

Memory, Trauma, and Cultural Semiotics

An Extensive Review

LUKAS RÖSLI

ABSTRACT: The following review-article deals with three publications that have been released in recent years, all of which can be read in the context of memory studies through the mention of memory in their titles. It is evident that memory studies has become a field of research that ranges from the humanities to the social sciences to the natural sciences, with the only common denominator being the object of study of memory. But what memory is, how memory is constituted, or how it can be analyzed or even made measurable is where the publications discussed differ strikingly. The aim of this review is therefore not to place the three publications in a singular context but rather, by discussing their differences, to show how diverse memory studies is as a field and to present what the breadth of different approaches that look beyond one's own disciplinary boundaries can offer regarding the future engagement with memory in Scandinavian studies and especially in Scandinavian medieval studies.

RÉSUMÉ: L'article de synthèse suivant traite de trois publications parues ces dernières années, qui peuvent toutes être lues dans le contexte des études de la mémoire en raison de la mention de la mémoire dans leur titre. Il devient évident que les études de la mémoire sont devenues un champ de recherche qui s'étend des sciences humaines aux sciences sociales en passant par les sciences naturelles, avec pour seul dénominateur commun l'objet d'étude qu'est la mémoire. Toutefois, ce qu'est la mémoire, comment elle est constituée ou comment elle peut être analysée ou même être rendue mesurable, sont des points sur lesquels les publications discutées diffèrent de manière frappante. L'objectif de cette étude n'est donc pas de placer les trois publications dans un contexte singulier, mais plutôt, en discutant de leurs différences, de souligner la diversité des études de la mémoire en tant que champ et de présenter ce que l'étendue de différentes approches qui examinent au-delà de leurs propres frontières disciplinaires peut offrir concernant l'engagement futur de la mémoire dans les études scandinaves et en particulier dans les études médiévales scandinaves.

Lukas Rösli is Junior Professor of Scandinavian Languages and Literature / Medieval Studies at the Department of Northern European Studies at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

Tota, Anna Lisa, and Trever Hagen, eds. 2016 *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*. London: Routledge. 570 pages. ISBN: 9780367868451. eISBN: 9780203762844.

Eyerman, Ron. 2019. *Memory, Trauma, and Identity*. Cultural Sociology. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan (an imprint of Springer Nature Switzerland AG). 216 pages. ISBN: 978-3030135065. eISBN: 978-3-030-13507-2.

Lotman, Juri. 2019. *Culture, Memory and History. Essays in Cultural Semiotics*. Edited by Marek Tamm, translated from Russian by Brian James Baer. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan (an imprint of Springer Nature Switzerland AG). 281 pages. ISBN: 978-3030147099. eISBN: 978-3-030-14710-5.

As can be seen from the present special issue, memory studies is no longer a marginal phenomenon in Scandinavian medieval studies, indeed in Scandinavian studies in general. The focus on the past—which can no longer be understood solely as history in the sense of a history that can be reconstructed with documents and artifacts, but as a form of present-day statement about the past—has led to a scholarly turn in the humanities in recent years. The theoretical awareness that the past is not a fixed entity to be reconstructed in a real-historical and universally valid sense, but rather a variable that is constructed as memory in the present and through certain cultural and collective processes, is due not least to post-structuralism, which rejects naïve objectivism. In literary studies in particular, the object of study, i.e. the text, is read as an ambiguous image in which memory is simultaneously constructed and confirmed and thus consolidated, without it being apparent at first glance which of these past-generating processes would take precedence.

This review presents three very different publications that have appeared in recent years and, at first glance, have little direct connection to Scandinavian studies. Two of the three publications are also not decidedly based in a philological subject or on a theory oriented towards the humanities, but stem from sociology or an interdisciplinary perspective that attempts to build a bridge between the humanities and the natural sciences through the mediation of sociology. Nevertheless, or rather precisely because of this non-disciplinary approach to the topic of memory studies, these publications can offer us new impulses for our own approach to the topic. The monographs, anthologies, and handbooks published in recent years in Scandinavian medieval studies on the topic of memory studies are all oriented towards cultural and literary studies, which are strongly influenced by the work of Aleida and Jan Assmann, Mary Carruthers, Maurice Halbwachs, Astrid Erll, and Pierre Nora, to name just a few of the most prominent

scholars. A look beyond this theoretical-methodological horizon can therefore be quite fruitful.

With forty main contributions written by fifty-two authors, the *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies* edited by Anna Lisa Tota and Trever Hagen offers a cross-section of the most diverse disciplines dealing with memory studies: Psychology, Political Economy, Organic Chemistry, Film Studies, Theoretical Physics, Archival Studies, Anthropology, Environmental Chemistry, History, Comparative Literature, Communication Studies, Psychiatry, Peace Studies, Japanese Studies, Energy Medicine, Media Studies, Molecular Biology, Cardiology, and Genocide Studies. However, the main emphasis of the contributions is clearly on Sociology. This diversity of approaches to the topic, which is due to the form of the handbook, is then also reflected in the division of the contributions into main chapters, each containing six to eight essays. The introduction written by the editors is preceded by an eulogy by Gerald H. Pollack for Emilio Del Giudice, the Italian theoretical physicist who died in 2014 and co-authored an essay on the “Memory of Water” for this handbook. The brief introduction not only discusses the structure of the handbook, but also points to handbooks that they consider important predecessors, but at the same time accuse of “theoretical isolationism” (1). The editors conclude the introduction with a note that the volume is dedicated to Emilio Del Giudice and with an esoteric spiritualist quotation attributed to him (5).

