

# Impact and Resonance –

## *Towards a Theory of Emotions in Cultural Memory*

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### *Introduction*

Most current approaches to the complex phenomenon of (cultural) memory start from the premises of neurosciences, which are then connected to sociological, media-oriented and other cultural data and concepts. In keeping with this, we have all absorbed the central axiom of memory studies that tells us that memories are extremely malleable and endlessly reconstructed according to the actual demands of power and identity construction. Memories, as we are all aware, fulfil specific functions in socio-political contexts. This constructivist and functionalist approach is premised on the neuro-scientific view of memory as something that is constantly transformed and overwritten: a memory is a memory of a memory. This view is beautifully expressed in a novel by Julian Barnes and deserves to be quoted here *in extenso*:

If a memory wasn't a thing but a memory of a memory of a memory, mirrors set in parallel, then what the brain told you now about what it claimed had happened then would be coloured by what had happened in between. It was like a country remembering its history: the past was never just the past, it was what made the present able to live with itself. [...] an element of propaganda, of sales and marketing, always intervened between the inner and the outer person.<sup>1</sup>

When we move to cultural studies, this view of memory is in all points confirmed. Adapting Julian Barnes' description to the cultural context, we have

1. Barnes, *England, England*, 2000, 6.

to replace the constant revisions of the brain with the constant reframing of media representations that endlessly reconstruct and change the memory content. Neurosciences and Media Studies are based on the same constructivist hypothesis that events and experiences have no ontological status but are made and remade over and over again. I am not questioning these premises; I think that they have opened our eyes to new phenomena and that we have seen a lot of evidence that confirms them. But I am also convinced that they cannot do full justice to the complexity of memory. There are aspects involved in the dynamics of memory that get lost or are covered up by these approaches and remain inaccessible. I therefore want to explore here another approach, hoping that it might turn out to be complementary to the functionalist and constructivist approach. It should help us to ask a different set of important questions such as: what is the role of emotions in the construction of memories? Why do some memories strike a deeper chord and have a more lasting effect than others? How are long-term memories generated? How do earlier memories shape later memories?

I am interested in a theory of cultural memory that investigates the role of emotions and affect in a diachronic, trans-generational dimension. In addition to the constructivist point of view that emphasises the *synchronic* and embedded quality of a memory fabricated according to actual needs and demands in the present, we also need approaches to the affective dimension of memory in a long-term *diachronic* perspective, be it the life span of the individual or the trans-generational transmission of culture. Such an approach would focus especially on the transmission of affect and the recharging or transformation of emotions. I define emotions with Eva Illouz as the “energetic” side of action, the term “energy” implying simultaneously cognitive, affective, value-oriented, motivational and physical aspects. She continues:

Emotions are all but pre-social and pre-cultural. They are indeed an amalgam of cultural significations and social relations, and it is the high density of the complex that charges actions with specific energy. Emotions are the store for such energy, because they underpin the relation of the self to its cultural others.<sup>2</sup>

The emphasis on the relation between memory and emotions is by no means a new theme in memory studies. It is generally accepted that “remembering is often suffused with emotion, and is closely involved in both extended

2. Illouz, *Die Errettung der modernen Seele*, 2009, 26 (my translation).

affective states such as love and grief, and socially significant practices such as promising and commemorating.”<sup>3</sup> But while for instance the question of truth in memory has received considerable attention in memory research, the connection between memory and the emotions has not been studied with similar intensity. The role of emotions in the formation and transmission of memory is often downplayed or altogether elided in constructivist studies. My intention is to look more closely into the interplay between various levels and qualities of memory. Neuroscientists refer to the complex wired architecture of the brain (“*Verschaltungsarchitektur*”, Wolf Singer), in which experiential, mediated, social and cultural impressions interact to serve as dispositions and templates for later memories.<sup>4</sup> To come back once more to the description given by Julian Barnes, he emphasised that how we remember is influenced by what intervened between the remembered event and the actual moment of remembering. In addition, I want to stress that how we remember is also shaped by memories and preconceptions that were already in place before the event ever happened. The building up of memories, I want to argue, has not only an *afterlife* of repeated transformations but also a *prehistory* that I want to bring back into the discussion. I want to learn more about the ways in which memory traces interact with previous experiences and cultural patterns; how both of these provide templates that gain a steering function within our mental cosmos. “An element of propaganda, of sales and marketing,” writes Barnes, always intervenes “between the inner and the outer person”. To this we may add: there are also cultural patterns and deeper impressions that intervene between the inner and the outer person, because our acts of remembering are also shaped by individual or shared previous imprints that we tend to neglect and which have so far largely remained outside the focus of our study.

If we agree that, to a large extent, our memories are crystallised around and coloured by emotions, we need to learn more about the dynamics of affect in the interaction between individual and cultural memory. I am interested in images that are not confined to media images that have been so often reproduced that they have become part of the hard-wired stock in the collective repertoire. In addition to these pop-icons and icons of history, there are less definite internal images that are better described as cultural patterns,

3. Casey, “Memory”, 2003/2010.

4. See the chapters by both editors in Wertsch and Boyer, *Memory in Mind and Culture*, 2009.

templates, or scripts, which operate on a less concrete and conscious level. It is my hypothesis that these cultural patterns underpin the perception of external images, endowing them with form and charging them with meaning and emotions. This approach to the “deep structure” of cultural memory is not predominantly psychoanalytical but includes psychological, medial and cultural aspects. In order to open up a new path to the topic of cultural memory and emotions, I want to introduce two concepts, which I would like to probe as critical tools for cultural memory studies. These terms are “resonance” and “impact”, which stand in opposition to each other but can also be considered as complementary. “Resonance” will refer in this context to forms of stimulating and strengthening the affective charge in the process of remembering, while “impact” will be used to describe a traumatic overdose of affect which destroys the finer patterns of resonance and leads to a disturbance, a distortion and possibly even to a total blocking of memory.

### *Resonance and Impact*

#### **Resonance – Cognition as Recognition**

The English words “resonance” and “resonate” are derived from Latin *resonantia* which means ‘echo’, and from *resonare*, ‘to resound’. These words are formed around the root *sonus*, ‘tone, sound’, and refer thus to acoustic phenomena. The prefix *re-* refers to the repetition of a sound, which, in this case, is not a second independently generated sound but the effect of the first sound that produces what we may call a “secondary sound”. In plain speech, this secondary sound is an “echo” – the sound that is generated not from an instrument but from a primary sound. In Ovid’s story of Echo, the emphasis is on the lack of an independent origin. Echo is portrayed as a parasitic female figure with only a sham life and no vitality of her own. I shall not deal with this negative tradition of resonance here, but will focus instead on its positive quality of endowing a tone with a deep, full, and reverberating sound. While the echo is the sham image of a sound that is soon doomed to die, the physical logic of resonance stresses the reinforcement or prolongation of a sound by reflection from a surface or by the synchronous vibration of a neighbouring object. Without the response, the primary sound would vanish unheard. Resonance, in this sense, is not an after-sound but the sensuous shape and quality of the sound itself. Moving away from acoustics, the word “resonance” has been translated into figurative uses, where it

stands for the evoking or suggesting of images, memories, emotions and meanings. The concept of resonance implies the interaction of two separate entities, one located in the foreground, one in the background. In this case, the element in the foreground does not cover up or elide what exists in the background; on the contrary, the element in the foreground triggers the background and fuses with it. We may also speak of a cooperation, in which the background element nonconsciously or unconsciously guides, forms, shapes the foreground element. My emphasis here is on the hidden correspondence and the tacit agreement between a surface stimulus and its response on a deeper and nonconscious level, which can enlarge our understanding of the nonconscious but not necessarily unconscious, let alone occult, dynamics of memory.

