

Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory



Media and Cultural Memory/ Medien und kulturelle Erinnerung

Edited by/Herausgegeben von
Astrid Erll · Ansgar Nünning

Editorial Board/Wissenschaftlicher Beirat

Aleida Assmann · Mieke Bal · Marshall Brown · Vita Fortunati
Udo Hebel · Claus Leggewie · Gunilla Lindberg-Wada
Jürgen Reulecke · Jean Marie Schaeffer · Jürgen Schlaeger
Siegfried J. Schmidt · Werner Sollors · Frederik Tygstrup
Harald Welzer

10

Walter de Gruyter · Berlin · New York

Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory

Edited by
Astrid Erll · Ann Rigney

in collaboration with
Laura Basu and Paulus Bijl

Walter de Gruyter · Berlin · New York

⊗ Printed on acid-free paper which falls within the guidelines of the ANSI to ensure permanence and durability.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Mediation, remediation, and the dynamics of cultural memory / edited by Astrid Erll, Ann Rigney.

p. cm. – (Media and cultural memory = Medien und kulturelle Erinnerung)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-3-11-020444-5 (alk. paper)

1. Mass media and culture. 2. Mass media – Influence. 3. Collective memory. I. Erll, Astrid. II. Rigney, Ann.

P94.M3628 2009

302.23–dc22

2009018374

ISSN 1613-8961

ISBN 978-3-11-020444-5

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

© Copyright 2009 by Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, D-10785 Berlin

All rights reserved, including those of translation into foreign languages. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Printed in Germany

Cover design: Christopher Schneider, Laufen

Acknowledgements

This collection of essays emerged from a symposium on “Media and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory” held at the University of Giessen in September 2007. The symposium was hosted by the Giessen International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC) in collaboration with the research group “The Dynamics of Cultural Remembrance: An Inter-medial Perspective” (Research Institute for History and Culture, Utrecht).

Many people were involved in making the symposium a worthwhile experience and in the publication of the present volume. Our heartfelt thanks go to Ansgar Nünning, director of the GCSC, for hosting this event; to Anna-Lena Flügel, Meike Hölscher and Jan Rupp, who took care of the organisation; to Paulus Bijl and Laura Basu for their highly valuable help in the editing and formatting of the text; to Sara B. Young for additional help in linguistic matters; and to Franziska Springstubbe for making the index. We gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Giessen International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture, funded by the German federal government’s Excellence Initiative.

Wuppertal and Utrecht, April 2009
Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney

Table of Contents

ASTRID ERLI and ANN RIGNEY: Introduction:
Cultural Memory and its Dynamics.....1

I. Mediation

SIMON COOKE: Cultural Memory on the Move
in Contemporary Travel Writing: W. G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*.....15

VERENA-SUSANNA NUNGESSER: I forgot to remember (to forget):
Personal Memories in *Memento* (2000) and *Eternal Sunshine of the
Spotless Mind* (2004)..... 31

PAULUS BIJL: Old, Eternal, and Future Light in the Dutch East Indies:
Colonial Photographs and the History of the Globe.....49

RICHARD CROWNSHAW: The Limits of Transference:
Theories of Memory and Photography in W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*.....67

ANDREW HOSKINS: Digital Network Memory.....91

II. Remediation

ASTRID ERLI: Remembering across Time, Space, and Cultures:
Premediation, Remediation and the "Indian Mutiny".....109

LAURA BASU: Towards a Memory Dispositif:
Truth, Myth, and the Ned Kelly *lieu de mémoire*, 1890-1930.....139

DAVID WERTHEIM: Remediation as a Moral Obligation: Authenticity,
Memory, and Morality in Representations of Anne Frank.....157

III. The Public Arena

MEIKE HÖLSCHER: Performances, Souvenirs, and Music: The Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria 1897.....	173
MAREN RÖGER: News Media and Historical Remembrance: Reporting on the Expulsion of Germans in Polish and German Magazines.....	187
NICOLE L. IMMLER: Restitution and the Dynamics of Memory: A Neglected Trans-Generational Perspective.....	205
JESSEKA BATTEAU: Literary Icons and the Religious Past in the Netherlands: Jan Wolkers and Gerard Reve.....	229
Index of Names.....	245
Notes on Contributors.....	253

