

Recovery and Transgression

Recovery and Transgression:

Memory in American Poetry

Edited by

Kornelia Freitag

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INTRODUCTION

KORNELIA FREITAG

*He wishes he could figure out how memory acts.
Or how an act remembers.*
—Keith Waldrop, “First Draw the Sea”

Memory is one of the most basic and important features of human beings. Thus it has fascinated scholars, scientists, and artists since antiquity. Poetic texts shape and are shaped by personal, collective, and cultural memory. The past is recovered in poetry in manifold moves that are, despite, or rather because of, their unquestionable relation to the past, their *Nachträglichkeit*, always also multidirectional and transgressive. While we tend to think of memory as serving the *recovery* of the past by safeguarding and containing it, as “retaining and recalling past experience” (*Webster’s* 1995, “memory”), the workings of memory are much more complex. They are, in fact, often *transgressions* of what “really” happened, of good taste, of what is officially sanctioned; they “go beyond or over,” even “act in violation of” the limits (*Webster’s* 1995, “transgress”) of “past experience.”

In a somewhat different context, Bernard Stiegler explains the contradictory dynamics of memory production:

The preservation of memory, of the memorable (selection for inclusion in the memorizable, the retention of this memorable element, creates it as such), is always already also its elaboration: it is never a question of a simple story of “what happened,” since what happened has only happened in not having completely happened; it is memorized only through its being forgotten, only in its being effaced; selection of what merits retention occurs in what should have been, and therefore also in anticipating, positively and negatively, what soon will have been able to happen (retention is always already protention). (Stiegler 2012, 126)

Literature has always been a primary medium for the selective/exclusive, preservative/creative, repetitive/elaborative, illuminating/obfuscating, retaining/forgetting, representing/effacing, backward-/forward-looking tradi-

tion of re/making memory. “Literature is news that STAYS news” (Pound 1960, 29), as Ezra Pound famously summarized the contradictory momentum that propels literary texts. As much as this conviction seems to be focused on the present and the future (“news”), it is, basically, an observation concerning poetic memory: what *stays* is what is *remembered* and included in “the memorable” (Stiegler 2012, 126). *What gives which* works their staying power, what makes readers and writers remember some but not other texts, has as much to do with the textual structures themselves as with the cultural situation in which they are re-collected: both establish the “selection of what merits retention” (Stiegler 2012, 126).

This becomes clear in all of the essays in this collection, which were originally delivered as papers at a 2012 international poetry conference at Ruhr-University Bochum, in Germany. These essays are devoted to the manifold transgressive moves by which different pasts have been and are recovered in American poetry and thereby “made new.” The focus is on the effects of the cultural interaction, mixture, translation, and hybridization of the memory *of, in, and mediated by* poetry (Erll and Nünning 2005, 264-65). The interest is in American poetry as an integral part of literary developments that transcend U.S. national borders and as integrally connected to other fields of cultural knowledge. The contributions are devoted to poetic memories that result from the recovery and transgression of real and imaginary boundaries between geographical spaces, cultural archives, national traditions, disciplines and forms of writing and thinking in different times up to today.

Before introducing the scope and variety of essays in this volume, I will look at a question that was not directly addressed during the conference, focused as it was on memory and the transnational: namely, memory and the lyric. While this topic (extending from the definition of “the lyric” to the varying ideological baggage of the term and mode) is much too large to be tackled comprehensively in an introduction to an essay collection, it remains an intriguing phenomenon. Hence, I will present on the next pages a number of observations on ways that American writers today react self-consciously to the well-established lyric tradition of addressing memory.

What will become obvious from both the essays in the volume and my cursory glance at four American poems penned after the turn of the millennium is not only that memory remains an important topic in today’s American poetry but also that strategies that de-center the poetic subject are especially fruitful to engage with the lyric tradition of writing memory. By “de-center[ing] the subject,” a strategy is used that Richard Sennett has, in an article presenting sociological findings on the shaping of

collective memory,¹ called instrumental for the development of a productive memory, since “a searching memory requires a de-centered subject” (Sennett 1998, 20). He is following insights of Maurice Halbwachs, according to whom, in Sennett’s words,

Recall will remain active only if narrating remains restless. The facts of the past have to be used to combat people’s tendency, in his words, to “center themselves in their memories” . . . [C]ritical voices both stimulate recall and destabilize narrative reconstruction. (Sennett 1998, 20)