The first part on “Theories and perspectives” offers six contributions of very different lengths, both introductory overviews and presentations of individual theories, such as Nora’s concept of *Les Lieux de mémoire*. It should be noted, however, that even the introductory overviews are not aimed at readers who have not yet dealt with memory studies, as they presuppose a certain prior knowledge and, in some cases, also shed light on rather internal discourses, which can seem somewhat hermetic for people who have no basic sociological knowledge. Ann Rigney’s contribution “Cultural memory studies. Mediation, narrative, and the aesthetic” (65–76) is certainly useful for readers interested in cultural and literary studies, since Rigney not only discusses the theories known in these disciplines, but also provides an outlook on future research questions.

“Cultural artifacts, symbols and social practices,” the second part, is strongly sociological despite the title. Ron Eyerman, whose work will be discussed in more detail below, shows in his contribution how social movements are strongly linked to the formation of memory. Eyerman, who is one of the leading cultural trauma researchers in sociology, offers an outline of his previous work on the topic of social movements rather than new insights or even attempts at ideas for future research. Thomas S. Eberle’s phenomenological analysis of “organizational memories” (93–108) shows impressively how organizations, i.e. both institutions and companies, govern the memory of themselves via material objects and increasingly digitally. This organization of memory, which takes place, for

example, by providing material or digital archives through which the companies or institutions want to be remembered, could also be interestingly and fruitfully linked to the question of literary canon in our field. Paolo Jedlowski's contribution "Memories of the future" also offers, based on neurological studies, interesting insight into the question of how the future can be made into the past in order to be remembered, a question that could also be applied to e.g. prophetic texts in Old Norse-Icelandic literature.

Part three, "Public, transnational and transitional memories," offers an introductory overview by David Inglis on "Globalization and/of memory." The other contributions in this part are very specific, which makes them no less interesting, but much less adaptable to other questions or even disciplines, such as the contribution by Trever Hagen on the Czech underground band "The Plastic People of the Universe"—whose members were active in the 1960s and 1970s and whose arrest led to the so-called "Charter 77"—and how their musical work and memory manifested itself in the (post) communist reality.

Unfortunately from the fourth part titled "Technologies of memory" on, any contextualization of the contributions is missing, so that the thematic brackets set by the main titles seem arbitrary. In particular, the topic of "Cultural heritage," to which Diane Barthel-Bouchier devotes her attention in terms of UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage, would have deserved a much more in-depth and comprehensive consideration, since the very concept of cultural heritage is a strong collective-forming one and thus explicitly related to constructed cultural memory. The contribution by E. Ann Kaplan on "Memory and future selves in futurist dystopian cinema," which follows a similar theme as the previously mentioned contribution by Jedlowski, raises the question of why these two texts were published so far apart in the book. A closer alignment of such topics and theoretical connections could have made the handbook much more fruitful.

Part five, "Terror, violence and disasters," focuses on traumatic memories, but again lacks an introduction to this topic. The individual studies, such as Lia Luchetti's and Anna Lisa Tota's contribution on the Italian "strategy of tension" of the late 1960s to the early 1990s, offer an exciting socio-political reading of the recent past. However, since a general and transferable theoretical approach can only be discerned in certain passages, such individual studies cannot really be adapted to other disciplines, as is the case with "Remembering 7/7" by Steve D. Brown, Matthew Allen, and Paula Reavey, which deals with the memory of the 2005 London bombing, for example.

For a philologist, the contributions in part six on "Body and ecosystems" are only marginally comprehensible. The content of the contribution on "When memory goes awry" by Maria I. Medved and Jens Brockmeister, which argues psychologically and neuroscientifically, can still be followed if you have ever read a book by the neurologist Oliver Sacks. Contributions such as Anna Lisa Tota's "Dancing the present," which deals with an anthroposophical-esoteric body

memory in connection with quantum field theory, or the contribution “Memory of water” by Emilio Del Giudice, Alberto Tedeschi, and Vladimir Voeikov, in which quantum electrodynamic theories are used to prove a memory of water that is otherwise mainly recognized by esotericists, do seem rather forced in the context of memory studies.

The index that concludes the handbook (533–46) appears very extensive at first glance, but on closer examination and if it is to be used, one will quickly realize that particularly relevant names mentioned several times in the book have not been included. The issue that becomes apparent with this volume is that, due to the high degree of interdisciplinarity, the common denominator of the contributions only refers to a rather vague concept of memory studies, whereby one cannot get rid of the feeling while reading that this is not even used uniformly as a theoretical concept, but seems to get out of hand in different approaches. This is particularly evident in some contributions of the book’s last part, when memory becomes a quasi-esoteric para-scientific concept.

A much more reader-friendly approach is offered by Ron Eyerman’s partially co-authored collection of essays *Memory, Trauma, and Identity*. In addition to a brief foreword by series editor Jeffrey C. Alexander outlining the significance of Eyerman’s research, the first chapter, “Introduction: Identity, Memory, and Trauma,” offers not only a simple introduction to the topic but also a comprehensive account of the history of scholarship on how the studies of cultural trauma co-founded by Eyerman came about. Here and throughout the book, Eyerman never presents himself as an academic lone wolf, but always as part of a research environment that developed the theories of cultural trauma as part of memory studies in collective work and intensive disputes, and which is still actively working on the continuation of these theories today. As a sociologist, Eyerman repeatedly distances himself explicitly from historians, whom he insinuates—quite in the spirit of Lotman, as will be shown below—that although they have recognized that collective memory is a construct, they no longer pay attention to the fact that even factual documents must still be interpreted as narratives with a poetic intention (22).