Introduction: Cultural Memory and its Dynamics

ASTRID ERLI and ANN RIGNEY

In his pioneering work *La mémoire collective* (1950), Maurice Halbwachs illustrated the social dimensions of individual memory by invoking the case of someone's first visit to London: the experience of the city, and hence the long-term memory of that experience, would be shaped by the various descriptions of the British capital that the visitor had heard beforehand from friends or read in books (53). This passage provides one of the few references in Halbwachs' work to the role of media in the formation of collective memory, his main emphasis being on the ways in which individual memory is moulded by the specifically social frameworks in which it operates. But his telling invocation of the influence of Dickens and other accounts of London on memories of the city is indicative of something that he himself did not discuss at great length, but of which he was apparently quite aware: the fact that "media" of all sorts—spoken language, letters, books, photos, films—also provide frameworks for shaping both experience and memory. They do so in at least two, interconnected ways: as instruments for sense-making, they mediate between the individual and the world; as agents of networking, they mediate between individuals and groups (see Schmidt).

Halbwachs himself may have paid only incidental attention to the role of media in memory-making. But it has recently become one of the central areas of attention in cultural memory studies. Indeed, the very concept of *cultural* memory is itself premised on the idea that memory can only become collective as part of a continuous process whereby memories are shared with the help of symbolic artefacts that mediate between individuals and, in the process, create communality across both space and time. The centrality of media to cultural memory is expressed in the title of the present series and this collection of essays pursues many of the issues already raised in earlier volumes. At the same time, however, it also marks a new step in this discussion by taking a fundamentally *dynamic* approach to the study both of cultural memory and of the media which shape it.

Initial discussions of cultural memory, especially those inspired by the work of Pierre Nora, tended to focus on those canonical "sites of memory" which provide relatively stable points of reference for individuals and

communities recalling a shared past. As the field has advanced, however, one can note a shift towards understanding cultural memory in more dynamic terms: as an ongoing process of remembrance and forgetting in which individuals and groups continue to reconfigure their relationship to the past and hence reposition themselves in relation to established and emergent memory sites. As the word itself suggests, “remembering” is better seen as an active engagement with the past, as performative rather than as reproductive. It is as much a matter of acting out a relationship to the past from a particular point in the present as it is a matter of preserving and retrieving earlier stories. It follows from this that canonical “memory sites” themselves have a history and, although they represent in many ways the terminus ad quem of repeated acts of remembrance, they only continue to operate as such as long as people continue to re-invest in them and use them as a point of reference (Rigney, “Plenitude”). If stories about the past are no longer performed in talking, reading, viewing, or commemorative rituals, they ultimately die out in cultural terms, becoming obsolete or “inert” (Olick and Robbins). In the process, they may be replaced or “over-written” by new stories that speak more directly to latter-day concerns and are more relevant to latter-day identity formations (Irwin-Zarecka).

The rise, fall, and marginalization of stories as constitutive parts of the dynamics of remembering have thus emerged as key issues in memory studies. This turn towards memorial dynamics demands among other things new insight into the factors which allow certain collective memories to become hegemonic or, conversely, allow hitherto marginalized memories to gain prominence in the public arena. Fighting about memory is one way of keeping it alive and, as a number of recent studies has shown, the history of cultural memory is marked as much by crises and controversies running along social fault lines as it is by consensus and canon-building (Olick; Suleiman; Blanchard and Veyrat-Masson). It is the contention of this book, however, that the dynamics of cultural memory can only be fully understood if we take into account, not just the social factors at work, but also the “medial frameworks” of remembering (Erll 161) and the specifically medial processes through which memories come into the public arena and *become* collective. The basic point can be illustrated by referring to the role regularly played by novels or films in sparking public debates on historical topics that had hitherto been marginalized or forgotten (Assmann; Rigney, “Dynamics”). In such cases, particular media offerings become agenda-setters for collective remembrance and it is then through the inter-medial reiteration of the story across different platforms

in the public arena (print, image, internet, commemorative rituals) that the topic takes root in the community.

It will be clear from all of this that media are more than merely passive and transparent conveyors of information. They play an active role in shaping our understanding of the past, in “mediating” between us (as readers, viewers, listeners) and past experiences, and hence in setting the agenda for future acts of remembrance within society. What may be less evident, but is something central to this collection, is the fact that media are themselves caught up in a dynamics of their own. Indeed, the shift from “sites” to “dynamics” within memory studies runs parallel to a larger shift of attention within cultural studies from products to processes, from a focus on discrete cultural artefacts to an interest in the way those artefacts circulate and interact with their environment. This shift of emphasis has led in particular to a new understanding of media as complex and dynamic systems rather than as a line-up of discrete and stable technologies. Media are always “emergent” rather than stable, and technologies for meaning-making and networking emerge in relation to each other and in interaction with each other (Wardrip-Fruin and Montfort; Lister et al.). Although we can speak of “photography” and “film”, for example, as media with certain distinctive and stable characteristics, a closer look shows both photography and film to be constantly evolving in reaction to new technologies for recording information, but also to developments in the media landscape at large and to the ever-changing repertoire of sense-making tools available to us (the basic point can be illustrated by referring to the recent influence of video games and comic strips on the making of feature films).