While it is not really surprising that memory in poetry should follow the same basic rules as in other arenas of life, the essays in this volume suggest that one of a variety of ways to bring about a “de-center[ing] of the subject” (Sennett 1998, 20)—and the lyric tradition based upon it—has always been to transnationalize the lyric subject or text. Yet another way to “de-cente[r] the subject” (Sennett 1998, 20) in poetry is calling upon *scientific* knowledge and methods of engaging with memory—as can be observed in the poems by Peter Gizzi, Pimone Triplett, and Keith Waldrop that I discuss below (and as is certainly observable in texts by a host of other poets writing and publishing today). In other words, in order to transgress the long established tradition of using the lyric to write about memory, these three poets choose to emulate or play upon discourses outside the humanities and thereby disentangle themselves decidedly from a specifically “literary” realm, which in poetry today is often thought to be synonymous with the “lyric.” That the leap to the other, the extra-poetical culture is never complete, is enabled by and couched in a multiplicity of literary and poetical strategies, goes without saying. The texts by Gizzi, Triplett, and Waldrop are resolutely poetry and not science writing; they are examples of “the *language art*” that uses, in Marjorie Perloff’s formulation, “language that is somehow extraordinary, that can be processed only on re-reading” (Perloff 2006, 143, emphasis original).

Still, an important trend related to memory in today’s poetry scene is nonetheless the continuation of the lyric tradition. The most interesting examples acknowledge this tradition while also transgressing it. John Ashbery’s “Obsidian House,” included in *A Norton Anthology of New Poetry: American Hybrid*² (Ashbery 2009, 25-26) and first published in

¹ Sennett studied the collective memory associated with the loss of jobs of computer programmers who worked for IBM in New York.

² Edited by Cole Swenson and David St. John. The volume’s subtitle indicates the editors’ aim to showcase that the two-camp-model of American poetry, in which the “innovators,” were set against the “traditionalists,” “is no longer the most

Chinese Whispers (2002), is a good case in point. It unquestionably invokes the lyric tradition by an epigraph from the beginning of the first stanza of Friedrich Hölderlin's famous "Mnemosyne" (ca. 1803).³ The German poet's anguished recollection of the dead Greek heroes and their time announces already by its title his engagement with the question of memory and, specifically, with cultural memory. Hölderlin's stanza starts optimistically: "*The Fruits are ripe, dipped in fire, cooked / and tested here on earth*" (Ashbery 2009, 25, Ashbery's emphasis)—and this is where Ashbery breaks off the quote. The original sentence continues, in fact, with a complete reversal of the Dionysian mood established so far: "and it is a law / Prophetic, that all things pass / Like snakes" (Hölderlin 1984, 197, ll. 2-3). Thus, the left-out rest of the sentence expresses—contrary to its life-affirming beginning—Hölderlin's acknowledgement of the inevitable power of mortality and forgetting. This acceptance of forgetting presupposes memory—which is further stressed in Hölderlin's twofold use in this stanza of "behalten" (Hölderlin 1984, 196, ll. 8 and 14),⁴ German for "to keep" and "to keep in mind," i.e., to remember.

Despite Ashbery's meaning-changing truncation of the quotation, his stance is not at all more confident than that of the older poet. In fact, it is every bit as tragic. As Luke Carson has argued regarding the function of Hölderlin for Ashbery, "the tragic appears in Ashbery's work specifically through a series of allusions to the work of the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin" (Carson 2008, 182). Yet, this tragic mode is finely calibrated to our postmodern or post-postmodern cultural moment by the "self-contradiction of Ashbery's poetics[, which] makes him such a unique—but also curiously elusive—figure in the annals of late twentieth-century [and early twenty-first-century] poetry" (Perloff 2013, 14-15).

Ashbery further complicates Hölderlin's poem, which alternates between optimism ("the fruits are ripe") and resignation ("all things pass"), by what Brian Reed has called in another context "attenuated hypotaxis": a meandering from one grammatical unit to another that allows for "some relation of subordination" while also "blur[ring] those connections and inhibit[ing] the formation of clear, neat, larger units"

accurate one and that . . . the contemporary moment is dominated by rich writings that . . . hybridize core attributes of previous 'camps' in diverse and unprecedented ways" (Swenson 2009, xvii).

³ I follow Beissner's opinion of the stanza's function as a variant for the first stanza of "Mnemosyne" (cf. Sieburth 1984, 277).

⁴ Sieburth translates Hölderlin's "behalten" the first time as "to bear in mind" (l. 8) and the second time as "to retain" (l. 14) (Hölderlin 1984, 197).

