Transculturality and the Eco-Logic of Memory

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Abstract

This article asks how memory studies might use the conceptual insights gained during its “third transcultural phase” for the challenges of its “fourth phase” – heralded in this Special Issue as a phase of research invested in questions about memory and the environment. It argues that memory is fundamentally “eco-logical”, and that the relational dynamics explored in research on transcultural memory can enable an understanding of the more-than-human in collective memory. The article offers a brief introduction to the field of memory studies and its transcultural turn around 2010. It traces the emergence of transcultural studies as a field of enquiry and its roots in research on colonialism, postcolonialism, and cultural globalisation. It discusses new developments in memory studies and considers their transcultural and broader eco-logical dimensions. Finally, the article distinguishes between “the relationality of the remembered”, “relational remembering”, and “mnemonic relationality” as conceptual building blocks for eco-logical mnemohistories.

Keywords

1 Eco-Logical Memory

Memory is eco-logical. It follows a logic of relationships (“between living organisms and their environment” as the OED has it in its entry on “ecology”) rather than being contained in individual human minds. This assumption is foundational for the interdisciplinary field of memory studies. In psychology, the concept of “ecological memory” was already brought up in the 1980s, advocated most prominently by Ulric Neisser (Neisser & Winograd, 1989; Graumann, 1986). Thinking memory ecologically is the very condition for psychology’s participation in memory studies debates (e.g., Fivush & Merrill, 2016). But also, in other places of the field’s disciplinary spectrum, “ecology” is the term of choice for the description of memory’s logic. Coming from sociology and media studies, Andrew Hoskins (2016), for example, proposes the term “memory ecology” for an understanding of the interconnectedness of minds, media, and societies. Last but certainly not least, awareness of species extinction and the Anthropocene moved memory scholars towards ecocriticism, leading to the development of productive new perspectives on remembering and forgetting (see Craps et al., 2018).

I think that the so-called “transcultural turn” (Bond & Rapson, 2014), which the field of memory studies saw around 2010, provides an important “training ground” for new research on memory and the environment. It trained scholars in a type of conceptual thinking about memory that could be called “relational”, because it emphasises that in the making of collective memory, different cultural, national, ethnic, or religious groups are related rather than separate. Such relational thinking is also needed for thinking through more-than-human memory constellations in expanded ecologies of memory.

The aim of this article is to consider how memory studies might move on with its “third transcultural phase” towards a “fourth phase” invested in questions about memory and the environment. To this end, this article offers a brief

1 In 2011, I proposed that the field of memory studies may be entering a “third phase” after a first phase of its interdisciplinary constitution in the early 20th century, and a second phase of largely national memory studies since the 1990s (see Erll 2011b). This special issue posits a “fourth phase,” or wave, of environmental memory studies. Waves flow into each other. As memory scholars well know, linear histories with completed periods are oversimplified constructs. “National,” “transcultural,” or “ecological” memory are (as I already argued in Erll 2011b, p. 9) not different phenomena, but different research perspectives on the memory process. It is timely and important that the field’s curiosity and concern are now with the environmental. It is a necessary move in an age of climate change, species extinction, pandemics, all of which have brought the more-than-human world into focus and propelled different kinds of ecological and environmental memory studies to the academic stage. But
introduction to the field of memory studies and its transcultural turn around 2010. It traces the emergence of transcultural studies as a field of enquiry and its roots in research on colonialism, postcolonialism, and cultural globalisation. It discusses three recent developments in memory studies (rethinking the archive, memory activism, and “the implicated subject” sensu Rothberg) and considers their transcultural and broader eco-logical dimensions. Finally, the article distinguishes between “the relationality of the remembered”, “relational remembering”, and “mnemonic relationality” as conceptual building blocks for eco-logical mnemohistories.

