

Organizational Memory Studies

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview and discussion of the rapidly growing literature on Organizational Memory Studies (OMS). We define OMS as an inquiry into the ways that remembering and forgetting shape, and are shaped by, organizations and organizing processes. The contribution of this article is threefold. We briefly review what we understand by organizational memory and explore some key debates and points of contestation in the field. Second, we identify four different perspectives that have been developed in OMS (functional, interpretive, critical and performative) and expand upon each perspective by showcasing articles published over the past decade. In particular, we examine four papers previously published in Organization Studies to show the distinctiveness of each perspective. Finally, we identify a number of areas for future research to facilitate the future development of OMS.

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Introduction

Over the past decade, memory has re-emerged as a significant area of inquiry in management and organization studies (Rowlinson, Booth, Clark, Delahaye, & Procter, 2010; Godfrey, Hassard, O'Connor, Rowlinson, & Ruef, 2016; Wadhvani, Suddaby, Mordhorst, & Popp, 2018). The new interest in memory has expanded the scholarship on Organizational Memory Studies (OMS) to examine how memories shape—and are shaped by—present and future choices, behaviours, and strategies in and around organizations. Research in this area has multiplied in varieties of fruitful avenues because of the recognition that the past is an important feature of organizational life. For example, some researchers have studied the importance of the past for managerial action and the ability of managers to harness the past for organizational purposes, such as catalysing change, organizational identity and revival (Wadhvani, et al., 2018; Foster et al, 2020; Hatch & Schultz, 2017; Oertel & Thommes, 2018; Basque & Langley, 2018). Others have highlighted the role of diverse stakeholders, such as employees, customers and investors/donors, in shaping organizational memories (Ybema, 2014; Bell & Taylor, 2016; Foroughi, 2020). While still others have explored the politics of memory and the underlying struggles and contestations over mnemonic representations (Foroughi & Al-Amoudi, 2020; Mena & Rintamäki, 2020; Durepos et al, 2020). The growing interest in organizational memory has been fueled by the development of two predominant streams of thought in OMS: functional and constructionist approaches to memory (Rowlinson et al, 2010). While these diverse perspectives has contributed to a rapid progression of the field, it has also led to increasing ambiguity about the boundaries of the field and obfuscation of the field's core constructs (Decker, Hassard, & Rowlinson, in press).

In this Perspectives article, we build on the foundational *Organization Studies* paper by Rowlinson and colleagues (2010) to map the terrain of the growing field of OMS, ten years after. To this end, we extend the mandate from social memory studies (Olick &

Robbins, 1998, p. 112) to the realm of organization studies and define OMS *as an inquiry into the varieties of ways that organizations and organizing processes shape, and are shaped by, remembering and forgetting*. This definition allows us to recognize the breadth of the field, and at the same time distinguish it from related streams of research, such as historical organization studies and uses-of-the-past.

The study of memory in organizations emerged with the recognition that decisions and actions taken in the past influence present organizational behaviour (Cyert & March, 1963). Subsequently, many organizational theories (e.g. institutional theory, path dependence) have espoused simple views of the past and memory without proper theorization until only recently (e.g. Ocasio, Mauskopf & Steele, 2016). The field is also multidisciplinary, inheriting from social memory studies (Olick & Robbins, 1998) with the intent of being open to a variety of perspectives and interests, fostering the combination of approaches that move our understanding of the intersection between memory and organizations forward. Our definition also provides some much needed boundaries that circumscribe the interests of this community of scholars around issues of remembering and forgetting. This is important considering the ambiguous usage of memory as either knowledge (e.g. de Holan & Philips, 2004) or history (e.g. Ravasi et al, 2019).

Our paper has three primary aims. First, we provide an overview of the developments in OMS over the last decade (2010-2020) to explore how the field has evolved and coalesced into a distinctive community. Next, we provide an overview of organizational memory studies with a focus on the distinctions between OMS and two other well known perspectives on the past: Historical organization studies and the uses-of-the-past. Our goal is to emphasize the differences between these approaches such that it is clear what is distinct about organizational memory. We then present and outline four different perspectives in OMS: functional, interpretive, critical and performative. We explain these four perspectives by

showcasing OMS articles published in the last decade, specifically four exemplar papers published previously in *Organization Studies*. Next, we argue for the field to continue to evolve scholars need to emphasize construct clarity, clarify boundary conditions and conduct further empirical research within and across the aforementioned four perspectives. Our discussion is intended to incite and stimulate discussion about organizational memory such that new opportunities can be grasped, developed and explained. We conclude by presenting a broad path forward for future discussion about organizational memory and what this might mean within organizations.