(Reed 2000, 117). The third stanza of “Obsidian House” may serve to illustrate the structural “attenuation” of Ashbery’s verse:

Further, one was sure
 one had come to pass,
 yet no slovenly proof was
 ever forwarded.
 (Ashbery 2009, 25, ll. 9-12)

This is a full grammatical sentence in simple, everyday language. The second line is clearly subordinate to the first, and the last two lines are subordinate to the first two lines. Yet it is not clear whether “one” in the second line is the same “one” as in the previous line, or perhaps some-“one” else, not to mention the open question of who is meant by “one” in the first line and what “one was sure” about or what “had come to pass,” no matter by whose agency. Moreover, the last two lines that assure the reader that “no . . . proof was / ever forwarded” unexpectedly void the assurance that was presented in the first two lines (“one was sure”), an assertion that makes the attribute “slovenly” for “proof” not only superfluous but semantically mistaken. Yet while there is no definite meaning to ascribe to any given line within the stanza, meaning is mockingly remade and/or postponed time and again. The stanza definitely thematizes knowledge about the past and how one may prove it; it is “somehow about” memory and how it can(not) be proven, (not) even if “slovenly.”

The overall disjointed impression of the poem is augmented (or intensified) by Ashbery’s strategies of subverting the lofty style of Hölderlin’s hymn by abrupt stylistic changes (as between the prophetic and the profane from the second to the third line in the example above) and of stripping his poem of any consistent use of a poetic speaker. The third-person speaker of the beginning (ll. 1-22) is supplanted in line 23 by a first-person speaker, who starts confiding that “I hoped (was hoping) . . . ,” only to be replaced by a “we” in the next (and last) stanza, which concludes the poem with the three lines “We *forgot* about the / treasure, *forgot* it happened / among the madness of whirling wheat” (ll. 34-36, emphasis added). The repeated non-sequiturs notwithstanding, this ending establishes unmistakably that mortality and forgetting are the very topics that Ashbery negotiates in his poem, just as Hölderlin does. Even in its repeated denial of their persistence, the poem conjures ghostly memories of mythical heroism (“treasure” and something that “happened”)—without presenting a hero or a consistent remembering subject.

Indeed, Ashbery is following Hölderlin more closely than one might think, despite the fact that Ashbery abstains from any direct topical reference to memory while Hölderlin's title "Mnemosyne" expressly invokes the Greek Goddess of remembrance and mother of the muses. Hölderlin obviously struggled writing "Mnemosyne" and he composed three introductory stanzas. The stanza that begins "The fruits are ripe," chosen by Ashbery as epigraph, seems to have been written to replace the two earlier versions. The one designated the second version by Beissner (cf. Sieburth 1984, 277) starts full of doubt and bitterness ("A sign we are, without meaning . . . and have nearly / Lost our language") to move to an assured ending ("But there is *One*, / Without doubt, who / Can change this any day. He *needs* / *No law*;" Hölderlin 1984, 117, emphasis added). In the version that Ashbery selected for his epigraph, this movement from despair to hope has been reversed to lead from an optimistic ("The fruits are ripe") to a sober mood ("All things pass"), as argued above. In particular, the possibility of Christ's second coming ("One . . . who . . . needs no law" in the previous version) is clearly negated by a stress placed on the applicability of the *law* of transience to *all*: "it is a law / . . . that *all* things pass" (Hölderlin 1984, 197, ll. 2-3, emphasis added). No exception is made for Christ, the "One" is not mentioned anymore.

Looking back at Ashbery's four-line stanza quoted earlier, it becomes evident that he is playing on the wording of both of Hölderlin's versions ("there is *One*, / Without doubt" and "*All things pass*") in order to perform the same move from assurance ("one was sure") to complete negation of hope for higher interference ("no . . . proof was / ever forwarded") in one stanza that Hölderlin performed between his two stanzas. He repeats Hölderlin's move, only that he "attenuated" (Reed 2000, 117) the connection of "one" to Jesus by spelling it with a small "o" and changed to an overall lower register.

"Obsidian House" recalls and repudiates Greek myth, Biblical prophecy, and German Romantic poetry; Ashbery recovers and transgresses cultural and poetic memory. Much more could be written on Ashbery's memorial strategies: how his "elaborate artifice . . . contradict[s] the close to life quality" of his language, how "literary citation . . . undercut[s] the surprise element" (Perloff 2013, 15), and how, "[i]n spite of many ironies," his take on memory "is solidly grounded in the lyric tradition" (Carson 2008, 181). Yet for reasons of space I move on to another and opposite trend in writing memory in poetry that tackles the tradition of embracing (and revising) memory's lyric and/or tragic representation by approaching it head-on in quasi-scientific fashion.

