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Public Memory

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Summary and Keywords

The term *public memory* refers to the circulation of recollections among members of a given community. These recollections are far from being perfect records of the past; rather, they entail what we remember, the ways we frame it, and what aspects we forget. Broadly, public memory differs from official histories in that the former is more informal, diverse, and mutable where the latter is often *presented* as formal, singular, and stable. Beginning in the 1980s, scholars from various disciplines became interested in the way ideas about the past were crafted, circulated, and contested. A wide variety of artifacts give evidence of public memory, including public speeches, memorials, museums, holidays, and films. Scholars interested in public memory have observed the importance of such informal practices in relation to the conception of the nation-state, as well as a growing sense of an interconnected transnational or global network of memories. While the study of public memory spans multiple disciplines, its uptake in communication and rhetorical studies has produced a wealth of critical and theoretical perspectives that continues to shape the field.

Keywords: memory, culture, trauma, controversy, publicity, history, public memory

The Study of Public Memory

The world is filled with evidence of the human impulse to mark experiences in ways that will endure beyond a single lifetime. Cave drawings, burial mounds, pyramids, and statues were all crafted at least in part with the hope that some aspect of human experiences—lives, deaths, battles, triumphs—would be recalled by others who did not experience them directly. For many scholars, the various processes by which individual experience is crafted into things that can be shared, repeated, and endure are part of crafting a shared, or public, memory.

In its broadest sense, public memory entails the acts and processes, through which memories move beyond the remembering individual and become shared, passed on, and in this way, form a broader network through which people gather a sense of collectivity. We are a public, one might say, to the extent that we share a set of memories. While shared memories are rarely uniform, uncontroversial, or uncontested, the fact that certain individuals, events, places, and legacies are shared through this network of memory helps to craft us as a collective, as an "us."

History is one way in which the past is shared with future generations, and most social collectives put energy into crafting and preserving an official history. History, however, is not identical with public memory. As early as 1926, philosopher R. G. Collingwood contended that, "the difference between them is that memory is subjective and immediate, history objective and mediate" (Collingwood, 2005, p. 366). The divergence between these two ways of knowing the past—one informal and personal, the other formal and official—accelerated as the nation-state emerged as a principle source of cultural and political identity. French sociologist Pierre Nora contends that the nation-state employed the science of history to construct an official account that provided it legitimacy as the locus of identity and authority. As Nora writes in relation to the French experience: "History and memory were being brought together in such a way as to become another point of reference for the nation: in this sense, national history was becoming the French memory" (Nora, 2001, p. xvi).

The assumption that history held the final word in relation to past events, however, did not last. At least since the 1930s, there has been a growing recognition that the dynamic circulation of diverse memories constitutes an important aspect of culture. The reasons for this growing interest in public memory will be discussed later. At this point, it is sufficient to note that the study of public memory—or one of its numerous cognate terms such as "cultural memory," "collective memory," or "social memory," each of which has its specific applications and valences (Casey, 2004)—has rapidly expanded to encompass scholars from a wide range of disciplines throughout the humanities and social sciences, including those in Communication Studies and Rhetoric.

While the broad field of "memory studies" draws from numerous sources, French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs has been particularly foundational. Influenced by the works of Henri Bergson and Emile Durkheim, Halbwachs developed some of the first comprehensive theories of what he termed "collective memory." In his work, Halbwachs insists that memory is socially constructed and, as such, can be analyzed in relation to other social structures, including the family and religious institutions. Halbwachs posits that "no memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections" (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 43). Moreover, society not only enables recollection through collective frameworks but, in certain instances,

requires acts of recollection through rituals and celebrations. Illuminating the social frameworks that both enable and constrain memory also opens up ways of thinking about the means by which memories change. As Halbwachs notes, “precisely because these memories are repetitions, because they are successively engaged in very different systems of notions, at different periods of our lives, they have lost the form and the appearance they once had” (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 47).

Building upon Halbwachs’ work, scholars recognize memory as a dynamic, complex, and often conflicted process in which diverse and at times divergent groups dialogically engage with each other over the present meaning of our shared pasts. Rhetorical and communication scholars have been particularly interested in public memory in part because it opens avenues for exploring the public meaning-making practices and contests over the past. As Barbie Zelizer observes, “This recognition of conflicting renditions of the past by definition necessitates a consideration of the tensions and contestations through which one rendition wipes out many of the others” (1995, p. 217).

Another aspect of public memory that draws the attention of communication and rhetoric scholars is the necessity that memories be manifested in some way. These manifestations may take the form of public speeches, monuments, museums, and commemorative events, but they are all decidedly public and visible. Stephen H. Browne identifies this aspect of public memory “a principle of textuality,” and through this principle “public memory lives as it is given expressive form; its analysis,” he asserts, “must therefore presume a theory of textuality and entail an appropriate mode of interpretation” (Browne, 1995, p. 248).

Importantly, there are diverse modes of interpretations that lead to diverse, conflicting claims about the past, often resulting in contests and controversies. As such, the contests over public memory are not merely disputes about the historical record but entail fundamental questions about the structure and legitimacy of social and political institutions. John Bodnar notes that the real focus of a public memory dispute “is not the past, however, but serious matters in the present such as the nature of power and the question of loyalty to both official and vernacular cultures” (Bodnar, 1992, p. 15).

The 1980s, for example, witnessed a wealth of scholarly interest in the manifestations and contests over memory. This period is marked by a rapid proliferation of public memorials and commemorations (the “memory boom”) and a rapid growth in memory scholarship across various disciplines (the “memory industry”), including communication, rhetoric, history, religion, architecture, philosophy, sociology, English, literature, and political science. Gavriel Rosenfeld (2009) argues that “the emergence of memory represents one of the more noteworthy developments of contemporary Western, if not

global, cultural, and intellectual life" (p. 125), while Jay Winter (2001) refers to public culture's (re)turn to memory as the "historical signature of our own generation" (p. 13).

