

Afterword: Memory worlds in times of Corona

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Abstract

This afterword addresses the complex temporal and global dynamics of the coronavirus pandemic. After considering some of the new social rhythms that have emerged in the wake of Covid-19 around the world, it turns to the role of collective memory before, during and after corona. The aim is to provide a basic grid for how the Covid-19 pandemic could be addressed using memory studies expertise and concepts such as premediation, memorability, memory (ab)use, national memory, colonial memory, racial stereotypes, the digital archive, generational memory, or Anthropocene time.

Keywords

Covid-19, pandemics and memory, rhythmanalysis, the Spanish Flu

Reframing time in memory worlds

This special issue is a call to memory scholars to reframe their concepts of time and the past. Paradoxically, it is one of memory studies' merits to have paid close attention to different forms of temporal experience and historical consciousness: all the way from Aby Warburg's (2000) 'phantom times' of ancient art (see Didi-Huberman, 2018), Henri Bergson's (1908) *durée*, Marcel Proust's 'involuntary memory' and Walter Benjamin's (1977) theses on the concept of history, to Paul Ricoeur's (1984) 'narrative time', Reinhart Koselleck's (2004) 'futures past', François Hartog's (2017) 'régimes of historicity', or Aleida Assmann's (2020) 'modern time régime'. But such temporalities (nonlinear, palimpsestic, coming in leaps or as permanency) tend to be seen as an epistemological problem, and not an ontological one. They are studied as (subjective) experience and (collective) consciousness. Implicitly, unknowingly even, as the editors of the special issue argue, memory studies has all the while carried on the concept of Newtonian empty and linear time as its ontological basis. The problem with this invisible baggage is, first, that in light of modern physics Newtonian time is not the only, and possibly not the most valid, model any longer, and second, that it is deeply implicated in modernity's capitalist, colonialist and racist orders.

To tackle this problem, the editors propose a new combination of perspectives. They bring quantum physics (Rovelli, 2019), new materialism (in particular, Karen Barad's agential

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realism), and the wealth of memory research conducted in anthropology into dialogue with memory studies.

What the contributors to the special issue have brought forth as insights into the ‘Maya cyclical sense of time’ (Aída Hernández Castillo), ‘generational eating’ in China (Nancy N Chen), the articulation of ‘pretrauma’ in Filipino languages (Jocelyn S Martin), the emergence of a ‘here-now’ temporality in Australia (Felicity Collins, Chris Healy, Susannah Radstone), or the creation of first-time knowledge among the Saamaka (Richard Price) are all steps towards a ‘*denaturalisation* of western historicity’ (see introduction).

Using, as the editors suggest, Barad’s ‘relational-ontology sensibility to questions of time, memory, and history’ (2017: 71), these examples not only show how time is perceived, but what time *is* in various locations around the world. ‘Times’ are entangled with ‘worlds’.

In the spirit of this special issue and its combination of questions of time and ‘memory worlds’, this afterword seeks to address the global, combined, yet utterly uneven, *régime* of ‘Corona-time’ as of spring 2020. After considering some of the new social rhythms that have emerged in the wake of Covid-19 around the world, this afterword will turn to the role of collective memory *before*, *during* and *after* the corona pandemic, thus trying to provide a basic – but as we’ll see, in terms of temporalities highly permeable – grid for how the Covid-19 pandemic could be addressed using memory studies expertise.

As the pandemic is raging while this special issue is produced, this afterword is a rare and risky attempt in memory studies of ‘writing to the moment’. More generally, the following reflections are therefore also about how memory studies, a field invested in studying the remembrance and resonance of historical events *ex post facto*, could address a global occurrence in the present, while it is unfolding into an event. On the one hand, this afterword is therefore tainted with what Hans-Georg Gadamer (1960: 271) would call ‘desperate uncertainty’. But on the other hand, the ongoing pandemic exhibits diverse logics of memory and the kind of complex entanglements between pasts, presents and futures that our field can discern and critically address.

New rhythms: what Covid-19 has done to time

The Corona-crisis has subjected people around the world to new rhythms: Work, childcare, home-schooling, family visits, leisure, even eating, sleeping and taking showers are – temporally – not what they used to be. What would a ‘rhythmanalysis’ (Lefebvre, 2017) – which this special issue’s introduction eloquently puts on the agenda of memory studies – look like in the case of the profound temporal changes in everyday life brought about by the corona crisis? The pandemic and resultant curfews and lockdowns across the world have shown how seemingly ‘natural patterns’ of social time can break down, and be thoroughly repatterned.

Frankfurt, in March 2020: After the lockdown, the order of time as we knew it is shaken. Clear temporal separations between time at work and time at home are suddenly obsolete. A variety of tasks, private and professional, have become embedded in and distributed across what appears like boundless days, unordered weeks and indistinguishable months. The modern everyday experience of time and space – while moving in space, we realize how time passes – does not hold any longer. Everyone stays put. All that seems to be moving is the sun. Repetitive, cyclical patterns of temporal experience are emerging.

