

Participatory Memory Collective Imagination

Connecting Institutions and Communities

The symposium contributes to ongoing debates on gender, race, and class within cultural imaginations of the past. It does so by examining the participation of co-researchers from cultural institutions and civil society activism, including those from marginalised communities. In recent years, participatory approaches have gained increasing prominence, fostering forms of knowledge production that are co-constructed within broader social contexts rather than being defined solely within (academically) institutionalised research. However, studies of cultural memory often still fall short of fully integrating participatory methods that ensure the active involvement of societal actors in shaping project design, research questions, and analysis. The symposium seeks to advance participatory memory studies that approach cultural memory in socially engaged and inclusive ways. It addresses the general challenges and opportunities of participatory methods in transdisciplinary research, maps memory researchers' experiences with these approaches, and aims to initiate collaborations with co-researchers during the event.

Panels Chances & Challenges • Exploring Experiences • Spaces of Memory • Alternative Practices

- **SYMPOSIUM**
2 July 2026
- **VENUE**
TH Köln, Faculty of Cultural Sciences. Ubierring 40, 50678 Cologne, room 11
- **ORGANISATION**
Alexander van Wickeren & Carolin Höfler
- **REGISTRATION**
Attendance at the symposium is free of charge. To attend, please register [here](#).
- **FUNDED BY**
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TH Köln**

Programme

09:00–09:15 Welcome & Introduction
Carolin Höfler & Alexander van Wickeren

I. Chances & Challenges

09:15–10:15 **Jonathan Ngeh**, University of Cologne
“Doing Research With, Not On: Ethics of Knowledge Co-Production” (Keynote lecture)

10:15–10:30 Coffee break

II. Exploring Experiences

10:30–11:00 **Red Chidgey**, King’s College London
“Activist Collaboration: Exploring Methods for Equitable Memory Work”

11:00–11:30 **Felix Fuhg**, eCommemoration Körber-Stiftung
“The Past as a Participatory Medium: Rethinking Memory Culture in the Post-Digital Age”

11:30–12:00 **Sandra Vacca**, ICOM International Committee for Collecting
“Co-Making Memory? Participatory Research and the Postmigrant Museum”

12:00–13:00 Lunch break

III. Spaces of Memory

Co-Research with **Bebero Lehmann**, DOMiD – Documentation Centre and Museum of Migration in Germany

13:00–13:20 **Daniel Lohmann**, TH Köln
“Whose Cultural Heritage? The Power Station on the Zanders Site in Bergisch Gladbach as a Reflection of Architecture, Industrial History and Migration”

13:20–13:40 **Yvonne Lober & Carolin Höfler**, TH Köln
“Boundaryma(r)king: Mediating (Im)material Memory Along the Inter-Entity Boundary Line, Bosnia and Herzegovina”

13:40–14:10 Comment and discussion

14:10–14:25 Coffee break

IV. Alternative Practices

Co-Research with **Fabiola Arellano Cruz**, Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum Köln

14:25–14:45 **Simon Meienberg**, TH Köln; **Sandra Kurfürst**, University of Cologne; **Sevi Bayraktar**, Cologne University of Music and Dance & **Wan Issa**, The Kurdish Center for Studies
“Moving Memories: Embodied Acts of Collective Remembering through Dance and Theater”

14:45–15:05 **Marc Pfaff**, Berlin University of the Arts/Technical University Berlin & **Jonny-Bix Bongers**, curator and researcher, Berlin
“Imagining Alternative Archives”

15:05–15:35 Comment and discussion

15:35–16:15 Final Discussion
with Wrap-Up by **Glenda Obermuller**, Theodor Wonja Michael Bibliothek, and **Simon Meienberg**, TH Köln

Further information [here](#).