In their seminal study *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999), David Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin have introduced the concept of “remediation” in order to draw attention to processes such as these and to describe “the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms” (273). What they observe is “the mediation of mediation”. Not only in today’s new media cultures, but at least since the Renaissance, media have continually been “commenting on, reproducing, and replacing each other, and this process is integral to media. Media need each other in order to function as media at all” (55).

Connected with this process is what Bolter and Grusin call the “double logic of remediation”, its oscillation between immediacy and hypermediacy, transparency and opacity. “Our culture wants to multiply its media and erase all traces of mediation; ideally it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them” (5). Hence the central paradox of remediation. On the one hand, the recycling of existent media is a way of

strengthening the new medium's claim to immediacy, of offering an "experience of the real". On the other hand, remediation is an act of hypermediacy that, by multiplying media, potentially reminds the viewer of the presence of a medium and thus generates an "experience of the medium" (see 70f.).

The concept of remediation is highly pertinent to cultural memory studies. Just as there is no cultural memory prior to mediation there is no mediation without remediation: all representations of the past draw on available media technologies, on existent media products, on patterns of representation and medial aesthetics. In this sense, no historical document (from St. Paul's letters to the live footage of 9/11) and certainly no memorial monument (from the Vietnam Veteran's Wall to the Berlin Holocaust Memorial) is thinkable without earlier acts of mediation. In Grusin's words: "The logic of remediation insists that there was never a past prior to mediation; all mediations are remediations, in that mediation of the real is always a mediation of another mediation" (18).

The "double logic of remediation" is also visible in the dynamics of cultural memory. On the one hand, most memorial media strive for ever greater "immediacy". The goal is to provide a seemingly transparent window on the past, to make us forget the presence of the medium and instead present us with an "unmediated memory". On the other hand, this effect is usually achieved by the recycling and multiplication of media: internet platforms of remembrance such as www.YadVashem.org offer online photo archives, written testimonies and virtual museum tours, thus combining many different media to provide access to the past and occasions for remembrance. The relatively new TV-genre of "docufiction" tries to present viewers with a window to the past by combining documentary media with witness interviews and fictional re-enactments. Hollywood's war movies, such as *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) or *Flags of our Fathers* (2006) incorporate or emulate press photography and documentary footage, i.e. media which are commonly understood to have represented the "real thing/real past".

While "immediacy" creates the experience of the presence of the past, "hypermediacy", which reminds the viewer of the medium, points to the potential self-reflexivity of all memorial media. The paintings of Anselm Kiefer, for example, tend to multiply memorial media and rearrange them in heterogeneous spaces, thus pointing to the relevance, possibilities and limits of media for acts of remembrance. Similarly, a memory-reflexive movie such as Atom Egoyan's *Ararat* (2002) features a "film within the film", video footage, an art work, a photograph, oral stories—in short, a host of different media, all (insufficiently) referring to the Armenian geno-

cide. *Ararat* thus prevents its viewers from becoming immersed in the past; it continuously keeps them on the surface of medial representations, thus creating an experience of the medium (rather than of the past) and drawing attention to the mediatedness of memory.

The *dynamics* of cultural memory—and this is another claim the present volume makes—is closely linked up with processes of *remediation*. When we look at the emergence and “life” of memory sites, it becomes clear that these are based on repeated media representations, on a host of remediated versions of the past which “converge and coalesce” (Rigney, “Plenitude” 18) into a *lieu de mémoire*, which create, stabilize and consolidate, but then also critically reflect upon and renew these sites. Cultural memory relies on what Bolter and Grusin would call “repurposing”, that is, taking a “property” (in our case a memory-matter) from one medium and re-using it in another (45). In this process, memorial media borrow from, incorporate, absorb, critique and refashion earlier memorial media. Virtually every site of memory can boast its genealogy of remediation, which is usually tied to the history of media evolution. The Trojan War and the French Revolution, Julius Caesar and Queen Victoria: such memory sites have been encoded and circulated in oral stories, handwritten manuscripts, print, painting, photography, film and the internet, with each of these media referring (either implicitly or explicitly) to earlier media and their technological and representational logics.

