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Towards Transcultural Memory Studies

Arguably, memory studies is in the process of consolidating into an academic field. This is testified to by an ever-growing number of research centres and funded projects; by the establishment of journals and book series; and finally by the trickling down of the field's questions, theories and methods into university curricula. Like media or gender before it, cultural memory has become both a key concept in the humanities and the social sciences and a specific context of interdisciplinary research and teaching.

But after a quarter of a century of what I have elsewhere called the "second phase" of memory studies (the first phase being the 1920s), with all its now well-known characteristics (among them a "memory boom" in society and academia, a virtually unsurpassed interdisciplinary and international dimension of research activity) and familiar protagonists (Nora in France, the Assmanns in Germany, Huyssen in the United States, Radstone in Great Britain, and many others) – whither is memory studies moving now?

This talk proposes that one of the major roads for future memory studies to take should (and probably will) be "the transcultural", that is, approaches which enable us to look at memory from a perspective which is precisely *not* cultural, in the sense of being confined to a specific cultural formation. I will argue that the transcultural is not only an adequate tool for understanding memory in the current age of globalization, but also in an historical light: All cultural memory is fundamentally transcultural memory. This talk will also contend that a transcultural perspective might emerge as a fundamentally different approach to cultural memory, a new way of looking at memory-phenomena, which could alter the field beyond what we have known so far and at the same time help to get rid of some of its fundamental flaws.

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