Peter Gizzi, for instance, starts with a number of perfectly confident theses in his poem “Human Memory is Organic,” first published in *The Outernational* in 2007 and also included in *A Norton Anthology of New Poetry* (Gizzi 2009, 155-156). The poem’s title is already a complete proposition. It is followed by the restatement of a fact from physics: “We know time is a wave” (l. 1); by a petrological observation: “You can see it in gneiss” (l. 2); and the statement “everything crumbles” (l. 3). This is a far cry from the narrative of Mnemosyne in Greek myth, Hölderlin’s groping for the right way to begin “Mnemosyne,” and even from Ashbery’s ironic despair that “We forgot about the / treasure, forgot it happened / among the madness of whirling wheat.” Gizzi seems almost to talk back to Ashbery, whose memory seems stuck in the prison of lava, in an “Obsidian House,” when he cautions in the next two lines “Don’t despair. / That’s the message frozen in old stone” (ll. 4-5).

Of course, Gizzi’s poem is vastly different than a scientific treatise, and its different “propositions” are much too open to make for a rational scientific argument on the “organic quality of memory.” “Organic” alone has seven different meanings listed in *Webster’s New College Dictionary*, ranging from “1. Of, relating to, or affecting an organ of the body” to “3 b Free from chemical additives” to “7. Chem. Of or designating carbon compounds.” Hence, what it actually means that “Human Memory is Organic” is open to question. The poem—which proceeds in fast motion from “I” (ll. 6 and 8) to “us” (twice l. 18), from “water” (l. 8) to “consciousness” (l. 10), from “seeing” (l. 11) to “story” (ll. 14 and 15), and from “message frozen in . . . stone” (l. 4) to “all unstable and becoming” (l. 19)—does not really answer this question precisely. It opens all kinds of collective memory narratives—related to community, life, literature, and communication—that make the poem strikingly exploratory. It perfectly exemplifies Gizzi’s explanation that “I write to discover what I might know only in the act of making the poem itself. Writing as an aid to discovery, and to hold always a space open, to give this openness some relief” (Gizzi 2007, 47). The answer aligns him with Lyn Hejinian’s *Writing Is an Aid to Memory* (discussed in this volume by Michael Golston) and also with the poetics of writers like Susan Howe and Rosmarie Waldrop, who are—like Gizzi—indebted to Jack Spicer and Charles Olson, whose poetics of the “open field” Gizzi evokes at the end of his explanation quoted above.

Whatever else one can say about “Human Memory is Organic,” its mood is unemotional. Notwithstanding the two sentences beginning with “I” and covering five and a half lines, the poem is anything but lyrical, and

it ends with something that can be read as a closing announcement on the tragic-lyrical memorial tradition:

The organic existence of gravity.
The organic nature of history.

The natural history of tears.
(Gizzi, 2009, 156, ll. 22-24)

A final effort at definition in these lines characterizes organically based “Human Memory” as the expression and result of coordinates that are natural (“gravity’s”), historical (“history’s”), and also emotional (“tears”). Emotions, symbolized by the word “tears,” would, of course, necessitate a human subject—which has, at this point of Gizzi’s poetic “discovery,” been removed as subject of enunciation. The lyric subject, as the *one* who is speaking and feeling memory, is absent. It is in this sense that Olivier Brossard is right when he writes that “it is true to state that Peter Gizzi aims at renegotiating the lyric tradition” (Brossard 2008, 2). It is a renegotiation from the outside, presented by an interested observer looking on. The short and belated nod to memory’s connection to “tears” reminds one of the way neuroscientist and director of the Brain and Behavior Research Group at the Open University, Steven P. R. Rose refers to affect. As an afterthought to his overview on “Neuroscience and Memory” (Rose 1998, 135-139) and before he starts laying out “The Taxonomy of Memory” (Rose 1998, 139-142), Rose notes that “human memory . . . demands not just cognition but affect too” (139). For both the poet and the neuroscientist, affect needs to be mentioned but it is not the topic of concentration.