There is little agreement on what sparked this sudden upsurge. Some contend that the turn to memory was caused by emergent anxieties over national identity and multiculturalism (Kammen, 1991), or as a response to challenges facing the boundaries of nation states (Bodnar, 2000). Others suggest alternative causes, including the growing distrust over official history marshaled by the "post-modern turn" (Klein, 2000; Schwartz, 1996), an increased awareness of the differentiation between past and present (Lowenthal, 1985), as a response to modernity's various social transformations (Nora, 1989), and as a repercussion to World War II and the Jewish Holocaust (Winter, 2001), among others. Whatever the memory boom and rise of the memory industry's root causes, this academic turn has had sweeping influence on numerous fields, including communication and rhetorical studies. This article identifies some of the major trends within the broader field of memory studies, especially, within Communication and Rhetoric.

Public Memory and the Study of Public Address

Memory has a long relationship with the study and practice of rhetoric. As one of the classical tradition's five canons of rhetoric (along with invention, style, organization, and delivery), ancient rhetoricians were particularly interested in memory. This interest is often characterized in relation to the search for mnemonic devices that enabled speakers to recall important pieces of information or evidence. Francis Yates demonstrates that there were numerous and remarkably complex systems for facilitating recollection, perhaps most famously the notion of the "memory palace," which recommended using an architectural frame for placing important ideas in particular locations within a mental structure (Yates, 1966).

While contemporary scholars are less interested in memory-as-mnemonic, the ways memory influences and is influenced by public address has received great interest. Scholars attentive to the relationship between memory and public address have generally approached it along several broad lines: memory as inventional resource; memory as an animating force within public address; public address focused on memory issues; and, the lingering memory of particular public speeches.

The relationship between memory and invention is one crucial notion undergirding much of this contemporary work. As Sharon Crowley notes, the connection between memory and invention was an important part of classical rhetoric. As she puts it, "memory was not only a system of recollection for ancient and medieval peoples; it was a means of

invention” (Crowley, 1993, p. 35). J. Robert Cox extends this notion by suggesting that our collective memories of the past serve as the basis for many kinds of arguments and appeals. In Cox’s conception, memory provides a valuable resource for critiquing the status quo and is thus crucial for imagining future possibilities (Cox, 1990). Connecting public memory to rhetorical invention processes provides a useful lens through which to view and assess the development of the kinds of critical appeals Cox conceptualized. In their study of 19th century abolitionist Anna Dickinson, for example, Sara VanderHaagen and Angela Ray examine the way Dickinson employed her tour of southern states in her own rhetorical invention, becoming what they call a “pilgrim-critic.” As they explain, “Our conception of the pilgrim-critic combines the spiritual, experiential, often subjective dimension of the pilgrim—who views places as sacred—with the intellectual, analytic, often more public functions of the social critic—who approaches places seeking knowledge” (VanderHaagen & Ray, 2014, p. 351).

Just as public memory provides resources for speakers and writers to develop their arguments and appeals, it is also an important context, at times a difficult one, through which public speakers must navigate. Stephen H. Browne (2003) observes the rhetorical maneuvers required of Thomas Jefferson in the first presidential inaugural address to reconstruct a unified national culture after a particularly contentious electoral process. Early patriotic speeches like Jefferson’s worked, as James Farrell puts it, to “craft a useful history and consign those narratives to the public memory, to suggest a dominant national identity proud of its past and confident of its future” (1999, p. 148). This difficult process of simultaneously navigating and shaping public memory provides an important context for understanding political public speeches. Kirt Wilson, for example, observes the ultimately failed efforts of President Benjamin Harrison to promote black civil rights within the context of an “increasingly romanticized public memory of the Civil War and Reconstruction” (Wilson, 2008, p. 270).

In addition to serving as a resource and context, public memory also functions as an animating force within particular instances of public address. For example, Denise Bostdorff and Steven Goldzwig demonstrate how President Ronald Reagan appropriated quotations from the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to justify his administration’s civil rights’ policies. Similarly, in their study of President Bill Clinton’s 1998 speech commemorating the March on Washington, Shawn and Trevor Parry-Giles examine how Clinton utilized the past as a bulwark against his sex scandal with Monica Lewinski. As they observe, Clinton “is able to exploit a national commemorative moment for his personal rhetorical needs and to use the nostalgia shared by his audience for the success and the struggle of the civil rights ear in the service of his individual image (re)construction” (Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, 2000, p. 432).

While public memories are often marshaled as evidence for contemporary issues by rhetors, those same memories are also often openly contested. Numerous rhetorical scholars have attended to specific controversies erupting around diverging public memories. Marouf Hasian Jr. and Robert Frank, for example, examine the public arguments surrounding the German people's complicity in the Holocaust after the publication of Daniel J. Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (Hasian & Frank, 1999). Similarly, Bradford Vivian analyzes the public arguments complicating Thomas Jefferson's legacy in light of his relationship with his slave, Sallie Hemmings (Vivian, 2002).

Equally important, other scholars have focused on how individual moments of public address can seek to reconfigure the public's memory. In his 1974 essay, Thomas Benson examines the ways that Malcolm X's *Autobiography* works to frame the civil right's leader's complicated life as a series of "transcendent movements" that invite readers to become "actors in the drama of enlargement and reconciliation" (Benson, 1974, p. 15). G. Mitchell Reyes also engages Malcolm X's *Autobiography*, focusing instead on the way the divergent identities of Malcolm X are not so easily reconciled into the transcendent. Reading the text through a framework of alterity, Reyes argues that "memory is a medium for the negotiation of present and past, identity and alterity, self and other" (Reyes, 2010, p. 236). The work of rhetoric in crafting an individual's place in memory is also engaged by others. Amos Kiewe, for example, observes similar efforts in Ronald Reagan's farewell speech, which Kiewe reads as an attempt by Reagan to craft his place in the national memory (Kiewe, 2004). In her study of the 1905 commemoration of Sacagawea, Cindy Koenig Richards finds a rhetoric that raises the iconic Native American woman's status and opens up transformative possibilities for women's social place and standing. For Koenig Richards, the commemoration "promoted identification with a new or different vision of community through the veneration of an 'invented great'" (Koenig Richards, 2009, p. 3).