These new rhythms of everyday life may almost seem medieval, pointing back to a time when workplace (the bakery, the pottery, the blacksmith’s forge) was part of the home, and working rhythms were weaved together with domestic rhythms. Modernity, industrial revolution and the more recent ‘great acceleration’ of the globalizing age have, successively and ever-increasingly, done away with such older spatiotemporal patterns. For those caught up in the spiralling cycle of social acceleration, the lockdowns may even have come as ‘something akin to the relief one feels

when one falls sick with exhaustion after a long period of hyperactivity', as novelist Amitav Ghosh notes.¹ According to sociologist of acceleration Hartmut Rosa, the collective forced deceleration is an opportunity to experience a new 'resonance' with our immediate surroundings.²

But of course, all these observations are made from the relatively comfortable positions of middle-class authors, whether in Frankfurt, Calcutta, or Jena. Corona-rhythms look different in other worlds of temporal experience, and these worlds can be both far away or close to home, nested in otherwise leisurely paralyzed villages and cities. People in densely populated slum areas, from South Africa to Brazil, have to develop new routines, when under lockdown, everyone is forced to stay in tiny huts that were never designed to keep a great number of people inside all day.³ Workers without social security, from the United States to Kenya, keep following their daily routines, because they just cannot afford to do otherwise.⁴ Outbreaks of Covid-19 among migrant workers in Germany's meat industry and in Singapore's building sector show that for some people even in affluent countries, neither slowing down nor social distancing is possible.⁵ In this perspective, the new rhythms associated with the corona pandemic emerge as a marker of privilege.

The stasis of many middle-class lives also stands in stark contrast to the vortex of acceleration into which all those working in the critical infrastructures are drawn: Lorry drivers, police and cashiers see their working hours extended in unprecedented ways. Medical personnel and politicians are having 24/7 rhythms and need to take fundamental, sometimes existential decisions in a formerly unheard of brevity of time.

This parallel world of ever-increasing speed – rising case numbers across the globe, ad hoc political measures, new scientific insights about the virus – is brought to those locked at home via media in real-time. Digital media and methods make it possible to track the global spread of a virus with unprecedented precision. But interestingly, at the same time, we can observe the return of an older, almost forgotten *régime* of mass media: In addition to the now common forms of asynchronous information (via digital news and social media), people are returning to their radios and television sets (or their digital equivalents) in order to receive information about corona simultaneously. This is the return of a media-cultural practice last seen in the 1980s and 1990s. Nations assemble again before the 8 o'clock (or 9 o'clock) news in a way they haven't done in decades.⁶ Is this a practice of coming-together in a world where physical closeness is prohibited, a practice of experiencing and performing community?

Other practices of creating synchronicity in times of radical spatial separation are noticeable across the globe: Italians singing together from balconies, Spaniards clapping to applaud to their medical staff every evening, rainbows painted by children on windows worldwide. It seems that a new aesthetics of synchronicity as 'social eurythmy' is emerging.⁷

The coronavirus pandemic engenders a sense of global simultaneity, produced by the mediation of minute statistics about infections and deaths around the world. This undeniably leads to a sense of the planetariness of our condition. But it does not necessarily lead to greater solidarity. With its rapid spread, corona paradoxically leaves the world in both a paralysed and frenzied 'now', with little time for future-thinking or attention paid to those outside the narrow emergency-frames of collective (usually national) identity – such as, for example, the refugees on Europe's borders.⁸ If Covid-19 is another moment of what Ulrich Beck (2009) has termed the 'world risk society', then the pandemic seems to expose the world's unevenness rather than bringing about a 'cosmopolitan moment'.⁹ What happens at the same time around the globe is not the same everywhere. The synchronous experience of the viral process does not lead to a planetary eurythmy.

Memory before Corona: forgetting pandemics

What was remembered *before* the onset of the coronavirus pandemic? – We could have seen it coming: 2014–2016 Ebola, 2015–2016 Zika virus, 2015 MERS, 2009/10 Swine Flu, 2004 Avian

Flu, 2002/3 SARS (i.e. SARS-CoV, the first SARS coronavirus), since 1980 AIDS (HIV), 1977/78 Russian Flu, 1968–1970 Hong Kong Flu, 1957/58 Asian Flu. Pandemics are no surprises coming out of the blue, but recurring events. But not so in European consciousness: For most Europeans, the idea of the pandemic was either projected on the premodern Self (the Plague) or the cultural and geographical Other: Ebola as a problem of West Africa, and recent flus, as their names falsely suggest, a concern of Asia.