Organizational Memory Studies: Origins and core constructs

Organizational memory has been a long-standing interest of management scholars. Early studies referring to organizational memory were concerned with organizational learning and knowledge management (Cyert & March, 1963). These studies typically explored how organizations learn from past experience to improve their production processes (Fiol & Lyles, 1985; Levitt & March, 1988). The organizational learning process was characterized by three components: knowledge acquisition, storage, and retrieval (Argote, 2011). Memory became a central concept in the literature because of the central focus on the latter two. That is, it is possible for organizations to store, or imprint, information or knowledge into organizational memory and to retrieve it at will. This ‘storage bin’ (Walsh & Ungson, 1991), or database, approach to how organizational memory operates was, and to an extent continues to be, how organizational memory is characterized in discussions of organizational learning (Coraiola & Murcia, 2019).

Though the general focus of these studies examined how to retain and retrieve useful knowledge, other studies addressed the issue of unlearning obsolete knowledge (Hedberg, 1981; de Holan and Philips, 2004) as a crucial component of effective knowledge management. The core idea is that old knowledge could, and sometimes should, be erased

and subsequently replaced by new knowledge. For instance, the dominance of old, out-of-date ideas may hamper a firm's competitiveness and, as such, these ideas should be eliminated to make room for new, up-to-date ideas (Nystrom & Starbuck, 1984).

By the early 1990s this database view of organizational memory was widely shared among scholars of organizations and management. These early studies eventually contributed to the emergence of the knowledge-based view of the firm (Grant, 1996) and other influential streams of literature such as dynamic capabilities (Teece et al., 1997). This research usually builds on psychological typologies of memory to discuss organizational memory, for example using terms, such as declarative memory—the memory of concepts and facts—and procedural memory—memory of underlying skills for performing task—to discuss how organizational memory is maintained and how it can be retrieved or utilised for organizational learning, innovation and improvisation (e.g. Moorman & Miner, 1998; Kyriakopoulos, 2011). Many of the findings from this early phase of research on organizational memory were integrated in theories of organizational learning. As such, the specific interest in memory waned over time.

A single approach, nevertheless, remained influential among learning and knowledge scholars, based on the concept of transactive memory systems (Wegner, 1985). From this perspective the metaphor of the storage bin is retained; however, a new level of analysis, the group, is introduced as crucially important aspect of organizational memory (Ren & Argote, 2011). A transactive memory systems approach asserts that people in groups create maps of who knows what. This knowledge then influences the strategic capabilities and the future performance of the organization (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011; Argote & Ren, 2012).

In hindsight, these early studies of organizational memory generated a baseline understanding of mnemonic processes within organizations which helped animate discussions

that eventually led to a renewed and broadened interest in memory in management and organization studies (Coraiola & Murcia, 2019; Rowlinson et al., 2010). This early work also emboldened others to offer critiques of the limiting aspects of these overly mechanistic explanations of organizational memory (Rowlinson et al., 2010; Nissley and Casey, 2002; Feldman & Feldman, 2006).

The search for new explanations of remembering and forgetting in and around organizations also pushed researchers to look at organizational memory differently. As such, some organization scholars turned to social memory studies (Olick & Robbins, 1998). Drawing upon the work of pioneers such as the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1992; 1980) and the British psychologist Frederic Bartlett (1932), as well as on more contemporary sources such as Le Goff (1992), Nora (1989), Ricoeur (2004), Olick (2007) and Zerubavel (1996), these scholars revitalized the study of the intersection between memory and organizations. Such research, broadly interested in collective memory, focuses on how people remember their pasts as members of groups, what some scholars have termed ‘mnemonic communities’ (Zerubavel, 1996). Instead of looking at memory as a database, or a storage bin, collective memory is viewed as an ongoing process (Misztal, 2003). Emphasis is placed on how shared pasts are understood in the present by a given group as a result of existing ‘social frameworks of memory’ (Halbwachs, 1992) and the interactions between interested actors attempting to influence these shared understandings of the past.

Many organizational memory researchers have sought to expand conceptions of memory beyond the storage bin conception of organizational memory by embracing and exploring the social processes of remembering and forgetting (e.g. Feldman & Feldman, 2006; Rowlinson et al., 2010). Nevertheless, this is not to say that the database approach to memory as knowledge has been eschewed or forgotten – to the contrary, this conception lives on and has grown in research on organizational learning (Madsen & Desai, 2010) and

transactive memory systems (Ren & Argote, 2011). Our characterisation is merely to indicate that many of the current debates about organizational memory have embraced multiple ways of understanding memory in organizations. These studies helped generate a baseline understanding of mnemonic processes within organizations which paved the way for the renewed interest in memory in management and organization studies (Coraiola & Murcia, 2019).

An overview of Organizational Memory Studies

The study of organizational memory largely remained a smaller, sub-field within the literature on organizational learning and knowledge management until the early 2000s. There were a few notable exceptions in which attempts were made to draw on Halbwachs and his work on collective memory when discussing the link between memory, emotions and identity (e.g., Casey, 1997; Gabriel, 1993; Nissley and Casey, 2002; Feldman & Feldman, 2006; Boje, 2008). These works, however, often appeared as idiosyncratic contributions on the fringes of conventional scholarship on organizational memory. Moreover, there was minimal cross-fertilisation or cross-citation among these alternative works on memory.

