

The Recent Rise of the Research Field of Memory Studies, and the Use / Range of its Perspectives, in Relation to the Much Older Fields of Folklore and Folkloristics

J.S. Ryan

In January 2008, there was launched in England by SAGE Publications the first issue / number of a new scholarly journal, one entitled *Memory Studies*, which had set out, boldly and reflectively, the intended agenda, challenges, and prospects for the then to be formally designated research field of ‘Memory Studies’.

Significantly for Australia, its foundation editors were then listed as being:

Andrew Hoskins, Principal Editor, C/o, University of Warwick, UK;

Amanda Barnier, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia;

Wulf Kanstener, State University of New York, at Binghamton, USA; and

John Sutton, of Macquarie University, Sydney.

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The Early Leading Role for Australian Scholars

In late 2013, as for the issue No 4, for its Volume 6, the first, second and fourth of the above were still in office, with the second being replaced by another Australian, Catherine Stevens of the University of Western Sydney. Thus the Australian leadership and responsibilities had not decreased, nor had its close proximity of southern location of the editors, while the Editorial Board had some 68 scholars listed—these including, from Australasia—both Scott McQuire and Elaine Reece, of the University of Otago. In October 2013, Andrew Hoskins was still principal editor, again with John Sutton (as above), and the Editorial Board now listed some 69 members, with Scott McQuinn of the University of Melbourne, Anna Reading of the University of Western Sydney, and Dirk Moses, University of Sydney included on it. The

journal is published four times a year by Sage, with the contact given as: Online.sagepubl.com.

Abstracts, tables of contents, alerts, etc. are available on line and free of charge for all. They constitute a most useful index to the range of memory topics that have been reported on / investigated in the last five years.

The First Manifesto

The initial issue had included invited contributions, as well as making the pledge that later-in-the-year issues would respond to further issues as variously raised earlier in its pages. In the now following paragraphs, there are offered some indications as to the emerging and reflective responses of the journal to the then defined / developing scholarship of the field, e.g.:

I, 2, May 2008:

collective memory; the claims of the past; gender and the collective memory; war, memorials and the public mediation of affect, as with National War Memorials; gender and collective memory, etc.;

and, in issue I, 3, Sept. 2008, those of :

energising the memory debate; the size / significance of a measure of visual material—as a prompt; the place of meditation as a surprisingly productive force for the emerging field; how many types of forgetting are there; placing journalism inside memory, etc., etc.

And since the field is one genuinely comprehensive and quite recently open, it was further described thus

innovative in provoking and maintaining a dialogic presence, and [so natural] for it to be generating a whole new set of articles and procuring intellectual dialogue and energising the debate, as well as identifying the [various aspects to the] ‘fundamental obstacle’ to the study of memory.

Forgetting, Yes, But Also Retrieval by Meditation?

Clearly reflective mediation was / is deemed to be a sound basis for the emerging field; and there is also offered a proper stress on its power¹ to give us ‘accessibility over time, due to one’s circumstances, and factors regarding the varying position of the self’; the core and ever so problematic clash between ‘individual biographic memory, and the prevailing societal one, as well as the [other] catalysing forces’; the

¹ This quality is akin to the skill of folklore.

intriguing and extraordinarily positive / quietly reminding influence of the human-computer interaction, where Google is clearly 'generative' of / operates through the digital memory; and much emphasis is placed on the perhaps unexpected ability of the computer / Google to help us to consult archives (p. 260), etc. etc.

Memory Places and Topics

Then the lead article glances at memory and sexuality studies,² even as it looks at the challenge of building an academic community of memory across disciplines and traditions,³ thus leading to specific memory places and creating 'communities of pondering' and so to result in the creation of / assistance with forming 'the community to come'.⁴ This relates, variously here, to Matthew Hugh Endelyi (City University of New York) who comments judiciously on Paul Connerton's 'Seven Types of Forgetting' (2008), while Martin Conway considers the likelihood that 'forgetting' and relevance are to be as much affected by accessibility as, severally, by emotion and the self.