Keith Waldrop’s “First Draw the Sea” in *A Norton Anthology of New Poetry* (Waldrop 2009, 441-445), first published in *The House Seen from Nowhere* (2002), also engages the question of memory’s “nature,” likewise approaching it from outside the traditional realm of lyrical poetry, and likewise bridging the gap between C. P. Snow’s “two cultures”—i.e., the humanities and the sciences. Yet Waldrop chooses to clearly anchor in a persona the freewheeling thoughts of what he calls “Interludes” (Waldrop 2009, 441)—some cross between Blaise Pascal’s *Les Pensées* and Bertolt Brecht’s *Keuner-Geschichten*. Waldrop names this persona “Herr Stimmung” (Waldrop 2009, 441; in English, something like Mr. Mood, Mr. Sentiment, or Mr. Humor). Here is a passage concerning Herr Stimmung’s thoughts on memory:

He wishes he could figure out how memory acts.

Or how an act remembers.

Struck by the intelligence of his hands, he would like to disguise us as animals.

(Waldrop 2009, 443)

Herr Stimmung approaches the problem that memory cannot be seen, smelled, tasted, or touched but is only perceptible in act(ion)s or/and especially when it fails. While memory is essential for thought, speech, *and* bodily functions, the latter is often forgotten—especially by people working in the lofty realms of the humanities and in the even loftier realms of literature. This is exactly the point, or at least one of the points Keith Waldrop discloses with the help of his naïve and curious protagonist. Through Herr Stimmung, he can raise basic questions: the connection between “memory” and “an act,” who “acts” and/or “remembers,” and how procedural memory, “the intelligence of his hands,” connects humans to “animals” (humans are not animals, or else it would be unnecessary “to *disguise* us as animals”).

Not surprisingly—if one is familiar with Waldrop’s strategy of condensing, defamiliarizing, and thereby highlighting the knowledge (and the limits of knowledge) of our time in his epigrammatic and ironic long poems—the three lines unfold an entire, quite serious research program. As if taking his cue from Waldrop’s last line quoted above, Steven P. R. Rose explains his own method:

I shall begin with human memory, but will be arguing quite strongly that we can learn a great deal about the brain mechanism of human memory, and even about the strategies for repairing damaged memory, on the basis of studies of non-human animals. (Rose 1998, 134-135)

Moreover, Rose insists that “the study of learning and memory will be the key to deciphering the translation rules which lie between the languages of brain and mind, the Rosetta Stone of the neuroscience” (Rose 1998, 135), and that this study is based upon measuring behavioral changes (Rose 1998, 136). In other words, Rose literally “wishes he could figure out how memory acts. / Or how an act remembers,” and he pursues this wish by correlating “memory” and the way it is materialized in “act[s],” exactly as Herr Stimmung does.

Pimone Triplett goes one step further in the direction of science in a three-part poem from her *The Price of Light*, titled “Hippocampus” (Triplett 2005, 70-73). As Rose explains the term:

The ending highlights both the text's consistency with the poetic tradition and the change that has occurred in it. Just as a wooden cross became—as sacred center of Christian religion—the speaker of its own miraculous transformation in the tenth century, in the science-focused twenty-first, the hippocampus—as “a structure essential for memory” (Rose 1998, 141-142)—tells in Triplett's poem of his own metamorphoses. Thus the ambiguous quotation (besides the cross and the hippocampus, “I” may also refer to the lover remembering midnight meetings in the lines before) lands an arguably scientific topic unmistakably in the realms of faith, poetry, and—as a word intervening between the two parts of the quotation indicates—“love.” This first part and the next two parts of the sequence containing quotes from *Gray's Anatomy* and the famous Anglo-Saxon “The Wanderer,” resonate with Rose's credo that “[i]t is not brains that make memories; it is people, who use their brains to do so” (Rose 1998, 134).

I have quoted Rose's and Sennett's articles in order to bring out the scientific undertones of the poems by Gizzi, Waldrop, and Triplett. Their two articles were part of the excellent essay collection *Memory* (1998) that aimed at bridging C. P. Snow's “two cultures” in the context of memory research (Fara and Patterson 1998, 2). The two editors, historian of science Patricia Fara and neurologist Karalyn Patterson, explain in the introduction that “[w]e expect *scientists* to be concerned with studying the *processes involved in remembering*, and *humanities scholars* to be interested in the *products of memory*,” but that their collection was meant to “expos[e] the falseness of this dichotomy” and sought “to explore the insights into memory which can be gained by juxtaposing the complementary perspectives of *specialists* who venture beyond normal disciplinary confines” (Fara and Patterson 1998, 2, emphasis added).

