

Introduction: Memories in American Studies

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The discipline of memory studies in all its diversity has steadily gained importance within American studies and has increasingly proven to be an enriching addition to the field. Analyses of memories in the context of American studies have the capability of spanning the field and can range anywhere from history and the social sciences, literary and cultural studies to media studies, film studies, psychology, philosophy, geography, and the arts. *aspeers*, recognizing the growing significance of memory studies, therefore decided on the topical focus of American memories for its sixth issue. The call for submissions, instead of creating boundaries of definition for the topic, invited a wide array of scholarly approaches. The diverse critical engagements with American memories that we received showcase what emerging scholars consider the most relevant aspects of studying memories in an American studies context. Hence, we have allowed our body of submissions to map—if not by way of precise delineation—the most productive aspects of American memories. All submissions received as well as the contributions published by *aspeers* addressed many specific characteristics, notions, and theorizations of as well as tensions and conflicts within the topic. Although these foci are often overlapping and intricately connected concepts, they can be categorized and structured in a way that reflects current trends in the scholarship on memories in American studies.

Four distinct aspects were central to this year's submissions: the constructedness of (American) memories, their functionality, the construction of collective identities through memories, and trauma. They highlight how MA-level American studies scholars in Europe negotiate and define different aspects of this issue's topic. This introduction will concisely outline these aspects in order to lay the groundwork for our readers' perusal of the issue. In doing so, it reflects the theoretical approaches employed by the body of submissions, the large majority of which can be situated in the realm of cultural studies. While this introduction will offer a brief overview of theory relevant in approaching memories from an American studies perspective, the

contributions to this year's issue of *aspeers* will provide elaboration on the memory-related concepts introduced here.

The primary aspect that stood out in how our submissions approached memories from an American studies perspective was the constructedness of memories. Constructivist approaches are immensely productive in the humanities in general and, possibly even more so, for the study of memories in particular. Understanding memories as social constructs is the foundation for diverse approaches to memories in American studies. While memories are often thought of as bridges that allow the past to be revisited, the events of the past and what is remembered of them are two completely different things; like bridges, memories do not exist naturally but have to be constructed in order to serve their purpose. This constructive act involves remembering as much as it involves forgetting, repressing, and adding components. By selecting certain elements and neglecting others, memories are created in order to convey a distinct version of the past (Thelen 1120). With regard to one of the origin myths of the United States, in which the glorious depiction of Christopher Columbus's conquest of the Americas is selected over the depiction of the indigenous peoples' suffering, this selective process is addressed in our contribution on Rosmarie Waldrop's poem "All Electrons Are (Not) Alike." Memories, in this regard, do not constitute reliable representations of "what actually happened" ("wie es eigentlich gewesen"; Ranke vi) but rather serve as "indicators" of what has been deemed "the gist of what happened" (Wertsch 8).¹ Hence, the complex and incomprehensible past is split into an array of accessible "bits" (Wertsch 7). Only this allows for the assignment of meaning to the past and the establishment of a coherent narrative from it (cf. Rüsen 50-51).

The relation between personal and collective memory is an important aspect of the constructedness of memories. Various submissions elaborated on the mutually informative relationship between these two concepts in manifold ways. Personal memories,² though certainly inseparable from and constructed by individuals, "have a social quality in that they are interactively constructed, and, therefore, always connected with the memories of others" (A. Assmann 40-41).³ Accordingly, personal and collective memory cannot be clearly separated from each other but rather are

1 The term 'memories' is of course not limited to events of which witnesses are actually still alive. For a more elaborate theorization of this dynamic, cf. Marianne Hirsch's "The Generation of Postmemory."

2 The term 'personal memory' is more adequate than 'individual memory' because 'individual' implies a binary opposition to 'collective.'

