to the appropriate forms of the future remembrance of these struggles and their respective accomplishments – how they will be remembered – by documenting the unfolding processes in photographs, by drafting eyewitness accounts as well as by collecting items and documents. Stemming from these efforts as well as the material resources and cultural framings they established, the peaceful revolution and its legacy are commemorated in a number of intersecting and at times conflicting ways (cf. Saunders & Pinfold, 2013). As such they marked, for example, the celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, which, in turn, sought to install novel iconic visions like the ‘Border of Lights’ retracing the former course of the Berlin Wall with illuminating balloons (see the cover image of this volume).

Similar patterns of anticipated future remembrance can be observed, for instance, within diasporic groups. In the case of the Cuban American
community in Miami, public and private archives thus have been established in order to enable the following generations and the wider public to remember life in Cuba, the circumstances of departure of different migrant groups and the arrival in the new country of residence. The selection of certain objects and their presentation already frame the ways in which historic events as well as personal circumstances will be remembered. This is not to say that these (re-)presentations are not debated and contested. However, recurrent themes and narratives lead to a mythologized version of the past, which forms part of the collective identity of migrant groups and sub-groups and informs their future plans and ambitions (cf. Lohmeier, 2014).

Mediating memory

In times when all walks of life are thought to be increasingly mediated, such simultaneously backward- and forward-looking enterprises involve a variety of media. Hence, to a considerable extent, the agency of those engaged in productive remembrance rests with their ability to make use of media as past ideas, actions and contacts become available and transferable through time and space with the help of different types of semiotic representations and communication technologies.

The worldwide Occupy movement, for example, has diversified into several international and local branches with the help of web technologies like websites, email and chat as well as platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Meetup. For one, these means of communication were employed to organize the ongoing activities around the normally ephemeral camps that spread across many local sites and loosely coupled people. Moreover, the activists mobilized these tools, which were already in use in the demonstrations of the Arab Spring and in the Iberian anti-austerity Indignants Movement, to gather the symbolic marks of their engagement so as to record what were often transient happenings. Some also went on to promote the movement’s ambitions through multimedia and art. Therefore, other than using media as a means to contend in the present for a variety of due changes, the Occupy protests strategically adopted imagery and slogans like ‘We are the 99 per cent’, the #Occupy hashtag or the Guy Fawkes mask in order to furnish future subversive actions with pertinent representations (Nielsen, 2013). As such, they were not only appropriated by other movements but also collected and conserved by institutions like the National Museum of American History and the New York Historical Society (Flamini, 2011).
Of course, media have been employed to fix, share and store expressions and impressions of individual and collective experiences since the very beginnings of human culture. Rather fundamentally, collective memories are thus, as Wertsch (2002, p. 25) has explained, mediated in the sense that humans use voices and texts as means to express and pass on their experiences and ideas. Moreover, from wall painting and cuneiform tablets via manuscripts and prints to the rise of networked electronic infrastructures and digital services and applications, media innovations have facilitated the reassembly of the practices and materials of individual and collective remembrance and reconstruction (e.g., A. Assmann, 2011; J. Assmann, 2006; Edy, 2006; Erll & Rigney, 2009; Ernst & Parikka, 2013; Garde-Hansen, 2011; Hoskins, 2003; Kansteiner, 2006; Neiger, Zandberg & Meyers, 2011; Sturken, 1997; Zelizer, 2000, 2010; Zelizer & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2014).

While the entanglement of media and memory has altogether gained considerable attention in memory studies, the volume considers the current conditions of mediation or mediatization more broadly. Hence, the notion of a ‘mediated world’ refers to the assumed centrality of media in any of an increasing number of social life worlds. In this regard, José van Dijck (2007, p. 16) explores media and memory’s twin relation in terms of the prefiguration of cultural memory through media. She defines mediated memories as ‘the activities and objects we produce and appropriate by means of media technologies, for creating and re-creating a sense of past, present, and future of ourselves in relation to others’ (2007, p. 21). Reflecting on mediation as a ‘process of shifting interconnected individual, social and cultural dependency on media maintenance, survival, and growth’ (2014, p. 661), Andrew Hoskins has posited that the potentials for remembering and reconstructing are fundamentally changing in an ‘emergent sociotechnical flux’ (2014, p. 661) that affects memory’s biological, social and cultural dimensions. Thus, following the conceptual works of Sonia Livingstone (2009), Friedrich Krotz (2009), Stig Hjarvard (2008) and others, we assume that due to the cumulative volume and systemic societal impact of an almost pervasive media manifold, an increasing range of public and private forms of remembering-cum-reviving is done in relation to media. As such, the empirical analyses assembled here, which are set within a broad range of localities ranging from Australia and Asia via Europe to North America and Latin America, interrogate, to use a distinction made by Nick Couldry (2012, p. 35), social life worlds where agents and activities are directly oriented to media, where they involve media without having media as their aim or where the possibility to act is conditioned...
by the presence and functionality of media (Lohmeier & Pentzold, 2014).

