Memory studies for the people: Marxism and popular culture in contemporary approaches to memory studies

Memory is a phenomenon, process, and social fact that has attracted much discussion. Even before memory studies emerged as an interdisciplinary research field in the 1980s, memory, among others referring to its (de)formation, selection, unconscious, affects, social use and (re)mediation, was studied and understood both in relation to individuals and from a more collective perspective. The latter has pointed out the range of institutions, from monuments and graveyards to history textbooks, state museums, international institutions (e.g., UNESCO) and, more recently, also digital infrastructures that deal with the processes of the storing, forming and reproducing of communicative, political, social and cultural memory. In the last century, studies of collective memory have sought to address the broader "memory culture" that has long formed a vital part of society, and recurring questions like what is being left behind, what will be remembered, and what forgotten, why, and in whose name – in the context of very different academic disciplines.

Even though sociology, psychology, anthropology, and political science have for quite a while considered individual and collective memory as a relevant research object, memory studies as an academic interdisciplinary field was only born in the 1980s following Maurice Halbwachs' (1925/1992) work on the "social frameworks" of memory, Pierre Norra's conceptualisation of "realms [also: sites] of memory" (1989), the advent of "archive fever" (Derrida, 1996), and the demise of Marxism. In the past 20 years, memory studies has consolidated its place in academia, with its own international Memory Studies Association (MSA) along with numerous dedicated working groups, workshops, international conferences, networks, academic journals, and series issued by established academic publishers. Memory studies is today a constantly expanding community of scholars and activists who seek to engage with both "traditional" and current issues, from the way national heroes and revolutionary events are represented in textbooks to the slow means for and quiet forms of commemorating gradual transformations and constants, such as climate change, inequalities, and systemic violence.

This issue engages with the broader historical "origins" of the field of memory studies. It does so by considering both the relevance and limitations of established approaches to the study of memory in the context of transitions to postsocialism, neoliberalism, and also the ever more digital, platformised and datafied cultural experience. The issue has two aims: to articulate the potential held today by

Marxist approaches to memory studies, and to foreground contemporary popular culture as a significant dimension of collective memory that calls for particular methodological approaches. To that end, this issue contains two sections, each with three articles.

An inspiration for this issue is Enzo Traverso's hypothesis in the book *Leftwing Melancholia* (2017). He contends the missed encounter between the fields of Marxism and memory studies is not only due to their methodological differences and research objects, but is also a peculiar coincidence of historical time. After the theoretical power of Marxism eventually reached its limits in the 1980s, memory studies not only arose as a new field of research, but enjoyed a veritable "memory boom" in the 1990s. The decline of Marxism, in turn, was linked to the crisis of the whole chain of political references, of socialism, the working class, and the Communist Party, coupled with the welfare state and regulation. These markers are becoming objects of nostalgia and of a retroutopian imaginary or, at worst, as signs of a (future) totalitarianism that must be prevented at all costs. Meanwhile, memory politics, abuses of collective memory, and burgeoning research in the field of memory have all been an increasingly influential part of our everyday life in transition, and of how we imagine the world, see the past, assess the present, and imagine the future.

Each of the three articles in the first section of the issue provides a theoretical and historical response to this debate, and advocates not only possible but even urgent materialist and Marxist interventions in the field of memory studies. Placing the field of memory into the broader spectrum of social dynamics, we can no longer ignore the deeply antagonistic forces of the neoliberal transition that additionally hold strong material implications for memory studies and memory culture.

The opening article by Gal Kirn, "A contribution to Marxist memory studies: The structural need of capital to foget violence and eternally remember debt" makes it clear that the theoretical dealing of Marx/ism with memory studies has actually entailed a series of fascinating encounters: from thinking about the primitive accumulation of capital and the iconoclast powers of capital to the emancipatory and redeeming dimensions of the memory of the oppressed. The article goes on to describe a metatheoretical social bind between the structural logic of capital which, albeit necessary, forgets the histories of violence in the recurring cycles of capitalist accumulation, and the other structurally necessary remembrance of debt. Kirn's extension of the Lazzarato's notion of indebted subjectivity – revealing that the moral and memorial aspects of debt have been often overlooked by Marxism – leads this text to argue this to be an area for a productive encounter with Marxist memory scholarship, especially as concerns the topics of reparation, restitution, and debt cancellation.

The question of the remembrance of the violence of the civil war and dictatorship in Spain has since 1936 been an example of disputed/contested memory and memoryscapes, as extensively studied by Daniel Palacios González. His article "Memory as reproductive labour: From traumatic remembrance to institutionalised victimhood" considers the memory of the mass graves and its remediation and reproduction with the help of Marxist feminist scholars, such as Lise Vogel, Alba Gotby, Tithi Bhattacharya, Susan Ferguson, Silvia Federici, and Hannah Proctor. Based on ethnographic research and evaluating mourning and monumental practices, institutional political action, Palacios González addresses the importance of emotional labour as part of memory where the possibility of consciousness-raising is confronted by the state and its apparatuses, whose imperative is to reproduce the mode of production.