3 The works of both Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann, while influential to scholarship on memories in a cultural studies context, focus primarily on studying memory in relation to written text. Although this narrow understanding of what constitutes a text does not apply to cultural studies' inclusive definition of all cultural artifacts as texts, this approach can still be transferred.

closely related (Wertsch 35). David Thelen points out that what is deemed worth remembering of the past results from “conversations with others that occur in the contexts of community, broader politics, and social dynamics” (1119). Thus, in constructing memories, consciously or unconsciously, elements that belong to a collective’s representations of the past are included in personal memories. These representations are influenced by social and political actors, institutions, and public discourses: “[I]t is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories” (Halbwachs 38).

The present, in this sense, conditions how the past is negotiated and eventually remembered. Since memories are constantly informed by the needs of the present, they are “dynamic [...] and highly unstable” (Sturken 75). The assumption that memories are nonstatic and actively constructed by various actors also implies the plurality of historical narratives. Social and political actors, be they individuals, institutions, or collectives, decide which memories to include in their respective accounts of the past and which ones to exclude (Shahzad 389). Thus, various, sometimes competing, narratives and counternarratives are constructed, each claiming to represent what ‘actually’ happened.

The constructedness of memories as well as the existence of competing narratives already point to a second aspect of memories with which numerous submissions were concerned: the functionality of memories. Many of our submissions elaborated on the diverse functions memories perform in the social, political, and cultural context of the United States. Social and political actors, such as representatives of governmental and nongovernmental institutions, employ memories to construct a past that aims to unite a people behind a collective memory articulated in a coherent historical narrative (cf. White 1-42). Here, the past is put to pragmatic use in order to create a sense of national and cultural belonging (Brown and Hamilakis 1). In this regard, a “usable past” that social and political agents can employ for their respective purposes is constructed (Brooks 339).

The debate about which elements of the past to include in a historical narrative exemplifies a process that Van Wyck Brooks already describes in his 1918 article “On Creating a Usable Past.” This process makes a selected array of events of the past, to use Brooks’s term, “available” to the present generation (338), turning these events into collective memories. The result is a past that is not simply “a dry collection of facts” (Blake 423) but that has been molded into a meaningful historical narrative, e.g., history. This narrative constitutes a particular foundation from which people can derive a sense of national and cultural belonging. In other words, these narratives aim to establish a usable past that provides answers to questions about a collective’s origin and identity. What is deemed ‘usable’ is constantly up for debate. As Thelen as well as K. S. Brown and Yannis Hamilakis have pointed out, individuals or groups are motivated by

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constantly changing political, cultural, and social dynamics, which simultaneously influence what they consider worth being remembered of the past (Thelen 1123; Brown and Hamilakis 2).

In attempting to create a usable past, social and political actors might try to influence the process of meaning making, but just like other texts, memories are able to perform “cultural work” independent of their intentions (Lauter 23). By performing cultural work, memories shape diverse images and narratives that influence how societies make sense of the past and conceive of their present surroundings. In this respect, they “construct the frameworks, fashion the metaphors, create the very language by which people comprehend their experiences and think about their world” (Lauter 23). Memories of the Vietnam War, for instance, have performed cultural work in that they have affected Americans’ perceptions of such diverse issues as US military strategies and international involvement as well as mental illness among soldiers. In this context, our contribution “The Anti-Experience as Cultural Memory: Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* and the Vietnam War” elaborates on the film’s influence on the process of constructing memories, which, in turn, can perform cultural work themselves.