A final notable strand of research on memory and public address involves studies of the collective memory of public speeches. "Great" speeches often become part of the collective memory of events and movements but, as several scholars observe, these memories can at times limit our understanding of the movements themselves. Garth Pauley pursues such an agenda in his historical recovery of civil rights activist John Lewis's role in the historic 1963 March on Washington. The emphasis on King's iconic "I Have a Dream" speech has obscured other, often more radical, dimensions of the historic march and King's own rhetoric. This emphasis, Pauley contends, plays "a role in perpetuating the dominant, uncomplicated understanding of the March on Washington" (Pauley, 1998, p. 321). Kristin Hoerl finds a similar tactic at work in news media coverage of the 2009 Inauguration of President Barack Obama. She argues that the coverage de-emphasized histories of violence and discrimination in favor of

constructing a narrative connecting King's nonviolent struggle to Obama's election. As Hoerl notes, such efforts promote a kind of "selective amnesia," which omits "events that would dramatically reframe our understanding of how historic conflicts connect to contemporary social relations" (2012, pp. 194–195).

The Places of Public Memory

While investigations into memory and public address have a long history within rhetorical and communication studies, the role of *place* within the discipline is equally ancient. In the opening pages of Yate's *The Art of Memory*, the author tells the story of the poet Simonides of Ceos, who, it is told, left a banquet shortly before the roof collapsed, crushing all the guests (Yates, 1966). The poet was called in to identify the now unrecognizable bodies and used his memory of their location around the table to make the identification. The story of Simonides is found in Cicero's *De oratore* in his discussion of memory as one of the five canons of rhetoric, which included a discussion on the mnemonics of places and images (*loci* and *imagines*) employed by Roman rhetors. This technique was also discussed in the anonymous *Ad C. Herennium* and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*. In general, the technique calls for the student of rhetoric to construct a mental architecture (a "memory palace") to form a series of places of memory that one can use to arrange and recall a speech.

Contemporary scholars focus less on the mental placement of memories than on the way physical places or spaces are constructed to evoke particular memories. For Pierre Nora, these official places or sites of memory, lieux de memoire, have become crucial because, as he puts it, "there are no longer any milieux de memoire, settings in which memory is a real part of everyday experience" (Nora, 1996, p. 1), which is not to suggest that these environments of memory are not equally crucial. Yet, the multiple crises of history, identity, and the nation state discussed earlier have led to the apparent political and cultural need to anchor memory in stone and static, constructed sites of commemoration. Nora contends that such sites have "no referents in reality; or, rather, they are their own referents—pure signs" (p. 19), and therefore are open to interpretation, contestation, and counter-memories from vernacular communities or others. Since the late 1980s, rhetoricians and communication scholars have been drawn to these contested and polysemic meaning-making practices surrounding memory places, such as museums, monument, and memorials.

James Young observes the crucial relationship between memorials and the crafting of the national story. On one hand, official state memorials are designed to "shape memory

explicitly as they see fit, memory that best serves a national interest.” On the other hand, “once created, memorials take on lives of their own, often stubbornly resistant to the state’s original intensions” (1993, p. 3). Scholars in communication and rhetoric have pursued similar notions. Treating places of memory as rhetorical texts, these scholars unpack the often conflicting messages inscribed in such sites to reveal the power relations imbued therein.

In an early foundational essay, Carole Blair, Marsha Jeppeson, and Enrico Pucci (1991) engage the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to argue for how memorials “select from history those events, individuals, places, and ideas that will be … [considered sacred] by a culture or a polity,” and that they “instruct their visitors about what is to be valued in the future as well as the past” (p. 91). They read the memorial as a postmodern memory text in order to call attention to the site as a “multivocal rhetoric” able to produce a variety of meanings and evoke a variety of responses, while still firmly establishing the political character of the memorial’s rhetoric.

Others in communication and rhetorical studies have investigated how museums are curated to (re)present particular interpretations of history onto the American memoryscape in order to constitute a national identity. Many such studies aim to pry open the dialectic of presence(s) and absence(s) to reveal the power relations and political stakes inscribed in these constructed mnemonic places. Greg Dickinson, Brian Ott, and Eric Aoki (2005), for instance, argue that the Buffalo Bill Museum fosters a vision of “national identity that rests on white masculinity, carnivalized violence, and manifest destiny … [and] purposefully forgotten oppressions and rejections of the ‘Other’” (p. 102). Similarly, in an analysis of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Hasian (2004) finds that the exhibit’s curation lends itself to (re)presenting the Holocaust as a distinctly American event through a complex negotiation of selection and deflection. While such (re)presentations may be problematic in that they omit certain historical details and subtly toe the line of revisionism, the imperfect nature of such places of memory still do important memory work. Taken together, the rhetorical engagement with museums opens space to consider how institutions of memory function to shape national identity through writing and rewriting the past for present political purposes, and how such narratives can be contested in the process.