If all these more recent pandemics were not memorable enough, the sheer casualty numbers of the Spanish Flu of 1918/19 should have guaranteed it a firm place in collective memory: The Spanish Flu came in three waves, from spring 1918 to early 1919. According to recent estimations by medical historians, it killed between 50 and 100 million people worldwide, that is, between 2.5% and 5% of the global population.¹⁰ According to Laura Spinney, author of the compelling *Pale Rider* (2018), a global history of the Spanish Flu, which is full of food for thought for mnemonologists, this influenza pandemic was ‘the greatest demographic disaster of the 20th century, possibly of any century’ (Spinney, 2018: 171), with a death toll ‘surpassing the First World War (17 million dead), the Second World War (60 million dead) and possibly both put together’ (Spinney, 2018: 4). The Spanish Flu is ‘the mother of all pandemics’, also because it led, through viral mutations, to many of the smaller influenza and respiratory illness pandemics in the following hundred years. But in everyday historical consciousness it seemed utterly forgotten.

In early 2020, pandemics such as the Spanish Flu were, for most Europeans, just not part of what Reinhart Koselleck (2004) has called the ‘space of experience’. In what could be termed a collective ‘remembering-imagining system’,¹¹ what is remembered in culture constitutes the space of experience, which in turn shapes what can be imagined as possible futures, the ‘horizon of expectation’. But the Spanish Flu was not a major item of the commemorative cycle or of school education, even after the recent ‘re-awakening’ of its memory in the context of the Flu’s centenary.¹² Perhaps most importantly, it was nowhere impressively mediated – while its mnemonic competitors, the world wars, were all this, and in all respects. And this is precisely why the onset of the corona pandemic could thoroughly jumble up the relationship between ‘space of experience’ and ‘horizon of expectation’: What Europeans thought or knew yesterday (about the dangers of a respiratory illness, about the possibilities of curfews or ad hoc legislation in their democratic societies, about compulsory school attendance, or economic stability) was blown away today – and would again be thoroughly transformed tomorrow. With surprising, and ever more surprising, virological and political news coming in each day, the new corona experience just did not match up with usual expectations. The corona pandemic quickly turned into an ‘imposition’, as chancellor Angela Merkel said in her governmental statement on 23 April 2020, not only ‘on democracy’, but also on many people’s everyday sense of time and rhythms of change.¹³

All this has been different in different places of the world. South Korea showed a greater preparedness, because of their recent experience of severe SARS (2002) and MERS (2015) epidemics.¹⁴ People in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia appear little surprised by the Covid-19 pandemic as they vividly remember the devastating Ebola epidemic of 2014.¹⁵ And then there are differences in habit memory (Connerton, 1989) and differing situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988), such as the ready usage of face masks across Asia (a habit which seems to go back in Japan and China to the Spanish Flu) compared to arduous controversies over their relative usefulness in Europe.¹⁶

The anticipation of, preparedness for and coping with future events on the basis of remembered experience has recently been discussed in the field of memory studies with a series of concepts holding pre-prefixes: as ‘preforgetting’ and ‘prememory’ by Guy Beiner (2018)¹⁷ or ‘pretrauma’ by Ann Kaplan (2016; for related concepts in Philippine languages, see Jocelyn Martin, this volume). I use the term ‘mnemonic premediation’ (Erll, 2009, 2017), because collective memory is essentially a matter of mediation, from oral conversation to films and social media. As all collective memory is mediated memory, all collective anticipation (or lack thereof) is therefore a matter of premediation. And in

Europe, pandemics just have not been sufficiently mediated and remediated in the past – no famous paintings, novels, film, rarely very exciting lore of oral family history – so that they could then turn into a premediating force in the present. Such is the temporal dynamics of mediated memory.

The memory of the Spanish Flu therefore remains, as Spinney (2018: 1) puts it, the ‘elephant in the room’. But why are some elephants more visible than others in the ‘commemorative room’? Ann Rigney (2016) has thought about this question with the concept of ‘(differential) memorability’. Considering the Spanish Flu, several aspects emerge as playing into its failure to be memorable, and to mnemonically premeditate the corona pandemic:

First, there is the question of the *discreteness* of historical events and the possibility of gaining an (however patchy) overview of them.¹⁸ The Spanish Flu virus was incredibly quick. It killed people often within no more than 3 days, and it was not diagnosable at the time, as viruses had not yet been made visible under the electron microscope. Therefore, the flu became entangled with other rampant sickness and epidemics, like tuberculosis and venereal disease. As an event, the Spanish Flu therefore lacked discreteness, at least at the time of its experience.

What follows from this, second, is a lack of *narrativity*, the possibility to evoke a story in people’s minds.¹⁹ How can a story about an event emerge, if people don’t know what the event is, where it started, and how it evolved?²⁰ Third, in its historical context, the Flu lacked *tellability*: Harrowing as they were, flu deaths were less tellable (i.e. less noteworthy, they had less of a ‘point’) than stories of heroic deaths on the battlefields of the First World War.²¹ Fourth, memory culture verges towards the *evaluative*. And evaluations are easier to make when remembering human-made catastrophes, like war, genocide, or terror, where agency and responsibility are more clearly discernible than in natural catastrophes.²²