As my reading of the three poems has illustrated, extending *scientists'* and *scholars'* explorations of memory to *artists'* and *poets'* is possible and revelatory.⁵ Gizzi, Waldrop, and Triplett even *perform* and *highlight* the interdisciplinary nexus between science and the humanities in their poems. On the one hand, they ask basic questions and establish links that are common in “studying the processes involved in remembering.” On the other, they display their “interes[t] in the products of memory” through specifically poetic ways of “remembering”—which, basically, come down to one method: repetition. Poetry's “long-term memory” might be said to rest on more or less intricate intertextual relationships (to Hölderlin or an

⁵ An essay by novelist A. S. Byatt is included in *Memory*, but she has contributed not a literary but a scholarly text that explains “Memory and the Making of Fiction” (47-72).

anonymous tenth-century poem), and its “short-term memory” upon rhyme, meter, anaphora, and other formal features. The basic memory technique is repetition-with-a-difference. This procedure is clearly observable in the mirror structures in all of the discussed poems; for instance in Ashbery’s “one was sure / one had come to pass” (Ashbery 2009, 25, ll. 9-10); Gizzi’s “The organic existence of gravity. / The organic nature of history” (Gizzi 2009, 155, ll. 22-23); Waldrop’s “how an act remembers / how memory acts” (Waldrop 2009, 443); and Triplett’s mirroring second and first lines in subsequent stanzas.

The essays in this volume discuss how a number of American authors have addressed memory. These essays are arranged in three clusters that give a certain consistency and are meant to make for good reading. The attribution of an essay to one cluster does not necessarily exclude its association from the other two. The first section addresses different transgressive memorial strategies and techniques in famous modernist (in the first three essays) and a number of experimental postmodernist poems (essays numbered four to seven). The second section is devoted to contemporary poems that concentrate on memory with a clear emphasis on its transnational quality. The third and last section collects various approaches to and by poetry that are decidedly interdisciplinary and reach out into brain science, disability studies, and ecology, thereby coming the closest to my objectives in the discussion above.

The section “From Modernist to Postmodernist Memory” starts with two essays on *The Waste Land*. Martin Gurr reads T. S. Eliot’s poem in light of Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*. His discussion of the representation of layered urban memory, the role of the *flâneur*, and Baudelaire serves not only to show the parallels between Eliot’s and Benjamin’s urban imaginaries but also to take their works as two paradigmatic examples illuminating points of contact between the discourses of modernist poetry and urban studies in the first decades of the twentieth century. While Gurr highlights the transnational urban memory in *The Waste Land*, MaryAnn Snyder-Körber aims at unearthing specifically American memories underlying the poem. Based upon a close reading of an earlier and very different version of the beginning of Eliot’s long poem, Snyder-Körber argues that Eliot inscribes his text with a new and specifically American rhythm by working the syncopated and sensuous time of *ragtime* into its structure. The third essay in this section, in which Susanne Knewitz reads William Carlos Williams’s late love poem “Asphodel, That Greeny Flower,” also highlights memory’s innovative function for modernist writers. Starting from Williams’s poetic

definition of memory as “a kind / of accomplishment / a sort of renewal” (Williams 1991, 245), Knewitz shows how the poet refashions in “Asphodel” the trope of the flower, which he had often used before, through a performative play of memories.

Heinz Ickstadt’s discussion of the memorial strategies in Susan Howe’s poetry establishes the link between the discussion of modernist and postmodernist poetry. It starts with a short and highly informative overview of the continuities and ruptures between modernist and postmodernist poetics, between Ezra Pound and Charles Bernstein, William Carlos Williams and Susan Howe. In the second part of his essay, Ickstadt reads Howe’s *THIS THAT* as an example of the ways in which Howe merges personal recollection and historical commemoration, myth and history, in poetic texts that are emphatically language-centered in order to express a Transcendentalist vision, however broken and subdued. Howe’s fashioning of this vision as an alternative to official versions of American history is also traced in Mandy Bloomfield’s reading of three long poems by Howe that chart American geographies, namely *Secret History of the Dividing Line*, *Thorow*, and *Souls of the Labadie Tract*. Bloomfield, though, is interested specifically in the paradoxical fact that Howe uses in all three works earlier texts that tended to *silence* alternative voices, even as her aim is to *liberate* these voices in an alternative literary and cultural history. Michel Delville shows in the following essay on Charles Simic’s and Rosmarie Waldrop’s poetic appropriation of Joseph Cornell’s boxes what also Bloomfield finds in her readings of Howe’s appropriation of various historical and literary source texts, namely that the foregrounding of (trans)form(ation) and fragmentation in poetic collage—be it the visual explosion or disfigurement of texts in Howe or the formal restrictions of miniature prose poems in Simic and Waldrop—allows the poet both to preserve and to open historical sources, to refer to collective and insert personal memory, to write within and transcend a tradition. In this section’s final essay, Michael Golston looks at Lyn Hejinian’s somewhat different, epistemological take on writing and memory. He argues that since the 1970s Hejinian’s poetry has been *formally allegorical* so that the logic of metaphor, normally connecting two semantically different fields, works itself out in the syntactic, grammatical, and visual organization of her texts on the page. The result is poetic montage that foregrounds less the textuality of history (and its gaps) and more the processes of reading and knowing—thus disclosing the memory of *Writing [as] an Aid to Memory*.