Related to this last is the Wessel / Moulds notion of how knowledge about the past may be disregarded, ignored, and severally replaced:

from the role of dictators in the transfer of historical details through the generations of a nation, to the passing of recipes through the generations of a family. (p. 287)

The nature of procedural memory is nicely instanced by reference to (the skill of) riding a bike, or to the deliberate accessing of one's past⁵ by means of / reference to a particular place / setting, to like (nagging) associations, or to appropriate persons. And fascinating distinctions are made between the culture's standards, the civil society, the family, and the particular individual; and it is interesting to consider the range of the various possible states of recollection, from one's personal forgetting, to a culture's loss of a sharper memory. And intriguing here is (p.290) the helpful reference to the 'more durable form' in the mnemonic details of autobiographic memory, and of 'maintaining a coherent sense of the self'.

² These have become peculiarly significant in Australia in the investigation of the exploitation of and indecent assault on minors and the vulnerable, especially when the crimes were/are committed by persons in positions of trust and responsibility.

³ This notion is illustrated in the problems of universities or like institutions, where changes of personnel, and the coming of computers has resulted in the wholesale destruction of records.

⁴ This item obviously addresses places of people studying, and reminds the reader of the rise of the mediaeval university/ like special communities in other cultures.

⁵ This reference allows for the communal memory, long before the access to writing or to print, let alone electronic images.

Further,

collective memory may be conceptualised; archives and museums may be likened to a knowledge base; while governments and other societal institutions may resemble the control mechanisms of the working self.

And there is a most significant emphasis on the process of

shaping deliberately the group's past ⁶ in order to fit its current goals.
(p. 29)

Amnesia and the Techniques of Memory

Like forces / controls are also explored, such as structural amnesia, repressive amnesia; prescriptive forgetting; or even humiliated silence. Much is also offered (pp. 295, ff.) *op. cit.*, on the technologies of memory, these changing rapidly, and so they have much to do with HCI (human computer intervention) and with

the need for memory studies to remind and inspire designers of what is possible and useful, and help expand the understanding of human memory on which these systems are based. (N.Van House, and Elizabeth Churchill, as at *op. cit.*, p. 295)

Another focus of significance, especially for folklorists, is then given by Carolyn Kitch's emphasis (pp. 311, ff.) on the real need for placing journalism inside Memory and Memory Studies, her paper also arguing (pp. 210, ff.) that

scholars should pay attention to the forms of journalism beyond elite news organisations and to recognise that journalism is a site of memory construction not only about shocking events, but also about everyday life.

This matter was then followed by an elaboration on the way in which nostalgia and popularity may well blur or 'debase' memory, emphasis also being put on A. Hoskins' then recent and more disturbing work, as in his *Televising War: From Vietnam to Iraq* (2004). This last point may well be linked with a very well known folklorist's particular more recent work, namely B. Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, in her 'Kodak Moments: Flashbulb Memories', in *The Drama Review*, 47.1 (2003), pp. 11- 48.

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⁶ This is a neat way of referring to propaganda, political manipulation, etc.

And Over the Last Five Years?

As the journal has progressed, *Memory Studies* has handled / featured various significant fields of memory, and so of the past and present styles of treatment of significant / personally disturbing, associated with events, places, persons, and issues. And so, our summarising continuing, these intentions may be cited—

Volume 2, No 1, January 2009, treats of / features the themes of / associated with *more public / notorious monuments* and architecture; as with, ‘The pasts, presents, and futures of Ground Zero’; the Holocaust Memorial, Berlin; Irish folk history, and social memory, etc.;

Volume 2, No. 2, May, 2009, discusses, inter alia, the *relation between apology and memory* (pp. 171-194); the anniversary coverage of Hurricane Katrina (p. 235. ff.); while C. Pentzoldon writes on ‘The online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, as ‘a global memory place’, pp. 255, ff.; and the same issue also focuses particularly on themes which had treatment in the 2008 Memory Day conference held at Macquarie University—and that was an interdisciplinary function, which had included: aspects of *autobiography and the phases of memory in children and adolescents* (pp. 272-280); an interest in family iconography, and the scholarship of this as relating to an Indigenous Australian community;⁷ a review of Amy K. Levin’s edited book, *Defining Memory: Local Museums and the matter of the ‘Construction of History’ in America’s Changing Communities* (pp. 292-294);

Vol. 3, No 2, April 2010, was an issue largely focussed on ‘*perpetrator memory and memories about perpetrators*’, and so concerned with guilt, victims, and the demonic, as well as a long review concerned with ‘The Poetics of Memory in Post Totalitarian Narration’, with special reference to Germany;