But these dynamics of remediation do not always take effect in cultural memory. Bolter and Grusin remind us of the fact that “no medium today, and certainly no single media event, seems to do its cultural work in isolation from other media, any more than it works in isolation from other social and economic forces” (15). In the case of cultural memory, it is—as Halbwachs famously claimed—the social frameworks which ultimately *make* the memory. It is the public arena which turns some remediations into relevant media versions of the past, while it ignores or censors others. This means that the dynamics of cultural memory has to be studied at the intersection of both social and medial processes.

*

The aim of this collection is to provide a bridge between the social dynamics of cultural memory and the dynamics specific to the ongoing emergence of new media practices. The collection is subdivided into three sections which are captioned with what we see as key components in the formation of cultural memory: *mediation*, *remediation*, and performance in *the public arena*. We certainly do not suggest that there is a clear-cut distinction between the three components; it is rather through their constant inter-

play that cultural memory is continuously being produced. However, the section headings indicate which of these processes our authors have stressed most. The essays in section one (“mediation”) are concerned with the fundamental mediatedness of all cultural memories and highlight media-reflexivity in the domain of the arts (movies, novel) and of academic studies (trauma studies, new media theory). Section two (“remediation”) offers examples of genealogies of remediation. It brings three influential sites of memory into focus and shows how they were constructed, altered and kept alive by repeated representations over time and a broad spectrum of different media. Section three (“the public arena”) turns to the performance of memory in the public arena. The focus is on media producers and users and on the public occasions and discourses which turn a device for (re-)presenting the past into a medium of cultural memory proper. Here, mediation is linked to agenda-setting, iconisation and publicity.

The essays in the first section deal with mediation as an active shaping of information about the past using a variety of historically evolving technologies: writing, photography, film, digitisation. The different essays show the variety of modes of engagement with the past, from the literary writings of W. G. Sebald (Cooke, Crownshaw), through early photography and recent film (Bijl, Nungesser) to the new possibilities being provided by digital media (Hoskins). The individual essays demonstrate the impact particular technologies have on the way information is presented, but also the ways in which individual writers and artists manage to exploit the possibilities of their chosen medium in unpredictable ways; as “masters of the medium” they reflect on their medium even as they use it and hence continue to expand its possibilities. Thus Simon Cooke shows how W. G. Sebald used the traditional medium of the printed book in *The Rings of Saturn* (1995), but did so, using the model of travelogue, in such a way as to present cultural memories innovatively in a non-linear and yet interconnected form. Focussing on recent cinema, Verena Nungesser shows how the possibilities of fiction film are used in order to engage the viewer of *Memento* (2000) and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) in reflections on the instabilities of personal memory.

One of the most striking features of the different media offerings examined in the various essays here is the extent to which writers and artists, while themselves working on one medium, do so in order to reflect on others. Thus Nungesser shows how characters are filmed making photos, writing notes, and engaging in a range of non-filmic acts of remembrance. Turning again to Sebald, Richard Crownshaw focuses on the role of photography in the writer’s struggles to find a way of talking about the traumas of twentieth-century history; he shows how photography is figured in

Sebald's novels as exemplifying the elusiveness and omnipresence of trauma. Moreover, the writer not only describes photos in words, but also includes photos and other images in the body of his novels. By combining texts and images in sometimes bewildering ways, and thus operating under the logic of hypermediacy, Sebald highlights the fact that our media landscape is thoroughly multimedial. In a highly self-reflexive way, he shows how meaning is produced not so much in one technology as in the interstices and interactions between different media, which are themselves constantly changing (thus combinations of word and image in novels have become much more common in the years since Sebald popularised the practice).

If such intermedial exchanges lead to the evolution of expressive practices, technological innovation can lead to more radical breaks and new departures. In his analysis of early photography in the Dutch East-Indies, Paulus Bijl shows how the technical possibilities offered by the new medium encouraged the colonial regime in the 1840s to attempt to appropriate the precolonial past in a new way by taking photos of all major monuments. The implementation of this plan led to unexpected results, however, as the strangely evocative photos led to unpredicted and unsettling perspectives on the past rather than to its definitive domination. That new technologies can offer both exciting new possibilities for cultural memory and provide a threat to certainties is also borne out by Andrew Hoskins' analysis of the impact of digitisation on memory practices. Digitisation allows us to store sublime amounts of information, he argues, but does so in a way that challenges traditional temporalities, the clear-cut distinction between past and present on which the very notion of collective memory is based. Since digitized information is highly instable, being regularly re-written and over-written, it is constantly eliding as well as producing memory. While Hoskins reveals the unprecedented challenges to memory at the present time, the other essays show that the current crisis of memory is not so much the first of its kind, although perhaps the most dramatic, but is rather the newest phase in the ongoing evolution of memorial media.