Although the majority of these mediated memories in states of flux are set within digitally networked environments, and so-called social media feature strongly in several of the chapters, all sorts of media can essentially be termed social and have the potential to afford various forms of memory-making and mnemonic practices. Yet these new types of connective media have been met with the expectation to engage people in memory matters in particular (Ashuri, 2011; Cohen & Rosenzweig, 2006; Foot, Warnick & Schneider, 2005; Haskins, 2007; Hess, 2007; Pentzold, 2009; Reading, 2003b; Reading et al., 2009). A considerable portion of recent studies that look into these forms of productive remembering is especially concerned with mourning and grief, investigating for example the interactions and rituals concerning the handling of online profiles of deceased users and the engagement with their enduring virtual presence. In sum, they show that these personal and collective losses can stimulate the formation of compassionate communities beyond acts of mourning and personal acquaintance, providing new sources of solidarity (Brubacker et al., 2013; Christensen & Gotved, 2014; Jones, 2004; Lingel, 2013; Marwick & Ellison, 2012).

Contributions

Exploring these ideas, the volume assembles contributions that empirically study the conscious, future-oriented remembrance of past events, activities, relations or experiences that are employed to reconstruct future ways of living and living together. As such, it moves beyond the idea of mediated memories as enterprises that turn back time and bypass critical occasions for personal development and social progress. Rather than focusing on retrospective memories, the volume interrogates the prospective employment of memory work in devising memory-wise practices and discourses so as to revive and reconstruct personal and public life. In other words, the volume does not rest with investigating past events and how these are mediated, but looks at four crucial arenas of contemporary scholarship and current affairs regarding the active collective and individual processes of remembering and reconstructing linked to situations of emergency, social struggle, displaced communities and death, respectively.

Accordingly, the volume is organized along four parts that enquire into four major states for remembering and reviving in troubled times under the conditions of mediation. Along the social macro,
meso and micro scales, which are introduced by Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley, the first main part, ‘Rejoining through States of Emergency’, centres around the responses to grand scale natural disasters. The second part, ‘Reforming States of Affairs’, investigates transformations supported by social movements and activism. The third part, ‘Recollecting States of Identity’, looks into types of community-(re)building around ethnic, cultural or habitual commonalities and boundaries. Finally, the fourth part, ‘Recalling States of Life’, is concerned with matters of death and mourning. More specifically, in order to explore this perspective thoroughly, the contributions consider a wide range of conflicts, troubles and challenges, as these take shape in the personal and the public spheres. Overall, the volume examines changes in personal life courses as well as disruptions of public life and simultaneously aims to acknowledge the interconnections between them.

The two opening chapters address overarching themes of this anthology from a theoretical and a methodological perspective. Andrew Hoskins begins by characterizing memory in terms of the current media ecology and then moves on to critically examine the possibilities of recording and the attempt to archive ‘everything’. Hoskins concludes by emphasizing the value and humanity of involuntary remembering – both on an individual as well as on a collective level. Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley then call for a more refined methodological base in memory studies in order to complement the strong focus on theoretical and conceptual work in this emergent field. Their contribution outlines interscalarity as a useful principle for empiric research.

In the first part, ‘Rejoining through States of Emergency’, Joanne Garde-Hansen, Lindsey McEwen and Owain Jones bring together geography, memory studies and digital media studies as they unfold a mixed-media approach to the 2007 UK floods, which they define as a memo-techno-ecology of remembering and forgetting environmental crises. In doing so they offer a critical reflection upon how individuals and communities use mediated memory practices to remain resilient through remembering and forgetting. Chiaoning Su and Paige L. Gibson follow up with their study of the 921 Earthquake and Typhoon Morakot in Taiwan. Using narrative analysis and juxtaposing institutional and vernacular remembrances, they examine the content and architectures of two memorials, the 921 Internet Museum and the alternative journalist platform 88news. Finally, Manuela Farinosi and Alessandra Micalizzi consider the digitization of memories following the 2009 earthquake of L’Aquila in Italy. Their focus of research is the local memory website,