Another focus within the discipline is how (re)presentations of the past by museums, monuments, and memorials are often contested within vernacular cultures. Since public memory “speaks primarily about the structure of power in society” (Bodnar, 1992, p. 15), its material manifestations become sites of both “conflict and domination,” where subjugated vernacular communities leverage their own interpretations to better reflect their own values (Hauser, 1999, pp. 114–116). As Bernard Armada (1998) writes, “somewhere beneath the surface of all presentations of the past lie the potentially defiant

voices of marginalized groups awaiting fulfillment in the crucible of public controversy" (p. 236). Given the function of such places of memory to construct a vision of national identity for their viewers, these same sites invite dissident voices to challenge the official versions of history to create space so that their own voices may be heard. Some build counter-memorials or counter-museums that contest the institutional version of the past, as Armada details with his analysis of the National Civil Rights Museum. Others may critique, debate, and deliberate over a given monument's meaning in order to make it better reflect the contingent economic, political, and material context in which it is represented (Gallagher & LaWare, 2010). In such cases, the locations of museums, monuments, or memorials within a specific space and time, and the embeddedness within a particular geographical and economic landscape, open them to vernacular contestation.

Commemoration and Public Memory

While some aspects of public memory—memorials, historical markers, museums, the list goes on—fill everyday spaces, most cultures have developed certain ritual practices that serve to acknowledge past events, at least those events deemed worthy of acknowledging. These commemorative events may take the form of feasts or fasts, celebrations or days of mourning, parades or vigils and, at least after several iterations, they may come to seem rote and pointless. But even the most mundane commemoration can be powerful. As John Gillis notes, "Commemorative activity is by definition social and political, for it involves the coordination of individual and group memories, whose results may appear consensual when they are in fact the product of processes of intense contest, struggle, and, in some instances, annihilation" (Gillis, 1996, p. 5). Even as commemorative activities lose their somber and sacred tones, Gillis reminds us, they constitute important social moments during which some aspect of our culture is magnified and reflected back to us.

Scholars of communication and rhetoric have attended closely not only to the tension between the sacred and profane within public commemorative activities, but also focus on how tensions between official and vernacular memories create the conditions for commemoration to change in meaning, function, and importance. In one of the field's foundational essays on public memory, Stephen H. Browne traces the shifting remembrance of Crispus Attucks, an African-American victim of the 1770 Boston Massacre. Over the decades in which the Massacre was commemorated as a crucial moment leading to the American Revolution, Browne finds that public memory of Attucks shifts as it is deployed and redeployed by different parties towards different political ends. The public commemorations of Attucks, like most national commemorative

activities were, in Browne's words, places "where rituals of remembrance could be deployed, in effect, to re-create for new Americans a story they might call their own" (Browne, 1999, p. 185). Importantly, Browne's work suggests that these highly strategized acts of commemoration are not static but are reformulated by those seeking to establish or re-establish a single interpretation of the commemorated event.

While recognizing the shifting meaning and valence of commemoration, other scholars have focused more specifically on individual iterations of commemorative activities. Barbara Biesecker, for example, explores the numerous commemorative activities of the 1990s centered on World War II, including Steven Spielberg's film *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and the construction of the World War II Memorial on the National Mall in Washington, DC. In these various commemorative gestures, Biesecker finds an effort to counter contentious contemporary politics and valorize the "Greatest Generation's" stoic suffering. Of this valorization, she writes, the "pained body is being made to trump the historically and social disenfranchised subjects in the national imaginary" (Biesecker, 2004, p. 213). Similarly, Bradford Vivian examines the use of excerpts from famous American speeches during the first anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, an event we return to below. In Vivian's view, these historic words helped to reestablish national identity following the traumatic attacks. They also functioned to re-inscribe a set of neoliberal values that "encouraged audiences to view the recent tragedies as yet one more trial in the destined reign of American liberties over the forces of violence, fear, and repression" (Vivian, 2006, p. 16).

In addition to inscribing and repairing cultural values, commemorative activities can shift the interpretation of current events. In their analysis of television news coverage during Israel's Memorial Day for the Holocaust and Heroism, Eyal Zanderberg, Oren Meyers, and Motti Neiger discern the way that the holiday transforms current news items so that they become narrated in relation to past events. They term this process "reversed memory," which "cultivates the understanding of past events as continuous ones, constantly extending the past into the present" (Zanderberg, Meyers, & Neiger, 2012, p. 66).

Commemorative activities have the power to shape and reshape not only our understanding of the past but also of our present and future. While commemorations are largely dictated within official and socially accepted frames, they also can serve as opportunities for social intervention and critique. Columbus Day, for instance, has become a time of protest, as Native Americans and First World peoples object to the portrayal of Christopher Columbus as a hero (see Riding, 1993). Perhaps the most famous and celebrated instance of social critique emerging from commemorative activities is abolitionist Frederick Douglass' July 5, 1852 speech. The famous African-American

speaker and freed slave spoke in Rochester, New York, during a celebration of July 4, 1776. Douglass's speech, however, shifted the grounds from celebration to condemnation of slavery's persistent presence on American soil (Leroux, 1991, p. 45). Douglass's speech, entitled "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" has been the focus of considerable attention by rhetorical scholars (Jasinski, 1997; Leroux, 1991; Lucaites, 1997; McClure, 2000; Terrill, 2003). Robert Terrill, for instance, finds the speech "an unparalleled exemplar of rhetorical irony" (Terrill, 2003, p. 217), while John Lucaites argues that Douglas' employment of an ironic framework "crafts a usage of equality that would reconstitute the national public forum as a dialogue between past, present, and future, and thus enact a legitimate public space for the articulation of a uniquely African-American political voice" (Lucaites, 1997, p. 49).

Public Memory, Affect, and Trauma

Public memories are crucial to the creation of a shared sense of the past, to the ways we contest this shared sense and, as noted above, to our very conception of who we are as members of a broader public. While symbolic construction and circulation of memory has garnered much attention, scholars have also pointed out that our memories are not solely constituted by how we envision the past, but also by how those visions make us feel. Renewed attention within the Humanities to the concept of affect has also animated studies of public memory.

