

# Memory Studies

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## Editorial

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# MEMORY STUDIES

## *Editorial*

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Public discourses on our past have intensified over the past 30 years. Technological, political, interpersonal, social and cultural shifts affect what, how and why people and societies remember and forget. What is 'memory' under these conditions? How do we realize calls for 'interdisciplinarity' and also move beyond them towards a systematic set of conceptual, theoretical and methodological tools for the investigation of social and individual memory, of people and their groups? Welcome, then, to the launch issue of *Memory Studies*.

The name of this journal is a statement of intent in affording recognition, form and direction to work in this nascent field, and in facilitating a critical forum for dialogue and debate on the theoretical, empirical and methodological issues central to a collaborative understanding of memory today.

We welcome submissions that speak to a range of participants across memory studies. Articles may be explicitly based in the best methods of a single discipline or seek to bridge or synthesize research tools and traditions from different disciplines. Manuscript submission guidelines are available at: [mss.sagepub.com](http://mss.sagepub.com) and see also our website dedicated to developments in the field: [www.memorystudies.net](http://www.memorystudies.net).

For our inaugural issue we have invited scholars distinguished by their writings on memory from an array of disciplines to contribute short articles setting out their views on the agenda, challenges and prospects for the field and its core issues. Although these invitations were not overly prescriptive, their responses engage with overlapping and intersecting traditions and discourses, and also appear to speak to each other without the authors' knowledge of the other contributions. Furthermore, we are pleased that these are richly provocative: *Memory Studies* will energize research and debate, rather than merely follow and summarize it.

The field of memory studies mobilizes scholarship driven by problem or topic, rather than by singular method or tradition. Yet divergence in backgrounds and assumptions must be highlighted and deliberately negotiated, not wished away. Only by encouraging

the open, careful contesting of concepts can we exploit the strengths of the daunting range of disciplines – from neurobiology to narrative theory, from the developmental to the postcolonial, the computational to the cross-cultural, and on and on – which can all drive the collective and various enterprises involved.

Our opening article explicitly and boldly interrogates the question of the field: Henry L. Roediger, III, and James V. Wertsch argue that the development of systematic methodologies and unique theoretical perspectives is critical to its progress from a multidisciplinary to an interdisciplinary field. Yet they suggest a thoughtful, rather than overeager, adoption and integration of concepts from one discipline to the next. And as founders of the memory studies programmes at Washington University, they highlight the role of education in this endeavour.

Issues of disciplinarity also resonate with other contributors' assessments of challenges for the field: Susannah Radstone cautions as to the risks of the pursuance of 'transdisciplinarity' with 'travelling concepts and hardening orthodoxies' (for instance in relation to the widespread use of the term 'trauma'); Sue Campbell highlights the sharing of memories and joint renegotiating of the past, suggesting that interindividual memory is both the key challenge to interdisciplinary dreams and the reason memory makes epistemologists nervous; Jeffrey Olick charts the trajectory of the conceptual development of collective memory and identifies this journal as part of an emergent solution to a 'non-paradigmatic, transdisciplinary, centerless' condition resulting from a 'metastatic' growth in social memory studies; and Marita Sturken contends that there is no place for the 'policing of disciplines' in the field.

What does emerge strongly in these debates as to the actual and desired inclusivities and exclusivities of memory studies is the identification of objects and practices of memory that might appear counter-intuitive to its being and to its study. Sturken, for example, points to a realm of the 'inauthentic' (drawing on her work on consumerism) that may appear as inimical to memory but which, she argues, is essential to its cultural production and negotiation. Similarly, Barbie Zelizer argues that memory 'made' by journalists is mostly unreflected on by the 'agents' of memory themselves, and that this contributes to academe's overlooking of journalism's rendering of the past. Furthermore, Paul Connerton challenges both the common attribution of virtue to remembering and commemorating and their associated obligations, and the idea of forgetting as a 'failure' and its associated culpabilities. He does this through distinguishing seven types of forgetting and their different agents, functions and values, from 'repressive erasure' through to 'humiliated silence'.

Some of the methodological issues raised in a number of articles are spoken to by Karen Till's critique of what she maintains is a "'biography of a site" approach' common in memory scholars' treatment of place. Instead, she employs a case study of an 'art of place' through which she argues for greater attention to be afforded to artistic, activist and ethnographic place-based practice. In doing so, she seeks to probe a number of assumed distinctions in the field between: 'time and space, interior and exterior worlds, and the individual and the social'. Ann Rigney also challenges the (temporal and spatial) inertia associated with place and memory in her conceptualization of a *premature* monument through analysis of collective remembrance in relation to a specific site.

She also signifies the importance of performance as contributing to a circulation of memories and the continuing formation of mnemonic communities.

Finally, Robyn Fivush reminds us, in a very compelling way, of what memories and remembering mean to humans. Quoting Smith (2004), she writes: 'A life without stories would be no life at all'. Although Fivush's work and article focus in particular on the developmental pathway of children's autobiographical storytelling, she argues that our narratives of the past are critical at multiple levels of individual and cultural analysis.

This first issue is rounded out by a submitted article, in which historian of science Richard Yeo hones in precisely on a shift in the use of notebooks and commonplace books in the 17th century, from reminders of what should be carried internally in memory, to ways of retaining and organizing information that could never be memorized. In analysing tangled, particular interactive relations between embodied minds, media and memory practices, Yeo's article exemplifies the combination of precise historical and cultural detail with multi-levelled theoretical context that memory studies invites.

Given the stimulus of the articles contained in this opening issue, we have decided to open up more space in Issue 3 for a developed set of responses. Beyond this, we will extend the opportunity for dialogue and debate via the 'Interventions' section (see [mss.sagepub.com](http://mss.sagepub.com) for details).

Commissioning such an ambitious journal has taken several years and we are very grateful to Julia Hall who first championed this project at Sage, and to Kerry Barner, who has enthusiastically continued this work. Our thanks are also owed to the contributors that have provided engaging and provocative articles to help chart the issues and challenges for, and the parameters of, *Memory Studies*.

## Reference

Smith, A.M. (2004) *In the Company of Cheerful Ladies*. New York: Anchor Books.