### **Impact – Clash with the Real**

“Impact” has become such a trite and ubiquitous “plastic word”<sup>5</sup> in our time that, from the outset, we should be aware of a dramatic difference between its colloquial usage and the meaning with which I want to invest it here. Every academic project, every launch of a consumer product in the public realm and every political speech today aims at making an impact, that is: at making a positive difference, at raising awareness, at having a lasting effect. Impact in this sense is part of the inflated rhetoric of self-promotion. A rather different meaning of the term is invoked by the flight attendant in the airplane when she makes her pre-take-off announcement: “In case of impact on land or water [...]”. Such an event (in the sense of collision) – if we were to survive it – would create a totally different kind of impact (in the sense of long-term consequences), namely that of a traumatic and unforgettable, because deeply disturbing, event. Impact is here understood literally as a forceful and extremely dangerous collision. The term is used scientifically in geology to refer to a collision of meteorites, asteroids, comets and other celestial objects with the earth. The larger the objects that hit the earth, the greater is the release of energy, which may far exceed that of several weapons of nuclear energy detonating simultaneously. The history of the earth has been shaped by such “impact events” for better (in generating the water of oceans) and for worse (through devastating destructions and chemical reactions that induced climate change which led to the extinction of vari-

5. Pörksen, *Plastikwörter*, 2004.

ous species). Large impact events occur very rarely in the history of the earth and could not, until recently, be technically observed and anticipated.

In the realms of nature and technology, the forceful collision, be it that of a meteor or that of a crashing airplane, occurs in the form of an “accident”. It is a highly irregular event carrying a huge destructive potential. This destructive charge, however, can also be unleashed intentionally in warfare as in the case of dropping nuclear bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. From the point of view of those who are exposed to it, it is experienced as an abrupt event for which they have no cultural templates and which therefore stands out in catastrophic immediacy. In nature as in culture, impact is associated with the unexpected *par excellence*, which cannot be anticipated. Theorising the notion of that which has not been anticipated, Derrida has distinguished between *l'àvenir* – a coming event that is “not knowable”, setting it off against *l'avenir* – a future that is “not known” but can be predicted, controlled, contained.<sup>6</sup> I will therefore move away from the meaning of impact as influence or impression and focus solely on the meaning of impact as a crash, smash, bump, bang, knock (to offer a few of the synonyms listed in the dictionary), all referring to a sudden, unexpected and violent thrust of something that shatters a more sensitive fabric and leaves indelible marks.

My claim is that the terms “resonance” and “impact” can point to important structural elements of cultural memory, which have not yet been investigated systematically. Resonance refers to a fusion in the process of remembering between a new stimulus and an earlier one that has been deeply incorporated, while impact relates to experiences that stand out because they lack any precognition within the networks of resonance. These two are not necessarily polar phenomena but, as we shall see, they can interact in various ways. Impact lacks or destroys the fabric of resonance by creating hot cores whose overwhelming energy has to be reworked across generations in ever new attempts of mediation and reshaping. Its imprint in cultural memory, however, can also assume the quality of a negative schema, which can unfold its own kind of resonance and add to the traumatic impact of later events. Moreover, emotional impact may be both auratic and negative, consisting of both sacred and haunting images.

6. Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 1996, 47.

### Remediation and Premediation

Before looking at effects of resonance and impact in concrete examples, I will prepare the ground further for this study by picking up two concepts that were introduced by the media historian Richard Grusin: “remediation” and “premediation”. The term “remediation” was introduced in a book co-authored with David Bolter in 1999.<sup>7</sup> The authors designed the concept to better conceptualise the interaction of different media formats such as the printed book, photography, film, TV, digital photography and the Internet etc. The theory of remediation describes the evolution of these media formats as a history of intense interaction in which a later medium always copies, transforms, intensifies, incorporates (some even say: cannibalises) features of earlier media. “Each act of mediation depends on other acts of mediation. Media are continually commenting on, reproducing, and replacing each other, and this process is integral to media. Media need each other in order to act as media at all.”<sup>8</sup> The larger claim behind this description is that it is impossible to draw a clear borderline between the world as constructed by the media and reality as such. According to Bolter’s and Grusin’s media theory, “there was never a past prior to mediation; all mediations are remediations, in that mediation of the real is always a mediation of another mediation”.<sup>9</sup> This statement sounds familiar; it is, in fact, a clear variation of Julian Barnes’ constructivist credo: a memory is a memory of a memory.

The term “premediation”, which is a sequel to remediation, was introduced by Grusin five years later in 2004. The addition of the new concept was the direct consequence of the intervention of a real external event: the attack on the Twin Towers in Manhattan. In introducing the sequel “premediation”, Grusin revised his previous media theory in significant ways.<sup>10</sup> He argued that since September 11, a shift has occurred in the quality of US media culture. It was no longer geared only to remediating the past in the present: its aim had instead become also to premeditate the future. Grusin commented on the state of the world and the media after 9/11: “The current cultural moment is marked by the hypermediacy of premediation” (34). Premediating the future is not to be confused with predicting or programming

7. Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 1999.

8. Bolter and Grusin 1999, 55.

9. Bolter and Grusin 1999, 18-19.

10. Grusin, “Premediation,” 2004, 17-39.

the future. According to Grusin, in a democratic country like the United States of America, this future-oriented use of cultural media clearly differs from political ideologies or professionally authorised formats such as meteorological prediction, technological planning and ideological programming. Premediation creates a pluralisation of scenarios in which the future can be imaginatively anticipated and thereby controlled in more subtle psychological ways. Grusin's primary aim in introducing the concept of "premediation" was to elucidate the role of mass media as a coping strategy in the aftermath of terror. His notion is that imagined anticipations of terror help to reshape and alleviate mass anxieties. For him, the ultimate goal of premediation is to colonise the future, or, to put it even more succinctly: "the logic of premediation seeks to prevent the future" (37).

In this media theory, a surprising shift has taken place from remediating the past to premediating the future. What is perhaps even more surprising is the change of the quality traditionally ascribed to the future. The future that, until recently, was considered a resource for innovation, change, hope and regeneration has become a source of deep collective anxiety and impending terror. To evade this shock, the future must be constantly monitored in a dynamic coping strategy of overcoming anxiety by anticipating it. Grusin presents the new era of terror as an "age of anxiety" in which the media have the function of keeping the ball of anxiety rolling but playing it low.

