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Memory on Trial

MEMORY ON TRIAL

Media, Citizenship and Social Justice

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LIT

Photo on cover: *Tank Man*. Photo by Jeff Widener

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MEMORY ON TRIAL. MEDIA, CITIZENSHIP AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Anders Høg HANSEN, Oscar HEMER, Thomas TUFTE

"The canvas is a court where the artist is prosecutor, defendant, jury and judge", the Canadian-American painter Phillip Guston said back in 1965. He could not imagine "art without a trial"[1]. An impetus to this book – and its preceding festival with the same title, *Memory on Trial. Media, Citizenship and Social Justice* – was to approach the memory sharing of groups, communities and societies as inevitable struggles over interpretation of, and authority over, particular stories. Coming to terms with the past in memory work, alone or with others, is always unsteady ground with its on-going search for truths and understanding – apropos Guston's prosecutor, defendant, jury and judge. But the trial also points forward: the activation of memory will always relay imaginations of futures we want to shape and inhabit. Here *memory* is elaborated upon, firstly, beyond its common-sensical understanding as a noun and container for storage of the fixed that individuals or collectives may occasionally attempt to retrieve or re-excite (see e.g. Hoskins et al. 2008). *Memory* is also, secondly, approached beyond the individual work of relating to past experience either by intended recall or habitual forms, including those where memory sets off in the mind unexpectedly – a madeleine dipped in a cup of tea triggering childhood memories?

What is at stake in this anthology is the making public of memory, what has been brought into the open, and where the sum – of public memory – becomes more than the individual parts. *Memory* needs social frames and contexts, otherwise it would flicker like dreams in the theatre of consciousness, Schutz notes (in Hoskins et al. 2009: 11).

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[1]   "The canvas is a court where the artist is prosecutor, defendant, jury and judge. Art without a trial disappears at a glance: it is too primitive or hopeful, or mere notions, or simply startling, or just another means to make life bearable"- Philip Guston, 1965 (quoted in Louisiana Museum of Modern Art exhibition, opened 4 July 2014).

In this elaboration of *memory* evolving through social frames, there is an emphasis of memory as a painstaking but also resourceful and future-posing activity that makes it the very *processor* of social changes. It becomes an inevitable activity of the present with which groups, and the media footprints of societal memory they make, try to define the past. *Memory work* also becomes work of catalysis necessary to try to take some kind of hold of the future. Temporary movements of the street, internet blogs, NGOs and governments, major archives, monument builders and History school curricula are domains or groups of people constantly engaged in activities of retrospection, imagination and reinterpretation, trying to give authority to and mediating particular stories.

With this book we have tried to engage scholars and intellectuals that do not necessarily place themselves at the centre of *memory studies* within the humanities or social sciences, but who all share an interest in *how citizens can actualize a public* and how citizens and groups struggle with their pasts and presents – and other group's understandings – in their work for futures they dream of, or envision. This leads into an engagement with the notion of *social justice*, which in turn implies *trial* and revision of ideas and procedures of how to share the world. But to *share* also takes some kind of common ground and distributed power. Memory is here understood as *living*, not just by providing access to the container or archive of societal memory, but the very contestation and use of memory as *developing* rather than *dormant* material – with help from Aleida Assmann (2010) this may be named *working memory*, as opposed to *storage memory*. Living memory implies events of activation where citizens create meaning of the present and near past by exploring or challenging understandings of societal development.

The media, and their increasing ubiquity, both produce and conceal tensions between living memory and established history. They also continuously imprint on our memory and vice versa. The imprints are continuously written over, partly or fully, with new representations. But silenced or overwritten memories can also make their sudden return. This anthology engages with a range of cases that bring views and voices back in public, demanding justice, recognition, sometimes literally triggering new trials.

Some of the bringing back of voices and views is done strategically, in the context of communication for development and social change interventions where NGOs, community-based organizations, governments or UN agencies pursue not just voice and views, but also very material demands for social justice and social change. A lot of the campaigns and strategies within communication for development and social change are driven by the impetus of meeting immediate needs, responding to urgent demands and promoting development as a process of constructing a better future with health, education and sustainable solutions to the various needs. However, no sustainable development process or strong sense of ownership, commitment and engagement can be articulated if it is not contextual-

ized and takes its point of departure in the histories and trajectories of the issues and people at stake.