Where the focus of the first section was on processes relating to mediation, medial innovation, and media-reflexivity the second section deals with the phenomenon of remediation and its contribution to the creation of memory sites. The sites examined in the three essays give an idea of the national, intercultural and transcultural dimensions of modern *lieux de mémoire*. Astrid Erll writes about the "Indian Mutiny" of 1857, the famous uprising in Northern India against British rule, and its repercussions in British and Indian media cultures from the mid-nineteenth century to the

present day. Remediations of the “Indian Mutiny”, a memory site shared by colonizer and colonized, have become a platform for playing out cultural differences and intercultural conflicts. Laura Basu studies the remediation of “Ned Kelly”, the Australian outlaw, who has become a highly contested national site of memory since his execution in 1880. David Wertheim’s essay is on Anne Frank’s diary, a truly transnational site of memory, which has been translated into many different languages and media ever since the papers of the diary were found in 1944.

The three essays in this section make different methodological and conceptual moves so as to attune the concept of remediation to the specific questions asked by cultural memory studies. Erll focuses on the interplay between “premediation” and “remediation” in the emergence of cultural memory, between what may be called the “prelife” and the “afterlife” of stories about the past. Premediation refers to the cognitive schemata and patterns of representation that are available in a given media culture (very much like the books, maps and conversations that Halbwachs mentally took with him to London), and which already preform the events that we later remember through remediation. Laura Basu introduces the concept of a “memory dispositif”, drawing on the notion of “dispositif” as it was developed by Foucault and Deleuze. She understands the memory site as a “conglomeration of heterogeneous media texts, genres and technologies”, the relationships between which determine the nature and function of a memory site at a given time. The case study of “Ned Kelly” highlights how the remediations of the site revolve around notions of truth and myth and how the battle for authority and veracity is enacted between the various media texts. Similar issues arise in David Wertheim’s essay about remediation as a “moral obligation”. The creation of different editions of Anne Frank’s diary, of movies, theatre plays and documentaries is inextricably linked with the desire for immediacy and authenticity, with “the quest for the true Anne Frank”. The memory site “Anne Frank” (like “Ned Kelly”) is a case in point for the logic described by Bolter and Grusin, according to which our culture multiplies its media and at the same time tries to erase all traces of mediation. However, Wertheim makes clear that, even though remediation may not finally succeed in presenting a clear window on the “true” Anne Frank, it is only by remediation that the site has constantly renewed itself and the memory of Anne Frank has stayed alive.

All in all, the section on remediation is concerned with the ways in which the same story is recalled in new media at a later point in time and hence given a new lease of cultural life. With their reconstructions of genealogies of remediation the essays move along the axes of media history.

Remediation is thus viewed as a form of diachronic intermediality and cultural memory as a transmedial phenomenon, which is realized, over and over, by means of those media technologies that a community has at its disposal and to which it ascribes the potential of creating ever greater immediacy and memorial truth. This latter aspect, the fundamental embeddedness of all mediation and remediation in social constellations, is the main focus of the final section.

The essays brought together in “The Public Arena” address from various perspectives what we call the “social performance” of memory. By this we mean the ways in which particular memorial practices are taken up in the public sphere and hence become collective points of reference. This involves shifting analytic emphasis away from particular media products and how they remediate earlier products, towards the social actors and organisations which ensure that certain stories rather than others enjoy publicity and become salient; even more fundamentally, which ensure that certain topics rather than others are put on the society’s commemorative “agenda”. These agenda-setting organisations include media organisations such as the press and television, but also political and civic organisations with the power to orchestrate public attention for particular stories or issues in the form of official commemorations.

The latter certainly applies in the case of the jubilee celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of the coronation of Queen Victoria in 1897. In her detailed examination of this event, Meike Hölscher shows how the jubilee brought into play a whole range of media using different platforms (public spectacle, souvenir objects, music) which worked in tandem so as to produce an intense societal focus on the royal jubilee. She shows, moreover, how these media were mobilised both by commercial and civil powers, again working in tandem, so as to fabricate the sense of a media event that would in the future be remembered as a glorious moment in the history of the British Empire. That commemorations play a role in setting collective agendas in combination with media representations is brought out also in Maren Röger’s essay, which examines the way in which the fate of the German refugees from Silesia at the end of the Second World War has been remembered in Germany and Poland since 1989. She shows how current-affairs magazines function as public platforms for initiating, relaying and re-interpreting public discussions on this highly contentious memory site, whose significance plays—like the jubilee, like the case of Ned Kelly—into the construction of present-day and future identities.