### **Terror and Trauma**

Grusin's media theory of premediation revolves around the experience of and the discourse on 9/11. The synchronised attack of hijacked airplanes crashing into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon shattered the constructivist logic of remediation, according to which there is "never a past prior to mediation". What occurred on 9/11 has therefore been defined as an event that was not premediated. Its traumatic effect was ascribed to its suddenness, to the harsh, brutal rupture in the presumed solidity and continuity of reality. It has, however, also been pointed out that images of planes crashing into landmark buildings of New York and crowds being attacked and panicking in the streets of New York have been a constant theme of pop culture and have appeared in various invasion films. It was even argued that the event was premeditated to such an extent that it was experienced with an uncanny *déjà vu* effect. This, however, did not minimise the impact, which was caused by the collapsing of two different ontological levels: the fantasised Hollywood

images suddenly appeared in the news format, where they were asserted as part of our common time/space reality. The shock was that these images were not produced by film directors and the media industry but by terrorists who had transformed a thrilling American nightmare into a devastating experience.

After the collective shock of 9/11, the media reacted with a ritual overdose of remediation: time was arrested as the same images, which had long lost their status as “news”, were rerun in an infinite loop. Grusin, however, focused on another answer to the trauma provided by the media, namely pre-mediation. He argued that it became a constant concern of the visual mass media to premeditate all kinds of impending traumas, such as an invasion from outer space, an ecological crisis or the complete breakdown of social norms. He interpreted the intention behind such acts of premediation as “the desire that catastrophic events like those of 9/11 never catch us unawares, the desire to avoid the catastrophic immediacy”.

In the language of Baudrillard and Zizek, Grusin defined this catastrophic event as an unmediated clash with the real. At the beginning of the twentieth century, concepts like “immediacy” or the flash of “unmediated experience” used to be charged with highly positive connotations. In the midst of the trite routine of modern life, an “epiphany” promised a kind of secular revelation and a mystical contact with the real. Modernists in general had resented ornaments and conventional patterns; they longed to rip off the trappings and camouflage of all kinds of mediations to lay bare what they considered the essence of the real. In the context of a post-traumatic society, however, this desire for immediacy and the real has vanished and been replaced by the atmosphere of a depressive aftermath. Post-traumatic societies, according to Grusin, are now anxiously fortifying themselves with techniques of (pre-) mediation that will shield them from the terror of the real.

This analysis is fraught with problems because of the conflation of two terms that are often conflated but ought to be more carefully discriminated: terror and trauma. Both terms have several things in common: they refer to phenomena characterised by a combination of extreme violence, sudden attack, utmost danger and overwhelming emotion. Both are described as events that have an enormous impact, which can be understood to mean that they potentially have devastating long-term effects. In colloquial speech, the two terms are therefore often used synonymously. Yet there are good reasons for departing from this practice by examining these two phenomena

more carefully. Closer study reveals significant differences in their temporal frames of reference that are of central importance for the analysis of each phenomenon individually.

Terror is understood here as the core element of terrorism. The meaning of a terrorist attack lies not only in the quantifiable number of victims and destruction of property, but also, and in particular, in the event's psychological effect. It affects not only those who suffered directly, but also those who emerged without physical harm. While the act of violence itself affects a limited number of individuals, the impact of terrorism affects entire nations. Terror, as has been emphasised repeatedly, is automatically converted into fear, or to put it more precisely: into the fear of a next time. The message of terrorists is: "We are invisible, you are vulnerable, and we have struck you today and can strike again tomorrow". In his graphic novel about 9/11, *In The Shadow of No Towers*, New York comic artist Art Spiegelman illustrated this apprehension by means of a familiar anecdote, in which a tenant of a badly soundproofed building comes staggering home, tipsy after an evening of making merry, and in the midst of noisily undressing for bed suddenly realises the lateness of the hour and stops making noise. After an interval of silence, a voice is heard from the apartment underneath: "Drop the other [...] shoe so we can go to sleep!" This state of waiting is precisely the situation of those living under terror, waiting "until the other shoe drops".<sup>11</sup>

In order to have this kind of effect, terrorists need support. They find it, paradoxically, in their victims. Terrorism is a dialectical form of violence, in which the aggressor and the victim work together in an "unholy alliance". The terrorists bring the explosives; the victims bring the media that set off a second, symbolic explosion. The dissemination of news stories and their images produce the boundless terror, the epidemic fear, and the deep destabilisation of collective trust. Such an impact can only unfold fully in modern democracies, with their uncensored media and robust infrastructures. Terrorism therefore paradoxically involves close cooperation between perpetrators and victims, in which the one half of the event comes from the outside, and the other half is home grown. By capturing public attention and focusing it on a single point, the media create moments of "collective effervescence", or surges of communal emotion. And it is the media, too, that keep this emotional impact perpetually alive and present.

11. Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers*, 2004.

None of this applies to the great traumas of history. A clinical definition of trauma has only been in use since the year 1980, when the term first appeared in the *American Handbook of Psychiatry*. Much has changed in our perception and interpretation of history since that time. In short, the introduction of “post-traumatic stress disorder” as a new term for belated symptoms of a psychic wound marked the beginning of serious consideration of the psychological after-effects of violence. Research began with studies of American soldiers in the Vietnam War and expanded to consider the impact of trauma on civilian victims of war and violence. Inroads in trauma research had been made previously, after the end of World War I, but these medial approaches ultimately lost momentum.<sup>12</sup> The term applies to the usually lifelong psychological damage that accompanies the experience of severe violence, whether as a victim or a witness. The spectrum of such experiences is as broad as the human imagination is boundless in devising violent acts that invade the integrity of the human body; they range from genocide to slavery; from war and torture to sexual abuse. What these experiences all have in common for the victims is that they undermine the individual’s identity and tend to go through periods of latency. Acts of violence that are destructive, humiliating, and disorienting are especially difficult for the survivor to put into words and can only be verbalised in a supportive, empathetic social environment. Speaking about the traumatic experience generally has a liberating, therapeutic effect. Here, it is vital that there is political or social recognition of the suffering – expressed, for example, in social debates, political symbols and public mediations. In some cases, this can lead to society subsequently incorporating the victims’ suffering into collective memory.

While with trauma, communication is a means of therapy in the broadest sense, with terror, communication is itself part of the weapon. It expands the effect of the act of violence through the lightning-quick diffusion of information, and by capturing and controlling the attention of a media-based audience of witnesses. In the case of 9/11, this took the form of an obsessive infinite loop of images of the horror, suggesting a timeless present. But that is not the only important distinction between the two experiences of extreme violence. These media images penetrate deep into society’s cultural imagination; they function as a sounding board and an amplifier of resonance, acting directly on the human psyche by shaping emotions and heightening the expectation of the next terrorist attack. Terror is a form of profound appre-

12. Leys, *Trauma*, 2000.

hension and is thus always directed towards the future. Trauma, on the other hand, is a connection to a past that refuses to go away and that bursts abruptly into the present, over and over again. The long-term post-traumatic stress disorder is rooted in a delayed reaction. Usually a period of silence is required before the dissociated event returns and makes its presence felt again in the language of symptoms. The symptoms of trauma include repeated flashbacks and sudden outbursts of acting out in the present. At such moments, the traumatic past again becomes present, and has to be lived through all over again. This illustrates how the dimension of the future is closed off to the traumatised person; the therapeutic path into the future must therefore take a detour through the past.