In chapter two, “The Past in the Present: Culture and the Transmission of Memory,” he argues, with reference to Marx, that memory is always central to the formation of an individual and a collective identity in a society (24). In contrast to Foucault’s discourse, which he describes as a principle of order imposed from outside, he sees an individual agency in a collective narrative that can be reflected in memory (26). However, this narrative is not determined solely by the individual as a singular entity, but by an individual collective, whereby—for example in founding narratives—such narratives can be compared to myths (27). Eyerman sees the possibility of strong collective identities emerging in particular in

traumatic, collective experiences, which he illustrates with the example of the identity of African Americans (28–32).

In chapter three, “Intellectuals and Cultural Trauma,” Eyerman looks at how an incident becomes what he calls an event. He sees the main cause for this change of meaning from an event to a happening, which can become part of the cultural trauma, in those members of society whom he calls intellectuals. He calls intellectuals those actants who “embrace the performance of a social role” (40), in which the articulation of ideas in various media and forums helps to shape public opinion. He does not consider academics who do not participate in this shaping of public opinion to be everyday intellectuals, as they simply do not occupy this role (41). Eyerman understands cultural trauma as a discursive reaction to a rupture in the social fabric, a time when the foundations of an established collective identity are shaken by a traumatic event that requires a re-narration to repair the rupture (42). Eyerman uses political assassinations, such as those of John F. Kennedy, Theo van Gogh, and Olof Palme, to discuss his thesis of ruptures in the social fabric that lead to cultural trauma. According to Eyerman, such ruptures occur when a tragic incident is turned into an event by intellectuals or the media (43–46). Only this staged eventfulness, argues Eyerman, enables an incident to create a cultural trauma in society (46–50). What is interesting about the examples Eyerman gives is that he denies the function of cultural trauma in particular to the assassination of the Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme (47). The intensive social, public, and media reappraisal of this tragic event in Sweden might well be seen as counterevidence to this thesis.

In chapter four, “The Assassination of Harvey Milk,” Eyerman again shows, but this time on a single study, how a murder can become an event with politically iconic status. Based on the day of the assassination, the people involved, the trial, the media coverage and the subsequent reappraisal, he shows how a drama could become a trauma. Eyerman takes up Victor Turner’s notion of “social drama” (81), which begins with a disruption of socially established norms in a public arena and in the course of which attempts at repair and reconciliation evolve. According to Eyerman, it is only through the charging of the drama as a general symbol by the media, political authorities, and intellectuals, which is endowed via a re-narration with an impact on society as a whole and not just on an individual section of society, that a longer-term cultural trauma emerges as part of society’s cultural memory (85–86).

Eyerman’s starting point for his theoretical reflections on “Social Theory and Cultural Trauma,” the fifth chapter of the book, are the basic works on trauma by Freud, Bauman, and Horkheimer and Adorno. After describing trauma as an individual and a collective phenomenon (90–91), Eyerman returns to his main theme of cultural trauma (92–93), describing cultural trauma as something characterized by the fact that an established collective identity is shaken and challenged in its foundations through the process of trauma formation (93). With

reference to Freud and Bauman (93–96), but especially to Horkheimer and Adorno’s “Dialectic of Enlightenment” (97–100), Eyerman approaches the question of how the (Jewish) survivors of Nazi terror and especially of the Shoah (Holocaust) were able to deal with this trauma. Eyerman refers to precisely such a profound collective trauma as a cultural trauma, in which an emotionally charged struggle for meaning takes place over the foundations of collective identity, in which perpetrators and victims are named and the past is re-narrated and reappraised as a collective memory (102). Experienced personal trauma, which is shared by a collective in the form of cultural trauma, can thus only be dealt with in the sense of a re-narration to restructure collective memory.

The sixth chapter of “The Worst Was the Silence: The Unfinished Drama of the Katyn Massacre,” co-authored with Dominik Bartmanski, deals with a massacre of Polish military personnel and elite civilians by the Russian Red Army during World War II. In this case study, Eyerman and Bartmanski show how such a massacre could be used by the perpetrators as propaganda, blaming the event on the enemy. Poland’s cultural trauma was nurtured and prolonged by the fact that first the Stalinist power apparatus prevented a collective coming to terms with these crimes, and then the rewriting of events continued throughout the Soviet period and into Putin’s Russia. The “power/knowledge” structure dominated by Soviet Russia suppressed the subliminal “memory/knowledge” from becoming active (136–37). In order to become culturally productive in the sense of coming to terms with trauma, this suppressed “memory/knowledge” had to be admitted by the official side. In retrospect, this also led to a cultural shock among the Polish elite implemented by Soviet Russia, which again had a cultural traumatic effect.

Chapter seven, co-authored with Todd Madigan and Magnus Ring, on “Cultural Trauma, Collective Memory, and the Vietnam War,” discusses how the traumatic memory that emerged in response to the war in Vietnam has affected the US, but with a look at the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the exile community of South Vietnamese who fled to the US. The authors show that trauma understood as cultural trauma, in contrast to the popular or classical use of the word, is contingent because it involves a struggle to define what is experienced as traumatic and what is to be solidified in discursive practices, collective memory and collective identity (145–46). This struggle over what may be considered traumatic or even transformed into cultural trauma is particularly difficult for Vietnamese who have fled to the USA, as they are torn between their own exile and search for a new collective identity in the society of the new homeland, the official memory practice of the institutions of the USA and its army, and the culture of protest against the war in this new homeland (159–63).