2 From Collective Memory to Memory Studies

Memory studies is an interdisciplinary field, which has formed around Maurice Halbwachs’s concept of mémoire collective (collective memory). In the 1920s, the sociologist Halbwachs claimed that memories are never a purely individual affair, but always already “socially framed” (cadres sociaux de la mémoire). In that sense, all memory is collective memory. Halbwachs’s works were reread in the 1980s and 1990s by scholars from diverse disciplines who sought to rethink history and memory. It was a time when ways of commemorating and historicising the Holocaust were hotly debated (e.g. in the German “historians’ dispute”), when the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the Cold War brought to the fore new national memories in Eastern Europe, as well as the vexed question of how to remember the Soviet era. It was also the time when Apartheid ended in South Africa and was addressed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), when the reckoning with authoritarian regimes had started in Argentina, and was soon taken up all over Latin America. And it was the time when memory in multicultural societies emerged as an issue of great interest (e.g., in the wake of the 1998 Windrush commemorations in the UK). Over the past two decades, memories of slavery, colonialism, and racism have emerged on the agenda of many societies, and with them questions of how grassroots movements and memory activism can transform (habits of) memory – and with it, society.3

the earlier work has not disappeared, on the contrary: we currently see the emergence of significant new research on “national memory,” for example with regard to Russia (Wertsch, 2021), while “transcultural memory” has been hotly debated since October 7, 2023 (Rothberg, 2022).


3 For an overview of key texts of collective memory research see Olick et al. (2010); for an introduction to the field, see Erll (2011a).
Memory studies is a robustly international and multidisciplinary field which brings together researchers from the humanities, the social sciences and the natural sciences (among them, sociology, history, anthropology, literary and media studies, cognitive psychology and the neurosciences). Memory is conceived as a multidimensional process involving biological, mental, social, medial, material and cultural phenomena. The foci of memory research range all the way from personal trauma to transgenerational family memories, to official commemorative culture and to digital memory.

A collective memory perspective does not pit “history” and “memory” against each other. Instead, “history” as an academic discipline and “historiography” as its written form are specific modes and media of collective memory, besides others (familial, religious, aesthetic, popular etc.). “History” understood more widely as the totality of past happenings and experiences is the focus of all forms of memory-making. I therefore advocate using “memory” as a broad umbrella term for all kinds of relating past, present, and future in environments that include human and non-human actors. This wide perspective is particularly helpful for the study of transcultural and eco-logical constellations of memory.

In what follows, I go back to the fundamentals of the “third phase” of memory studies – the transcultural turn and its connections to cultural and transcultural studies – in order to consider how the field of memory studies might move on in the future with the transcultural beyond the transcultural and towards the environmental.

### 3 The Transcultural Turn in Memory Studies

“Transcultural memory” emerged (to misquote Virginia Woolf) in or around 2010 within the field of memory studies. The term describes the programmatic move away from the assumption that memory is the product of bounded “cultures”, usually national cultures. In fact, “national memory research” had become a dominant practice in wide sections of memory studies, especially in the wake of Pierre Nora’s monumental *Lieux de mémoire* (1984–92). But Nora’s “inventory of the house of France” not only neglected many sites that France shared with its European neighbours, but also sites of memory related to French colonialism and immigration (see Tai, 2001).

Proponents of transcultural memory studies therefore started to criticise the field’s “methodological nationalism” (Beck, 2006). In fact, the problem was even greater: Memory research was based on the assumption of “bounded

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4 See Koselleck (1975) for an understanding of “history” as a “collective singular.”
mnemonic communities” (sometimes national, sometimes religious, ethnic, or familial), and this was a way of conceiving group memories, which points all the way back to Maurice Halbwachs.

New memory research emphasised instead the fluidity and fuzziness of memory in sociocultural contexts as well as the non-isomorphy of culture, nation, territory, language, religion, ethnicity, social groups, and memory. Individuals usually have different mnemonic memberships. (You may remember national history according to the British education system, religious history according to Islam, and the European refugee crisis of 2015 in the framework of family memory.) Contents, forms, and practices of memory are not pristine mnemonic nuggets, but they constantly “travel” and mix. Examples of this ongoing process include the movement of languages of Holocaust memory to the commemoration of the Rwandan genocide (Levy & Sznaider, 2006) or to Argentina, where they energised discourses about the violation of human rights (Huyssen, 2003), in order to move on from there to the mass graves of Spain (Baer & Sznaider, 2015).