The concept of cultural memory indicates the third essential aspect of memories that was of utmost importance to many of our submissions: the relevance of collective memories to the formation of collective identity. The construction of collective identity entails the questions of how memories work in establishing collective (national) identities and who is included in and excluded from such groups for what reasons. This process fulfills an essential role in the present: It gives meaning and identity to a collective (Wertsch 32-33). In collective memories, historical events are narrated from specific angles and tend to get “reduce[d] [...] to mythic archetypes” (Novick 4), as can be seen, for example, in the reduction of the complex and multifaceted process of ‘discovering’ the Americas to a storied account encapsulated in the celebration of Columbus Day. Carrying supposedly timeless components of a group’s identity, collective “[m]emory [...] denies the ‘pastness’ of its objects and insists on their continuing presence” (Novick 4). Through narrating a shared memory, a group affirms its identity over time (Wertsch 41). Therefore, the main function of collective memory is not to represent the past of the collective but to establish a certain ‘stability’⁴ for a group and to preserve “a sense of sameness over time and space” (Gillis 3; cf. Wertsch 41). Remembering enables one to belong to and identify with a group while emotional investment in this belonging often elicits the urge to pass on the group’s memory (J. Assmann 114; cf. Halbwachs 80; Wertsch 68).

4 This, however, does not imply that memories or identities in themselves are stable (Gillis 4; Wertsch 46).

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When collective identities are constructed through memory, it is impossible to encompass an entire people in a unifying narrative that articulates a consistent memory. In fact, it is usually intended that certain groups are excluded from it. By revealing the plurality of poetic responses to the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001, our contribution on 9/11 poetry critically discusses this exclusive nature of group identity formation. Othering through collective memory and the negotiation concerning what to remember (and how) as well as what to forget are closely connected to power relations: To preserve a dominant order, anything and anyone that could threaten the narrative is excluded from it (Ryan 158). For example, Bradford Vivian observes “a disavowal of [...] difficult sociopolitical differences in favor of transcendent political symbolism and supposedly universal civic sentiment” when writing about the rhetoric of public mourning (64). Such a process affects collective memory and, in turn, collective identities, which are shaped by the continuous process of including some memories but excluding others. With the rising awareness of the fact that collective memory entails these processes of exclusion, space for minorities’ perspectives on history has been opening up during recent decades as history writing strives to become more representational (Wertsch 46). In this respect, memories that were previously suppressed have now become increasingly important and have gained recognition within the dominant discourse (Whitehead, *Memory* 13).

The creation of collective identities through memory is most powerfully exemplified by their expression via national narratives (cf. Anderson; Bhabha), which can be considered both a result and a form of memory. Benedict Anderson understands a nation as “an imagined political community” (6), stressing its constructed character and identifying national narratives as the glue that holds it together. As the dominant collective memory, official history provides nations with a foundation on which to base their existence and distinctiveness—a dynamic illuminated by our contribution on Rosmarie Waldrop’s poem “All Electrons Are (Not) Alike.” Regardless of the exclusion of minorities from the collective, the supposedly common past uniting a people is vital in order to form a nation. In this regard, national “[n]arratives based on commonality, shared experiences and memories construct identity” (Ryan 156), which necessitates stressing similarity over difference.

As numerous of our submissions have proven, another aspect highly productive for an engagement with memories in American studies is that of trauma, which offers new insights and perspectives on various topics relevant to the field. Characterized by interdisciplinarity, the study of trauma constitutes an important domain within the study of memories, reflecting the close relation between the concepts of trauma and memory. This interrelation is evident in the fact that each concept describes a process of how the past is shaped by an individual and of how that individual is shaped by the past. Whereas memory can be regarded as a graspable experience, “[t]rauma [lies] [...]

beyond the limits of our understanding” (Belau par. 1). Trauma prevents the victim from accessing the traumatic experience that was responsible for the collapse of coherent selfhood and prohibits the “[u]nclaimed [e]xperience” from transforming into a processable memory (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 10; cf. LaCapra). The disruptive character of trauma often reveals itself in flashbacks or “unexpected encounter[s] with an event that the mind misses and then repeatedly attempts to grasp” (Caruth, “Parting Words” 20).⁵ Trauma theory has opened new dimensions “of conceptualising trauma and has shifted attention away from the question of what is remembered of the past to how and why it is remembered” (Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* 3; cf. Hartman 260; McNally). Thus, it allows for new perspectives on events such as the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001.