While the Western notion of development, and particularly that of the modernization paradigm, has been severely criticized for its uniform, linear and economic growth orientation, the debates of post-development, post-colonialism, cosmopolitanism and other notions of development follow other criteria. They speak for example about development as 'happiness' and 'the good life' (de Souza Silva 2011) thus opening up for other histories, trajectories and narratives to be considered about development. In communicating about development in these contexts, living memory is an approach and a resource this book wishes to promote. Some memory work can be seen in communication for development interventions in the stories that are told, the genres that are chosen to convey these stories and in the media formats and channels applied. However, this book calls for a stronger incorporation of living memory into the work of communication for development practitioners.

Working with the public sphere is a strategic site for communicators for development. The public sphere may here be viewed as a *memory of publics* (see e.g. Phillips 2004), where issues are brought into the open, but maybe in fragmented publics, in plural, and taking globalization into account. Places and platforms are nevertheless where citizens come together and act and authorize certain memories. Acts of sharing, but also of including, excluding, and persuading, are inevitable in the struggle with/for public memory, which may remind us of Hannah Arendt's notion of *action,* emphasizing the collective nature of a citizenry, disclosing and expressing itself with others (Arendt 1958: 182-200).

It may be difficult to make a difference as a lone activist, whereas changing the world is easier to imagine for a group. We may nevertheless think of resistance that – while inevitably triggered by social circumstances – takes the form of a highly individualised action. When this introduction was drafted it was the 25th anniversary of the 'Tank Man' protest at Tiananmen Square. The most well-known and depicted documentation of the event is one photograph capturing a lone protester standing in front of four driving tanks (the column was much longer) brought to a halt. It was 5 June 1989, the day after the Chinese government had removed a larger group of demonstrators by force from the square. The photo is an example of how an incident may be framed by media and then distributed. It has become a well-known and globalized 'flashbulb' memory (Brown and Kulik, 1977 in Hoskins et al. 2009: 12), a glimpse of an incident many people remember. A media memory of a magnitude implying that those that are old enough recall where they were, or what they were doing, when they heard about it or saw it on TV. What is not captured in the photo is further drama and story development: the man crawls up on top of the first halted tank, has a conversation with a driver, then leaves, but when the column begins to move again, 'Tank man' returns and makes

them stop again. Soon he is pulled away by two guards. Who he was and what happened to him, we don't know.

Here, media do not just function as tools or channels for the distribution. When engaging with possible change, practices of communication become important means of articulating and scrutinizing change, revisiting our pasts and mapping out futures.

The conflict between official history, or the hegemonic narrative of History books (History with a capital 'H') and its alternative, revisionist or silenced voices, has long been of concern in the humanities – and with the advent of new social media practices in the 21st century, the fragmentation of a public may, on a positive note, open for a proliferation of voices and more peer-to-peer and group-to-group exchanges, also across distance, although not replacing more traditional one-to-many mass communication. The potentiality of citizen engagement around social justice is of importance in societal debates concerning what, how and for whom we remember, not least in transitional processes of attempted healing and reconciliation after incidents of massacres or mass-violence. Such traumatic events are most often concealed, and witnesses silenced or ignored, either to preserve impunity for the perpetrators, or for the sake of "moving on." Yet telling the story in all its horrific detail may be a prerequisite for true reconciliation. Whether formally, through truth commissions and memorials, or informally, through grass-roots initiatives or artistic interventions, memories of collective trauma need to be constructed and maintained, in order for a society to acknowledge and possibly come to terms with appalling and shameful parts of its history.