Affect is generally understood as a kind of energy or intensity circulated among individuals by virtue of their contact with events, objects, and others. While affect is often associated with emotions, there is a sense that affect is felt prior to a specific emotion's designation and, as such, precedes emotion. As Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth contend, affect consists of "visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion" (2010, p. 1). While distinct from both emotions and cognitive thought, affect is deeply intertwined with these other psychic qualities and, importantly, these processes intersect within the human body. As Brian Massumi notes, the intensities of affective energy "are immediately embodied" (2002, p. 25).

Public memory scholars have pursued these notions of affect and body in relation to practices of remembrance. Carol Blair, Brian Ott, and Greg Dickinson suggest that public memories contain a crucial affective dimension. In engaging these dimensions, scholars explore such questions as, "Why is this memory so alluring as compared to another? What affect is being deployed that helps to secure adherence to this particular memory

content and to the group that holds it to be important to is collective identity?" (Blair, Ott, & Dickinson, 2010, p. 14). Affective energy can thus be thought of as one dimension through which memories become visible, and gain, or lose, adherence among the broader public. Affect is also a dimension that helps explain our experience of moving through memorial spaces. Greg Dickinson, Brian Ott, and Eric Aoki contend that our bodily movement through memory sites, like monuments and memorials, activates an "experiential landscape" that "invites visitors to assume (to occupy) particular subject positions" (Dickinson, Ott, & Aoki, 2006, p. 30).

While affect can be seen as permeating our everyday experience of memories, these energies are most intense during sudden moments of upheaval and crisis. Such experiences are often defined as trauma, which Cathy Caruth understands as "the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (Caruth, 1995, p. 91). The overwhelming experience of trauma is depicted as devastating the individual's psyche. Julia Kristeva contends that trauma entails a kind of "shattering of psychic identity" (1989, p. 222). This shattering is among the reasons that the experience of trauma often returns in flashbacks as the shattered psyche attempts to reintegrate both itself and the traumatic experience that affected it.

Public memory scholars have observed similar processes at work in the collective psyche. Jay Childers, in his study of the national response to President McKinley's assassination, observes that "at times certain violent political acts or events can cause a rupture in the nation's understanding of itself"; these moments of rupture, in turn, "demand an immediate response by the nation's intellectual and political leaders" (Childers, 2013, p. 174). Public responses to trauma provide rich material for rhetorical critics interested not only in the crafting of public remembrance but also in the political body's constitution and reconstitution. In this light, Mary Stuckey observes the way that Ronald Reagan's speech after the Challenger disaster served to reunite the nation in the act of remembrance and mourning. As Stuckey notes, "Mourning thus became an act of citizenship" (2006, p. 85).

One of the most traumatic global events in recent memory was the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, DC on September 11, 2001. This event reverberated through global culture, and scholars have shown considerable interest in its memorialization (e.g., Biesecker, 2007; Bostdorff, 2003; Milford, 2016). Nicholas Paliewicz and Marouf Hasian Jr. attend to the National September 11 Memorial and Museum's construction in New York City, arguing that its physical contours craft a rhetorical tone of absence and melancholia: "The way the museum is organized—spatially, visually, and aesthetically—makes it impossible for visitors not to experience some form of post-9/11 grief" (Paliewicz & Hasian, 2016, p. 15). Interestingly, the careful crafting of the national memorial did not

make it immune from contest and controversy. Theresa Ann Donofrio observes the public protest launched by some family members of victims of the World Trade Center attack in their effort to “take back the memorial.” Donofrio notes the way that their position as mourning family members adds a certain affective tone to their protests. “Their authority is derived from subjectivities of suffering,” she writes, “meriting critical attention to the ways in which rhetorical tropes of suffering function ideologically. Those thought to be suffering—and particularly individuals who are in the throes of grief—are ceded privileged status as their claims become unassailable in many respects” (Donofrio, 2010, p. 164).

While trauma may be most acute for those who directly experienced it, repetition is one of trauma’s notable qualities. This happens both through the periodic flashbacks of traumatic memories as well as in the more systematic public remembrances of them. As Marita Sturken notes, “compulsive repetition is a response to trauma” (2007, p. 26). Scholars of rhetoric have shown considerable interest in the ways that public traumas are engaged and reengaged. Some of this occurs through the official mechanisms of commemorations, discussed above, but there are also other modes of engaging the traumatic past. A. Susan Owens and Peter Ehrenhaus, for example, explore the practice of reenacting the horrifying 1946 lynching of four African Americans at Moore’s Ford in Georgia. In exploring the 2008 performative reenactment, they found that it “invites participants to experience the past viscerally through the liminal space that performance opens, and consequently, to participate in the affective construction of traumatic memory” (Owens & Ehrenhaus, 2014, p. 86). Stephanie Houston-Grey identifies a similar form of repetition in the performative aspects of the literary accounts of atomic bomb survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Houston-Grey notes, “these performances symbolically reconstruct the traumatic moment, representing the past through vocabularies capable of both revision and selective repression” (2002, p. 1).

Memory and Forgetting

The power of traumatic memories has spurred a growing interest in the way we can become reconciled to them and move on, leading to a focus on the multiple dynamics of public *forgetting*. Traditionally, forgetting has been seen as a kind of moral failing. In the years following World War II, European governments refused to publically recall or draw attention to the victims of the Nazi party’s inflicted mass genocide. In such cases, “forgetting is institutionally fostered by states and governments, and ideologically supported by modernity. Official responses throughout the world are predicated on encouraging permanent forgetting, because the intent is to reproduce the existing power

relations that would be undermined through remembrance" (Göçek, 2014, p. 50). Such a selective memory, and thus purposeful forgetting, may bolster the nation state's power, but only at the expense of those who suffered from the wartime atrocities. On face value, memory and forgetting in such contexts can be viewed in binary opposition to one another, and the call to remember serves as a means to grant both legitimacy and recognition to those who have suffered and as a way to confront past wrongdoings.