The section concludes with a text by Maria Urbina: "The narrative of a transformative leader: Neoliberal memory politics and the reframing of Augusto Pinochet in Chile". Here, Urbina looks at the historical "origins" and creation of the public memory of the very first neoliberal transition; namely, the military coup led by General Augusto Pinochet in 1973. Urbina argues that the reframing of the coup by Chilean institutions was intended to dismantle any evidence of collective solidarity and agency among the working class. The core of the presented argument examines how Pinochet's death in 2006 caused a shift in the memory process, emphasising the neoliberal narrative of the transformation having been a pivotal moment for modernisation and national renewal. The article builds on previous work that called for a bottom-up approach to memory to counteract the institutionalised methods, and primarily focused on Chile and how the top-down approach to collective memory has romanticised the Pinochet regime as a historical moment that brought about a positive transformation and a turning point, positioning the country as an economic exception in its own right, in contrast to the image of Salvador Allende as a fallen hero.

While Urbina's article introduces popular culture as a powerful site of collective memory, it also encourages the reader to consider the methodological complexity of studying popular culture and its impact on people's attitudes, behaviours and actions. Accordingly, the article may be viewed as a soft introduction to the second section of the issue. In this section, the connection of collective memory to cultural production, distribution, consumption and reception is placed in the context of contemporary popular culture and popular imaginaries, which are considered at the intersection between cultural industries and self-reinvented spaces, venues and practices, and digital, analogue and hybrid forms. In the outlined framework, the three articles in this section address both the eventual and gradual dimension of memory and remembering, and their media and material conditionality.

Therefore, the three articles that follow all consider popular culture as a transmedia memoryscape, each unpacking a specific methodological and conceptual dilemma regarding memory mechanisms and memory work (Kuhn 2010) – active and reflexive engagement with the past – in the post-Yugoslav context.

In the first article in this section, Jernej Kaluža and Natalija Majsova's article "Modern, postmodern and metamodern structures of feeling: big data analysis of memories of Josip Broz – Tito in the 21st century" investigates the reach and explanatory potential of the concept of metamodern memory by investigating how memories of socialist Yugoslavia – notably of Josip Broz - Tito – are articulated and mediated by generational, political and media dynamics. With that goal in mind, the authors perform innovative big-data analysis of 179 memory interviews with senior persons who spent their childhood, youth and adulthood in socialist Yugoslavia, as they engaged with a corpus compiled by six generations of undergraduate students, to trace how memories are not just recollections of events but reflect evolving popular imaginaries underpinned by political contexts and media ecologies. Kaluža and Majsova identify modern, postmodern and metamodern structures of feeling as entangled in the interviewees' memories, and determine how Tito as a symbolic figure evolved in these complex memories, from heroic moderniser to pop-cultural trickster.

Nina Cvar and Jasmina Šepetavc's contribution "Bold smugglers and DIY heroes: Collective memories and erasures of Yugoslav gaming histories" continues the discussion on the dialectic of ruptures and continuities in collective memory processes. The authors analyse the recent global "technostalgic" momentum from a local perspective, examining how – and to what mnemonic effect – socialist Yugoslavia's unique geopolitical position and self-managed socialist experiment fostered vibrant do-it-yourself (DIY) computing and gaming cultures. The authors dissect the recent nostalgia for late Yugoslav computing and computer games by considering extant historical sources and juxtaposing them against more recently constructed memory sites, such as documentaries and memoirs, to provide a critical perspective on contemporary commemorative practices. Cvar and Šepetavc argue that practices in the domain of commemorating slow technological transformations often reinforce mnemonic hegemony, privileging male-coded heroism and entrepreneurial myth-making while marginalising women, queer voices, and class-based experiences.

The section concludes with an article by Robert Bobnič and Jan Kostanjevec entitled "Yugowave and Serbwave on YouTube: Audience analysis by community detection", which introduces a third perspective on popular culture as not merely a site of memory, but a mechanism of memory work, and a generator of mnemonic communities of practice. The authors apply this view on memory to Yugowave

and set out to analyse the aesthetically specific audiovisual phenomenon, its communities, and genre-offshoots, on the YouTube platform. In the article, the authors examine the genre's evolution and using the Leiden algorithm map audience communities in a bipartite network linking commenters to their public YouTube subscriptions, drawing on data from 433 videos and 14,344 commenters associated with them, and establishing that the majority of the videos feature Serbwave war aesthetics, and attract a wide transnational audience, its commenters holding recurrent interests in history, militarism, and gaming.

Taken as a whole, the six articles that make up the present issue refer to some pressing conceptual and methodological challenges caused by the heterogeneity and fluidity of contemporary memoryscapces. Responding to these issues, the first section introduces materialist/Marxist research into the memory studies field, and highlights a major blind spot most evident in the lack of dealing with politico-economic changes. These three articles thereby provide starting points for original conceptual frameworks that allow researchers to grasp memory as a matter of lived experience and labour under specific socio-political and economic circumstances that, paraphrasing Marx, are not necessarily chosen by those living under them. The second section, in turn, zooms in on the case of post-Yugoslav popular culture to present several methodologically innovative responses to the challenges accompanying the attempts to address popular-cultural imaginaries as transmedia memoryscapes generated and (re)mediated at the conjuncture of affective, political and media infrastructures that must be constantly reassessed.

Gal Kirn and Natalija Majsova
Editors of the thematic issue

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