In “Perpetrator Trauma and Collective Guilt: The My Lai Massacre,” the eighth chapter of the book, the difficult issue of perpetrator trauma and collective guilt is addressed by looking at a US war crime against over 500 Vietnamese

civilians. According to Eyerman, perpetrator trauma occurs when individuals and collectives feel they have been acting in a way that is contradictory to their own deep-rooted moral convictions (167–68). In the case of collective guilt, Eyerman argues, the difficulty is that this requires a society to identify with the perpetrators, i.e. those persons who are held responsible for the crime or actions, and this identification takes place within a larger collective (169). As a contested concept, collective guilt must be narrated, assigned, and accepted by a collective that reconstitutes itself in this process and keeps the re-narration active through retelling. Eyerman calls this discursive process cultural trauma (169). The fact that soldiers were perpetrators here, i.e. individuals who acted within the hierarchy of the institutionalized collective “military” that purports to act on behalf of a nation and its society, makes such a tracing of guilt back to society possible, but it does not fundamentally presuppose it, as can be seen in the example of Nazi Germany and its official and unofficial collaborators after World War II, and especially in dealing with this historical guilt today, which later generations will no longer want to acknowledge (169–70). In the aftermath of such an event, a narrative frame is needed that not only commemorates the event, but also articulates and establishes accountability in society. In the case of cultural trauma, this happens through a judicial apportionment and societal recognition of guilt and through the attribution of responsibility through media and popular culture (171–75). According to Eyerman, the reaction to such collective, as well as individual, attributions of guilt can take two different forms: through shame or through an admission of guilt (182–85). Feelings of shame are linked to how others see us, and thus to self-esteem, which is controlled by an external attribution (183). Shame often leads to a counter-reaction, to a rejection of guilt, which may well seek a reduction in an aggressive violent outburst. Guilt, and especially its recognition, in contrast, is tied to actions, to what has been done, and can be exonerated by taking responsibility, admitting, and confessing (183). The cultural trauma of an event that implies collective guilt, however, cannot be solved solely through the judicially legitimized condemnation of individual culprits, according to Eyerman. The cultural trauma in such a case only emerged through the social, collective identification with the culprits, and so society as a whole needs a re-narration of the events and its participation in them, which remain active in the collective memory.

The concluding ninth chapter, “Conclusion: Ron Eyerman and the Study of Cultural Trauma,” written by Eric Taylor Woods, revisits the content of the entire publication and provides as adept a conclusion as the introduction written by Eyerman provided a clever beginning. Woods follows the text not in its chapter-by-chapter structure, but by locating Eyerman’s objects of analysis in their historical context, in terms of both the events described and the literature generated by Eyerman and his colleagues for the study of cultural trauma. This consolidation of the theoretical work reflected in Eyerman’s publications with

the objects of study on which he bases his theoretical reflections once again offers a new perspective on the texts just read.

Eyerman's book offers many exciting approaches, with a decidedly sociological perspective. In his theories on memory and cultural trauma, Eyerman describes in a sociological way similar phenomena that e.g. Foucault examined through his theories on discourse for the humanities. However, the sociological theories of cultural trauma presented very convincingly by Eyerman offer problems if one wants to transfer them to a philological field. Eyerman's objects of investigation, on which he develops his theories, are drawn from examples of recent and contemporary history. In doing so, he can rely on an archive of multimedia artifacts (newspaper reports, television news, eyewitness interviews, political and academic discourses, etc.) for his sociological investigations, which form a certain reality. A transfer of these sociological theories to a philological subject in which text-based, literary narratives and the "societies" diegetically represented therein form the object of study, does not seem readily possible. Or, to put it differently, one would always have to bear in mind that no one-to-one transfer of the "society" in a literary text to an extra-textual "reality" is possible. Basically, it can be stated that Eyerman's theories do not offer any method of transferring insights into a society within literature to an extra-textual society.

The scholar Yuri Lotman and especially his work on cultural semiotics have of course been very well known in non-Russian-speaking cultural and literary studies for some time now. However, in *Culture, Memory and History. Essays in Cultural Semiotics* Marek Tamm edited texts by Lotman that were previously available mainly in Russian and are thus accessible to an English-speaking public for the first time. The volume not only offers a veritable treasure trove of new approaches in terms of theoretical content, but is a joy to read simply because of Lotman's powerful, intricate language, which Brian James Baer has so skilfully translated into English. Many of Lotman's statements make you want to quote them immediately in your own work or even frame them and hang them above your desk, because they are so aptly phrased.

The book is divided into seventeen chapters, three of which are not by Juri Lotman but by the editor, the translator, and Mihhail Lotman respectively. Few people may be aware that Lotman—who is known in our field mainly for his structuralist works *The Structure of the Artistic Text* (1970, trans. 1977), *Analysis of the Poetic Text* (1972, trans. 1976), and the concept of the *semiosphere* coined in 1984—also developed theories that are (or could be) used today within memory studies. The first chapter, "Introduction: Juri Lotman's Semiotic Theory of History and Cultural Memory" by Marek Tamm, is particularly important for dismantling Eurocentric prejudices and assumptions. Tamm briefly and succinctly discusses Lotman's life and work, but he devotes by far the larger part of the introduction to the three terms that are important for the book and which also form the titles