Fifth, there is the question of *archives*: If an event like the Spanish Flu pandemic cannot clearly be discerned by contemporaries, there will be a lack of sources which encode experience and memory for future reference. To be sure, in recent decades, historians have brought together global traces of the Spanish Flu. But there are no major contemporaneous (or later) memoirs, paintings, novels, or films dedicated to the Spanish Flu.²³ (Edvard Munch’s *Self-Portrait After Spanish Influenza*, 1919, and Egon Schiele’s *The Family*, 1918 are impressive, but not the artists’ central works). No strong visual icon seems to have survived. Arguably, collective memories of the medieval plague are still strong due to impressive long-living artworks, such as the painted Dances of Death still found in many churches all over Europe or Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (ca. 1349–1353).²⁴ In 1918, however, as Spinney argues, ‘people didn’t know how to think about it; they still don’t’ (2018: 291). Adapting a concept by cultural historian Samuel Hynes (1990), the Spanish Flu was ‘not sufficiently imagined’. As it was not a ‘pandemic imagined’, it did not turn into a ‘pandemic remembered’.

But again, there are different worlds, also of forgetting, and different reasons for forgetting. Spinney argues that in ‘Australia, the Spanish flu became telescoped into people’s minds with a 1900 outbreak of bubonic plague, in part because newspapers referred to both as “plague”’, while ‘in Japan it was eclipsed by another natural disaster, the great Kanto earthquake of 1923, which destroyed Tokyo’ (Spinney, 2018: 293).

There was and is, however, one strong and detailed form of memory of the Spanish Flu. It is not found in state commemoration, text books, art and literature, or family history, but in scientific memory systems. In the emergence of epidemiology and virology as a modern scientific disciplines since the 1950s, the Flu attained foundational status. Other academic fields such as the social history of medicine, too, reconstruct, retain, and transmit memories of the Spanish Flu (see Phillips and Killingley, 2001). Such specialized systems are also ‘memory worlds’. These worlds do not operate with commemoration but with archives, knowledge retention (Bowker, 2005), and

in the case of ‘reverse genetics’ also with the reconstruction of Flu-RNA (Tumpey et al., 2005). In times of crisis, such specialized forms of memory can come to the fore and feed into more mainstream interdiscursive collective memory. Importantly, scientific worlds of memory verge more towards the abstract ‘knowledge’-pole than towards the time-bound, identity-related, experiential and emotional ‘remembering’-pole of collective memory (see Erll, 2011: 107–108). But both systems are part of collective memory – and memories can migrate between them. I will come back to this point at the end.

Memory during the Corona pandemic: triggered, used and abused

What is remembered *during* Corona times? What memories are triggered by the experience of a pandemic? Again, there are manifold memory worlds. In different contexts, different memories are activated when people are confronted with corona.

Paradoxically, a transnationally operative virus has engendered a re-nationalisation, also in terms of memory. Patriotism and national repertoires are ransacked for historical analogies to understand the present and legitimate political action. Vocabularies of past wars have been tried out, as by Boris Johnson,²⁵ who invoked the British effort during the Second World War, and Donald Trump,²⁶ who compared the corona pandemic to Pearl Harbour (by implication, another devious attack by ‘Asians’). The British Queen’s address is an interesting case, where appeals to English national character (‘self-discipline’, ‘quiet, good-humoured resolve’) and the idea of a ‘strong generation’ – all core elements of British memory of World War Two – are mixed with what is staged as a spontaneous personal memory: ‘It reminds me of the very first broadcast I made, in 1940, helped by my sister. We, as children, spoke from here at Windsor to children who had been evacuated from their homes and sent away for their own safety’. What apparently cues this episodic memory is the similar situation of people in the UK today facing ‘separation from their loved ones’.²⁷

Memories of World War Two are always quick at hand when framing great crises. But corona also seems to bring back memories of colonialism. Cameroonians have been reported attacking white people as bearers of the virus (an ethnologist’s report has made it into a German debate²⁸). Memories of influenza and other diseases brought by European colonizers are emerging again in countries with indigenous populations (from the Amazonas region to Australia), who – from Columbus’ times onwards – had been decimated, often to the brink of extinction, by illnesses brought by white people they had no immunity against (Spinney, 2018: 20).²⁹

How pretrauma and crises-related memory-cues work together becomes clear in the case of the Philippines where, as Jocelyn Martin explains, people are not only reminded of devastating typhoons such as ‘Ondoy’ in 2009, when many were forced to stay indoors, but with the lockdown and ‘the enforcement of military personnel on the streets . . . citizens are starting to see shadows of Ferdinand Marcos’ terrifying Martial Law’.³⁰

The corona pandemic also triggers racial stereotypes, which belong to the (often non-conscious) standard repertoire of collective memory. There is a long history of coding fear of others into a language of infection, disease and decay. Nineteenth-century Sinophobia among Europeans and Americans found expression in the phrase ‘yellow peril’ (Tchen and Yeats, 2014). The sheer extent and detrimental power of such re-emerging stereotypes is evidenced by the fact that as of May 2020, Wikipedia features a ‘List of incidents of xenophobia and racism related to the COVID-19 pandemic’ with more than 350 entries, ranging all the way from Sinophobia in Nigeria to Antisemitism in the United States.³¹ Deep-seated, sometimes millennia-old practices of negative stereotyping are popping up again that many thought were no longer part of societies’ working memory – implicit cultural patterns, which James Wertsch (2019) calls ‘habits of thought’.³²