The notion of *"transitional justice"* is usually associated with formal judicial processes that bring punishment and redress. But sanctioning memory, honouring the dead, and allowing the suppressed stories to be told can arguably also be defined as a form of justice, regardless of legal procedures, as demonstrated by the proliferation of truth commissions in the last decades, although the real impact of these extra-legal commissions with regard to (national) reconciliation is a highly disputed matter.[2]

Today's discourse on memory within the humanities and social sciences emerged in the 1980s, with the Holocaust as its fundamental reference, and reached momentum in the late '90s, when first-hand experience of the Nazi death camps was beginning to disappear. Our knowledge of the Shoah has long been confined to what James E. Young (2000) calls history's after-images. Discussing the after-image of the Shoah in relation to children of Holocaust survivors, Young's colleague Marianne Hirsch (1997) coined the concept *postmemory* for

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[2]   Cf. for example the legal prosecution of the Argentinean military Junta leaders and the still ongoing trials against perpetrators of ''the dirty war" in the 1970s to the amnesty process of the South African TRC (Hemer, 2012). For a thorough discussion of traumatic memory and transitional justice, see Bird and Ottanelli (2015).

this intermediate state between (personal) 'memory' and (public) 'history'. *Post-memory*, as Hirsch defines it, applies specifically to the second generation; those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, and whose own stories are overshadowed or even eradicated by the traumatic experiences of the parent-generation.

The *postmemory* concept has since appeared in many other contexts of contested traumatic experiences, for example in Argentina with regard to the children of the disappeared (see e g. Beatriz Sarlo's intriguing comparison of the "post-memories" of the generation of the guerrillas and those of their children, in Sarlo 2005), and lately in Spain, where the third and fourth generations of the victims of the terror during and after the Civil War (1936-39) are coming forth, demanding recognition and justice for their murdered grand and grand grandparents.

Spain, often presented as the model for a successful transition from dictator-ship to democracy, is also an example of the perils of closing the book on the contested past without either a judicial process or a truth commission (see e. g. Martin-Ortega and Alija-Fernández in Bird and Ottanelli 2015). An even more striking example of the lingering consequences of silenced trauma is the partition of British India in 1947, which displaced some twelve million people and caused the death of up to one million in gruesome communal violence. No official memorial has ever been raised over the victims of the Partition.

There are many examples of different ways to deal with the societal impact of violent conflict, whether ethnic, religious (communal, sectarian) or political ("national liberation", revolution), and whether imposed by the state ("combating terrorism") or by insurgent groups or paramilitary organizations. The rationale for suppressing or discouraging performances of traumatic memory may be, as in the two disparate cases of Spain and India, that these performances have the potential to inflame latent conflicts and instigate new outbursts of violence. However, as Eva Hoffman argues, suppressing the "long afterlife of loss" may also deprive the next generation of the ability not only to validate the suffering of the past, but to use that memory constructively in the future (Hoffman 2010: 414).

Literature and art have likewise played an important role for the public memory and processing of the perpetrated violence and its consequences. The fictional accounts are supplementary to testimonies and documentary accounts, especially when testimonies are absent, but they may also sometimes question and even stand in opposition to the testimonials, defying both the official history and the alternative counter-history, as demonstrated in the Argentinean discussion of the Malvinas/Falklands War (Hemer in Bird and Ottanelli 2015). This tension between fiction and truth attains crucial importance when it comes to historical events where few or none of the first-hand witnesses are still alive, as in the cases of the Spanish Civil War and the Indian Partition (as well as the Holocaust). The understanding

and imagination of these events is largely shaped and conveyed through fictional mediations.

Implicitly or explicitly, the common denominator for these theoretical and empirical explorations is to demonstrate how 'living memory' work can be crucial for citizens to move forward as plural collectives (or counter collectives) and create or revitalize publics that engage in social justice debates and change processes.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The anthology is divided into two parts. Part I presents the scene of the inquiry with primarily theoretical discussions exploring approaches to memory, media and communication studies. Part II directs orientation towards actual empirical and locational cases, bringing in practices of art, movements and ethnographic reflections with the aim of providing elaborations on how memory work ignites public debate and re-actualises particular pasts or issues/memories of concern for particular groups. *Kendall R. Phillips* (chapter 2) explores contests over our recollections and interpretations of the past and the considerable anxiety they provoke. His chapter suggests that the struggle over how to remember the past can be productively understood as a rhetorical process. The relationship between memory and the art of rhetoric is pursued through the historical connection between these concepts in ancient western philosophy. Focusing on this relationship suggests attending to the processes by which the past is debated as an indicator of democratic culture.