Where the essays by Hölscher and Röger focus on the interplay between media, memories, and national identities, the final two essays turn

our attention to the role of media in creating an interface between different social frameworks of memory, including the familial and the religious. Focussing on several generations of Jewish families from Austria, Nicole Immler examines the impact of the governmental restitution policies on family remembrance of victimisation during the Second World War. She shows how the familial attitudes to restitution were shaped in significant ways by the public representation of restitution in newspapers and on television. Quoting at length from interviews with family members, she argues that the media helped turn the private acceptance of a modest material compensation for suffering into an act with public significance and hence private value. The intersection between public display and private value is also at the heart of the final essay by Jesseka Batteau which focuses on the remembrance of the religious past in the Netherlands. Analysing the work of two high-profile writers and its reception, she shows how novelists could play a central role in providing new re-alignments with the Christian heritage in a predominantly secular society. Thanks to the convergence of books, journalism, and television, moreover, the writers themselves have become icons of a particular relationship to the Christian heritage. In this media-reflexive way, the writers function as mediators for their fans as they individually and collectively reposition themselves in relation to the Christian past.

Together the essays make clear the fact that the ongoing production of cultural memory in and through the media is mixed up with the political and social forces which orchestrate memories. What we call the “dynamics of cultural memory” thus refers to a multimodal process, which involves complex interactions between medial, social (and ultimately also cognitive) phenomena. In order to understand it fully, we need close scrutiny of specific memorial configurations, of the kind which this volume hopes to offer.

References

- Assmann, Aleida. *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*. Munich: Beck, 2006.
- Blanchard, Pascal, and Isabelle Veyrat-Masson, eds. *Les guerres de mémoires: La France et son histoire*. Paris: Découverte, 2008.
- Bolter, Jay David, and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999.
- Erll, Astrid. *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 2005.
- Erll, Astrid and Ansgar Nünning, eds. *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008.
- Grusin, Richard. "Premediation." *Criticism* 46.1 (2004): 17-39.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. *La mémoire collective*. 1950. Paris: Albin, 1997.
- Irwin-Zarecka, Iwona. *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory*. New Brunswick: Transaction, 1994.
- Lister, Martin et al. *New Media: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Nora, Pierre, ed. *Les lieux de mémoire*. 3 vols. 1984-92. Paris: Gallimard, 1997.
- Olick, Jeffrey K., ed. *States of Memory: Continuities, Conflicts, and Transformations in National Retrospection*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003.
- Olick, Jeffrey K., and Joyce Robbins. "Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 105-40.
- Rigney, Ann. "Plenitude, Scarcity and the Circulation of Cultural Memory." *Journal of European Studies* 35.1 (2005): 209-26.
- . "The Dynamics of Remembrance: Texts between Monumentality and Morphing." Erll and Nünning 345-53.
- Schmidt, Siegfried J. *Kalte Faszination: Medien, Kultur, Wissenschaft in der Mediengesellschaft*. Weilerswist: Velbrück, 2000.
- Suleiman, Susan Rubin. *Crises of Memory and the Second World War*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2006.
- Wardrip-Fruin, Noah, and Nick Montfort, eds. *The New Media Reader*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003.

I. MEDIATION

Cultural Memory on the Move in Contemporary Travel Writing: W. G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*

SIMON COOKE

1. Introduction: The Paradox of a Place of Commemoration

In one of the mental digressions and associations that form much of the substance of the German émigré writer W. G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*, ostensibly the travelogue of a walking tour of Suffolk in August 1992, the narrator describes his encounter with an historical event which has been mediated into (inter)cultural memory through sources as diverse as secondary school history textbooks, a London district and international train terminal, and pop hits by *The Kinks* and *Abba*: in connection with a critique of European colonialism, the narrator recalls a visit to Brussels, and describes how the “very definition of Belgian ugliness, in my eyes, has been the Lion Monument and the so-called historical memorial site of the Battle of Waterloo” (123). In Sebald's narrative, this “so-called historical memorial site”—depicted, ironically, with a modestly miniature pencil-drawn postcard—serves not one of the conceivable cultural memorial purposes envisaged by its patrons. Not only does the “definition of Belgian ugliness” already seem somewhat unlikely as the cultural memory intended in the construction; the memorial site turns out to be less an example of what Pierre Nora called *lieux de mémoire*—that is, “vestiges, the ultimate embodiments of a commemorative consciousness” (6)—and more of a *lieu d'amnésie*: “Why I went to Waterloo,” the narrator continues, “I no longer know” (124). He does recall, however, his visit to the Waterloo Panorama, an enormous surround-mural of the eponymous Battle, in which the “horrific three-dimensional scene” is painted onto the inner wall of a “circus-like structure” (124), where his experience again seems out of keeping with any cultural memorial functions we might expect in such a reconstruction: “This then,” he proposes, “is the representation of history. It requires a falsification of perspective. We, the survivors, see

everything from above, see everything at once, and still we do not know how it was” (125). These reflections on two static models of cultural memory—one monumental, the other representational—lead the narrator to a sternly ironic series of questions about their relationship with our sense of the past: “Whatever became of the corpses and mortal remains? Are they buried under the memorial?” (125).