Meanwhile, among those who can afford to be more bookish, in their attempts to make sense of the current situation, Covid-19 triggered a renewed interest in the history of pandemics. Laura Spinney's *Pale Rider* is sold out. The outbreak of AIDS in the 1980s is revisited.³³ New books about the medieval plague are published. Albert Camus's *La Peste* (1947) and Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1772) are reread. And Boccaccio's *Decamerone* shows how social distancing (during the plague in Florence, a group of young people flee to a villa in the countryside) leads to a suspension in time, which can give rise to narration. Once more, the power of literary stories as both a form of framing harrowing experience and archiving cultural memory comes to the fore.

All these disparate examples (and there are a myriad more) show that current crises tend to work like retrieval cues for collective memory, from consciously drawn historical analogies all the way to non-consciously emerging stereotypes.³⁴ Politicians, journalists and other professional 'meaning makers' are groping for earlier, comparable, analogous situations. But future-oriented 'lessons of history' are difficult to draw in the case of natural disasters. Or what could a 'Corona – never again!' look like?

Memory after Corona: The open horizon

What will be remembered *after* the corona pandemic has passed? In terms of sheer sources, one is tempted to say: everything. Instant history-making abounds. Every second of pandemic time seems to be recorded on digital media, distributed, and shared via social networks. What the Spanish Flu lacked (a consciously created archive in the first place) is exactly what Corona is characterised by: It is the first worldwide digitally witnessed pandemic, a test case for the making of global memory in the new media ecology.³⁵ But the question is, which mediated experiences, beliefs and narratives will make it into the dominant memory discourses that shape the global future.

The game of naming is part of a conscious effort to encode certain narratives about the pandemic into future memory. When Trump calls Covid-19 the 'Chinese virus', and the Chinese government counters by suggesting that it is more likely an 'American virus', we are in the middle of the age-old game of attributing sources – and with that responsibilities – for pandemics.³⁶ In the Middle Ages, Jews and prostitutes were identified as origins of, and thus scapegoats for, the bubonic plague. The Spanish Flu got its name because in 1918 Spain was the first European country to acknowledge its influenza epidemic, while other European powers were covering up their casualties as part of wartime censorship (Spinney, 2018: 63). Wrong as it was, the term stuck. To stop such practice of 'blaming the obvious other',³⁷ and in an act of what one could call prospective memory politics, in 2015, the World Health Organisation (WHO) issued guidelines for naming new infectious diseases in ways that are not stigmatizing or misleading, stipulating the avoidance of reference to (alleged) origins in geographical locations, peoples, animals, or food.

The production of antagonistic collective identities and of counterfactual narratives vying for entrance into collective memory are the last things needed in a global pandemic. But the process of narrativization itself is inevitable. Any historical event begs the question of 'where did it begin', 'what course did it take' and 'how did it end'. It calls for an 'explanation by emplotment', which, according to Hayden White (1973: 7), is at the basis of all historical accounts. It is the active, recklessly simplifying and falsifying intervention, the attempt at creating false memories – prospective 'memory abuse' (McConnell, 2019) – that is shameful.³⁸

The power of narrative in the construction of these memory worlds cannot be underestimated. Literary and cognitive scientist Fritz Breithaupt has addressed the narrative possibilities emerging

from the corona crisis. He distinguishes five narrative patterns, among them the ‘rise of total control’, ‘failure of egomaniac leadership’, or the narrative of ‘depression’.³⁹ In memory studies, scholars increasingly point out the necessity of finding alternatives to the pervasive narrative pattern of ‘cultural trauma’ (Alexander, 2012). With regard to the corona epidemic in particular, patterns of ‘tragedy’ (Simko and Olick, 2020) or narratives of ‘outrage’ and collective action (Rigney, 2020) could be more enabling to build resilient futures.

For careful observers, the difficulties inherent in all pandemics of making sense and remembering remain: Contrary to what populists and conspiracists may suggest, there are no easy normative equations. Pandemics are not brought about by evil people, but by genetic accident. Pandemics are not entirely just – or entirely unjust – in whom they hit (affluent skiing parties were affected first in Europe, but so were old people’s homes and migrant workers), although the social dimension of pandemics usually leads to the poor being hit harder (Spinney, 2018: 203).