Terror and trauma are two different ways of experiencing and processing violence. The one focuses not only on the immediate victims but also on the community of witnesses comprised through the media, who all suffered the same attack simultaneously and imagine themselves, in an anticipatory way – “when the other shoe drops” – as the next victims. The other separates the victims from the witnesses, who only assume this role – if at all – at a later point in time. Whereas terror is oriented toward the future, trauma is oriented toward the past. Terror is a highly mediatised event, whose resonance is amplified to a maximum degree above all through images, while the impact of trauma corresponds to a detonation that pierces the sounding board itself, numbing and silencing it.

To do justice to the emotional complexity involved in processes of individual remembering, social framing and cultural transmission, I want to complement the terms “remediation” and “premediation” with the terms “resonance” and “impact” as introduced above. To do so, I now turn to a further analysis of the term “impact”, relating it relating it to “impact events” and “impact narratives” as introduced by Anne Fuchs.

### ***Impact events***

In a book on the cultural history of the after-effects and remediations of the bombing of Dresden, literary theorist Anne Fuchs has introduced the term “impact event”.<sup>13</sup> Using this term, she discusses the topic of catastrophic

13. Fuchs, *After the Dresden Bombing*, 2011. Against the backdrop of the historical debate about the bombing, this study analyzes the memory of the bombing from 1945 to 2005 through a cultural lens, illuminating the cultural templates that have shaped the iconicity of Dresden at local, national and international levels.

immediacy, referring to moments of rupture that challenge the psychic and cultural continuity of a group or nation. Impact events, she writes,

can be defined as historical occurrences that are perceived to spectacularly shatter the material and symbolic worlds that we inhabit. Impact also denotes the duration of the after-effects in the material culture and collective consciousness. While the idea of an impact event calls forth the Latin etymology of “impingere”, which means to “dash against”, it is important to emphasise that impact events are inseparable from the ways in which they are received and interpreted by individuals and communities who process these events according to changing social and cultural needs. From the perspective of our normal frames and modes of comprehension, impact events appear as seismic historical occurrences that are nearly always defined by extreme forms of violence that turn our known worlds upside down. The emphasis is here on the violent overturning of the social, cultural, and — in the case of extreme trauma — symbolic frames and the destruction of the material world in which we constitute meaning as social beings that inhabit shared social worlds.<sup>14</sup>

Because of their devastating charge of violence that destroys not only human lives and material goods but also shatters the symbolic frameworks, impact events produce a collective trauma that intercepts the access to conventional social resources of perception, interpretation and communication. Rupture prevents emotional and cognitive assimilation within a given cultural framework, and so “repression and displacement [become] powerful agents of the displaced memory” of such events. They communicate “a haunting legacy through a language of symptoms” (Fuchs, 13). Fuchs complements the term “impact event” with “impact narrative”, making it quite clear, however, that the relationship between the two is premised not only on symbolic representation but also on the symptomatic expression of affective traumatic excess. Impact narratives revolve around a hot core, or what has been called “the excess of the Real”, in continuous and competing attempts at reshaping and reinterpreting them, always coping with the essential non-representability of the impact event.

Impact narratives are defined by the employment of tropes of violent excess that invoke their own inadequacy. [...] This ineluctable dialectic between the overabundance of images and their simultaneous inadequacy is thus the driving engine, propelling the generation of further impact narratives. They invoke an

14. Fuchs 2011, 11–12.

historical excess that can never be adequately grasped by the various artistic, literary and historical representations that impact events incite. It is precisely the unsettling idea that excess was realised through the historical event that challenges the ordinary relationship between signifier and signified. Impact narratives suggest that the signified excess has a life of its own beyond the impact narrative. The historical excess of the event is thus the black lining of each variant of the impact story, which simultaneously dictates and refutes further re-imaginings and acts of narrativisation. (14, 15)

Anne Fuchs offers an alternative language to that of current constructivist media theory, according to which the first premise and last revelation is the eternal constructedness of all cultural phenomena. Without negating the premises of constructivist media theory, Fuchs provides important elements for a conceptual framework in which the emotional charge of events and their long-term impact in cultural memory can be addressed. Her theoretical configuration between impact event and impact narrative points to a complex relationship between the representational and the symptomatic or, to use the terminology of Julia Kristeva, the symbolic and the semiotic, by which latter term she designates the uncoded affective languages of the body.

In her book, Anne Fuchs has eloquently and persuasively elaborated her concepts by presenting the pathways of Dresden memory from 1945 to the present. I want to turn here to another case study of a paradigmatic impact event that occurred in the middle of the nineteenth century: the Indian insurrection of 1857.<sup>15</sup> Astrid Erll's impressive study deals with this key event in British colonial history that lends itself to a similar analysis of impact narratives and the way in which they carry a specific affective charge that remains tied to its own deficiency in relation to the impact event. Erll's methodological premises, however, are strictly tied to the axioms of constructivist media theory and thus do not allow her to engage with the affective and traumatic charge of this event that – in the words of Anne Fuchs – “turned the known world temporarily upside down” and shook the foundations of the British colonial system. The rebellion started with a mutiny of sepoys, the Indian soldiers of the British East India Company's army, which triggered further civilian rebellions and armed resistance against the representatives and symbolic sites of the empire. Even though a year later, in 1858, the British re-established their rule with unprecedented cruelty, avenging British victims, the Indian insurrection became a seminal event for both colonisers and colonised.

15. Erll, *Prämediation – Remediation*, 2007.

Four decades later, which is more than a generation, it was emphasised that “of all the great events of this century, as they are reflected in fiction, the Indian Mutiny has taken the firmest hold on the popular imagination”.<sup>16</sup> Shaswati Mazumdar speaks of a “frenetic preoccupation with the mutiny in England”; the event gave rise to a new popular genre with sensationalist graphic descriptions of extreme forms of violence and a mass readership: the “mutiny novel”. In the time span of 90 years after the event, more than 70 mutiny novels appeared.<sup>17</sup> Erll’s study reconstructs not 40 but 150 years of remembering this crucial event, looking at different media, genres and contexts, stressing the heterogeneity of the material. Her research focus is on the “media culture” of this event and its hold on the popular imagination as documented in its ongoing remediations in various genres and media. Erll’s book productively combines the conceptual tools of both media and memory studies. The focus of her study, however, is not the Indian insurgence as an *impact event* but as a *mediated event* in British and non-British collective memory.