The second section, “Poetic Memory Across Nations,” is introduced by Brian Reed’s discussion of a contemporary Australian poet whose work is

as postmodern and experimental as Howe's, Waldrop's, or Hejinian's, but whose specifically and consciously transnational quality is the focus of the essay. Reed traces the shrewd moves by which John Tranter claims and advertises his connection to the American poet John Ashbery in a poem that re-members an Ashbery poem from the mid-1960s in order to comment on the modes of writing and reading Australian poetry at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Reed's illumination of the transpacific poetic dynamics between Ashbery and Tranter is followed by Diederik Oostdijk's account of the transatlantic link between the American poet James Merrill and the Dutchman Hans Lodeizen, whose memory remained important throughout Merrill's career and manifested in works like *The Changing Light of Sandover*. Further transatlantic connections are explored in Clemens Spahr's account of Lawrence Ferlinghetti's continuation of the internationalist Italian American literary tradition of the first half of the twentieth century and Evangelia Kindinger's outline of various late-twentieth-century circulations of *xenitiá* in Greek American poetry. In their respective essays, Kornelia Freitag and Susanne Rohr discuss poetry that remembers the trauma of past genocide. Rohr argues that poetry is a significant site where the cross-national memory of the Holocaust is staged and that the Shoah has become central to American self-understanding. Freitag analyzes a poem by the Kashmiri American poet Agha Shahid Ali that evokes a surrealist Bergen-Belsen in order to address the genocidal atrocities in his native land. The section closes with explorations of the transnational dynamics in two overtly political poems. Christian Klöckner characterizes Amiri Baraka's "Some-body Blew Up America" as a timely, if not uncontroversial, interruption of a consoling and nationalist post-9/11 commemorative discourse. Klöckner argues that Baraka's poetic assemblage of vigorous and transnational counter-memories of imperialist violence inside and outside the U.S.A. was a Foucauldian insurrection of subjugated knowledges. Martina Pfeiler reads the performance of "Kumulipo," based upon the Hawaiian creation chant *Kumulipo*, by the Hawaiian slam poet Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio at the White House and its subsequent representation in the media as an example of the possibilities and contradictions of public constructions of the cultural memory of ethnic and racial minorities.

Sabine Sielke's re-reading of Emily Dickinson's poetry on and in memory opens the third section of the volume. After sketching the ways in which Dickinson renders the human brain and consciousness in her poetry, Sielke expounds how and why contemporary science and philosophy draw on what she calls the "poetics of the brain" of the nineteenth-century poet. Rüdiger Kunow creates a very different link between poetry and the brain

in his essay on Alzheimer's poetry. While he starts by elucidating the transnational cultural overdetermination of the illness and introduces texts written by patients (alone and with the help of others), he ultimately comes to inspect the status of these texts as poetry and the ethical questions that the negotiation of Alzheimer's poetry in literary and cultural studies entails. The last two essays in the collection are devoted to poetry that grapples with ethical questions in the realm of ecology. Christine Gerhardt devotes her exploration of displacement and environmental memory in American poetry to Amy Clampitt's "Nothing Stays Put," the Chicana poet Lorna Dee Cervantes's "Freeway 280," and the Cuban American Carolina Hospital's "The Gardener." Spiritually akin in its focus on poetic environmental awareness but—as an experimental mixed-media long poem—notably different in form is *Exit 43* by the Italian American Jennifer Scappettone, the subject of Daniela Daniele's contribution to the volume. Daniele situates the postmodern, semi-autobiographical, and ecocritical poem in the tradition of modernist and postmodernist writing and art by William Carlos Williams, Clark Coolidge, Robert Smithson, and others. With the discussion of Scappettone's experimental interweaving and juxtaposing of transnational, personal, and collective memories of migration and ecological disaster, the volume comes full circle, and the way in which American poetry recovers cultural and personal memory in order to transgress and "make it new" is demonstrated once again.