However, the term “transcultural memory” should not suggest that a certain type of memory is identified and essentialised (“transcultural memory” as opposed to, say, “familial memory”). Transcultural memory is not a specific framework of memory; it is a mode of research. The term puts emphasis on and keeps reminding us of the inherent mixedness, transculturality, of all acts of remembering. As a theory and methodology, “transcultural memory” therefore does not so much mean a change in the objects of study as in the focus of attention: from stable and allegedly “pure” container-memories of container-cultures towards the ongoing movements, connections, and mixing of memories.

As research activities evolved during the 2010s, there were two significant emphases in the work of transcultural memory scholars. First, the emphasis on the movement of memory – its travels with people, forms, and media, and via migration, translation, and global media cultures. But memory studies is not satisfied with just the description of transcultural processes and forms. As the question of mental representations is inscribed into the field, a second, related concern emerged: How will individuals “receive” memories from elsewhere? What are the mental and social strategies of making sense of them, situated as rememberers always are in their specific mnemonic locations?

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5 See the articles in Crownshaw (2011); Bond & Rapson (2014); De Cesari & Rigney (2014); Bond et al. (2017).

6 On remembering between travel and locatedess, see Dorr et al. (2019). On the important question of the “reception” of memory, see Törnquist-Plewa & Sindbæk Andersen (2017), and Laanes et al. (2024); on remediation as a form of memory reception and production, see Erll & Rigney (2009).
Transcultural memory studies is therefore not just about movement, but also about the transmission – and transmissibility – of memory. What happens when a miniseries like *Roots* (1977) or *Holocaust* (1979) transmits the historical experiences of slavery or the Holocaust to broad audiences? An early and influential discussion of such questions is Alison Landsberg’s *Prosthetic Memory*. Landsberg (2004, p. 20) argues that mediations of memory can engender prosthetic memories, which “like an artificial limb, are actually worn by the body” of distant audiences. (A cognitive psychology understanding of the process would probably be that they turn in recipients’ minds into semantic memories, which are invested with particular affect.) Quite optimistically, Landsberg suggests that prosthetic memories potentially “produce empathy and social responsibility as well as political alliances that transcend race, class, and gender” (2004, p. 21). This shows how questions of reception, empathy, and ethics are closely connected with the notion of transculturality when studied from a collective memory perspective.

4 The Meaning(s) of Culture

While everyone in the field of memory studies arguably has a sense of what is meant by “transcultural memory”, it is not the term of choice for everybody. In fact, there is an abundance of alternative terms: There is research on “cosmopolitan memory”, “prosthetic memory”, “multidirectional memory”, “travelling memory”, “moving memory”, “memory unbound”, “migrant memory”, “transnational memory”, and “affiliative postmemory.”

One of the reasons for a certain hesitation when it comes to the term “transcultural” might be different understandings of the underlying term “culture”. In everyday language, “culture” may have a ring of “high culture”, or suggest “the arts” only. In its influential version of “British cultural studies”, the practice of cultural analysis is connected with the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Culture Studies (founded in the 1960s), with its focus on popular culture and a Marxist framing.

German academia, quite on the contrary, tends to work with a broad anthropological-semiotic understanding of culture. It saw a “cultural turn” in the 1990s, which went under the name of *Kulturwissenschaften*.

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7 For cognitive psychology approaches to collective memory (which are just now tapping the potentials of the transcultural turn), see Hirst et al. (2018).

(Bachmann-Medick, 2016a; Kugele et al. 2020). This turn was transformative in that it affected and reshaped the German philologies and considerable parts of history and sociology into “the study of culture”. In this context, Aleida and Jan Assmann developed their foundational theory of “cultural memory”.

German cultural studies used the term “culture” with a maximum extension, both of its referents and of possible methodological approaches. To cut a long story short (and surely to oversimplify), it drew on a combination of cultural anthropology (Clifford Geertz’s “self spun web” became proverbial) and cultural philosophy (Ernst Cassirer’s *animal symbolicum*10) to emphasise the constructivist insight into the “social construction of reality” (*sensu* Berger and Luckmann).11 Humans create and shape what they perceive as their world, and the tools and processes of such construction are “culture”. To make this expansive term operative for research, semioticians suggested a three-dimensional model, according to which culture has a material dimension (all human artefacts, including the arts, but also technology), a social dimension (social relations, political institutions etc.), and a mental dimension (the invisible world of mentalities, belief system, situated knowledges etc.).12 The model was conceived not as a static structure, but as processual, dynamic, constantly in-the-making, and transforming.