Erll describes the Hindu and Muslim insurgence of 1857 as *un lieu de mémoire*. This term was coined by the French historian Pierre Nora to denote objects, practices and events that have crystallised in the collective imagination and are celebrated as important props and features of a nation’s distinctive identity.<sup>18</sup> By adopting Nora’s terminology of *lieux de mémoire*, Erll emphasises the constructed quality of the event. She emphasises that although there are various eyewitness accounts of this events, there is no objective and reliable testimony. Faithfully following (de-)constructivist methodology, her central point is that what we refer to as “the historical event” of the Indian Mutiny is nothing but a retrospective construction created by “the canon of existent media constructions” in a memory culture.<sup>19</sup> She presents the Indian Mutiny as a contested *lieu de mémoire* which was emplotted in different political myths by colonisers and colonised, both equally heroic and self-serving. While the British resorted to sensationalist victim narratives of treachery and massacre, or rape and revenge, the texts taking up the point of view of the Indian insurgents framed the mutiny as a

16. Gregg, “The Indian Mutiny in Fiction”, 1897, 218.

17. Mazumdar, *Insurgent Sepoys*, 2011, 8, 7.

18. Nora, *Realms of Memory*, 1997.

19. Erll, “Remembering across Time, Space, and Cultures”, 2009, 111. The phrase “Indian Mutiny”, mostly used by the British press, is only one of the many signifiers for his event, depending on the perspective and framing narrative in which it is embedded, such as: rebellion, popular uprising, insurrection, revolution, national revolt.

heroic and courageous act of revolution, relishing the carnage that they managed to unleash on their oppressors.

Erll's comprehensive and differentiated study of the Indian insurgency is fully up to date with current trends in media and memory studies. What is conspicuously missing in her study, however, is an interest in the affective or psycho-historic dimension of her topic. If we swap the terminology and think about the Indian Mutiny not only as a *lieu de mémoire* but also as an extraordinary "impact event", the emphasis of the investigation would be no longer exclusively on the constructedness of historical events and collective identities but also on lasting traumatic wounds and shattered collective identity. Even though Erll mentions that "rumours of massacres and the rape of British women struck at the heart of Victorian sensibilities", she consistently underplays the emotional impact of the event on the individual and collective psyche of the colonisers.<sup>20</sup> Instead, she emphasises "the selectivity, unreliability and political functions of cultural memory and British media culture".<sup>21</sup> Our postcolonial bias obviously forbids her to empathise with the colonisers, but can this justify the total elimination of the dimension of affect from her historical analysis?<sup>22</sup> Due to her methodological focus, words like "impact" and "trauma" are conspicuously absent from Erll's investigation. Yet her study, I would argue, can easily be read against the grain of her methodological premises. We can indeed detect clear symptoms of a shattered collective self-image. Erll mentions, for instance, the genre of "atrocities stories" and emphasises that the "rape-revenge plot" connected with the Indian Mutiny "can be found in most late-nineteenth-century romances", a theme that "popular British memory would become obsessed with, until even late in the twentieth century".<sup>23</sup> She explains this long-term obsession by mechanisms of premediation, retracing it to the literary fashion of "Gothic horror". Erll introduces the concept of premediation to bypass the historic event and its impact: "Premediation is a cultural practice of experiencing and remembering: the use of existent patterns and paradigms to transform contingent events into meaningful images and narratives."<sup>24</sup>

20. Erll 2009, 112.

21. Erll 2009, 113.

22. There are recent studies of the "Indian Mutiny" that have focussed on the emotional impact of the event: Gautram Chakravarty, *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination*, 2005; Christopher Herbert, *War of No Pity*, 2008.

23. Erll 2009, 133.

24. Erll 2009, 114.

Reading this sentence, I have my doubts about whether this contingent event has ever been successfully transformed into – and contained in – meaningful images and narratives. Following Anne Fuchs, I would claim that the Indian Mutiny is an impact event that has never congealed into a master narrative; instead, it was preserved as a hot core in the collective imaginary, producing a variety of impact narratives that testify to its continuous traumatic impact.<sup>25</sup> Let me once more return to Anne Fuchs’ important distinction between impact event and impact narrative. She writes: “although spectacular magnitude and duration of traumatic effect are essential dimensions of impact events, which differentiate them from other historical occurrences, these features are not sufficient in themselves: impact events depend on impact narratives for their power to unfold”(13). This involves two important points. The impact event – and this point is consistent with media theory – depends on impact narratives to mark it as such. Without cultural elaboration it would have no afterlife and would vanish from cultural memory. The second point, however, relates to the affective charge: in this case, there obviously can be no ideal match or clear fit between impact event and impact narrative. Instead of a single and conclusive narrative, we are faced with an amazing plethora of narratives, in the plural, emerging in different media and genres. In this plurality of mediations and remediations, to repeat Anne Fuchs, “impact narratives communicate their own inadequacy. [...] This ineluctable dialectic between the overabundance of images and their simultaneous inadequacy is thus the driving engine, propelling the generation of further impact narratives” (6). This is corroborated by the following assessment in a recent study: scholars have “taken a closer look at the consequences of the revolt in Britain and found enduring marks of the wounds inflicted by the revolt on the material and spiritual pillars of British society, wounds that certainly endured till the end of British rule” and even beyond it.<sup>26</sup>

By bringing the concepts of impact narrative and impact event to Erll’s study, her important research can be read in a different light, showing how a seismic historic rupture involving extreme violence is processed differently on both sides. According to Erll, the Indian Mutiny was transformed by

25. We may perhaps say that this hot core finally cooled down when it found its melodramatic shape. Melodrama seems to be an effective way to transform an initial trauma into a highly conventional fictionalised event that consists of the thrilling mixture of dread and attraction. One could also rethink the concept of kitsch along these lines.

26. Mazumdar, *Insurgent Sepoys*, 1–2.

colonisers and colonised alike into “foundational myths”. Again, this symmetrical description abstracts from the dimension of affect in the study of cultural memory. We may surmise that the traumatic impact of the event was experienced rather differently on both sides. While on the British side it was experienced as an unheroic event, it was eventually experienced as a heroic event on the side of the colonised. The defeat of the colonised could be framed, half a century later, by the Hindu-national historian and activist Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in his counter-narrative as the “First Indian War of Independence”.<sup>27</sup> In India today, this point of view has been taken up in contemporary postcolonial discourses and Bollywood films where the event is emplotted in a master narrative of political martyrdom and self-liberation. On one side, this impact event blocked a master narrative with remediations, thus filling the traumatic blank obsessively with ever new projections; on the other side, despite its traumatic legacy, the impact event could be fitted into the heroic format of a self-enforcing and mobilising new national narrative.

### *Cultural Patterns*

I have presented Erll’s work on the Indian Mutiny here in some detail to show how the concepts premediation and remediation can be fruitfully complemented with the concepts resonance and impact. At this point, we can take one step further, again with Astrid Erll, who has extended the concept of premediation with “prefiguration”. The introduction of the term “prefiguration” allows her to look more generally at the ways in which “medial schemata are reused to represent new events”.<sup>28</sup> Her term “prefiguration” refers to cultural patterns or media formats which act as blueprints for the construction of images and the patterns of their reception. In this process of prefiguration, older historic events can become a lens through which new events are perceived and experienced. Such cultural templates have an active part in the shaping and transmitting of an event. By adding the term “prefiguration” to “premediation”, Erll manages to map the complex interaction between three different dimensions: historic events, their medial presentation and cultural patterns.<sup>29</sup> It is this interplay of between culture, his-

27. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence, 1857*, 1909.