Other scholars, however, have pointed out how the desire to remember past atrocities can result in different forms of forgetting. Barbie Zelizer addresses the paradox produced by the mass circulation of images of Holocaust atrocities. While she grants that the proliferation of such images in the 1970s pushed the topics of witnessing and reconciliation into the public sphere, she argues that the more societies depend on these photographs for public memory, the more such remembering results in forgetting the particularities and specifics of events (Zelizer, 1998), a notion that Nora has also emphasized (Nora, 1989). The photographs, Zelizer contends, dull our responses to these atrocities and undermine "our ability to attend to contemporary atrocities" (Zelizer, 1998, p. 13). This repressive form of forgetting brought forth by repetition and habituation, moreover, threatens our collective ability to confront the recurrences of atrocities and attend to the specificities of other mass violence that have occurred in places like Rwanda and Bosnia.

While forgetting can be repressive when those in power refuse to recognize the past—or even as an effect of certain forms of ritual remembrance—public forgetting can also be a productive and even necessary cultural practice. Friedrich Nietzsche identified the desire to collect and remember everything as the main culprit of cultural decay. "All acting requires forgetting," he writes, "as not only light but also darkness is required for life by all organisms …, but without forgetting it is quite impossible to *live* at all. Or, to say it more simply yet: *there is a degree of insomnia, of rumination, of historical sense which injures every living thing and finally destroys it, be it a man, a people or a culture"* (Nietzsche, 1980, p. 10).

Extending this line of thinking, Nathan Stormer argues for a reconception of the material performativity of rhetoric within a framework that recognizes the simultaneous nature of remembering and forgetting. Stormer argues, "No term names the interdependence of remembering and forgetting, which creates a challenge for studying them, but the symbolic range of '*mnesis*' makes it a good candidate for a term of terms. As I use it, the word names a dynamic simultaneity of memory and its loss with no precedence for one state or another, of having remembered over having forgotten" (Stormer, 2013, p. 32). Rhetorical action, for Stormer, requires this simultaneous forgetting and remembering as discourse crafts the contours of its own emergence, creating its own present.

At the more practical level, productive forgetting is employed in historical moments of political transition and regime change. Paul Connerton, in detailing what he calls "prescriptive forgetting," points to the Ancient Greeks as offering a prototype for this form of forgetting. Connerton notes that in 403 BC, Athenian Democrats, returning to Athens after suffering a terrible defeat at the hands of a dictator, proclaimed general reconciliation as a means of moving beyond the preceding crisis and political turmoil. They issued a decree that applied to all citizens, from democrats to oligarchs, who remained in the city as non-combatants during the period of dictatorship, stating that it was "forbidden to remember" any crimes and misdeeds carried out during the period of civil strife. Moreover, the "Athenians erected on the acropolis, in their most important temple, an altar dedicated to Lethe, that is, to forgetting. The installation of this altar meant that the injunction to forget, and the eradication of civil conflict that this was thought to engender, was seen as the very foundation of the life of the polis" (Connerton, 2008, p. 62).

In a similar vein, Bradford Vivian views forgetting as potentially productive in our contemporary age, suggesting it is necessary for "beginning again" after atrocities or moments of historical rupture. Vivian asserts that remembering and forgetting should be seen as "reciprocal," and that "in healthier forms forgetting can be used productively to maintain, replenish, or inaugurate vital cultures of memory writ large. In what circumstances," he asks, "can one differentiate between productive and destructive manifestations of forgetting in public affairs?" (Vivian, 2010, p. 9). Vivian's question speaks to a tension inherent in many of public forgetting's different manifestations, one that calls into the question the clean binary between memory and forgetting.

Aleida Assmann coins the term "therapeutic forgetting" to capture a new form of productive forgetting that has emerged on the global stage. Assmann engages the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa to make her point. She asserts that "in these public rituals a traumatic event had to be publicly narrated and shared; the victim had to relate his or her experience, which had to be witnessed and acknowledged by the perpetrator before it could be erased from social memory" (Assmann, 2014). Rhetorical scholars have also paid considerable attention to racial reconciliation efforts in South Africa and the elsewhere. Katherine Mack (2014), for instance, notes the ways that reconciliation discourses circulated more widely than just in the official spaces of the Commission, while Erik Doxtader (2001) has similarly observed that scholars should pay heed to reconciliation's "unofficial" story in addition to its public articulations. In each of these cases, the focus on memory and forgetting has been central to coming to terms with the past.

To these ends, Mark McPhail (2004) argues that reconciliation efforts require a "certain degree of amnesia" for both sides to move on and for nation states to find coherence

between principles and practices, espoused ideals and material realities. John Hatch points out that, in the context of forgiveness, forgetting does not mean “forgetting the offense” altogether, but rather, “remembering in a different way” (2003, p. 750). Yet, McPhail asserts that “despite the willingness of black leaders and citizens to forgive and even forget the racial injustices of apartheid, there remains a strong commitment to an ideology of innocence among white South Africans” (McPhail, 2004, p. 395). Racial differences between this willingness to productively forget and claims for innocence might best be explained by Kirt Wilson’s observation that “it is the structure of our collective memory and public discourse that makes racism a persistent problem” (2002, p. 198). Considering the broader role of rhetoric in relation to questions of human rights, atrocities, and reconciliation efforts, Arabella Lyons and Lester Olson observe the urgent need for deeper “conversations concerning evidence, persuasion, and epistemology in human rights rhetoric” (Lyons & Olson, 2012, p. 8).