This broad concept is very close to “culture” in the sense used by anthropologist Charles Taylor (*Primitive Culture*, 1871), which, as philosopher Kwame Antony Appiah has pointed out, has much to offer today, but is liable to certain “organic temptations” (Appiah, 2018, p. 205). Understanding culture, as Taylor does (and as some of the anthropological-semiotic approaches do in his wake), as a “complex whole”13 may lead to the misunderstanding that each cultural phenomenon is an expression of that one “culture”, that “each part is essential to the functioning of the whole”. Quite on the contrary, as Appiah points out, “every element of culture – from philosophy to cuisine to the style of bodily movement – is separable in principle from all the others”. And such a view of culture as a “loose assemblage” (Appiah, 2018, p. 207) with moveable components is the starting point of transcultural studies.

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10 The cultural philosopher Ernst Cassirer collaborated closely with the biologist Jakob Johann Uexküll, who introduced the concept of *Umwelt* (environment) into wider discourse, affording perceptual agency to all living organisms.
11 See Geertz (1973); Cassirer (1944); Berger & Luckmann (1966).
12 See Posner (2004); for an application to memory studies, see Erll (2011a, ch. iv).
13 Taylor defines culture as a “complex whole, which includes knowledge, belief arts, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man (sic!) as a member of society” (quoted in Appiah 2018, p. 190).
The Emergence of the Transcultural

Transcultural studies is a research perspective interested in movements and mixings of cultural forms and practices, and in the resultant emergence of new cultural forms and practices. Travel, colonialism, and globalisation are key factors in this process. It is therefore no surprise that the first formulation of transcultural theory derives from a colonial context. Anthropologist Fernando Ortiz introduced the term *transculturación* in his study of sugar and tobacco cultures on Cuba (*Cuban Counterpoint*, 1940/1947). The transcultural makes a second major reappearance in Marie Louise Pratt’s work on European travel writing in the “contact zone” and the resultant “transculturation” (*Imperial Eyes*, 1992). Thirdly, the term was taken up again by German philosopher Wolfgang Welsch in the late 1990s, who saw “transculturality” as the dominant form of culture in the current age of globalisation (see Welsch, 1999).

Of course, similar ideas had been framed with other terms all along. Some of the most significant coinages are Edouard Glissant’s “poetics of relation”, concepts of “syncretism”, “creolization”, and Homi Bhabha’s “hybridity”. Different concepts lead to different accentuations, but they are all driven by an attempt to describe culture as an ongoing process of relationality and transformation. The majority of such terms derive from research on colonialism and its afterlives, and they therefore carry the insight that transcultural processes are more often than not asymmetrical and conflictual, fraught with political, economic and ethical questions.

The awareness of transcultural processes is thus intimately (though not exclusively) bound up with the experience of colonialism and the emergence of postcolonial studies. But as Edouard Glissant’s and Homi Bhabha’s work also show, not only are asymmetry and difference to be accounted for in situations of cultural contact, but also emergence. The transcultural is the answer to Salman Rushdie’s famous question: “How does newness come into the world?” (in *The Satanic Verses*, 1988, p. 8, see also Bhabha, 1994). The merging of cultural repertoires brings forth unexpected new phenomena that could not exist in, or are not easily deductable as the sum of, the former elements alone. The transcultural is a generative, culture-making process. That does not mean that the process is necessarily smooth or its outcome invariably positive. Conflict is part of the transcultural, and its emergent phenomena are sometimes good

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and sometimes bad (global Islamist movements or the European and North American Far Right are also examples of transcultural processes).  

Over the past decade, transcultural studies has developed into a rich and vibrant multidisciplinary field. What diverse schools share is the practice of comparison in a globalised field, the understanding of transculturality as a process, the method of close analysis of relationalities beyond the national frame as well as beyond simplistic coloniser/colonised binaries. For art historian Monica Juneja (2013, p. 29), for example, a transcultural perspective “highlights the procedural character of a broad variety of phenomena, including flows, entanglements, and other forms of circulation, and confronts us with the challenge of finding a precise language to capture the morphology of the relationships built into these phenomena”. Juneja (2013, p. 24) also maintains that there are “historical forms of mobility and connectedness that have been characteristic of cultures over centuries, pre-dating the advent of modern communication and global capital.” Transculturality is thus not solely a phenomenon of what Ulrich Beck (2006) would call “third modernity”. It has also been a driving force of cultural change in premodern and ancient constellations (see also Erll, 2018). However, in our present moment, it has taken on its most visible and world-defining shape.