28. Erll 2007, 32.

29. Erll 2007, 33.

tory and the human psyche that we have to investigate further to learn more about the emotional charge of cultural memories.

As soon as we move from premediation to prefiguration, we may include in our frame of research new terms such as *topoi*, tropes, images, narratives and other conventionalised and habitualised meaning formats that help to shape the construction, recognition and emotional resonance of an experience or event. With this methodological extension, we move from media studies to the study of cultural memory. All cultures create systems of prefiguration that help their members to cope with events and endow experience with meaning. Or to put it in slightly different terms: humans construct and transmit a cultural memory that upholds a stock of generative elements in which light and through which perspective they construct their future.

Prefiguration is a cognitive tool that works on different levels. *Linguistic prototypes*, for instance, are part of our brain structure for the moulding of perception with the help of cognitive mental maps. They are acquired through language and stored on a default basis for our orientation in the world. These mental maps create order and ensure that perception will proceed swiftly and with maximum efficiency. Linguists and cognitive psychologists have developed a theory of prototypes that are stored in the brain to explain the ways in which members of cultural and linguistic communities acquire their knowledge about the world. Through prototypes, cognition is closely tied to recognition. Without concepts and mental schemata, we would be unable to perceive objects or to understand the structure of situations. Jerry Fodor describes the operation of these habitualised mental modules as “encapsulated, fast and stupid”.<sup>30</sup> These prototypes are not memory impressions but hardwired cognitive schemata and mental maps that allow us to orient ourselves quickly and efficiently in a world that threatens us with a multitude of bewildering sense impressions. Without such prototypes and maps, our mental apparatus would break down; we would be flooded with information and would suffer from maladies which were diagnosed around 1900 as hysteria or neurasthenics and around 2000 as Alzheimer’s and ADS.

Prefiguration is also at work in *social stereotypes*, which are responsible for inveterate prejudices and irrational attitudes in our mind-sets.<sup>31</sup> *Cultural*

30. Fodor, *The Language of Thought*, 1975; Rosch, “Prototype Classification and Logical Classification,” 1983, 73-86; Langacker, *Grammar and Conceptualization*, 1999.

31. See A. Assmann, “Introduction”, 2009, 1–33.

*patterns* operate on another level. They help to elaborate individual experience and to endow it with meaning by framing a contingent event in a larger trans-historical perspective. They can be recognised as a stable motif or repetitive structure in canonised pictures or stories, retaining their identity in an inexhaustible play of transformations and variations. While they are part of the concrete creative composition, they also exist as deeply internalised images with which members of a respective community see, experience, value and interpret each other, situations, experiences and events. In addition to carving out relevance and providing meaning, these patterns highlight a sense of identity and continuity in the experience of difference and change. They also create a halo of collective emotion and an aura of accumulated historic experience around what we perceive in the present. This reservoir of *topoi* prefigures our perceptions and experiences in such a way that it familiarises us with the radically new and unknown. Cultural patterns help us to transform a formless and unwieldy reality into the structure of cultural semantics. Humans are endowed not only with mental networks developed in the course of evolution, but also with a cultural memory developed in the history of culture. Even though they have not encountered something before, they already have a template for dealing with it.

Putting it in an even more general way, we may say that the function of cultures (just like that of the human mind) is to equip us for dealing with the world and to shield us from an encounter with the real. Both move in an intermediary realm between too much sameness and too much novelty. At the pole of total sameness and at the pole of total otherness, the life of the mind reaches its limit and is extinguished. The cognitive strategy of prefiguration is a device that humans need to keep a safe distance from these dangerous limits by steering a middle course. This basic structure is realised rather differently from culture to culture, depending on whether the culture is premised on a normative framework of continuity or of rupture. There are event-preventing and event-generating cultures. In China and Ancient Egypt, which can be described as event-preventing cultures that rely heavily on normative repetition, the future has negative connotations. In the cultural semantics of these empires, actions have to be staged in ritualistic frames; contingent events are considered highly precarious because they may endanger and shake the established order. In China, the wish for the new year is to have eventless days; in a similar vein, Hegel called the happy times the blank pages in history books. The culture of Western modernity, on the contrary, has specialised in rupture, singling out events as important manifesta-

tions of rupture and change. In this type of culture, sudden and violent changes and watersheds are emphasised to mark caesuras in the flow of time. Revolutions like those of 1789 or 1989 have the important historical function of inaugurating new epochs. The memory network of prefigurations, however, works also across such changes and ruptures. These cultural patterns, consisting of a relatively stable but open repertoire of key forms, notions and images which have been deeply internalised and habitualised through ongoing education, meditation, mediation and exposure, form a continuous cultural infrastructure that supports, informs and shapes the ways in which we confront and process new input. Through this ongoing interplay between the cultural matrix and new challenges, humans are able to process, shape and communicate their experiences in meaningful articulations, rendering them more or less flexible to negotiate the new and adapt to changing living conditions.

### *The Archaeology of Cultural Patterns*

The term “prefiguration” has its own history that is anchored in Christian hermeneutics of the church fathers. *Figura* is a Latin term that was first used in the early commentaries on the Christian Bible and was developed by scholars during the Middle Ages into a full-fledged system to register ties of similarity and correspondence between the Old and the New Testament.<sup>32</sup> Though no longer applied methodically after the Age of Enlightenment, it retained a hold over the verbal and visual Western imagination that has never fully disappeared. These scholars constructed a complex system of references according to which an item that appeared in the Old Testament was read as a prefiguration or adumbration of something that reoccurred in the New Testament, thereby answering it, confirming it and making it “real”. Built into this framework of references and method of reading was temporal progress enforcing an ontological change from signs to events and from symbols to reality: readers of the Bible could witness a shift from the old to the new, from past to future, from promise to fulfilment. While Old Testament events were considered as signs that had to be allegorically interpreted, New Testament events could also stand for themselves and were considered as part of history. The system of prefiguration created a closed

32. Auerbach, “Figura,” 1944.

universe of meaning in which attention was sharpened to details and a theory of the Bible as a complex structure of meaning on different temporal levels was elaborated. The most impressive visual presentation of this theory is a twelfth-century altar created in enamel by the master of Verdun in Kosterneuburg, near Vienna. It organises the stories of the Bible in three horizontal registers representing different linear temporal frames, allowing at the same time a vertical reading of these registers in the style of a crossword puzzle that reveals hidden typological meanings. As this is a closed system, it not only yields ever new levels of deeper meaning but also is as infallible as the paranoiac who only admits the input that confirms his preconceptions. This was the point made by Nietzsche, who described the Christian system of typological prefiguration as a self-fulfilling prophecy that reduces the complexity of the world and fortifies the spirits of the believers.<sup>33</sup>

The Christian system of prefiguration was vastly extended when, in the Renaissance, the classical heritage of Greek and Roman culture was incorporated into European cultural memory. The myths, legends and histories of the Greeks and Romans that entered Western cultural memory did not acquire the status of canonical texts and images but were used as a generative matrix of forms and types that could be endlessly reshaped and recast. Within this kind of prefiguration there was no inbuilt drive of revelation “from shadowy types to truth”.<sup>34</sup> It created, rather, an anthropological storehouse of forms, shapes and expressions that greatly enlarged the cultural memory and could be endlessly reactivated and transformed according to the cultural matrix. Items from religion, the arts and history make up this storehouse; it is the cultural heritage of images, narratives and topoi that provide shapes, meaning and frames for ever new creations and events.