This is one of many instances in Sebald’s work in which official or institutional storage sites for cultural memory—whether in the form of libraries, archives, or monuments—serve, literally as well as figuratively, as cover-ups of the past; either as instruments of wilful suppression in the name of the victor’s view of history or as the result of indirect falsification through inevitable—even if unintentional—representational partial-sightedness or distortion. His efforts to engage with the past take as their uncertain foundation the premise, succinctly described by the novelist and travel writer Cees Nooteboom, that “the past becomes inaccessible at the very place where this same past is revealed”—a conundrum Nooteboom calls the “Paradox of a Place of Commemoration” (118). As even the example above illustrates, Sebald’s means of overcoming or acknowledging this Paradox to recover the past—or perhaps, rather, to evoke it—is characterised and defined by its rejection of such static models—most obviously in his inter-medial weaving together of the textual and the visual, and through direct and self-reflexive discursive assessments of how different commemorative forms foster relationships with the past. The concerns of *The Rings of Saturn* thus resonate powerfully with what Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney have shown to be the most recent movements in cultural memory studies: that “the memories that are shared within generations and across different generations are the product of public acts of remembrance using a variety of media. Stories, both oral and written, images, museums, monuments: these all work together in creating and sustaining ‘sites of memory’” (111). This is, indeed, a fitting description of the substance and preoccupations of Sebald’s texts: his work sets cultural memory on the move¹, dislocating and reconfiguring embodiments of memory from their sites of origin and contexts, and focusing equally and self-reflexively on the processes by which they are recalled and reconfigured while *ex situ*.

That the process of re-mediating the Battle of Waterloo and its representations takes place, so to speak, in a walk around Suffolk, highlights the central point to be addressed in the following section of this article. Our sense of the distinction of Sebald’s book derives in part from its dynamic relationship with that most directly dynamic of literary forms—the travel narrative—and our own cultural memory: the generic horizons of expecta-

tion that are confounded by his work. In some ways, the procedure governing Sebald's approach in *The Rings of Saturn* might be described as the result of transgressing, or even forgetting about, the defined generic model of the form he supposedly set out to write: a travel book. We can begin, then, by outlining some of the generic patterns of the genre, highlighting some features that are specifically relevant to cultural memory, as a way of casting in sharper relief the way Sebald's narrative relates to contemporary concerns in cultural memory studies.

2. Travel Writing and Cultural Memory

We might start with the observation that the practice of travel writing has intriguing implications for cultural memory. First, there is what Walter F. Veit has called the "cognitive necessity of comparison" (71): in any encounter with a new place (or text), our assessment implicitly involves an act of cultural recall, evoking and focusing the contents of cultural inheritance. Secondly, we might look to travel writing for a kind of pre-history of the issues of a mediated society, which are so pertinent to cultural memory studies (representing the equivalent in spatial form of the temporal mediation of vicarious memory). As Andrew Hoskins has put it, the three primary components of memory in society are "people" (with eyewitnesses as the primary source), "place" (attributed with special significance), and "mass media" (3); and the analysis is equally fitting for the travel narrative. The centrality of the claims of the first component—that of the witness—is emblematically evident in one of the touchstone texts for all subsequent travel narratives, Marco Polo's *Travels*, in which it is claimed that the "book will be a truthful one" about distant cultures for the "benefit of those who could not see them with their own eyes" (1). This "rhetorical attempt to claim authority as a direct observer" is so powerfully implicit that it can reasonably be identified as "the fundamental literary mechanism of legitimation in the genre of travel literature" (Elsner and Rubiés 3). Equally, and bound up with this, is the requirement that the traveller should have actually been there, at a certain place (it is place, rather than a specific event, that is defining of the genre). And lastly, corresponding to the component of media: the records of such journeys also foreground the issue of mediation, as such notoriously fabricated medieval accounts as those of John Mandeville already alert us to (in their tales of marvellous and monstrous creatures and customs, composed not of what has in fact been directly witnessed—as his contemporaries apparently believed—but from a compound of records and myths drawn from di-

