

Call for Papers Mnemonics 2023: The Industry of Memory
London, UK, 27-29 June 2023

The eleventh Mnemonics summer school will be hosted by King's College London, the University of Westminster, and Goldsmiths, University of London from Tuesday 27 to Thursday 29 June 2023, and will take place on-site at King's College London and the Regent's Street Campus of the University of Westminster (with some panels online).

The annual Mnemonics summer school brings together junior and senior scholars in the interdisciplinary field of memory studies, affording PhD students from around the world the opportunity to receive extensive feedback on their projects from distinguished memory experts and to catch up with the newest methodological and theoretical trends in memory studies. Each edition features three keynotes and 24 PhD student presentations followed by in-depth commentaries by senior scholars from partner institutions. Mnemonics is a unique platform for learning, mentoring, and networking specifically designed to meet the needs and interests of the next generation of memory scholars. Further details can be found at: <http://www.mnemonics.ugent.be>

Format:

The summer school will include three keynote sessions and general discussions. The main emphasis, however, is on the presentation of PhD work in progress in the form of panels of three students who each give a 15-minute talk that is based on their ongoing research while also relevant to the theme of this year's school. In order to foster feedback and discussion, each panel will be chaired by senior scholars who act as respondents and kick off the extensive Q&A. The summer school will also include a workshop on professional skills and career planning.

Keynote Speakers:

Professor Brett Ashley Kaplan (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign)

Professor John Lennon (Glasgow Caledonian University)

Professor Jenny Wüstenberg (Nottingham Trent University)

Theme:

The 2023 edition of Mnemonics will focus on the industry of memory.

The "memory boom" (Huysen 1995) of the late twentieth century has engendered a burgeoning "memory industry" in which mainstream commemorative activities have assumed increasingly commodified and homogenised forms. As Alison Landsberg (2004) contends, as we become generationally distanced from sites of historical trauma such as colonialism, slavery, and the Holocaust, "prosthetic" memory practices enable different mnemonic audiences to stage "fantasies of witnessing" (Weissman 2004) via their dissemination through and imbrication with capitalist processes of production and consumption.

The memory industry is mediated by and dependent upon other cultural sectors, notably perhaps the arts, publishing, media, heritage, and tourism. Cultural institutions are, in turn, guided by their own political and economic agendas, which often have a memorative aspect – agendas that are not

necessarily free from influence of corporate funding. For example, companies have long engaged in the sponsorship of cultural sites, such as museums and galleries, in part to obfuscate problematic histories of commodity production. A seminal example would include the historical origins of London's Tate gallery. Such investment also functions as a form of soft power, gifting industrial benefactors significant influence over the curatorial narratives of public institutions, whilst simultaneously bestowing them with an image of social responsibility.

Today, corporate investment in the memory industries takes many forms – serving divergent economic, political, and social agendas, which are worthy of attention. In the American South, for example, petrochemical sponsorship of former sites of enslavement facilitates both historical whitewashing and contemporary greenwashing. The petrochemical industry not only remembers itself as integral to regional and national modernity but has sponsored a version of Southern heritage that renders the Old South in pastoral terms and sanitises the historical realities of slavery. Former plantation sites are proximate to land now occupied by petrochemical plants, the pollution from which has catastrophic effects on neighbouring African American communities. Evacuating the past of its racialised violence, corporate memory in this case prepares the ground for forgetting continuities between the past and present industrial regimes of disposable life.

Elsewhere in the South, the petrochemical sponsorship of energy, science, and natural history museums produces a much more explicit memory of industry, informed by nostalgic accounts of the early-twentieth-century oil and gas booms and thereby generating a sense of “petro-melancholia” (LeMenager 2011) through the fetishisation of extractive technologies, past and present. Such forms of industrial memory are typically triggered by reactive impulses, catalysed by transitions (or the threat of transition) to economies less reliant on fossil fuels. The result is often a celebratory or defensive account of the need for continuing reliance on these former industries, reflective of vested economic interests and socio-cultural or psychological dependencies on industrialised ways of life, and underwriting collective confidence in the putative sustainability of those industries.

Moreover, incorporated memory – or the memory of corporations – often enjoys a mutually constitutive relationship with national(ist) memories of modernisation and progress, or with orthodox memories of foundational moments in nation-formation. Situated between and funded by the state and the corporate world, the heritage sector often stages and prolongs the intimacy between incorporated and nationalist memory. On other fronts, state peace-building and reconciliation initiatives generate and are often dependent upon industries of memory that must navigate the heterogeneity of once irreconcilable stakeholders and their memories.