of the three main sections of the publication: “culture,” “memory,” and “history,” which Tamm defines in Lotman’s sense and places in a historical context. In doing so, Tamm shows that behind the so-called Iron Curtain there was an extremely active, critical, and theoretically versed research environment, especially in Tartu at the time of Lotman. Within this contextualization of the history of scholarship around the Tartu-Moscow Semiotic School, of which Lotman was one of the founders, the concept of the text is particularly important, which is not used in a purely literary sense, but is understood much more comprehensively as a semiotic “message that has integral meaning and integral function” (7). For Lotman, then, text is the basic element of culture as well as culture itself, so that culture is understood as a kind of giant mechanism of text creation that constantly translates non-cultural messages into cultural texts and thus contributes to the formation of cultural memory (7–8). What Aleida and Jan Assmann call “storage memory” and “functional memory” in their work on cultural memory from the late 1980s onwards, Lotman has described as “informative memory” and “creative memory” since 1985 (10). The first is marked by its focus on recording as accurately as possible the outcome of cognition and becomes the ultimate text. The second refuses to be fixed in time, but forms a cluster of cultural texts that can potentially and creatively be activated, so that the past always becomes a part of the present. From this, Lotman derives the epistemological conclusion, important for his work, that traditional literary and cultural history built on the idea of progress is profoundly misleading, as it disregards the active role of memory in the generation of new texts (10). Lotman also shows this critical attitude towards the study of history and its understanding of the past as history as a whole. Tamm quotes directly from Lotman’s later chapter, citing the importance that the decoding process faced by historians played in Lotman’s theoretical thinking:

A historian is fated to deal with texts. Standing between an event “as it was” and the historian is a *text*, which fundamentally alters the scholarly situation. A text is always created by someone and represents a past event translated into another language. One and the same reality differently encoded will yield different – often contradictory – texts. Extracting a fact from a text or an event from a story about an event requires an act of decoding. And so, whether this is acknowledged or not, the historian begins with the semiotic manipulation of his initial material – the text.

(189–90)

According to Lotman, neither “facts” nor “events” are something that can be taken as given, but are only generated by the historian through the encoding and decoding of text. Lotman thus poses the same question about objectivity and subjectivity in the culture of a society and the scholarly study of this culture that was also raised by post-structuralists and especially by the deconstructivists.

In chapter two, the “Translator’s Preface,” Brian James Baer shows that Lotman’s writing is characterized on the one hand by a very creative use of language, but on the other hand also strongly by his very interdisciplinary approach. In particular, according to Baer, the influence of the hard sciences on Lotman’s terminology, which is full of technical and scientific expressions, is not, however, due to an attempt to bring the humanities close to the natural sciences, but exactly the opposite (27–28). For Lotman, translation is therefore also a vital component in the construction of cultural memory, as a translation could both create something new as well as bring something old back into the focus of the present (29). One can only agree with Baer’s description of Lotman as a rhetorically brilliant storyteller (27), as Lotman’s texts never confront the reader with prefabricated premises when formulating his theses and theories, but lead his readership step by step through the development of his arguments.

Chapter three—the first of the fourteen chapters written by Lotman and the first of the part titled “Culture”—deals very fundamentally with “The Phenomenon of Culture.” Lotman starts from a tripartite definition of intelligence (33–34), which he sees as a basic prerequisite for translating cultural texts and thus generating new cultural texts (35–36), whereby these translated texts lead to semiotic diversity. In this internal semiotic diversity, Lotman sees a necessary condition for any intellectual structure (36). Even in monolingual structures, according to Lotman, such translations from one semiotic system to another can occur (36–37). He demonstrates this by means of myths and mythical thinking. In mythical thinking, and at this point Lotman argues in parallel with Ernst Cassirer’s theory of “mythical thinking” (*Das mythische Denken*, 1925), without, however, explicitly mentioning this connection to Cassirer, there are things that are similar to each other and can be considered to be a single phenomenon via this similarity (37). In this way, a semiotic sign can be transferred into another semiotic system without leaving the framework of myth. His statement that “[i]t is necessary to keep in mind that all known mythological texts have reached us as transformations, that is, translations of mythological consciousness into a linear verbal language [...]” (37) of course reminds one of Hans Blumenberg’s theories on “work on myth” (*Arbeit am Mythos*, 1979). In the case of linguistic texts, as opposed to other cultural texts, Lotman’s intensive engagement with current computational linguistics can be discerned (38–40), offering one of the many interdisciplinary approaches he makes fruitful for cultural semiotics. All transmissions, and even copies, of a text do not simply generate the identical, but something with a certain added value. This surplus of the semiotic text, which can only exist in a diversity and not in an individuality, is what Lotman calls “culture” (42–44). Lotman derives the following thesis from this insight, whereby we find ourselves back at the starting point of his essay and recognize why a definition of intelligence is needed for the definition of culture: “Culture, as supra-individual intelligence, represents a mechanism designed to compensate

for the shortcomings of individual intellect, and in that respect represents an inevitable addition to it" (46).

"The 'Contract' and 'Self-Surrender' as Archetypal Models of Culture," the fourth chapter, starts from the (clearly structuralist) dichotomy of "magic" and "religion" as typological principles (49). Put simply, Lotman sees religion as an unconditional submission to a higher, transcendent power, while magic represents an exchange between two parties within the magical system (49–50). Under what conditions two semiotic systems with different effects can coexist is shown by the example of pagan and Christianized Rus (51–56). However, this coexistence should not be understood as two systems existing side by side, but as one system that (partially) absorbed the other. In connection with the change from magic to religion in the case of the Rus, he then also sees a cultural and thus also cultural-semiotic diversification of power, which he follows using the example of the cultural text of literature from the Middle Ages to modern times. In connection with the change from magic to religion in the case of Rus, he then also sees a cultural and thus also cultural-semiotic diversification of power, which he follows, using the example of the cultural text of literature from the Middle Ages to modern times (56–62). Lotman uses countless references to canonized texts of Russian literature, just as Genette presents his theories on the classics of the French modern period. It is sometimes difficult to follow this rather hermetic line of argument if you are not familiar with Slavonic studies and have only a very sketchy knowledge of Russian literature.