I. Chances & Challenges

Jonathan Ngeh, University of Cologne

Doing Research With, Not On: Ethics of Knowledge Co-Production

Research is never neutral, particularly in times of crisis. This keynote examines the ethical, scientific, and practical dimensions of co-producing knowledge within transdisciplinary contexts. It begins from the conviction that research should be a space of parity, one that seeks to equalise relations of knowledge production and recognises all contributors as experts of their own experiences. Contemporary crises, such as climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic that began in China before spreading globally, demonstrate that the impacts of crisis are often indiscriminate. Responding effectively to such challenges therefore requires research approaches grounded in collaboration, mutual respect, and shared responsibility. Why does parity in research matter, and what is its scientific relevance? These questions form the foundation of my argument. Drawing on Homi Bhabha's notion of Third Space and on a collaborative research project with African migrants as co-researchers in the United Arab Emirates and China during the Covid-19 pandemic, I argue that co-producing knowledge is not an end point but an ongoing, inclusive practice. It requires balancing care with critique, openness with structure, and flexibility with accountability, while working through institutional and cultural hierarchies so that diverse forms of expertise can meaningfully shape research.

II. Exploring Experiences

Red Chidgey, King's College London

Activist Collaboration: Exploring Methods for Equitable Memory Work

Many activists are deeply attuned to performing memory work. Through their protest actions, cultural production, speech acts and cultivation of legacies, memory circulates within social movements as a vital activist resource and strategy (Chidgey 2018; Gutman and Wüstenberg 2023; Rigney 2025). Drawing on over a decade of working as a scholar-activist within transnational feminist and queer movements, this talk reflects on the methodological approaches used across several activist-aligned memory projects undertaken within academia. Spanning zine-making, digital archives and artist residencies, it foregrounds arts-based, DIY (do-it-yourself) and institutional approaches. Through discussing these projects, I introduce the concept of equitable memory work—a framework I propose for fostering more just, accountable and collaborative engagements between academic and activist communities. Attentive to questions of power, resource distribution and epistemic justice, I explore collaboration, creativity and ethical reflexivity as core considerations. In doing so, the talk offers critical insights and practical suggestions for what effective and reciprocal activist-academic collaborations can look like.

Felix Fuhg, eCommemoration Körber-Stiftung

The Past as a Participatory Medium: Rethinking Memory Culture in the Post-Digital Age

In post-digital societies, collective memory is produced through participation rather than simply being preserved in institutional archives. Our public sphere is shaped by platforms, networked images, OSA-data and various forms of interactive media. This causes remembrance to shift away from ritualised practices criticised as *Versöhnungstheater* today to become a social practice again, performed, contested and co-created. Positioned at the intersection of media art, design, technology, and public history, eCommemoration is a platform and initiator of participatory formats of an international, often multidirectional memory culture, including immersive storytelling strategies, performative and experimental media art, games, XR installations, and collaborative digital environments. Through its initiatives, the programme highlights aesthetic practice as a means of generating knowledge: not depicting the past but demonstrating that historical meaning in collective memory-making is created and shared through contemporary collaborative actions. This talk uses artistic case studies to demonstrate how new technologies pave the way for new forms of participation and to illustrate how new publics and a transdisciplinary approach can reshape our memory culture through collaborative artmaking.

Sandra Vacca, ICOM International Committee for Collecting
Co-Making Memory? Participatory Research and the Postmigrant Museum

Museums are sites of knowledge production and transmission, but also spaces of reflection and negotiation. The stories preserved and presented within them are often incomplete or fragmentary and frequently shaped by dominant national narratives. In recent years, these narratives have increasingly been challenged by actors from the postmigrant society whose perspectives have long remained unheard or marginalised. This contribution examines the relationship between museum research, participation, and memory within this context, focusing in particular on multiperspectivity as both a guiding principle and a methodological approach. It addresses the question of participation in museum research: who remembers, who narrates, and whose voices become visible or remain excluded. Attention is given to the institutional structures, power dynamics, and decision-making processes that shape participation and determine whose knowledge is recognised. Drawing on experiences from several participatory projects in museum contexts, the talk reflects on the structural conditions necessary for meaningful involvement of actors from the postmigrant society. It considers participatory methods that move beyond symbolic inclusion and explores how such approaches can reshape research practices within museums. Particular attention is paid to the tensions and possibilities that emerge when curatorial knowledge intersects with lived experience. By examining these dynamics, the contribution reflects on museums as spaces of negotiation and shared authorship in diverse, postmigrant societies, highlighting both the potential of participatory research to foster belonging and agency and the challenges it raises for institutional practices and knowledge production.