The essay collection at hand would not have come into being without the indefatigable efforts and boundless patience of Hans Niehues, the expert corrections by Heather Arvidson, and tireless proofreading by Anna Bongers, Evangelia Kindinger, and Heike Steinhoff. Thank you all for your diligence and travails. Special thanks, as always, to my friend and colleague Brian Reed, whose wisdom and support has been, again, infinitely valuable.

This volume results from the contributions to a conference and hence lays no claim to thematic completeness or balance. The contingencies that characterize such a project notwithstanding, it has shown a wide variety of topics and approaches that deal with the representation of memory in poetry. May it inspire further explorations of the ways in which *memory* functions in poetry to make it "*news that STAYS news*" (Pound 1960, 29, emphasis added).

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PART I

**FROM MODERNIST TO POSTMODERNIST
MEMORY**

CHAPTER ONE

THE MODERNIST POETICS OF URBAN MEMORY AND THE STRUCTURAL ANALOGIES BETWEEN “CITY” AND “TEXT”: *THE WASTE LAND* AND BENJAMIN’S *ARCADES PROJECT*

JENS MARTIN GURR

Let me begin by juxtaposing two passages: The first is from Kevin Lynch’s influential exploration of mental representations of cityscapes in his 1960 *The Image of the City*. Here, he speaks of urban environments as surroundings in which

[a]t every instant, *there is more than the eye can see, more than the ear can hear*, a setting or a view waiting to be explored. Nothing is experienced by itself, but always in relation to its surroundings, the sequences of events leading up to it, the memory of past experiences. (Lynch 1960, 1-2, emphasis added)

The second passage is from Michael Coyle’s essay on *The Waste Land*:

The sense of meaning escaping one on every side, the sense that at any given point *there is more going on than the reader can take in*, is integral to the experience of the poem. (Coyle 2009, 166; cf. also Lamos 1998, 111 *et passim*, emphasis added)

Taking as a point of departure these corresponding observations on the excess of simultaneous semiosis in both city and text, this essay sets out to read modernist urban poetry and poetics in light of roughly contemporary early urban studies. For reasons of space, I have to confine myself to *The Waste Land* as the paradigmatic urban text of the period and will have to leave out Ezra Pound, T. E. Hulme, Hart Crane and others.

In particular, I propose to read *The Waste Land* side by side with Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, which has received an astonishing amount of critical attention in urban studies (and elsewhere) in the last 20 years as arguably *the* paradigmatic text on urban modernity. I want to focus on the urban texture of both texts, particularly with regard to how they represent layers of urban memory. While there are of course innumerable readings of the city in *The Waste Land*, and a few scholars, such as Bowen (1994), Martindale (1996), Perloff (2010) and Yang (2011), have suggested Benjamin as a relevant analogy, the connection between urban and literary textures has hardly been elucidated.¹ Though one would think it should long have been clear that Coyle is right in arguing that *The Waste Land* "is a poem where the most important things happen on the level of form" (Coyle 2009, 163), most readings engaging with the poem's view of the city, such as for instance Day (1965), Johnston (1984, 155-181), Thormählen (1978, 123-140), and Versluys (1987, 172-191), do so more or less mimetically on the content level and essentially ask "what does it say about London?" In one of the few attempts to explain the urban texture of Eliot's text, McLaughlin, for instance, states that "Eliot's poem is richly overcrowded with 'ethnographic moments' offering the reader . . . an objective correlative for urban overcrowding" (2000, 183). However, this notion is not extended in any significant way in an essay that otherwise hardly considers poetic strategies at all. One of the best discussions of the urban texture of *The Waste Land* is Wolfreys's chapter, which, however, takes an approach entirely different from mine and only mentions Benjamin in passing, suggesting differences rather than similarities (2007, 221).

My particular focus in reading Eliot and Benjamin side by side will be on Benjamin's notion of "superposition" and the related concept of "remembering the new." The underlying view of the city as a palimpsest and the notion of layered, spatialized memory that this entails accord well, I believe, with the poetics of modernist urban poetry. *The Waste Land*, I will argue, is the quintessential poem of urban memory, because the text in its layering of structures and meanings resembles the urban fabric itself.

I will first comment on the more or less simultaneous origin and development of modernist poetics in the decades around 1900 and of urban studies and particularly of urban sociology as a field of study. How, we may ask, does Eliot's text—and by implication, modernist urban poetics—situate itself in an ongoing discussion of "the urban" as the dominant locale of people's lives in a period of dramatic urbanization? I

¹ For a survey of literary strategies of textual urban simulation see Gurr (2011).