Transculturation is at the basis of virtually all cultural processes and can be followed as deep in history and as wide in the range of possible places, practices, and products as anyone is ready to go. Such an expansive sense of the transcultural may seem puzzling or diluted to some – but it leads to a productive openness of a multidisciplinary field, which has the capacity to engage in a dialogue (while fostering the critical self-reflection) of very different kinds of research. A certain amount of translation and agonistic negotiation will be involved in such dialogues. But that is the transcultural process.

### 6 Transcultural Memory Studies Today

How can we imagine the path from transcultural studies to transcultural memory studies? The different genealogies of this type of memory research roughly correlate with the major strands of transcultural studies: For example, sociologists Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, who introduced the term “cosmopolitan memory” in *The Holocaust in the Global Age* (2005),

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15 There is a normative strand of transcultural studies, which sees transculturality as inherently positive and highlights its cosmopolitan, emancipatory potentials (e.g. Welsch, 1999). For transculturality as a non-normative, analytical term, see Erll (2011b).
a foundational text of transcultural memory studies, worked closely with German sociologist Ulrich Beck. They used Beck’s (2006) theories of globalised modernity and cosmopolitanism as a starting point for their study of globalising Holocaust remembrance. Comparatist Michael Rothberg, on the other hand, came to his Multidirectional Memory (2009) via a formative reading of Paul Gilroy’s The Black Atlantic (1993). For his Postcolonial Witnessing (2013), Stef Craps worked with Frantz Fanon. My concept of “travelling memory” (Erll, 2011b) derives from transcultural studies as outlined above and implies, of course, a nod towards James Clifford’s (1999) ethnographic work on “travelling cultures”. Dagmar Brunow’s research on transcultural memory and the essay film (Remediating Transcultural Memory, 2015) productively connects Stuart Hall’s work and British cultural studies with memory theories.

Within the international and multidisciplinary field of memory studies, notions of the transcultural have energised research on colonial legacies and postcolonial memories, on memories of migration in multicultural societies, on memories of travel and tourism, and on the particular mixed forms of heritage in Europe and across the world. In what follows, I will point out three recent directions of research in memory studies that promise to be particularly fruitful for studies that use both a transcultural and a broader eco-logical lens: Rethinking the archive, memory activism, and the implicated subject.

Rethinking the Archive: Memory studies has long been invested in attempts to rethink the archive, in particular along transcultural lines (Hamilton et al., 2002). Important work has been conducted by Diana Taylor (2003) on Latin American memory cultures. Her distinction between the “archive” and the “repertoire” points to the differences between recorded memories and embodied and seemingly ephemeral memories (in orality, song, dance, gesture). Ann Stoler (2008) has shown how French colonial archives produce “disabled histories” and a particular form of collective forgetting, which she calls “colonial aphasia”, and which points to the inability of societies to articulate certain disturbing historical events within its dominant post-imperial narrative. Stoler’s (2016) concept of “duress”, too, addresses colonial legacies and the (material and mental) durabilities that shape politics and societies still today. Increasingly, digital media plays an important role in reworking the archive. One aspect of this complex field is how in today’s “new media ecologies” (Hoskins, 2018) social media shapes the way people

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16 See, for example, Schwarz (2011); Bijl (2016); Ward & Rasch (2019); Teichler (2021).
17 See Rothberg & Yildiz (2011); Creet & Kitzmann (2014); Törnquist-Plewa & Sindbak Andersen (2017); Marschall (2018); Horsti (2019).
experience, remember, and collectively share their memories, thus producing a highly emergent global networked digital archive. How does the connective turn enable transcultural memory (via transnational communication), but also restrict it, with the apparent development of “memory silos” in the post-broadcast world (Edy, 2014)? And what are the eco-logical conditions and consequences of the connective turn?\(^\text{18}\)

*Memory Activism:* Research on memory activism addresses the role of collective action in the production and transformation of public memories.\(^\text{19}\) The term was introduced by Yifat Gutman (2017) who studied activist walking tours on Israeli-Palestinian land, thus addressing a fraught transcultural memory constellation. Today, much memory activism revolves around monuments and memorials. The “Rhodes must fall” movement (2015), the toppling of the Edward Colston statue in Bristol (2020) and the contestations over the Confederate Robert E. Lee monument in Charlottesville, Virginia (2021) are all examples of memory activism, which (often in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement) address legacies of colonialism, slavery, and racism.