Running counter to such conscious attempts at framing and narrating the pandemic for future memory is the fact that the Covid-19 has posed great challenges to ways of ‘being with the dead’ (see Ruin, 2018). Too many people died too quickly – in Wuhan, in northern Italy, in New York – and could not be buried with the usual public funeral rites. As political philosopher Magdalena Zolkos points out, with the ‘collective inability to process this in the present’, the dead ‘might return to haunt, but belatedly’.⁴⁰

What emerges as a more general pattern of meaning-making is the relationality between humans, animals and microbes. One of the ironies of the past century’s pandemics is that the ‘swine flu’ of 2006 was not a flu coming from swine, but the Spanish Flu returning to its original host a century later after humans had given it to their domestic pigs (Spinney, 2018: 186). What might play a role in the future is a greater awareness of the deep time of human-animal-microbe interactions (Barad, 2007: ix, would possibly call it ‘entangled intra-relating’) in the making of influenza and other pandemics, a process whose origins go back some 12,000 years to human settlement, the agricultural revolution, and ensuing ‘crowd diseases’ (Spinney, 2018: 16). Human-viral temporality is thus roughly equal to Anthropocene time, and current pandemics seem to share many causes with climate change and mass extinction.⁴¹

Collective memory depends on top-down commemorative investment: Will nations launch corona commemoration days? Some countries, like Spain and Italy, which were hit so hard will perhaps do so. Sweden, which seems to navigate through the crisis with minimal adjustments, is less likely. But there are other pathways of collective memory: bottom-up ones based on shared, deeply felt experience. Generational memory might be one significant path.

Corona will most likely have brought forth a ‘generation’.⁴² The experience of the pandemic, at least in countries under lockdown, has all the ingredients of a generation-defining experience. It is a fundamental and extended⁴³ change of life for young people, who, in what Karl Mannheim (1952: 300) has called their ‘formative period’, do no longer go to school, remain locked at home, and realize through an almost uncanny global simultaneity the connectedness of the planet. They witness and become aware of an historical moment. And historicizing the lived present and severing it from the past (here: the pre-Covid-19 world) is one condition of historical thinking. With the ‘reminiscence bump’ in autobiographical memories,⁴⁴ the fact that events from late adolescence and early adult life seem to be remembered best, this generation will likely retain a focus on the Corona pandemic.

How long is the mnemonic half-life period of the Corona crisis likely to be? How long and how strongly will this global memory carry into the future? And how differently across the world? All this is difficult to gauge and depends largely on the memory’s interaction with other experiences and memories. Corona may be blocked out or overwritten by other events that may happen in the near future, by economic and political crises in particular.

One thing is clear: Memory after corona will play out in different modes. There may be active commemorative memory. There will be a sense of common experience in generational memory,

possibly transnationally. There will be legacies of the pandemic (financial, ecological, educational, digital). There may be effects on social habit memory: new modes of interaction shaped by corona (politeness, education, work, play). There will be memories of the sensual, rhythmic, and affective specificity of this time. There will be new scientific knowledge, about the virus, and about the social, political, cultural and medial dimensions of pandemics in the twenty-first century. What this suggests is that memory analysis needs to differentiate between different systems and modes, such as explicit forms of collective memory (institutionalised commemoration, storytelling as intergenerational transmission within families, scientific knowledge) and implicit forms (legacies, aftereffects on mentalities, emotions, affects, behaviours, ways of speaking).

Here is an optimistic scenario: If the experience of an unprecedented, global slow-down and all its positive side-effects – from clear water (if not dolphins) in the canals of Venice,⁴⁵ to what Monika Büscher (2020, 58) sums up as ‘less air pollution, an increase in cycling and walking in some areas and an upsurge in birds singing in the trees’⁴⁶ – is connected in collective memory with what has been formative for many young people in the year before – the Fridays for Future-movement – then the Covid-19 pandemic might turn into a memory that engenders ecological thinking and transnational solidarity. But admittedly, this scenario is based on more than a pinch of wishful thinking on the author’s side, and as in all other respects, there will be different ways forward, different ‘worlds’ of corona-memory, depending on whether the pandemic was experienced in autocratic regimes, in failing or succeeding democracies, from the top or the bottom of global society.

Frankfurt, June 2020: While the George Floyd protests are gaining momentum, and their entanglements with the coronavirus pandemic will have to be illuminated in the future, we are gazing at the open horizon of Covid-19 as a global occurrence, long before it has fully unfolded into an historical event. Narrative closure or retrospective teleologies are a sheer impossibility. While this situation makes any account of the pandemic a ‘desperately uncertain’ affair, it forcefully brings home the temporal dynamic that Barad (2017: 68) describes as ‘different times bleeding through one another’: Images of the plague of 700 years ago jump time and unfold affective agency in the present moment. Current experiences of lockdowns activate memories of totalitarian regimes in Poland and the Philippines, and of the legacies of slavery and racism in the U.S. Our ever-accelerating present is challenged by processes that started in deep Anthropocene time. And all the while, there are many futures – many worlds – that are now still possible.

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1. <https://www.thehindu.com/books/what-we-have-to-think-about-above-all-is-how-to-slow-down-amitav-ghosh/article31414696.ece> (accessed 24 May 2020).
2. <https://www.zeit.de/zeit-magazin/2020-04/hartmut-rosa-coronavirus-gesellschaft-wirtschaftssystem> (accessed 20 May 2020). (See also Rosa, 2017).
3. See, for example, the interview with Steven Nwadi who lives in the township of Alexandra near Johannesburg <https://www.zdf.de/politik/auslandsjournal/auslandsjournal-clip-3-398.html> (accessed 24 May 2020).

4. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/04/20/lockdown-developing-world-coronavirus-pov-erty/> (accessed 20 May 2020).
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/23/singapore-million-migrant-workers-suffer-as-covid-19-surges-back>; <https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-modern-slavery-at-the-heart-of-german-slaughter-house-outbreak/a-53396228> (accessed 20 May 2020).
6. Television news such as the German 'Tagesschau' have seen soaring viewing figures (<https://www.ndr.de/fernsehen/sendungen/zapp/Mit-Corona-schlaegt-die-Stunde-der-Qualitaetsmedien,coronavirus620.html> (accessed 20 May 2020)). In the UK, Boris Johnson's Covid-19 address is one of most-watched TV programmes ever (<https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2020/mar/24/boris-johnsons-covid-19-address-is-one-of-most-watched-tv-programmes-ever> (accessed 26 March 2020)).
7. One example is a choreography for dancers of the Berlin Staatsballett who move to Beethoven's Symphony No. 7 (his is another anniversary thwarted by corona), each individually, from their home offices, and cross-cut into one collective stream: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7Vt2MVJk4o> (accessed 24 May 2020). Synchronicity is of course a modernist form, but today's variation is one prepared and enhanced by new digital media, and it shows a strong emphasis on what one might call (not with Rudolf Steiner) 'social eurythmy' as opposed to what Lefebvric criticizes as the 'deception of artificial simultaneity' that 'masks time' and the 'diversity of places', 'countries and peoples' (2017: 89).
8. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/20/europe-refugees-coronavirus-deportations-health-care/> (accessed 20 May 2020).
9. Beck (2014: 55–56) defines the 'cosmopolitan moment' as a combination of 'enforced enlightenment, communication across all divides and boundaries, the political power of catharsis, enforced cosmopolitanism, risks as a wake-up call in the face of the failure of governments, and the possibility of alternative forms of governance in a globalized world'.
10. See Johnson and Müller (2002), Spinney (2018) (4, 309, FN 2).
11. On the psychological concept of the remembering-imagining system (RIS) see Conway et al. (2016).
12. See Beiner (2021), the seminar 'Remembering, Forgetting, and Rediscovering the Great Flu' hosted in Dublin by the President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins (<https://president.ie/en/diary/details/president-hosts-a-reception-commemorating-the-great-flu-epidemic-of-1918-1919>), or recent books like Spinney's (2018).
13. <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/suche/regierungserklaerung-von-bundeskanzlerin-dr-angela-merkel-1746978> (accessed 24 May 2020).
14. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-04/south-korea-tests-hundreds-of-thousands-to-fight-virus-outbreak> (accessed 24 May 2020).
15. <https://www.dw.com/en/ebola-hit-west-african-nations-on-alert-amid-coronavirus-pandemic/a-52828460> (accessed 20 May 2020).
16. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/09/world/europe/virus-mask-wearing.html> (accessed 20 May 2020).
17. Beiner has also written on the Spanish Flu as a 'prememory' of the Covid-19 pandemic: 'We intuitively suppose that an event can be remembered only after it has occurred, but in practice remembrance begins during the event, if not earlier. Even before an event unfolds, our perceptions of it are shaped by expectations and anxieties grounded in historical remembrance of previous events. . . . [I]n a sense, we are already drawing on a prememory that is based on our notions (whether factual or fictional) of the Great Flu'. (<https://www.drb.ie/blog/comment/2020/03/28/the-prememory-of-the-pandemic> (accessed 24 May 2020)). In the model proposed here, the Great Flu is not so much an existing prememory of, than a memory retrieved during, the Covid-19 pandemic.
18. On the narrative logic of the historical event, see Ricoeur (1984: 96–111); for a new memory studies approach to events, see Wagner-Pacifi (2017).
19. For recent narratological definitions of narrativity, see Ryan (2004).
20. These are the key questions for any emplotment of historical events into a meaningful narrative; see Ricoeur (1984) and White (1973).
21. See Baroni (2014); for an application to memory studies, Savolainen (2017).