Trauma has transcended the personal and become an overarching concept ascribed to collectives, thus establishing itself as a factor in creating national narratives, shared experiences, and collective memories. This can be seen in the aftermath of the attacks when public discourse recognized 9/11 as a collective trauma that called into question national identity. Thus, 9/11 was elevated to a traumatic event of national impact that served to create a coherent, encompassing narrative on which to base a notion of togetherness. Our contribution “Mosaic of Ashes: Poetic Responses to 9/11” takes this as a starting point to analyze how these mechanisms are utilized, represented, and evaluated in poetry.

As various submissions pointed out, a particularly fruitful object of trauma studies is trauma fiction, which, in order to articulate and reflect upon traumatic experiences adequately, “mimick[s] [...] [trauma’s] forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterised by repetition and indirection” (Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* 3). Trauma articulates itself through flashbacks, hallucinations, or nightmares. The creative engagement with forms of trauma communicates the forceful, continuous nature of these articulations as they intrude upon the victim time and again. Postmodern and deconstructivist currents enabled literary and cultural studies approaches to incorporate aspects of trauma theory. “The Anti-Experience as Cultural Memory: Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* and the Vietnam War” exhibits the productivity of employing trauma theory within a cultural studies framework.

Surveying the aspects highlighted by our submissions, four foci—the construction of (American) memories, their functionality, the construction of collective identities, and trauma—emerged, constituting what MA-level American studies scholars in Europe consider to be the most fertile ways of approaching memory. All our

5 Other currents in trauma theory, however, question the assumption that trauma lies outside all representation and read its nature in a different way (cf. Leys).

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submissions, with their respective theoretical and methodological approaches and foci, explored the relation between the present, the past, and the formation of memories. The manifold dimensions of studying American memories invite multifaceted reflections. Cast in the mold of memories, the past, as our submissions insisted, plays a profound role in how individual and collective selves are defined: What is chosen to be remembered and how it is remembered constitutes the very foundation on which societies, cultures, and identities are based. Thus, scholarship on American memories in all its diversity offers an invaluable contribution to the understanding of the United States and its diverse society and culture. As our submissions made clear and as our contributions show, memory studies is an indispensable addition to the interdisciplinary field of American studies.

ACADEMIC CONTRIBUTIONS

The topical academic contributions to the sixth issue of *aspeers*, each branching off into different directions, reflect all of the four aspects mentioned above. Accordingly, they showcase the academic diversity and the fertility of investigating memories from an American studies perspective. Ranging from prose poetry analysis that calls into question national narratives to the examination of the cultural work performed by film and to a survey of poetry in the context of collective trauma, this year's academic contributions stand as proof that American memories as a topic is highly productive when inviting young scholars to evaluate the scope of American studies.

“Remembering the Beginning: ‘All Electrons Are (Not) Alike’ by Rosmarie Waldrop” provides the sixth issue of *aspeers* with a detailed analysis of an experimental prose poem. Anna Bongers contributes an insightful close reading of the poem, which portrays, for example, Columbus’s ‘discovery’ of the Americas and how he asserts his power over indigenous peoples. The contribution, including theoretical approaches by Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida, shows how concepts of language theory employed in the poem illustrate the constructedness of national narratives as collective memories. This demonstrates that language cannot transport the ‘truth’ but is instead subject to interpretation and functions as a carrier of power relations; thus, it can be used as a means of oppression. The analysis places “All Electrons Are (Not) Alike” in a transnational context by demonstrating how the poem displays the constructedness of national narratives. Bongers thus argues for a transnationalization of literary studies. This contribution provides *aspeers* with interesting insights into how language, memory, and power intertwine to construct the nation-state and how language, in turn, can also be used to deconstruct it.