Notwithstanding the salient exception of messianic and apocalyptic movements which try to blot out the past in order to enforce the radically new, religions seem to be premised more on continuity than on rupture. They have created some of the most lasting and most deeply entrenched images that have preserved their affective appeal and resonance across centuries. Religious images, narratives and topoi such as the binding of Isaac

33. Nietzsche criticised this form of hermeneutics which disowns the Jews, divesting them of their tradition by arguing that the Bible contains only Christian doctrine and belongs to Christianity as the “true Israel”. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Morgenröte* 1 § 84.

34. Madsen, *From Shadowy Types to Truth*, 1968.

(*akedah*), the figure of Job, the last supper, the crucifixion, or the *pietà* were invoked to guarantee a trans-historical sameness of human responses to varying existential challenges. These reactivations are signifying practices that work only within specific cultures and historical contexts that endow them their distinct appeal and meaning. Cultural patterns are by no means anthropological universals that are eternally reproduced and transculturally invariant, but rather are always open to new uses, contexts and meanings. When used within a certain tradition, this supply of , concepts and images can contribute to fortifying the human mind against contingency and catastrophes, helping individuals in different historical situations to endure the very worst and to find meaning in even the most adverse and cruel experiences. The great attraction of cultural patterns is that they create continuity across ruptures, allowing a devastating event to be interpreted in terms of a previous devastating event. If the template is strong enough, the non-assimilable will be assimilated within a narrative or a meaningful icon.

We may distinguish here between cultural patterns in the domains of religion, art, and history. Let me introduce an example that combines aspects of all three dimensions: religion, art, and history. I am thinking of the religious pattern of the *pietà* used in the symbolism of the Second World War in general, and German chancellor Helmut Kohl's reconstruction of the monument *Neue Wache* in Berlin in particular. The cultural pattern *pietà* refers to the figure of Mary, mother of Christ, who occupies a special position under the cross as a paradigmatically empathetic and mourning figure. While other figures, like the apostles of John the Baptist, act as historic witnesses that take on the responsibility of transforming the experience of the death of Christ into a new message and gospel, Mary fully exists in the present and is wholly absorbed in her grief. A strong cultural pattern has been formed of the shape and posture of mourning Mary, cradling the dead Christ in her lap. This image represents the human cycle from womb to tomb, assisted and framed by the nurturing and sheltering archetype of the female figure of the mother. Although in experience and practice of real life it is much more likely and common that the son buries the mother than that the mother enshrines and comforts the son, the image has become a powerful symbol of comfort, shelter and meaning in moments of death accompanied by devastating failure, utter exposure and desolation. From the male perspective, the female figure is connected with the larger rhythm and continuity of nature,

and is thus a reassuring mythic presence at the utmost bourn where life and death meet.<sup>35</sup>

The German artist Käthe Kollwitz lost her youngest son Peter in 1914, during the first weeks of the Great War. Twenty-four years later she created a small and intimate wooden sculpture in the shape of the *pietà*, with the title “Mother and Son”. In 1993, after German reunification, chancellor Helmut Kohl chose this sculpture by Käthe Kollwitz, which was enlarged, transferred and rededicated in the context of a new German monument to the Second World War, *Neue Wache*, in the centre of Berlin. The new dedication of the statue reads: “To the victims of war and tyranny.” This phrase was meant as an all-inclusive formula, including also the murdered Jews. It was a symbolic gesture, however, that the Jewish survivors and their families could not accept. The cultural pattern did not work for them – for religious as well as for historical reasons. They did not want to be subsumed (and thereby “forgotten”) under a Christian icon that did not resonate with their own religious traditions. Nor could this symbol provide meaning on the historical and empirical level: in stark contrast to the aftermath of the World Wars, the Holocaust has not left behind mourning mothers, who in this case were murdered along with their husbands, sons and children. This example clearly reveals the semantic limits of a cultural pattern. While chancellor Kohl, in designing his new national monument of mourning, had considered the semantic and affective scope of this cultural pattern to be universal, the contention that arose over his monument showed that it was indeed shaped, transmitted, understood and applicable only within the limits of a specific cultural community.<sup>36</sup>

35. The symbolic force of this image is charged with older layers, such as the ancient Egyptian figure of the goddess Nut. Her image fills the inner part of the lid of Egyptian coffins; thus she stretches herself over the corpse in a gesture of welcome, homecoming and abiding protection.

36. Reinhart Koselleck was a strong opponent of the monument. In a newspaper article he pointed to the fact that the symbolism of the *pietà* excludes both Jews and women: “The Pieta was chosen to represent the two largest groups of innocent people murdered and killed in the Second World War, namely Jews and women. But it is unwittingly anti-Jewish: Behind the sorrow around the body of Christ lurk those Jews who, since the late Middle Ages, have been visualised maliciously as murderers of the son of God. And behind the apparently surviving mother, millions of annihilated, murdered or gassed and vanished women cry out: And who remembers us? A double mistake with consequences [...]. The flawed thinking produces an aesthetically incorrect image.” Koselleck, *Die Zeit* (1998, Nr. 13).

### *Historical Prefigurations*

Some religious prefigurations have been used to overwrite the events of the present with a formative traumatic history of the past. In this case, the cultural memory creates a closed world in which history repeats itself forever.<sup>37</sup> An example is the ultra-orthodox Jewish interpretation of the Holocaust as *khurban*, an expression for the destruction of the second temple. This interpretation transforms the contingent historic impact event of the Nazi genocide of the European Jews into a repetition and subsumes it under a generic catastrophe that simultaneously enshrouds, effaces and blocks the experience of a new historic event. The new event is perceived in terms of a previous event for which a deeply internalised cultural shorthand has been created. In religious and political contexts, this system of prefiguration has the effect of refuting empirical evidence and of transforming the open future into a predictable repetition of the past. This *khurban* interpretation of the Holocaust was emphatically rejected by the other segment of international Jewry who have chosen another term, one without comparable biblical connotations, to represent the total break in history and experience, namely *shoah*, which signifies destruction and total breakdown.