22. This has to be qualified in two respects: Instead of clearly demarcated groups of victims and perpetrators, human-made catastrophes are generated and suffered by a range of 'implicated' subject-positions (see Rothberg, 2019). The human factor in the Covid-19 pandemic has repeatedly been pointed out through the destruction of wildlife and the world's ecosystems (see <https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-pandemic-linked-to-destruction-of-wildlife-and-worlds-ecosystems/a-53078480> (accessed 28 May 2020)).
23. A reassessment of the role of the Spanish Flu in literary modernism is provided by Outka (2019: 5) who teases out the 'subtle but significant presence of the viral tragedy within iconic modernist texts' by Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats.
24. On the importance of mediation and remediation for memory (ErlI and Rigney, 2009), on the longevity and afterlives of art, see Rigney (2012).
25. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/17/enemy-deadly-boris-johnson-invokes-wartime-language-coronavirus> (accessed 24 May 2020).
26. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52568405> (accessed 24 May 2020).
27. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/04/05/queens-coronavirus-speech-full-will-succeed-better-days-will/> (accessed 24 May 2020). In the televised address, a black and white photograph is cut into the Queen's speech, showing herself and her sister Margaret as ten- and thirteen-year-old girls in front of a radio microphone. Such remediations, which stage royal memory as both personal and of national import are a typical mnemonic device of the royal family's public relations (see Jordan, 2019), and now activated in times of crisis.
28. <https://taz.de/Privilegien-in-Corona-Krise/!5677150/> (accessed 20 May 2020).
29. Angelique EagleWoman provides an 'Indigenous perspective to COVID-19' from North America: 'With this pandemic, it brings to mind what our ancestors faced during the waves of illness and disease that devastated our communities documented as early as 1518 with the smallpox epidemic with various other epidemics including chickenpox, flu, tuberculosis, and measles to name a few' (<https://indiancountrytoday.com/opinion/an-indigenous-perspective-to-covid-19-V419mlmYKEenMJm2vNFyw> (accessed 20 May 2020)).
30. Jocelyn Martin, personal communication 19 May 2020. See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/05/philippines-main-channel-abs-cbn-forced-off-air-amid-coronavirus-lockdown> (accessed 20 May 2020).
31. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_incidents_of_xenophobia_and_racism_related_to_the_COVID-19_pandemic#cite_note-dw52862599-3 (accessed 24 May 2020).
32. For research on 'the new unconscious', see Hassin et al. (2005).
33. *Social Research* <https://www.socres.org/> is republishing in summer 2020 their 1988 issue entitled 'In Time of Plague: The History and Social Consequences of Lethal Epidemic Diseases' which was a response to the hysteria surrounding the AIDS epidemic at the time. It features a comment by Bill Hirst (2020) on the future of the memory of Covid-19, where the psychologist confesses to being 'not very sanguine about the long-term prospect of this endeavour, for all the evidence suggests that we will forget'.
34. Commemorative memory is another important aspect of memory during the corona pandemic. Commemorative events related to the end of the Second World War have been affected in unprecedented way. Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartman (2020) has shown how the 'restrictions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic on Holocaust commemoration intensified the development of distinct modes of social media memory.'
35. See Hoskins (2018) for approaches to understanding the digital dynamics of global crises like corona. As forms of active archiving dozens of initiatives building digital corona archives have sprung up across the globe. See, for example, the German coronarchiv (<https://coronarchiv.geschichte.uni-hamburg.de/>, accessed 6 July 2020) or the NYC COVID-19 Oral History, Narrative and Memory Archive (<https://wp.nyu.edu/covid19histories/2020/04/25/nyc-covid-19-oral-history-narrative-and-memory-archive/>, accessed 6 July 2020).
36. <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/opinion-as-us-and-china-peddle-conspiracy-theories-about-covid-19s-origins-only-independent-probe-way-forward/351874> (accessed 24 May 2020).
37. For Spinney (2018: 64) the 'time-honoured rules of epidemic nomenclature' imply the blaming 'of the obvious other. In Senegal it was the Brazilian flu and in Brazil the German flu, while the Danes thought

- it “came from the south”. The Poles called it the Bolshevik disease, the Persians blamed the British’ (Spinney, 2018: 64)
38. On agenda setting and ‘mediated prospective memory’, see Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2013).
 39. <https://www.zeit.de/2020/18/corona-krise-studierende-professoren-narrative?page=2#comments> (accessed 20 May 2020).
 40. Magdalena Zolkos, personal communication 4 June 2020.
 41. See Gatti (2020). For an overview on memory studies research on the Anthropocene and its temporalities, see Craps et al. (2018).
 42. See Mannheim (1952). On generation and collective memory, see Schuman and Scott (1989); on transnational dynamics of generational memory, see Erll (2014).
 43. See Draaisma (2012) for the different perceptions of time in younger and older people.
 44. See Rubin and Schulkind (1997). For an up-to-date overview of psychological approaches to collective memory, see Hirst and Merck (2021).
 45. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/20/nature-is-taking-back-venice-wildlife-returns-to-tourist-free-city> (accessed 24 May 2020).
 46. Büscher (2020: 58) notes that these facts are comparatively little covered in the media. Such ‘collateral benefits’ of the corona pandemic are sometimes noted (see e.g.: <https://sandrp.in/2020/04/22/earth-day-2020-can-we-sustain-the-collateral-benefits-of-covid-lockdown/> (accessed 20 May 2020)). But they seem more of a prearranged experience than a full-fledged narrative pattern. Pointing these out should not be misunderstood as cynical in the face of a devastating virus, but as a way of gesturing towards potentialities in the midst of crisis.

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