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Svenja Fehlhaber's contribution "The Anti-Experience as Cultural Memory: Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* and the Vietnam War" discusses aspects of medical discourse and cinematic representations of war and connects both with notions of collective memory and mediated experience. This sets the stage for an innovative close reading of the film that focuses on individual trauma in the form of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In showing how the film uses unique cinematic language that resists chronology and thus former representations of war to articulate and represent the protagonist's traumatic Vietnam experience, Fehlhaber reads *Apocalypse Now* (1979) as trauma fiction. In her reading of Coppola's work, she examines the film's ability to perform cultural work: The mediation and mediatization of individual trauma permit its audience to relive an experience in which it never took part (Kaplan 2) and thus influence subsequent generations' understandings of the Vietnam War in the contexts of medical, political, and social discourses. In exhibiting these aspects, Fehlhaber's contribution argues for the film's position in the realm of cultural memory as a counterexample to the official discourse of that time, thereby exemplifying the dynamics and versatility of American memories.

The contribution "Mosaic of Ashes: Poetic Responses to 9/11" explores the creation and shaping of collective memory in 9/11 poetry as well as the ways in which poetic works attempt to overcome the trauma of 9/11. Katarzyna Maria Mika examines three particular collections of poetry that display the positioning of personal memory in comparison to collective memory. She sets her analysis apart from previous scholarship by focusing on the diversity of poetic responses to 9/11 in relation to the labeling of the attacks as 'the event.' The poems' reactions, as Mika identifies, range from patriotic fervor to being critical of "*imperative patriotism*" to putting emphasis on the United States as a multicultural society (Salaita 154). Analyzing the medium of poetry, Mika shows that, depending on how 9/11 is remembered by US Americans, different interpretations and, thus, memories of the attacks offer competing understandings of national identity. This condition ultimately reveals a country deeply divided and incapable of sustaining a stable definition of its national collective.

While we have selected three strong contributions on American memories, which make up part of our multifaceted topical section, *aspeers*' sixth issue carries on the editorial policy of previous years, showcasing a distinguished nontopical contribution. *aspeers* has long had a nontopical section featuring submissions that clearly stand out because of their innovative approaches and unique reflections on topics not directly linked to the issues' respective topical foci. "Jacqueline Kennedy's White House Tour: The Political Dimensions of a First Lady" analyzes the documentary *A Tour of the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy* (1962). By providing a fascinating reading that uncovers references to President Kennedy's domestic policies throughout the documentary, Lena Ringleb reveals the political dimensions of this seemingly apolitical

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text. She argues for a reevaluation of the supposed apoliticalness of Jacqueline Kennedy's first ladyship. In doing so, the contribution points to the importance of the first ladyship for the president's administration as well as for American politics in general. Ringleb engages in innovative work in the emerging field of first lady studies and thus offers a unique contribution to American studies.

ART

The multidimensional nature of American memories is also demonstrated in the art section of *aspeers*, offering kaleidoscopic perspectives on this year's topic. Being able to deal with an abstract concept such as American memories in a uniquely evocative and expressive way, visual art, poetry, as well as narrative forms of fiction approach and illuminate issues on different levels and from diverse angles. As memories are all too often not directly accessible and frequently reveal themselves through forms of displacement, art—via personalization, fictionalization, aesthetization, and emotionalization—is precisely the means of communication that is capable of addressing these memories and expressing the otherwise inexpressible.

Decolonizing the Minds by Jared Wyatt takes on American memories by playing with notions of deconstruction and the postcolonial. The painting refuses to present the viewer with a visual context on the basis of which a coherent narrative of the person portrayed might be inferred. Employing only the colors black, red, and white, the painting depicts a face that emerges out of contourless darkness, revealing neither sex, age, ethnicity, nor any other detail. The viewer is confronted with a piercing gaze that expresses and evokes emotions such as sadness, pain, fear, and anger. In the context of its title, the work reflects upon the past of colonized groups and their absence in the construction of American memories. On multiple levels, the painting confronts the viewer with the inadequacy of categorizing the world according to perceived binaries because it demands filling the voids left by the deliberate lack of visual information.