This example shows that historical prefigurations can act as a protective shield against a new overwhelming experience, guarding against the novelty of the trauma by focusing on an older one. They can also have the opposite effect of a traumatic inscription that deepens the emotional charge of the new event. Impact events have happened on different scales to different communities, such as the sinking of the Titanic, Pearl Harbor, the bombing of Dresden, Hiroshima, or 9/11. Despite their immense differences, these impact events have hit the victims and bystanders with the shock of an immediate force. For those who experienced these events, their impact was catastrophically immediate. It is remarkable that these singular events of sudden traumatic violence have become negative patterns for other traumatic events. The trauma of 9/11, for instance, was experienced by some Americans as a second Pearl Harbor; for many Jewish Americans the trauma of the Holocaust deepened its impact. In both cases, an old wound was reopened in a sequence of cumulative retraumatisation. A negative historical pattern can also be used as a label in the public sphere to raise the significance of and public attention given to an event. When the museum of slav-

37. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 1982.

ery opened in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1988, it called itself “America’s black Holocaust Museum”.

We have ample evidence for the fact that historical prefiguration is an ongoing feature in the experiencing and witnessing of contemporary events. One most salient example is the tragic plane crash of the Polish delegation on Saturday April 10, 2010 in the forest near the Russian airport at Smolensk. The casualties included the president of state, Lech Kaczynski, and his wife, as well as high officials and prominent members of Polish society. These Polish dignitaries and representatives were on their way to a commemoration ceremony on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the massacre at Katyn. Now, to the total toll of almost 22,000 Polish victims, including 4,000 officers who had been shot in the woods around Katyn and hidden in mass graves in 1940, 88 new prominent victims were added. Despite obvious differences in quality and scope, the new event was immediately perceived in the light of the former. Lech Walesa coined the phrase “a second Katyn”, which was widely disseminated and absorbed by the Polish population, who fell into a collective state of shock when they witnessed how once more “the elite of the nation” perished on almost the same “cursed ground”. In the city of Opole, a mourning-commemoration ceremony was performed three days after the accident, in which lighted candles were arranged on the pavement of the market place in a pattern to form the words “Katyn 1940 – 2010”.

In the news coverage and commentaries on the event, we frequently encounter the topos of an “ironic twist of fate” and an uncanny *déjà vu* feeling. Commenting on the plane crash as a second Katyn, Lech Walesa clearly saw the new event in the light of an older one, which was not just an event but also a deeply entrenched and emotionally fraught cultural pattern. Historical comparisons are a common political tool utilised to heat up political debates by emotionalising certain events or options in the light of a specific interpretive framework. In just such a way, Lech Kaczynski had polemicised against the construction of a gas pipeline connecting Russia with Germany through the Baltic Sea, comparing it to the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. This was a non-aggression pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, after which Germany and the Soviet Union invaded their respective sides of Poland, dividing the country between them. In both cases we are dealing with forms of historical prefiguration, which present a new event in the red light of emotion. There are, of course, different qualities involved in such coupling effects, ranging from a calculated rhetorical argument designed to

vilify a political action to forms of historical paranoia and to manifestations of a traumatised collective psyche.

The national trauma of Katyn is a paradigmatic impact event in the traumatised Polish psyche.<sup>38</sup> During the Cold War, this trauma had been further enforced and deepened through repressive conditions of severe political censorship. When the allies were informed about this massacre during the Second World War, strategic considerations prevented them from intervening. During the Cold War, mention of these war crimes of the Stalinist era as again placed under a strict taboo in Poland, as a country allied with the Soviet Union.<sup>39</sup> Only after 1989 was Katyn officially commemorated as a central event in Polish national memory, thereby creating considerable political border frictions between a strong memory of the victims on the Polish side and a strong amnesia or silence on the Russian side. In the psychic dynamics of Polish cultural memory, Katyn 2010 has become an inseparable part of Katyn 1940, in which one event fused with the other. This has become obvious through the scandals that marred the commemoration ceremonies one year later. A group of relatives of the plane crash victims that belonged to the “Katyn 2010 Families’ Association” mounted a plaque on the memorial stone dedicated to the victims at the airport of Smolensk. This plaque, which not only connected Katyn and Smolensk, but also referred to the Katyn massacre as “genocide”, was removed by Russian officials the night before the first commemoration date and replaced by a bilingual plaque in Russian and Polish that made no reference to Katyn.<sup>40</sup> In response, Polish president Komorowski refused to place his wreath at the designated memorial stone on April 10, 2011; as a compromise, the Russian and Polish presidents agreed to lay their wreaths at an uncontroversial birch tree instead.

These events sparked heated debates in both countries. They showed, however – and this is very important – that the front line of the Smolensk/Katyn scandal separates not Poles from Russians but rather groups within both nations. In Russia, for instance, there is a new drive towards a de-Stalinisation of history and memory that is jeopardised by Polish nationalist provocations. A working group within the presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights tasked by Medvedev argues, for instance, that

38. Volkan, “Chosen Trauma,” 2004,

39. See the chapter on Poland in: Lingen, *Kriegserfahrung und nationale Identität*, 2009.

40. Fedor, “Russia and Poland,” 2011, 14.

“the whole of Russia is a ‘big Katyn’”, and they add: “having begun to extend gestures of respect to the victims of the totalitarian regime independently, voluntarily, without coercion, the country can only arouse respect on the part of all normal people and nations”. The critics, on the other hand, fear that such a program is “designed to give Russians a ‘guilt complex’” and “to force Russians to become the second Germans”.<sup>41</sup>

It is true that Katyn 2010 has reinforced and deepened the historic trauma of Katyn 1940, but that must not necessarily mean that both events coexist in a closed dynamic of paranoia, hysteria and traumatic re-enactment. In a more responsible and inclusive frame of Russian-Polish commemoration, the same constellation Katyn 1940–2010 can work in a transformative way and open up new possibilities for transnational integration in the future. The debates about Katyn in 2010 and 2011 also open a window for reflection and transformation, allowing the trapped nations to break out of the echo chamber of the past. Like the individual psyche, the national memory is not only determined by what has happened in the past but is also open to new transformations – if it can channel affect with reflection.

### *Conclusion*

“There was never a past prior to mediation; all mediations are remediation, in that mediation of the real is always a mediation of another mediation.”<sup>42</sup> What Grusin says about media applies more generally to all cultures: they create semantic networks, which fortify our gaze and program, to a certain extent, our experience. This media approach to cultural memory, however, has little to say on the ways in which emotions interfere to channel and shape new input. The concepts “resonance” and “impact” together with the concept of “cultural pattern” were offered here to extend our perspectives on this crucial topic. Cultural patterns function in multiple ways:

- as filters and frames for highlighting attention and relevance
- as an aura for semantic depth
- as an amplifier for positive and negative emotions
- as a shield that guards against shocking collisions with reality.

41. Fedor 2011, 15, 16.

42. Bolter and Grusin, 1999, 18-19.

While patterns of resonance are part and parcel of the general framework of cultural perception and meaning production, impact events deform these patterns by creating hot cores that claim a high priority in the cultural consciousness and the collective imaginary. They have become, however, an important part of our cultural memory that is acquired in the transmission of cultural memory, which has been entrenched in our cognitive and emotional infrastructure. The terms “resonance” and “impact” are both related to heightened and enduring forms of affect in personal and cultural memory. They are contrary in many ways, but, as I hoped to have shown, they can also elucidate each other in a theory of cultural memorability and immemorability.