The toppling of statues is the most spectacular indicator that memory has become a contested site (again) in today’s postcolonial and postmigrant societies. Memory studies perspectives can help to better understand these discussions. It has developed fine-tuned instruments to study the legacies of the past, the persistence of memory, and the different temporalities of history and justice (Bevernage, 2015). In fact, memory studies approaches to the recent monument debates belong to some of the most nuanced interventions, navigating beyond the false options such as “keep and treat as completed history” or “destroy and forget” (Rigney, 2023; Otele, Gandolfo & Galai, 2021). Memory studies shows that what is at stake in memory activism is the construction of new narratives for societies, in which inequalities are felt to be at least partly dependent on the toxic afterlives of racist histories (Rigney, 2022). It also brings to light adverse forms of the eco-logic of memory: the co-construction of the material mnemonic environment – landscapes, cityscapes, museum objects – dominant narratives, and the mental biases they shape.

*The Implicated Subject:* Michael Rothberg’s concept of the “implicated subject” is a useful tool for moving beyond the victim-perpetrator dichotomy and the idea of “the innocent, uninvolved bystander”, which is, “in most cases, an idealised myth”. (Rothberg, 2019, p. 202) According to Rothberg, “implicated

\(^{18}\) For first answers, see Reading (2014), Lohmeier and Pentzold (2023).

\(^{19}\) See Zamponi (2018); Merrill, Keightley & Daphi (2020); Wüstenberg & Gutmann (2022).
subjects occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm" (Rothberg, 2019, p. 1). Implicated subjects “play essential roles in producing and reproducing violence and inequality” (Rothberg, 2019, p. 202), be it as wealthy tourists in the Caribbean (see Rothberg’s reading of Jamaica Kincaid’s essay A Small Place, 1988) or as long-term benefactors of British slave ownership (see Hall et al., 2016). The concept of the implicated subject helps us understand how people can become “folded into” histories of injustice, often by seemingly innocent acts like ignoring racist monuments in their neighbourhood, by visiting museums with obscure materials, or – as scholars – by unthinkingly reiterating old archival practices. Thinking with the implicated subject is not only an important way forward for the decolonisation of collective memory, but it can also help us think through the complexities of our involvement in and responsibilities for climate change and species extinction.

7 Moving On: Relationality and the Eco-Logic of Memory

With climate change and pandemics looming large, the next challenge will be to move “with the transcultural beyond the transcultural” and towards the more-than-human. To ensure the very survival of humanity, global warming, wildfires, floods, desertification, species extinction, epidemics, and pandemics need to be turned into memorable events. Only if and insofar as they are narratable and memorable can they shape the productive future-thinking that our societies need – and need now.

What all these events have in common is that they are only intelligible in the relational framework of an uneven “world risk society” (Beck, 2014), which includes not only people of different places, but also the nonhuman world. The Covid-19 pandemic was a case in point for the “distributive agency” (Bennett, 2010) unfolding between animals, microbes and humans, who were for the most part implicated subjects – all moving and mixing, co-producing and spreading the pandemic (Erll, 2020a). Facing relationalities on the level of historical events is a mnemonic challenge, though. This demands a more nuanced, multidimensional and multiperspectival remembering than our received schematic slots of heroes and villains, victims and perpetrators allow for. It also holds challenges for historical consciousness as it introduces the

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20 On memory studies and posthumanism, see Knittel & Driscoll (2017); on the narratability of the Anthropocene, Ghosh (2016); on collective future thinking, Szpunar & Szpunar (2016); on time and history in the Anthropocene, Chakrabarty (2021).
factor of “deep time”. In Dipesh Chakrabarty’s (2021, p. 7) words, “the ‘now’ of human history has become entangled with the long ‘now’ of biological and geological timescales”.