Mnemonics 2023 draws on such dynamics to explore the links between the memory industry and related industries of memory (the arts, publishing, heritage, etc.), the industrial sponsorship of memory sites and practices, and the memory of industry itself. The summer school is by no means just interested in and limited to extractivist industries and their memory work, nor are we just concerned with memories of industry *per se*. Rather, Mnemonics 2023 is equally interested in the ways memory becomes an industry, enabled by infrastructure and investment, and geared towards the production and profitable reception of the reconstruction of historical realities. While this can describe the agendas and activities of an array of industries and their manufacture and corporate sponsorship of memory (of their own or related pasts), as well as the work of the heritage sector (whatever its ties to industry or the state), it also describes cultural memory studies itself. As noted above, the explosion of cultural memory studies in the 1980s in the Global North, in tandem with the era's creative and cultural industries' frenzied production of recollection, has institutionalised a series of ongoing feedback loops through which theory informs the practice of remembrance – and practice informs theory.

Exploring each of these dynamics (and more!), Mnemonics 2023 asks:

- How has interpolation of cultural memory studies into the wider memory industry affected the potential for critical engagement with the past? Now firmly ensconced in the academy, what vested interests does cultural memory studies have? Is the field of enquiry's generation of theoretical paradigms self-constituting at the expense of the historical specificity of what is remembered? To what extent is this academic industry guilty of propagating universalising templates of remembrance?
- What forms of industry (labour, production, etc.) inform the work of memory? How are these inflected by capitalist structures and power dynamics?
- How do different (corporate, creative, cultural, etc.) industries of memory intersect within the memory industry? What tensions arise between competing accounts of the past, and how do these play out within a commodified culture of memory?
- How does the memory industry produce, disseminate, and mediate memories of industry and industrial processes?
- What is forgotten in the industrialisation and incorporation of memory, and what agendas are thereby set for wider, public memories?
- What are the cultural, social, and political ramifications of industrialised remembrance?

In asking these questions, Mnemonics 2023 does not mean to suggest that the production of cultural memory is always an authoritative, top-down, institutionalised, and hegemonic business. Cultural memory is subject to constant revision, negotiation, and recontextualisation; it is dependent on the coherence and continuity of the "plurimedial networks" (ErlI 2014) through which it is articulated. With this in mind:

- What might different forms of memory work look like, un- or less implicated in entrenched economic and industrial regimes, operating on different scales and intending different forms of production and growth?
- What forms of cultural or political activism might subvert or challenge the production of heavily commodified or industrialised pasts?
- How, in turn, might cultural memory studies contribute to grassroots or counter-memorial activities that seek to disrupt hegemonic histories and/or to expose the links between contemporary corporate sponsorship and previous regimes of social or environmental violence?

References:

- ErlI, A. (2014) "From 'District Six' to District 9 and Back: The Plurimedial Production of Travelling Schemata". in *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales*. ed. by De Cesari, C. and Rigney, A. Berlin, München, Boston: De Gruyter, pp. 29-50.
- Huyssen, A. (1994) *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (1st ed.). London and New York: Routledge.
- Landsberg, A. (2004) *Prosthetic memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*. Columbia University Press, New York.
- LeMenager, S. (2014) *Living Oil: Petroeum Culture in the American Century*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Weissman, G. (2004) *Fantasies of Witnessing: Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust*. New York: Cornell University Press.

Applications:

Submissions are open to all doctoral students interested in memory studies. Half of the 24 available places are reserved for students affiliated with [Mnemonics partner institutions](#). Participants are expected to attend in person, as, due to technical reasons, only some panels will be accessible online. If you wish to be considered for a position, you should send a *300-words abstract* for a 15-minute paper (including title, your name, and institutional affiliation), a description of your doctoral research project (one paragraph), and a short CV (max. 1 page) as a single Word or PDF document to to: **Mnemonics2023@gmail.com**

Applications should be submitted by **1 March 2023**, 23.00 (GMT). Notification of acceptance: **21 March 2021**.

Costs:

The registration fee for the summer school is £230; successful applicants will be expected to pay this fee in advance (more information to follow). This fee covers tuition, lunches, refreshments, and a collective dinner. It does not cover accommodation. However, we do offer discount accommodation with the University of Westminster's Alexander Flemming Hall in Hoxton Market, which will be charged at £46.44 plus VAT per night.

A fee waiver may be requested in case of severe financial need.

Questions?

Please email **Mnemonics2023@gmail.com**