Public Memory in the Transnational Age

Although the majority of the topics addressed in this article have taken up memory and forgetting in the nation state, the forces of globalization have pushed scholars to consider public memory’s dynamics beyond and across national borders. Anthony Giddens defines globalization, “as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (1990, p. 64). It marks a multi-dimensional process of transnational social change that manifests across technological, economic, labor, trade, ecological, ideological, social movement, and human rights domains. In the past few decades, an immense body of literature has engaged the anxieties and hopes endemic to these fragmented processes of global interconnection, acceleration, and withdrawal. Andreas Huyssen suggests that these overlapping and, at times, conflicting processes have decentered the nation state as the primary site of public memory, simultaneously weakening the stable links between communities, families, and national identity, while also producing a return to tradition and heritage as a response to these crises (Huyssen, 2003, pp. 4–5). Scholars have tracked these transformations in the shape and tenor of public memory in a number of ways.

Kendall Phillips and G. Mitchell Reyes, for example, have advanced the term *global memoryscapes* to point toward the complex dynamics that influence and alter memories and memory practices within and across local, national, and transnational registers. They aim to move beyond considering the processes of public memory purely in relation to local or national cultures, and instead seek to resituate memory within a global

framework. For Phillips and Reyes, global memoryscapes is a concept “for imagining the ways that global forces impact local memories, the ways that international encounters create and transform memories, and the ways that memories change and adapt as the move across the global landscape” (Phillips & Reyes, 2011, p. 19). Such a conceptual shift, for the authors, aids in the ability to foster a “global memory horizon” and “planetary community” that would be able to better respond to universal crises and craft global perspectives in general.

An increasingly shared global memory of events has contributed to a growing transnational human rights movement. While public remembrances of World War II and Holocaust survivors came to the fore in the 1980s, the 1990s witnessed an increased and shared concern over remembering other victims of oppression and genocide. Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider contend that this transformation has created a “cosmopolitan memory” described as a process of “internalized globalization” that views global and local cultures as “mutually binding and interdependent principles” (Levy & Sznaider, 2006, pp. 9–10). This emergent dialectic allows global memories of watershed events like the Holocaust to be mediated and transferred to different cultural contexts, shaping moral dispositions and memories that transcend the nation state in the process. For Levy and Sznaider, transnational public memories of the Holocaust do not become some “totalizing signifier.” Instead, they become a framework for interpreting other historically contingent acts of mass violence and genocide (Levy & Sznaider, 2006, pp. 11–12).

Others within this debate suggest that the uptake of Holocaust remembrance in other countries has served as “another kind of Holocaust denial” (Michaels, 2006, pp. 289–290). Walter Benn Michaels contends that the failure to publically remember and grapple with transatlantic slavery in the United States is the result of the global proliferation of Holocaust memories. Michaels views such public memories as strictly “competitive,” arguing that to grant some memories of victimization legitimacy simultaneously marginalizes others (Michaels, 2006). Along similar lines, Marouf Hasian Jr. argues that even though nation states may apologize and admit regret over their colonial legacies, such admissions may belie more “substantive restitutional or restorative justice,” or serve as a means to end such “debates about contentious pasts” altogether (2014, p. 191).

Against this notion of competitive memory, Michael Rothberg suggests that “we consider memory as multidirectional” to recognize how the global proliferation of Holocaust memory has “contributed to the articulation of other histories” of victimization and genocide, including slavery (Rothberg, 2009, pp. 4–6). Along similar lines, Huyssen favors a softening of the borders between events like the Holocaust, colonialism, and migration to understand the similarities and differences of ostensibly competing histories. He suggests “the continuing strength of memory politics remains essential for securing human rights in the future” (2011, pp. 621–622).

New Directions in the Study of Public Memory

In addition to the topics identified, the study of public memory continues to expand into new territory. While the full scope of these many innovative studies is beyond our present limits, this final section identifies a few prominent trends in contemporary research as a means of acknowledging the on-going developments in the study of public memory. Of particular note are studies pursuing the relationship between public memory and social movements, efforts to queer public memory, and the recognition of public memory's place in popular culture.

Social movements arise out of some form of dissatisfaction with the dominant status quo. Often these movements promote a divergent narrative of the past in the sense of seeking to reconfigure the official story and promote some other, contrary, version. Michael Eric Dyson, for instance, contends that one of the important functions of anti-racist movements is the work they do to "unearth sites of resistive memory, history, and practice" (Dyson, 2003, p. 119). Houston Baker Jr. calls this kind of memory work "critical memory," a form of remembrance that simultaneously recalls past injustices and earlier efforts to combat them (Baker, 2001).

Recently, scholars have begun to consider the reverse aspect of this relationship between memory and movements; namely, the ways social movements are themselves remembered. At the conclusion to her study of memories of the civil rights movement, historian Kathryn Nasstrom notes, "By treating the civil rights movement from the perspective of memory and narrative, we call attention to activists not only in their own time, but also in relation to the present and, implicitly, the future" (1998, p. 134). Scholars in communication and rhetoric have pursued this notion with numerous studies attending to the way social movements of the past are remembered and the impact these recollections have on current social struggles. Kimberly Madison, for example, observes the way several historically based films, including *Cry Freedom* (1987), *Amistad* (1988), and *Mississippi Burning* (1988) featured white heroes and, thus, worked to "marginalize African and African American agency" and instead "highlight "white" heroism" (1999, p. 400). Pursuing a similar research agenda, Kristen Hoerl recommends close attention to the complex struggles surrounding efforts to commemorate past social movements and the ways in which such struggles "both nurture and suppress important memories about previous social struggles" (2009, p. 73).

