

Introduction

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Abstract

This introduction outlines the importance of transnational and transcultural perspectives for memory studies today. It discusses how the audiovisual media in particular challenge, transgress, but also reintroduce borders into Europe's mnemonic landscape. It shows how the individual contributions to this special issue address the question of audiovisual memory and the (re)making of Europe.

Keywords

Europe; transnational memory; transcultural memory; audiovisual media; borders

Globalisation, mass migration and regional integration are challenging the purported homogeneity and autonomy of national cultures and, with it, the primacy of the nation-state as a framework for “linking fraternity, power, and time” (Anderson 1991 [1983], 36). Witness the many calls in the Humanities and Social Sciences for the study of culture to go beyond ‘methodological nationalism’ (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) so as to map the movements of information and people in a way that does justice to the entanglements of a world in which the national has lost its self-evidence as a framework for identity.

Memory Studies too has participated in this broader trend. Over the past decade, a growing body of publications in memory studies has attempted to tease out the dynamic exchanges that occur between communities of memory, be these defined along ethnic, national, or religious lines. One can think here of Levy and Sznajder’s (2006 [2001]) idea of the Holocaust as a ‘transnational symbol’ or the concepts of ‘multidirectional memory’ (Rothberg 2009), ‘transcultural memory’ (Crownshaw 2011; Bond/Rapson 2013), ‘travelling memory’ (Erll 2011), and ‘transnational memory’ (de Cesari/Rigney 2014). Diverse as their perspectives are, these scholars share a common agenda: how to map the circulation of memory and memory practices across national and other borders, and how to explain the impact of this on the constitution of identities? These are vital questions at a time when new forms of solidarity are needed, both within Europe and between Europe and its southern neighbours, to meet the challenges of displacement, radical inequalities, and exclusivist forms of ethno-nationalism.

This special issue reflects these overall concerns. It is one of the outcomes of the EU-COST project In Search of Transcultural Memory in Europe (2012-2016) that brought together scholars from thirty-two countries around the interplay between processes of European integration and the production of cultural memory [<http://transculturalemoryineurope.net/>]. Has Europeanization at the level of institutions and the regulation of daily life fed into a concomitant Europeanization of memory practices and narratives? What role is played by the arts in shaping alternative narratives that transcend both national frameworks and that of ‘fortress’ Europe? This special issue of *Image [&] Narrative* asks these questions with particular reference to the production, circulation, and reception of audiovisual memory.

Several of our contributors provide detailed analyses of audiovisual narratives to establish how they depict cross-cultural engagements and perform transcultural connections. They examine how contents and models of remembrance move from one location and platform to another, thus linking groups, if not by a common narrative, then at least by their common way of narrating their past. They examine further the distribution channels (cinema, television, YouTube, digital archives) through which audiovisual products circulate and ask if recent developments enhance the formation of ‘imagined communities’ along new lines. The audiovisual is a crucial arena for examining these processes given the fact that the European project has coincided historically with the consolidation of the audiovisual as the dominant medium of storytelling, first in cinema and television and, more recently, in digital video.

The issue opens with two essays that examine how film directors have used the audiovisual to creatively explore the transnational and transcultural entanglements between people living in contemporary Europe. Astrid Erll shows through a range of examples how films about various kinds of ‘travel’ in Europe create different forms of ‘mnemonic relationality’. Sébastien Fevry shows specifically how the deep memory of classical myths has been deployed intertextually to link the experience of recent migrants to existing narratives

about Europe and the Mediterranean. Adding a historical dimension to current discussions by focusing on the Cold War period, Sabine Mihelj and Simon Huxtable show how feature films and television programmes dealing with history circulated not just across national borders within communist Europe but also across the East-West divide.

The transnational exposure of publics to common stories has undoubtedly been facilitated by European distribution networks in the field of cinema and television (beginning with the European Broadcasting Union, 1956). Given the high production costs often involved in the making of films and television series, transnational cooperation in the production of feature films and television programmes is also common. At first sight, these infrastructural conditions would seem to encourage an ever-greater convergence in the exposure to the same narratives across Europe. However, the articles in this special issue tell a more complex story. In his article on the distribution and reception of Serbian cinema in Croatia, Edward Alexander shows both the receptivity of Croatian publics to Serbian narratives of their shared Yugoslav past and the limits of that receptivity in the case of feature films dealing with the recent history. Silke Arnold-de Simine and Tea Sindbæk Andersen demonstrate with respect to a documentary on World War One, and Judith Keilbach with respect to a documentary on the Holocaust, that the circulation of particular narratives across borders goes in tandem with a re-nationalisation of the content to make it fit local expectations and concerns. In the final essay, Dagmar Brunow examines the role of audiovisual archives as memory actors, highlighting their potential for generating future memories that are more inclusive of minority groups, while maintaining, by virtue of their status as ‘national’, the integrity of the national framework. In sum: the transculturality of audiovisual memory is as much work in progress, and as much subject to counter-movement, as Europe itself.

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