In chapter five, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Interaction: The Semiotic Aspect," Lotman addresses the question of the extent to which comparative literature is possible, or what is being compared at all in the case of the so-called Mythological School and in Indo-European linguistics (67). According to Lotman, the basic condition necessary for researchers to make both typological comparisons and studies of historical-cultural "influences" and "borrowings" lies in the concept of the evolutionary unity of cultural typological phenomena (68), which he rejects. In his opinion, "influences" are only possible if one's own semiotic system allows them, and "borrowings" can only be introduced into a semiotically very similar system. Pointing out that there are, of course, similarities in Iranian and Celtic narratives, but that the differences are much greater and also correspond more to the historical distance of the emergence of these narratives, Lotman says that it is dangerous to conclude that these similarities make different material into a single entity (69). The impulses that lead to innovations, however, are not due to a similarity but to a difference and that is why they are so productive (68–69). He sees the adoption of a cultural text into another semiotic system as owing to two possibilities: "(1) the thing is needed because it is understandable, familiar, and fits within existing concepts and values; or (2) the thing is needed because it is not understandable or known and does not fit within existing concepts and values. The former can be described as a 'search

for oneself,' while the latter can be described as a 'search for the other'" (69). However, Lotman is not only concerned with finding an answer to the question of when something becomes possible within a culture; more important to him is the question of when it becomes absolutely necessary for a culture to transfer cultural texts from another culture into its own (70). To address the problem of a culture's need to make use of other cultural texts, Lotman again uses terminologies from computational linguistics to integrate them into translation studies theories (72-74). Lotman's reflections on the question of the cultural significance of the "other," its cultural semiotics, or the cultural texts formed from it (76-77), are interesting and can certainly be made fruitful for Scandinavian medieval studies, especially for questions about the possible reasons for the implementation of the translated *riddarasögur* in the literary semiotic culture of the sagas.

Chapter six, "Culture as a Subject and Its Own Object," as mentioned above, explores the question of subject and object in academic analysis. Starting from the view, founded by Hegel and Darwin, that culture, as an object of research, is an object, and from Kant, who proved that research itself can also become the object of its observation, i.e. an object, Lotman asks what the subject is in this relationship (83-84). In order to discuss this, Lotman goes intensively into the *monadology* founded by Leibnitz (85-93), in order to finally recognize that the dichotomy of subject and object is ultimately a relative and one-sided abstraction (92), which should not be ignored but rather consciously kept in mind.

"On the Dynamics of Culture," the seventh chapter, discusses the question of whether there can be such a thing as a "semiotic ground zero" that would lie before the development of any culture. The entire essay is devoted to the question of why one would locate a "semiotic ground zero" and thus a moment before culture in the past, but in cultural history more dynamic or freer societies are regarded as cultureless or even "not 'acting like a human'" (99) by the more regulated societies before them. Lotman shows that such statements are only possible when considering the history of culture as a linear sequence and contrasts it with a cyclical sequence (96-98).

In chapter eight, "The Role of Art in the Dynamics of Culture," Lotman introduces a concept that is important for his theories, that of the "explosion":

We understand explosions as events whose consequences are unpredictable due to the many factors involved and the extraordinary complexity of their interconnection. We include here events of a duration that so far exceeds the limits of a human life that we are unable to determine whether we are dealing with a one-time event or a repeating one. We also include in the category of explosions one-time events, which are by definition non-repeating. Explosive processes belong among the essential (and, from the point of view of the human observer, fundamentally destructive) phenomena of nature.

(116)

Lotman explains how historical instances of such “explosions” appeared in human consciousness and found their way into culture in the form of art (117–29), using a wide variety of examples, again mainly Russian.

“Memory in a Culturological Perspective,” the ninth chapter, introduces the second main theme, that of memory, in this publication. The essay is not a development of the topic based on an analysis. Rather, it is a list of Lotman’s observations, which he summarizes in six paragraphs with the spirit of a manifesto on cultural memory. Point one suggests that “the field of culture can be defined as a space of shared memory, within which certain common texts are preserved and actualized” (133). The second point states that cultural memory is not only unified but also inherently diverse (133–34). Point three asserts that in the case of memory related to text preservation, a distinction must be made between “informative memory” and “creative memory” (134–35). Point four holds that new texts do not only emerge in the course of a present culture, but also in the past (135–36). Lotman thus refers to the possibility that hitherto unknown texts from the past can emerge, or texts that have also been deliberately forgotten can be rediscovered and activated within cultural memory. According to the fifth point, cultures whose collective memory is fed only by self-produced texts are characterized in their development as “slow and gradual,” whereas cultures whose memory is periodically under the massive influence of texts from different traditions are characterized by an accelerated development (136–37). Point six states that texts that feed cultural memory come from different genres (137). On the basis of these six points, Lotman derives the conclusion that memory is not a passive storehouse for culture, but a constitutive part of its own text-generating process (137).