Volume 3, No 3, July 2010, had an issue very significant in its thrust, being focussed on ‘*Nostalgia and the Shapes of History*’. The issue makes the point very well that Colonisers and the Colonized have, alike, held idealised perceptions of home which were variously employed, with seemingly personal desire for home, but it then connected these feelings with wider debates about the utility / limitations of nostalgia within the more progressive stylistics of postcolonial studies. Thus there was the so common celebration of a golden European past, one very much used to denigrate an ‘unworthy’ / surrounding present, or the rawness of a colonial and derivative lifestyle. However, others again would become deeply attached to the areas they colonised, and yet mourn the passing of

⁷ A nice if ambiguous term here is that of ‘the scaffold of memory’ (p. 278).

what they themselves have transformed / modified irreversibly in the necessitous *societal changes in the new lands*.

Hence there is created a field of tension between nostalgia for the past and pride in what they, the new settlers, have created. Accordingly, it is a field of de-colonization, one alongside the continuing existence of respected home culture / imperial tropes within present day thought.

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The Scaffoldings for Our Individual Memories

Volume 3, Number 4, October 2010, was one much concerned with the premise, as outlined in its 'Editorial', that human memory extends beyond the mind of an individual to incorporate external resonances such that we rely upon objects, people, and tales, all these operating to 'scaffold' our individual memories, as well as impinging on the small group's / family's collective memory. The last is a transactive memory, one much like that of / shared between a long-term couple, but one, as with Alzheimer patients—when the physical environment they rely on to 'scaffold their cognitive processes' is lost completely, as also is the case if they are relocated into a controlled and almost totally strange / unfamiliar hospital setting. And the breaking up of a family means that the structure of the whole saga is less supported / likely to fall in a heap.

As the issue's 'Editoria' by Amanda Barnier⁸ puts it,

[Scholars/doctors] note that laws and social policies do not sufficiently recognise—what is in the best interests of the persons, do not sufficiently recognise the deep connectedness of people to the things of their world and the consequences of breaking these links.' (p. 295)

Other aspects of this paper treat of the confusion of (older) memory in terms of specific agency, and geography, or space. Clearly this is a field of much significance in testing the veracity of personal recollection, opinion, or the location of significant / traumatic events. At best, we are dealing with a 'memory text', fragmentary, flashed up on our screens, and one not certainly accurately / correctly time 'located.'

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⁸ She is Research Fellow at Macquarie University, and a co-editor of *Memory Studies* and she was the chair of the Organizing Committee of the Fourth International Conference on Memory, one held in Sydney, NSW, in July 2006.

Volume 4, Number 1, for January 2011, and an issue fascinating for folklorists, was concerned with ‘Social Memory and Historical Justice’, one paper of relevance interestingly being ‘Memory *disposifs* and national identities: The Case of Ned Kelly’, by Laura Basu of Utrecht in the Netherlands, and considering the most enduring of cultural memories, she arguing (p. 33) that they—as with those of Ned Kelly—do not come from politicians, monuments or media, but ‘they are formed and develop through a tangle of relations that reaches back and forth across time’ (p. 33). This so vibrant and defiant figure, that of Ned Kelly, is used as a model of the core of a group identity / the present day remembrance of the Australian outlaw, Ned Kelly.

Many forms of memory arousal are investigated, but the emphasis remains firmly on the historical Ned Kelly, despite the theory passages on historical novels, film flash-backs, ‘nostalgia for boyhood’ films, and various forms of (personal) autobiography—all of these modes of remembering being ‘modes of re-presenting the past’ (p. 35), and she quotes a then recent critic (G. Huggan), who had observed (in 2002) that

the sheer quantity of Kelly material available on the market currently testifies not just to the durability of the legend but also to its continuing profitability.

This Australasian-born notoriety is neatly clinched by the bemusing folktale, one of a Nolan painting of the masked outlaw which had sold for a record AUS \$5.4 million dollars. The writer, as European scholar, had clearly become fascinated by the issue, and, in a measure of detachment, she reflects on the meaning of this cult, concluding that the outlaw’s identity and that of the nation have ‘fused into and strengthened each other’, so that

He, Kelly, has come to be a significant ‘commodity circulating within an increasingly globalised memory industry’ (Huggan 2002),

‘floating,... dehistoricised, detached from the nation and attached almost randomly to products and events, and in some truly bizarre configurations’ (*ibid.*, p. 37), a recent one of which is Coca Cola.