The LGBTQ social movement has had considerable impact on communication and rhetorical studies, and some of this has entailed explorations of public memory. Scholars have carefully sifted through historical memory in an effort to recapture the lost voices of

LGBTQ individuals and open spaces for different ways of remembering. Charles E. Morris III, for example, has developed a large and sophisticated research agenda aimed not only at recovering lost voices, such as the collected speeches of activist Harvey Milk (Morris & Black, 2013), but also discerning new ways to explore existing archives. Morris urges recognition that "the archive's promise as an inventional wellspring is inextricably linked to queer movement; traversal of time and space, mobilization and circulation of meanings that trouble sexual normalcy and its discriminations" (2006, pp. 147–148). In a series of essays, Morris has undertaken this analysis on objects ranging from the AIDS Quilt to Abraham Lincoln in an effort to reframe public memory itself through the simultaneous engagement with a queer archive and a queering of existing archives. In their discussion of queer archives, Morris and K. J. Rawson observe that queer is more than simply a reference to LGBTQ individuals, but "implies a broad critique of normativity along many different axes of identity, community, and power" (Morris & Rawson, 2013, p. 75). E. Cram suggests this queer engagement with archives "plays with the dynamics of absence and presence, illustrating how even if dominant representational strategies attempt to control official narratives of gender and sexuality, that meaning is never guaranteed" (2016, p. 7).

Other scholars have pursued similar projects, examining how public memories of LGBTQ individuals are constituted, critiqued, and transformed. Thomas R. Dunn, for example, examines the public monuments memorializing Oscar Wilde (Dunn, 2014) and Canadian pioneer Alexander Wood (Dunn, 2011) and observes the ways such monuments both enable and limit the creation of queer public memories. Similarly, in her study of the AIDS Quilt, Erin Rand finds ways in which the memorial artifact may limit the possibility of activism by framing the AIDS crisis and the recognition of gay men within a framework of mourning and melancholia. Yet even within the confines of this rhetorical frame, Rand observes that "the process of mourning may actually serve as an opportunity for the externalization of aggression that serves to constitute the subject in a new way" (2007, p. 673).

A final trajectory of research to consider has been the focus in recent years on public memories as they circulate within popular culture. Memory scholars have long recognized a distinction between official memorial practices and the way memories are enacted in more ordinary circumstances. John Bodnar refers to this as a distinction between official and vernacular memories. Ordinary people, as Bodnar notes, will engage in official memorial events but often "they are less interested than cultural leaders in exerting influence of control over others, and are preoccupied, instead, with defending the interests and rights of their respective social segments," and tend to "privilege the personal or vernacular dimension of patriotism over the public one" (Bodnar, 1992, p. 16). Ekaterina Haskins pursues this notion of vernacular memory further to explore the way

the public is drawn into the circulation of particular memory texts. She coins the term "popular memory" to capture this sense of mass appeal and the processes of popularization through which, "historic representations began to speak the language of popular culture to gain traction in popular imagination" (Haskins, 2015, p. 12).

As noted, film is a prominent means by which popular memories achieve mass appeal and circulation. Peter Ehrenhaus examines Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) as invoking the memory of the Holocaust in an effort to relieve America of its "Vietnam syndrome," the legacy of our failed war in Southeast Asia. The film uses memories of World War II and the Holocaust to craft "a reconstituted national identity grounded in uncontested and incontestable moral clarity and commitment" (2001, p. 335). Of course, not all films seeking to depict past events are so uncontested or successful. John Jordan attends to the public controversy arising around Peter Greengass's 2006 movie, *United 93*. The film depicts the event of September 11th and the passengers who rose up against the hijackers on the United 93 flight. Controversy around the film provoked a vibrant discussion of "Hollywood's attempt to construct civic memory, the politics of seeing and avoiding *United 93*, and the veracity of cinematic representations of real events" (Jordan, 2008, p. 218).

Other critics observe the way that certain films can resonate with memories even while not seeking to depict historical events. Claire Sisco King (2006), for example, observes the ways Wolfgang Petersen's *Poseidon*, a remake of the 1972 film *The Poseidon Adventure*, resonates with the trauma of September 11th. In its depiction of a fictional disaster at sea, King contends that the film "attempts to make sense of and move past the traumatic memory of that day" (2008, p. 432). An even broader orientation towards memory is discerned by Greg Dickinson in Gary Ross's 1998 film *Pleasantville*. This film, along with similar films from the late 1990s, offered "spatial visions of nostalgically tinged suburbs that place individuals into the bosom of imperfect but loving and white families, and remake home and away, self and Other, on foundations of security and comfort" (2006, p. 213). Similarly, Kendall Phillips (2015) has argued that the popular documentary films of Michael Moore base much of their rhetorical appeal on an underlying rhetoric of nostalgia that simultaneously seeks a return to past values while opening avenues towards imagining new and different futures.

While films are one of the more obvious places that popular memories are crafted and circulated, there are numerous other aspects of popular culture that seem to operate in similar ways. Michael Butterworth, for instance, finds the intermingling of memory and a valorization of the American military at work in the Pro Football Hall of Fame and suggests, "public memory scholarship would be well served to engage more robustly with the discourses of sports" (Butterworth, 2012, p. 255). Josh Boyd pursues a different aspect

of the intersection between public memory and sports in his analysis of corporate sponsorship of sports arenas. In renaming historic sporting venues, corporate sponsors dramatically shift the way fans interact with these important cultural sites. As Boyd argues, “the name is critically important, anchoring the building as a memory place and making an identity statement about the city and the fans” (Boyd, 2000, p. 331).

In addition to cinema and sports, rhetorical scholars have explored the memorial aspects of numerous other artifacts of popular culture including video games (Hess, 2007), tattoos (Brouwer & Horwitz, 2015), and children’s books (VanderHaagen, 2012). Taken together, these diverse studies recommend the need to seek out the rhetorics of public memory in a wide variety of discourses that do not present themselves as explicitly commemorative.

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