In Chapter 10, “Cultural Memory,” Lotman develops a theory of cultural memory from a semiotic perspective. The starting point of his reflections is that Lotman critically examines the basic features of cultural history as a field of research in history and insinuates that it has developed a theory of closed cultures in its logical extremes (139). He also rejects the opposing thesis that culture is an anti-historical, unchangeable phenomenon in which history is only a superficial layer and offers a third perspective on culture (139–40). This third perspective considers culture as a form of collective memory that is itself subject to the laws of time, but at the same time develops mechanisms that are resistant to time (141). Using a passage from Victor Turner (144) about a figurine called Chamutang’a used in a Ndembu divination ritual, whose gestural elements Lotman associates with Rodin’s *Thinker*, he follows the symbolic gesture of the “Thinker” through a short history of art and culture (144–45). He then follows the traces of “Roman” symbols, especially those referring to the character of the tyrant, in French and Russian literature (146–48). It is noteworthy however that, in this very chapter entitled “Cultural Memory,” Lotman is fundamentally more concerned with the semiotic reference to culture and its symbols than to memory.

The eleventh chapter, “Some Thoughts on Typologies of Culture,” begins with a polemical statement regarding historians in general. Lotman states that the real problem with historians is that they rely almost exclusively on well-preserved written sources when examining chronological layers of human history. In doing so, Lotman argues, historians mistakenly consider these sources as the norm for all historical processes and the culture of the period under study as the norm for all human cultures (149). The aim of Lotman’s polemic is to point out that neither culture nor collective memory are fundamentally dependent on scripture-based artifacts, and that such a scripture-centred stance is due to a Eurocentric perspective that also manifests itself in the interpretation of other mnemonic symbols (150–52). Unlike members of a written collective, Lotman argues, members of a “non-written” collective are constantly faced with the need to make decisions, but these decisions are not made by relying on history, cause-effect relationships, or an expected outcome (152). Instead, decisions are made by turning to fortune tellers or magicians, again drawing on the example of the Ndembu figurine and Rodin’s *Thinker* already used in the previous chapter (152–54). Based on the assumption that the practice of writing did not complicate but simplified the semiotic structure of society in relation to memory (154), Lotman suggests—with reference to Plato’s *Phaedrus* among others (156–57)—that the semiotic structure, or rather the symbolism used in oral memory cultures, is much more pronounced and diverse. In a somewhat conciliatory manner, however, he then states at the end of the essay that a completely oral or completely written culture, under which he also classifies persistent symbols, is an extreme that would probably not exist in this form (159).

The twelfth chapter, entitled “The Symbol in the System of Culture,” is devoted to the considerations of the symbol introduced in the previous chapter. The article starts with the observation that the word “symbol” is one of the strongest polysemes in semiotics, but is usually used simply in the sense of “symbolic meaning” and a mere synonym for signification (161). Lotman adds to this the classical definition of a symbol, in which the most common understanding of a symbol is linked to the idea of a content, which in turn serves as an expression of another—usually culturally superior—content (162). He rightly states that every cultural text, and thus also symbols, are fundamentally heterogeneous in nature. Even when considering a completely synchronous section of a culture, the heterogeneity of a culture’s language produces a complex polyglossia (163). Using symbols that have found their way into Russian cultural texts, Lotman shows how they can be integrated into cultural memory and at the same time changed by this integration (164–72).

The third and final part of the book, which is titled “History,” begins with a chapter titled “Clio at the Crossroads.” Lotman makes it clear throughout this third main section that historiography is a discipline of which he is rather critical. From Lotman’s point of view, history is a view from the future to the past, a view

of what has already happened from the perspective of a concept of “law,” “norm,” or “code,” which elevates what has happened to a historical fact and forces us to perceive certain events as more meaningful than others (178). A major problem Lotman identifies in the study of history is that it has turned into a history of social institutions, struggles of social forces and ideologies, which is probably also a criticism of Marxist approaches to history. Instead, he calls for a history of people who are not just “extras in the global drama of humanity” (180). In view of the changes in historical scholarship in recent decades and years, which are due to the influences of the cultural turn, microhistory, and New Historicism, such a statement seems somewhat outdated today. The most important insight from this essay, however, is that history is a narrative that follows the laws of language and the locution of storytelling (181). On the one hand, this narrative, which we perceive as history, is only an excerpt of events and contexts; on the other hand, it seems to us like a logical sequence that had to happen this way and not differently when we look back from the present into the past (182–84). The basic statement of Lotman’s essay, that narrative texts—even and especially if they are understood as historical documents—always follow literary conditions and should therefore be examined from the point of view of literary studies and semiotics, cannot be repeated often enough in our field today either.

Lotman also puts forward similar theses in the fourteenth chapter, “A Divine Pronouncement or a Game of Chance? The Law-Governed and the Accidental in the Historical Process,” when he criticizes the fact that history still considers it its task to reconstruct the past (189). According to Lotman, such a reconstruction of the past would require one to deal with actual facts, but historians, he reiterates, are left only with texts that stand between the historian and the event in the past and that manipulate her or his scholarly understanding of the past (189–90). As a fitting example of such manipulation, he mentions historians’ preoccupation with the Icelandic sagas, which say that everything was quiet in times of peace and thus report nothing more about this period of calm (190). Such a narrated-event history thereby completely disregards most parts of the past, even in the literary text. With regard to working with texts, he notes that the difference in the level of consciousness and in the goals of the author of the text and the historian as reader of the text also creates a high threshold for decoding (191). From this Lotman concludes that the need to rely on texts inevitably exposes the historian to a double bias. On the one hand, the syntagmatic directionality of the text transforms the object of the event by rendering it into a narrative structure, while on the other hand the contradictory directionality of the historian’s view deforms the written object (198).