Devin Murphy's compelling short story "Opossum" touches upon both personal and collective memory. This story of initiation revolves around a young boy whom his older brothers try to force to hunt, trap, and drown an opossum as a rite of passage. The text gives a very personal account of the protagonist's childhood memories. At the same time, these memories strongly resonate with the reader: Despite the unsentimental diction, the story constitutes an emotional account, permitting the reader to empathize with the main character, through whom the narrative is focalized. Playing with the interconnectedness of personal and collective forms of memories, the

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story chooses a unique version of an experience and an identity-constructing personal memory to which many can relate: the loss of innocence.

The expressive painting ... *denn es war Krieg* [... *because it was War*] by Michaela Herbst is a convincing example of how a combination of bright colors and elaborate composition invite the viewer to create a narration around the depicted scene. Framed and highlighted through the use of complementary and warm/cold contrasts, the painting's focus lies on a group of marching people. The work establishes the prevailing theme of movement and mobility. Despite the rather explicit title, the openness of the composition and the refusal to provide details that unambiguously identify the figures as soldiers invite a variety of interpretations. Especially in an American context, themes of movement and mobility gain more dimensions: images of the Great Migration, the Trail of Tears, or westward expansion might cross one's mind. These themes are central to perceptions of American history and, thus, are central aspects of personal and collective memories of the United States. Because of the broad thematic potential for interpreting the scene in ... *denn es war Krieg* [... *because it was War*], this painting, through its combination of color and composition, illustrates American memories at work.

Colonial Ain't Dead is an extraordinary photograph by Karolina Slup that captures the gloomy, almost mystical atmosphere of the Southern gothic. The portrayal of a colonial house in the dark both evokes familiar notions of the South and echoes bewilderment and uncertainty, which are amplified by the canted angle and the grainy quality of the photograph. The intense reflections of light in the foreground and the middleground contribute to this feeling. The viewer finds himself or herself some distance from the house, a position that conveys a sense of exclusion and not belonging. As the title suggests, memories of the Old South—exemplified by the neocolonial architecture—are still a part of the conceptualization of today's South. However, Slup's photograph displaces the viewer and renegotiates these memories.

The poem "Cameras" by Daniel Gallant is an intriguing portrayal not only of the speaker's personal memory but also of photography's ability as a medium to recall past events in a very literal way. Set in British Columbia, this poem allows the reader to access a North American memory. The employment of stylistic devices such as onomatopoeic language, repetition, and explicit diction, as well as the free-verse form combine to create an aestheticized expression of a childhood trauma. Using the trope of photography as a means to articulate the speaker's trauma perfectly illustrates photography's inability to give a reliable account of reality. The poem goes one step further in addressing the highly constructed nature of memories by describing the act of taking pictures that are to become supposedly joyful family mementos as traumatizing for the speaker.

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The title of Ina Müller's photography collection *What Happened in Vegas* hints at Las Vegas's infamous theme "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas" and thus at the city's extraordinary relation to memories: Experiences made there characterized by splendor and sin are not to be carried outside the boundaries of the city, which becomes a keeper of both secrets and memories. The collection powerfully deconstructs preformulated conceptions of Las Vegas. The photographs do not indulge in depictions of stereotypical scenes focusing on glamour and gambling but instead provide behind-the-scenes glimpses. The viewers' expectations to see pompous illustrations of Las Vegas as a glitzy keeper of secrets are disappointed. In these carefully composed photographs, themes of alienation, isolation, disorientation, and decay come to the fore and renegotiate the city's reputation. Müller successfully captures contradicting moments that allow for different, multidimensional insights into an imagined space.

In his engaging short story "The Old Man's Rocking Chair Is Moving Slower, Boy," Randal Eldon Greene addresses substantial themes of life such as trauma, death, and loss. Upholding a mood of morbidity and decay throughout the story, the narrative consists of the fragmented visions of an old man's troubled life. In order to craft a story that approaches trauma as something that cannot be articulated explicitly, the text utilizes literary devices such as the motif of escape, color symbolism, and stark vermin imagery. The old man struggles to establish a coherent narrative from intermingled memories whose chronology is disrupted. This again demonstrates how memories and their articulation are used to make sense of one's own past and in so doing create identity. Greene's story is an illustration of how memories, narration, and selfhood mutually influence each other, inviting the reader to reflect on these complex interrelations.