In this connection Andrew Hoskins has claimed that the internet has transformed the conditions of cultural remembrance. This is one seemingly contemporary, so that we have reached ‘a crisis in historicity’, as we have lost the sense of time and distance, all of which dimensions have been lost to those on / over exposed to the internet. Thus he is now—there, and elsewhere—labelled as a terrorist... as since September 11,

2003, as in the writings of Christopher Bantick.⁹ Further, in Melbourne, Kelly ‘has been taken up as ‘a kind of latter-day street punk anarchist’, (*ibid.*, p. 39), even as he has been stencilled by a Melbourne street artist, and placed alongside Osama bin Laden. After this discussion, Basu concludes that ‘Kelly in turn becomes a site for the proliferation of both neo-anarchist and conservative identities, natural products of global forces’ (p. 39). And, one might well argue, that he is responsible for at least some of the mindset of those Australians with Middle Eastern antecedents who have returned to their ancestral lands to wage campaigns of destruction and revenge on the present peoples for events in a distant or even imagined past.

In Volume 4, Number 2 (April 2011), the ‘Editorial’ questions the value of continuing interrogation of the individual and the collective in the field of memory studies, and in it, Andrew Hoskins, as editor, then moves the debate to the issue of whether and how memory matters. Thus one moves from the collective memory to un-earthing its ‘roots’, and so to the biases that have too long been accepted—something akin to rumour, gossip, propaganda and the like. In a similar vein of valid and significant re-focussing, they suggest the need to focus on ‘the birth cohort’ of the informants / respondents ‘in addition to consideration of predictor variables of education, race and gender’. Further consideration is to be given to the period of highest impact on the memory, the period of early adulthood. Similarly, it is often helpful to see that there are three distinct wellsprings for the memories—public, personal, and also autobiographic. Similarly a craft and its practice may well be an ‘anchorage’ for memories. Like clusters are to be found in the world of dance, learning, touring and so back to the recorded culture associated with the particular works.

Provocatively,¹⁰ Hoskins ends his Editorial with these words,

Whether one actively seeks or rejects a nexus of triple forms of memory richly detailed in the accounts in this issue, we continue to welcome articles that critically develop and challenge the dimensions, parameters and the lexicons of the study of memory. (*Memory Studies*, 4.2, April 2011, p. 132)

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Not a Conclusion

⁹ Bantick, C., ‘Ned Kelly, Terrorist’, *Herald Sun*, 25 February, 2003

¹⁰ Interestingly, the issue Volume 4, Number 2, April 2011, draws attention to the fact that the editor, Andrew Hoskins, is ‘Interdisciplinary Professor in Global Security in the College of the Social Sciences, University of Glasgow, United Kingdom.

While we might continue with this analysis, it will perhaps be enough if we not some of the distinctive countries, and these necessarily given special treatment, as in—

Volume 4, Number 4, 2011, where there is offered a special focus on modern China, the Communist Party in Italy in the period 1943-48, and something much closer to the work of the traditional folklorist, in Andrew Blaikie's 'Imagining the Face of a Nation: Scotland, modernity, and the places of memory' (pp. 416-432). Thus we may leave the journal, and reflect on some of our conclusions, the burden of which must be embodied in the questions ever to be in mind—

Who tells the tale?

When was it recorded?

Were there circumstances operating to slew the account?

Were there factors in play likely to slew the account / record?

What is the character of the memory record / account?

While much of this may seem obvious to the folklore-wise reader, the journal is invaluable in that it makes such close analysis of the familiar, even as it reduces great 'events' and 'personalities' to the human size, emotions, and vulnerability or guilelessness that we often only accord to children of others.

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Engaging Indigenous Economy: Debating Diverse Approaches

A conference to be held at The Australian National University on

4-5 September 2014

(<http://caepr.anu.edu.au/seminars/conferences/EIE2014.php>).

Presented by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), the conference will coincide with the retirement from CAEPR of its founding Director, Professor Jon Altman, and will explore the themes of his writing and research.

Jeana Bajic

Council & Membership Officer-

jeana.bajic@aiatsis.gov.au