verse accounts). Stephen Greenblatt's *Marvelous Possessions*, for example, shows with great subtlety how Mandeville's and other travellers' representations of cultural Others are entwined with formulations of the respective traveller's culture of origin. Simon Schama has shown, too, that our engagement with the natural environment is equally "loaded with complicating memories, myths and meanings ... Before it can be ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind" (7). The word *landscape* itself, Schama notes, is a translation of the Dutch *landschap* which, "like its Germanic root, *Landschaft*, signified a human occupation, indeed a jurisdiction, as much as anything that might be a pleasing object of depiction" (10).

The picture of the world created by exploration and discovery, then—whether carried out in the name of conquest, agriculture, trade, scientific inquiry or religious pilgrimage—is a kind of geographical equivalent of the mediated world of the past we access in terms of cultural memory. Since Edward Said's *Orientalism* (first published in 1978 and one of the foundational texts that introduced travel writing into scholarly debates, as well as an inaugural text for post-colonial studies), scholars of travel writing have been conscious of the degree to which this mediated aspect of travel accounts has meant that the "world" beyond one's direct experience is a product rather than an objective record, mediated by the ideological motivations and cultural precepts of the "witness" (the Orient was produced, rather than discovered, by the West). Mary Louise Pratt has done most to extend the Saidian analysis of the discipline of Oriental Studies to travel writing more generally, showing, in *Imperial Eyes* (1992), the degree to which the history of exploration recorded in travel writing contributed to the development of a "planetary consciousness" in the European psyche, a consciousness developed through mapping, the collection of samples (as in the case of the natural-historical taxonomist Linnaeus), and the pursuit and administration of knowledge as well as through economic and military colonial expansion (15-37). Pratt finds that the residue of this colonial history continues to find expression in the work of such well-known contemporary travel writers as Paul Theroux (217-21).

Colonialism is one of the back-histories haunting contemporary travel literature; the counterpart is found in the way in which the history of exploration as the foundation of travel has given way, as the world's "undiscovered" regions were explored, mapped, and mined for resources, in the twentieth century particularly, to a sense of surplus, the depletion and ultimately the (lamented) loss of new horizons. Paul Fussell's 1980 study of British literary travel between the wars is the prototype of that powerful engine of cultural memory, nostalgia, in terms of travel writing. An elegy

for what he calls the “last age” of travel, his book was pivotal in introducing the long-neglected and often disparaged genre of travel writing into literary studies; but as it did so, it essentially pronounced the collection complete. The book, “assuming” as it did “that travel is now impossible and that tourism is all we have left” (41), by extension pronounced the end of the possibility of genuine travel books. Voyages of discovery, we might say, have given way here to what Michael Cronin has called (and critiqued as) “discourses of exhaustion” (17). The idea itself is not exactly new. Melville, for example, identified the fundamental issue with marvelous oratorical grandeur in 1851, in *Moby Dick*:

Were this world an endless plain, and by sailing eastward we could for ever reach new distances, and discover sights more sweet and strange than any Cyclades or Islands of King Solomon, then there were promise in the voyage. But in pursuit of those far mysteries we dream of, or in tortured chase of that demon phantom that, some time or other, swims before all human hearts; while chasing such over this round globe, they either lead us on in barren mazes or midway leave us whelmed. (258)

Not an entirely new idea, but increasingly paradigmatic in the era of the so-called global village. Of these two major directions from which travel writing has been approached as a genre, then, the first (post-colonial) stressed that the genre was potentially if not inherently immoral; the second (nostalgic) that it was now impossible (I am thinking of critical studies of the literary form itself rather than the parallel adoption of metaphors of travel in critical theory). Thus, in a recent book on *The Global Politics of Travel Writing*, Debbie Lisle asks:

How is contemporary travel writing coping with its embarrassing colonial past while also recognising there are no undiscovered places left to explore? Given this precarious position, can travelogues tell us anything relevant, let alone provocative, about contemporary global life? (3)

Lisle’s argument is centrally concerned with cultural memory, arguing that even travel writing which does not openly “alleviate the anxieties created by globalisation by recalling the assurances of Empire” and attempts a “cosmopolitan vision” nevertheless “reproduces a dominant Western tradition from which Western writers emerge to document other states, cultures and peoples” (5; for other insightful, sceptical readings, see Holland and Huggan). While travel writing from the late twentieth century certainly responds to these backgrounds and contexts in numerous other ways, however, it is arguably precisely through a foregrounded self-