PROFESSORIAL VOICE

The editors of *aspeers* are proud to introduce the professorial voice of this year's issue: Monica Michlin, Associate Professor of American studies at Paris-Sorbonne University in France. We are honored to continue the line of eminent professorial voices with such a renowned European scholar. Professor Michlin provides important insights into this year's topic as her research focuses on a variety of subjects relevant and related to memory studies, such as African American literature, LGBT literature, as well as film and TV series and how memory and trauma are displayed in these media. Moreover, it is a pleasure to further expand the journal's internationality by featuring an American studies professor from France.

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Professor Michlin's impressive academic background and its close relation to our topic make her professorial voice an invaluable addition to *aspeers*. She received her doctoral degree for her thesis on the works of Toni Morrison—whom she met during her studies at Princeton University, as she recounts in the professorial voice—and presently teaches classes on contemporary American literature and culture. Furthermore, she is a vice president of the French Association for American Studies and a member of the board of the journal *TV/Series*. Professor Michlin was also invited to deliver a keynote lecture at the 2013 conference of the Collegium for African American Research (CAAR) in Atlanta. Her contributions to numerous international conferences as well as her manifold publications reflect her extensive academic interests, which showcase the productivity of including approaches of memory studies in American studies. Among those publications are *Jean Toomer: Cane* (1997) and articles such as “Narrative as Empowerment: *Push* and the Signifying on Prior African-American Novels on Incest” (2006) as well as “‘Somewhere Along the Line I Knew There'd Be Girls, Visions, Everything': *On the Road* as Book of the Beat” (2012). Her long list of publications also reveals her interest in narration, as can be seen in her article “Voices That Move Us: Narrative Voice, Emotion, and Political Thrust in Contemporary American Novels” (2012). Moreover, in some of her works, Professor Michlin looks at the intersections of her abundant research interests: In her paper “Narrative and Ideological Entrapment in *24*: Plotting, Framing and the Ambivalent Viewer” (2009), she combines her interests in TV series and narration, and in “Recurrence, Remediation and Metatextuality in *Queer As Folk*” (forthcoming in 2013), she connects her interests in intertextuality, metatextuality, LGBT studies, and TV series. Other recent works engage with representations of memories and trauma in TV and film, also discussing depictions of the war in Iraq in different forms of media and how they shape public memory. Her academic interests, which in all their variety are especially relevant to the topic of American memories, make Professor Monica Michlin a superb contributor to this year's issue.

aspeers chose a professorial voice in the form of an interview because it is a format both personal and able to touch upon a multitude of aspects as best befits our topic. Professor Michlin discusses and comments on issues ranging from how nostalgia and memory play a role for audiences of the TV series *Mad Men* to how she considers Signifying a possible theorization of American memories and from why memory studies became a productive endeavor within the field of American studies to the repetition of cinematographic memories in film genres such as the Western. Furthermore, Professor Michlin gives advice to students regarding their studies and their future career paths. Her expert insights into American memories and her willingness to share personal experiences result in an enriching professorial voice for *aspeers*.

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With this current issue on American memories, *aspeers* dedicates itself to the wide and continuously growing field of memory studies and its relevance within American studies. The academic and art contributions featured in this issue showcase the multiplicity of different perspectives on and approaches to American memories. While the topical academic contributions speak to the productivity and diversity of the topic within European American studies MA-level scholarship, the art contributions add a creative dimension to this issue, which is furthermore enriched by the manifold aspects covered in the professorial voice. Additionally, our nontopical contribution provides an innovative reading of a noncanonical text and further underlines the ever-expanding potential of American studies. As the editors, we hope you enjoy exploring the sixth issue of *aspeers*.

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