III. Spaces of Memory

Co-Research with Bebero Lehmann, DOMiD– Documentation Centre and Museum of Migration in Germany

Daniel Lohmann, TH Köln

Whose Cultural Heritage? The Power Station on the Zanders Site in Bergisch Gladbach as a Reflection of Architecture, Industrial History and Migration

The talk analyses which cultural memories have been inscribed in Bergisch Gladbach's industrial architectural heritage to date, and whether and to what extent they are affected by new debates on class and race. This will be discussed using the example of the inner-city industrial site of the Zanders paper factory, which fell into disuse in 2021. With its acquisition by the city, the complex, with its extensive building stock, in particular a number of listed monuments, was recognised as "cultural heritage" in terms of remembrance policy. The example of the company's own power station shows that it is primarily the authorship and architecture of the famous church architect Dominikus Böhm that is commemorated, rather than the broader social history of the building complex. Although accounts from workers show that the building also served as a social and religious retreat for migrant employees and was popularly known as the "mosque", these references have hardly entered the collective memory to date. This raises the questions of whose cultural heritage the power station actually is and how the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in its subaltern and post-migrant history of remembrance can be understood. What strategies are available for a future supra-regional culture of remembrance for the Zanders site?

Yvonne Lober & Carolin Höfler, TH Köln

Boundaryma(r)king: Mediating (Im)material Memory Along the Inter-Entity Boundary Line, Bosnia and Herzegovina

The talk examines the boundary region of the successor state to Yugoslavia, using the example of the Inter-Entity Boundary Line (IEBL) in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. This boundary, which divided Bosnia and Herzegovina into two political-administrative entities in the wake of the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement, provides insights into the complex interactions between physical infrastructure, symbolic meaning, memory culture, and the everyday lives of inhabitants in a post-conflict context. A particular focus is placed on the discursive interweaving of material and immaterial boundary dimensions and their impact on collective memory, social identities, and practices. The present study concentrates on

an investigative approach that facilitates the process of gaining access to socio-spatial and cultural memories. This approach is employed to present and mediate inscriptions in the culture of remembrance, historic negotiations, and the affective charge of the boundary area. The objective of this research endeavour is to methodically capture the intricate inter-relationships between power, materiality, and memories in formerly frontier regions. This undertaking is expected to make a substantial contribution to the critical analysis of spatial-political practices from the perspective of cultural studies-oriented design research.

IV. Alternative Practices

Co-Research with Fabiola Arellano Cruz, Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum Köln

Simon Meienberg, TH Köln; Sandra Kurfürst, University of Cologne, Sevi Bayraktar, Cologne University of Music and Dance & Wan Issa, The Kurdish Center for Studies

Moving Memories: Embodied Acts of Collective Remembering through Dance and Theater

In an open conversation we ask how participatory practices of remembering in dance and theatre can challenge dominant constructions of collective memory manifested in monuments, anthems, institutionalised archives and staged choreographies. Such state-aligned narratives rely on notions of unity and nationalism that systematically marginalise the memories of ethnicised, racialised and gendered subjects to consolidate their own legitimacy. In contrast, embodied memory practices in a variety of folk dances in Turkey, Kurdish Govend dance, Senegalese forum theatre, and Vietnamese hip hop constitute ephemeral yet powerful formations emerging from marginalised communities across different historical and geopolitical contexts. These practices have the potential to create publics in which collective remembering is performed, negotiated, and transformed, while opening new forms of inclusive self-representation, collective healing, and resistance. Drawing on case studies from research conducted between Cologne and Turkey, Kurdistan, Vietnam, and Senegal, we ask how embodied acts of remembering unsettle hegemonic narratives and operate as embodied and dynamic archives of resistance.

Marc Pfaff, Berlin University of the Arts/Technical University Berlin & Jonny-Bix Bongers, curator and researcher, Berlin

Imagining Alternative Archives

Algorithmic systems are rapidly transforming how we produce and interact with our cultural memories and collective knowledge. As our present actions and the accumulated records of our past increasingly become training data for predictive and generative models, pressing questions arise regarding transparency, accessibility, and collective ownership. Building on insights from the transdisciplinary symposium and exhibition project “Reclaiming Data: Art and Memory in the Age of Digital Archives”, this talk examines the role of contemporary art and artistic research in prototyping and negotiating alternative futures and best practices for digital archiving and equitable AI use.