Jo Tacchi (chapter 3) examines how *voice, stillness* and *nostalgia* may play a progressive role in debates around development. Her contribution addresses the role of 'stillness' and 'nostalgia' in a contemporary concern for sustainability in international development. Communication for development and social change increasingly thinks about sustainable development and the importance of grounding our understandings of development processes within local contexts. While closer consideration of complex local contexts adds to understandings of processes of social change, ideas about culture and tradition can be considered backward looking and contrary to the forward-looking, progress-oriented goals of development itself. Tacchi challenges that culture and tradition are backward looking and focuses on ideas of 'stillness' and 'nostalgia' as evoked through close study of media practices. She considers how notions of voice and listening might be understood as moments of stillness in a fast moving and mobile world, and how experiences of nostalgia can be considered as located in the present, and part of aspirations for the future.

While Tacchi turns her focus towards new ways of viewing nostalgia and stillness, *Thomas Hylland Eriksen* (chapter 4) turns his attention to a *structural amnesia* as a distinct feature of global modernity. The term, coined to describe how tribal genealogies in Africa tended to vanish into the mists of oblivion after the fifth or sixth generation, applies to present-day society's concealing of its immanent "double bind", that is the dual impossibility of continued economic growth and its reversal ("degrowth"). If the past is no longer convincingly connected to the present, because imagined futures do not shed a particularly flattering light on the past to which we have been committed for generations, then the only credible response consists in reinventing the past to make it suitable for a meaningful present and future. Hence, Eriksen suggests that we replace the "standard modern script" with an ecological multispecies history, and a history of human justice and happiness rather than progress and development.

Thomas Olesen (chapter 5) addresses the possible global character of collective memory, and in particular *global injustice memories*. The last couple of decades have witnessed a virtual boom in academic works on collective memory. This body of work has made great strides in our understanding of the social and political character of memories. The literature remains limited, however, when it comes to the *global* character of some collective memories. Olesen suggests a number of empirical cases that can potentially be addressed from a global memory perspective. He also offers a range of suggestions for crucial analytical themes and discusses the relationship between global memories and global society. The focus of the chapter is on global *injustice* memories, i.e. memories based on events that entail perceived injustice towards individuals or collectives.

Thomas Tufte (chapter 6) builds on Kendall R. Phillips' notion of public memory as a rhetorical strategy and elaborates on an argument on how *memory work* can add a new dimension to both the research and practice of communication for development and social change. What is often overlooked is how memory constitutes a hidden resource in communicating for social change. In this chapter, Tufte proposes a three-pronged *diachronic dimension* to research in and practice of communication for development and social change. Recognizing public memory as both a rhetorical and political strategy and being attentive to the challenges of translating the past into a meaningful present altogether constitute stepping stones, both in planning communication for social change strategies and in understanding their dynamics and potential. This diachronic dimension, Tufte argues, can furthermore prove a useful pathway to deepen our understanding of what really happened with the 'eruption' of social movements in recent years.

Tamar Katriel begins Part II (chapter 7) with a study on the Israeli veteran's organization *Breaking the Silence* and their counter-discourse to a culture of silence surrounding the reality of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. Tamar discusses how this silence has been punctuated by voices of public dissent.

One such counter-discourse is generated, circulated and archived by *Breaking the Silence*. Amassing soldiers' testimonies of their experiences as upholders of the regime in the Palestinian territories, the organization's memory activism seeks to trigger open discussion of the country's military policies and their moral implications. Capitalizing on their authentic knowledge of the occupation regime, which is rooted in their embodied presence and participation in its day-to-day life, the soldier-witnesses circulate personal accounts of what they did, saw and felt during their military service in the Palestinian territories. They ground their project in a speech culture that highlights the value of defiant truth-telling, and use personal experience stories in attempting to constitute counterpublics that would support the kind of open public debate they envision. The testimonial project of *Breaking the Silence* demonstrates the possibilities and entanglements of 'memory activism' as a form of civic engagement within the wider field of anti-occupation protest in Israeli contentious politics – and beyond.