In Chapter 15, “Technological Progress as a Culturological Problem,” Lotman again explores the question of “explosions” in cultural history, using technological progress as an example. Lotman draws a paradoxical connection between historical events (204–16). A fast-moving, explosive process in the field of science and

technology shatters customary ways of life and changes not only the social but also the psychological structure of the epoch. This gives rise to various consequences that generate typical, historically repeatable conflicts. First, new possibilities for organizing social life emerge through the expansion of memory and recording capacity and thus the possibility of predicting outcomes. Second, the potential for individual creative activity also increases (216). At the end of the essay, Lotman states that every abrupt change in human history releases new forces. The paradox is that moving forward can stimulate the renewal of archaic models of culture and consciousness, generating both scientific benefits and epidemics of mass anxiety. Analyzing the socio-cultural, psychological, and semiotic mechanisms that come into play at such moments is thus not just an academic task, but a societal one (220).

Chapter sixteen, “The Time of Troubles as a Cultural Mechanism: Toward a Typology of Russian Cultural History” (225–43), concludes the section contributed to this book by Juri Lotman. The aim of the essay is to show that the Russian Revolution, which signified a change from a class society to a classless society, was not a singular event in history, but can be placed in a whole series of such binary shifts (225–26). The structures of explosions that generate such binary shifts can lead either to a social catastrophe or to the release of creative forces (226–28). However, a binary structure, Lotman holds, does not even recognize a relative equality between opposing sides that would allow the opposing side to claim, if not the right to truth, at least the right to exist whenever a conflict appears in the sphere of politics, religion, science, or art. The very idea of hybridity is unfamiliar to the logic of the binary system, which would characterize it as unprincipled or opportunistic. And so, the binary system only acknowledges unconditional triumph (228). Probably somewhat sobered by his own insight into binary systems and the explosions he so often uses terminologically, Lotman concludes his contribution with the famous Hamlet quote: “To be or not to be” (242).

The conclusion, or the seventeenth chapter, was written by Mihhail Lotman under the appropriate title “Afterword: (Re)constructing the Drafts of Past” (245–65). Like the introduction, this afterword is exceptionally informative when it comes to Juri Lotman’s theses and theories, and not least in connection with the Estonian-Russian history of scholarship. In addition, it again very skilfully contextualizes Lotman’s essays brought together in this publication with regard to his further work as well as in the context in which they are presented here. Since some of Lotman’s essays were written during the period of Perestroika, the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the independence of Estonia, one would have wished for a somewhat more in-depth classification of the theses in this socio-political context. Nevertheless, doing so offers research for further generations of cultural semioticians.

The three books presented here, with reference to the memory studies mainly dealt with in them, all offer, to varying degrees and with insufficiently necessary theoretical modifications, a fruitful enrichment for Scandinavian medieval studies and Scandinavian studies. It is obvious that Lotman's approaches, which originated in the context of the humanities but make intensive use of interdisciplinary terminology and concepts, can most easily be applied in a philological-historical subject. The possible concerns about a facile transfer of theories of cultural trauma, which as sociological theories are based on different premises and especially different objects of study than the humanities, have already been expressed above. As far as the handbook edited by Tota and Hagen is concerned, it is really only worth reading if you are looking for an interdisciplinary or even transdisciplinary approach to memory studies and you are already familiar with the relevant theories in your own discipline.

This review essay makes it evident that the three publications discussed are fundamentally different contributions to a research complex labelled "memory studies." On the one hand, these differences can be traced back to the various fields of research from which the publications emerged and whose very distinct disciplinary approaches obviously also require them to be adopted in their own way. On the other hand, the publications per se are not structured in such a way that one could expect to find in them a uniform concept of what we are supposed to understand by the term memory studies. A handbook written by different authors from a variety of disciplines, or compilations of essays that have previously been published in completely different contexts, can neither do justice to such a claim nor would it make sense to expect such a claim from them in the first place. Rather, the publications reviewed here are able to show that memory studies does not represent a homogeneous theoretical concept but rather a research complex in which memory forms the more or less central, thematically focused object of study. However, the very question of whether memory is a measurable quantity defined by biological or cultural constants, or whether it is something that is subject to modification and is nothing more than a semiotic or discursive construct, leads to the formation of irreconcilable disciplinary positions. This differentiation of memory studies not only corresponds to the conditions with which we are familiar in all other disciplines that we call studies, but it is also to be welcomed since differences fertilize and advance scholarship. In their heterogeneity, the three publications reviewed here also make it clear that we must not understand memory studies as an umbrella term for a theoretical-methodological approach to the object of study of memory, since such a universally valid approach neither exists nor was ever intended. Thus, in our own engagement with memory studies in the context of Scandinavian studies, we should always remember and also clearly state what we mean by "memory" and how this understanding defines our approaches and theoretical implications regarding memory.

REFERENCES

- Blumenberg, Hans. 1979. *Arbeit am Mythos*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Cassirer, Ernst. 1925. *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, 3 vols (1923–1929), vol 2: *Das mythische Denken*. Berlin: Bruno Cassirer.
- Foucault, Michel. 1972. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Genette, Gérard. 1997. *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. Translated by Chana Newman and Claude Doubinsky. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor Adorno. 1972. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. New York: Herder and Herder.
- Lotman, Yuri M. 1976. *Analysis of the Poetic Text*. Translated by Donald Barton Johnson. Ann Arbor: Ardis.
- . 1977. *The Structure of the Artistic Text*. Translated by Ronald Vroon. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Nora, Pierre. 1989. “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire.” *Representations* 26: 7–24.
- Turner, Victor. 1975. *Revelation and Divination in Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- . 1980. “Social Dramas and Stories About Them.” *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1): 141–68.