So far, transcultural memory studies has operated within a human-centred cultural framework. This needs to be extended so as to make possible a better understanding of the material, geological, and biological aspects that are involved in the making of history and memory. Transcultural memory research has been an important training ground for this kind of thinking as it has enabled memory studies to acknowledge the ongoing traffic and cross-fertilisation between and across seemingly (but in fact never really) bounded, yet always already co-constructed entities. It has also emphasised the processuality of memory and its emergent character.

Memory studies in its third phase had therefore already developed a sense of the memory process which is quite close to Karen Barad’s (2007) concept of “intra-action” or Donna Haraway’s (2019) “sympoiesis”. It also created models of the agency that unfolds between minds, social groups, and “vibrant matter” (Bennett, 2010), for example in its understanding of archives (Rigney, 2015). Last but not least, theories of the “extended mind” and the “situated brain” have furthered our understanding of memory as a complex ecology (Sutton, 2006; Erll, 2020b).

“Relationality” is a key term for such an integrated, eco-logical understanding of histories and memories as a bio-psycho-socio-cultural as well as material and more-than-human processes.21 In new ecocritical memory research, a conception of memory as a relational process is clearly traceable. It can be sensed in work on memory and the Anthropocene (Crownshaw, 2016; Craps et al, 2018), species extinction (Kennedy, 2017; de Massol des Rebetz, 2020), “ecological mourning” (Craps, 2023), or “slow memory” (Wüstenberg, 2023).

In a mnemohistorical perspective, there are three different aspects of relationality to be taken into account:22 First, the relationality of the remembered describes the dynamics at the basis of the very same historical events that will later be turned into objects of memory: 11,000 years ago, the intra-action of humans, domestic animals, and microbes produced the first epidemics in history. In the nineteenth century, the sympoiesis of European

21 “Relationality” describes an ongoing connectivity among diverse elements, which creates meaningful structures and at the same time transforms all elements involved. A relational perspective means “understanding all phenomena as constituted through relations, and treating relations themselves as processes or transformations” (Powell 2013, p. 187). Barad’s (2007) posthumanist relational ontology locates such processes firmly in the more-than-human world.

22 See also Erll (2017) and Erll (2018).
industrial cultures, colonised cultures, carbon dioxide, and the atmosphere, produced changes in the global climate that are still felt today. Such examples are instances of an *histoire croisée* in an expanded field – expanding towards non-human and deep history phenomena, many of which have only recently come to the awareness of present-day collectivities.

Second, *relational remembering* refers to forms of co-construction in the memory process itself. As Halbwachs (1925/1994) has argued, remembering is a socially framed process. We create our memories together with parents, friends, teachers, and colleagues – with their different cultural and mnemonic backgrounds. But memory frameworks extend also to media, objects, chemical compounds, and microbes. Memory is “eco-logically” framed. *Cadres sociaux* thus turn into *cadres écologiques*.

A third dimension is *mnemonic relationality:* With this term, I refer to the relationalities that are consciously (and imaginatively) produced in (creative) acts of memory. Memory studies has paid great attention to mnemonic relationality, because it is a hallmark of our current, self-reflexive age of metamemory. Its diverse forms have been theorised, for example, as “multidirectional” (Rothberg, 2009), “dialogic” (A. Assmann, 2014), or “agonistic” (Bull & Hansen, 2016). Mnemonic relationality describes acts of remembering that bring into connection different mnemohistories, thus enabling transformed memories and new visions for the future to emerge. But (how) can we extend the concept of mnemonic relationality to the more-than-human world? One first step could be to acknowledge that there might be memories (at least in the sense of imprints and after-effects) in plants and other species as well. In *Staying with the Trouble*, Donna Haraway (2019, p. 70) discusses the cartoon “Bee Orchid” by Randall Munroe, where “the only memory” of a now-extinct bee is retained as the “painting by a dying flower”. Such examples may point in the direction of more-than human mnemonic relationalities.

If *sympoiesis* is a word for “worlding-with”, as Haraway (2019, p. 58) maintains, then the three dimensions of memory and relationality discussed above can be understood as *mnemonic sympoieses*, as different forms of “worlding with” in the memory process. This is the eco-logic of memory.

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