S. Elizabeth Bird's case study (chapter 8) also addresses attempts to counter silenced or minimally reported stories. She focuses on an incident in the early months of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967, when the civilian population of Asaba was decimated in an unprovoked attack by Nigerian federal troops. The massacres went largely unreported in the press and subsequently received minimal attention in civil war histories. The people of Asaba have remembered, and are now attempting to re-inscribe their story into the official collective memory of Nigeria. Bird's recollection touches on the role of "old media" in suppressing the story, before moving to a discussion of the collaborative process of "reclaiming" the narrative and working to inscribe the lost history into the collective memory of the country, providing a form of overdue justice. Such public re-inscription is inevitably contested, but no more so than in a country still embroiled in ethnic and religious conflict. Bird discusses the potential of new media to provide sites in which such "memory work" may take place. From Israel-Palestine over Africa to Latin America:

Alfonso Gumucio Dagron (chapter 9) focuses on memory in relation to documentary film and movies. How does a movie remember? If a film aims to share or disclose the past, how do images activate the viewer's memory? What do we remember when we see a film? How do we create social relationships with the past through images? Being a filmmaker, a communication for development practitioner, and a researcher himself, Gumucio takes us on a *tour de force* through documentary film history, exploring how the documentary film debate has revolved around reality, truth and memory. Filmmaking implies choices and decisions that are creative as well as political and ideological. This also counts in the ways documentary film works with memory. Focusing on Latin American documentary film, Gumucio Dagron ends his essay by making a particular call for the urgency to use film to preserve the memory of people and cultures, a call for the need to

also make an effort to preserve film archives *per se,* and finally he calls for polit-ical will to strengthen collective processes of documentary film production at the community level.

In Chapter 10 *Toby Butler* unveils his journey of developing an oral history practice to create walking trails, or 'memoryscapes', that incorporate oral history recordings into our experience of the landscape. Along the way he explains why he spent weeks in a rowing boat on the River Thames, intensely following flotsam for fifteen miles, and how that experience opened up for the creative potential of using oral history in place-based media.

Chapter 11 continues in the experimental mode as an attempt of approach-ing the present past by means of what *Oscar Hemer* tentatively calls "ethno-graphic fiction". The city of Bangalore (Bengaluru) is portrayed in a form of meta-reportage that juxtaposes impressions of three journeys to the "IT metropolis", in 2003 and 2013. Hemer's literary recollection is interspersed with photographs by Bangalore-based artist *Ayisha Abraham*.

Sarah Nuttall (chapter 12) considers the questions posed by the rubric of 'memory on trial' by reflecting on the slow death of Nelson Mandela. She consid-ers not only Mandela's own attitudes to death and dying as well as his confronta-tion with his own possible death as early as 1964, but also how he dealt with the deaths of others in the context of his twenty-seven years in prison. Mandela's ac-tual death and the attempts by his family to extract money out of the event raised discussions on the relationship between death, memory and money. Nuttall argues that the task now is to interpret the meaning of his life in relation to other global figures such as Gandhi and King, an area where surprisingly little scholarship has been done.

With the final chapter (13), *Anders Høg Hansen* and *Erling Björgvinsson* take us back to one of the cities where early versions of these chapters were presented in 2013: the city of Malmö, Sweden. The chapter explores a recent attempt to archive and make publicly visible on the Internet, a productive historical era of popular folk-song writing in the city of Malmö. While introducing a local cultural association's now over 500 song lyrics archive (Project Malmö Folk Song), the chapter concentrates on an analysis of a selection of songs from the archive and their portrayal of one of the oldest public parks in the world, *Folkets Park* (People's Park) in Malmö. It questions how the park is represented as a place for different forms of public memory and citizen activity, socially and politically. The chapter also engages with the project's various means of preserving and revitalizing a musical heritage as a 'living archive'.

This volume is the outcome of the third *Ørecomm Festival*, a four-day aca-demic and artistic event in Malmö, Roskilde and Copenhagen in September 2013, with the title *Memory on Trial. Media, Citizenship and Social Justice*. The yearly *Ørecomm Festival* was initiated in 2011 by researchers active in the *Ørecomm*

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Center for Communication and Global Change, a bi-national collaboration between Roskilde University in Denmark and Malmö University in Sweden. We are happy that most of the keynote speakers at the *Memory on Trial* conference have developed their work into chapters for this anthology.

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