In fact, conversations about collective memory remained dispersed until relatively recently when a series of key articles and editorials highlighted the untapped potential of this field of research (i.e., Rowlinson, et al., 2014; Godfrey, et al. 2016; Wadhvani, et al., 2018). Most notably, the Rowlinson et al. (2010) paper in *Organization Studies* introduced management and organization scholars to the literature on collective memory and social memory studies. Their work was significant because it demonstrated how a number of articles, seen previously as contributions to distinct fields of research—e.g. organizational memory, business history, corporate museums, and storytelling—could be reclaimed within a new stream of research called Organizational Memory Studies (OMS).

Their primary argument was that the dominant, database view of memory within organization studies had overlooked the advances in the study of social memory. Further, the authors argued that the intra-organizational approach to memory excluded discussions from other relevant fields of study such as organizational politics, culture, and identity. The result was that early research on organizational memory only had a limited connection to other relevant areas in organization studies. The critique leveled by Rowlinson and colleagues was also not limited to research on organizational memory. In particular, they objected to the myopia of social memory studies because of the minimal recognition afforded to organizations and the influence they can have on collective memory. As such, the authors called for the reorientation of organizational memory research to engage with the transdisciplinary field of social memory studies.

Since the publication of Rowlinson et al. (2010) there has been an increasing awareness of the social aspects of memory within management and organization studies. The scope and impact of OMS over the past decade can be comprehended by looking at the range of recent articles on memory, broadly conceived, in organization theory (Foroughi & Al-Amoudi, 2020; Ocasio et al., 2016), strategy (Foster, Coraiola, Suddaby, Kroezen & Chandler, 2017; Sasaki, et al., 2020), entrepreneurship (Cruz, 2014; Jaskiewicz, Combs & Rau, 2015), corporate social responsibility (Coraiola & Derry, 2020; Mena, Rintamäki, Fleming & Spicer, 2016) and family business (Hjorth & Dawson, 2016, Sasaki, Ravasi & Micelotta, 2019). Such research has moved away from a conceptualisation of memory as an objective stock of knowledge. Instead, the diverse literature on social and collective memory in organizations stresses the socially constructed nature of remembering and forgetting. These studies maintain that the past is necessarily re-interpreted (e.g. Allen & Brown, 2014; Foster, Suddaby, Minkus & Wiebe, 2011), including mnemonic traces of the past (Mena et al, 2016) or memory ‘forms’ (Schultz & Hernes, 2013), and that present organizational memories are

socially negotiated and often contested (Ybema, 2014; Foroughi, 2020). This perspective also conceptualizes social remembering as processes stemming from social interactions between organizational actors (Rowlinson, et al., 2010). What is remembered and forgotten in a specific social group is a process of social construction anchoring around aspects of the past that matter to particular groups or communities of memory (Halbwachs, 1992; for a review, see Foroughi and Al-amoudi, 2020). Remembering and forgetting are, therefore, about the collectively shared reinterpretation, re-enactment, and reframing of the past through social interactions (Olick & Robbins, 1998).

The rise of OMS was also fueled by the emergence of two related perspectives: Historical organization studies and uses-of-the-past. Historical organization studies, understood as “organizational research that draws extensively on historical data, methods and knowledge” (Maclean, Harvey, & Clegg, 2016, p. 609), argues for a new methodological paradigm for management and organizational research that sensitizes organizational researchers to multiple possibilities for inquiring about the past by highlighting the role of collective memories in organizational affairs. For historical organization studies, collective memory can be seen as a rich source of information about the past that can be used in the development of historical work, as is the case of oral histories (Thompson, 2017). Such an understanding is grounded on the distinction between history and memory (Nora, 1989). As Decker et al. (In press, p. 8) elaborate, the past can be understood as either “‘finished’ and gone (history) or temporally prolonged into the present (memory)”. History and memory thus imply different assumptions about the past that may be irreconcilable. In this regard, a deeper understanding of the ways in which remembering and forgetting take place in organizations can foster the development of historical organization studies. For instance, the ‘memory work’ of corporate historians and archivists in cultivating and curating organizational

memory is essential to the work of historians of organizations which influences their ability to narrate the organizational past in meaningful ways (Mena & Rintamäki, 2020).

The uses-of-the-past approach (Wadhvani, et al., 2018) is another perspective that has contributed to the growing interest in OMS. The interest in understanding how organizations muster the past for purposes in the present brought significant attention to discussions of organizational memory. In contrast to Historical organizational studies, however, this perspective blurs the distinction between history and memory (Decker et al., In press). The core interest is in the past seen as “a source of social symbolic resources available for a wide variety of creative uses” (Wadhvani, et al., 2018, p. 1664) and the sources about the past become less important than the ability to skilfully re-present the past in convincing ways (Suddaby, Foster, & Quinn-Trank, 2010). Yet, we contend that history and memory may afford different uses in organizations. To the extent that they are distinct ways of re-constructing and re-presenting the past, they may converge, conflict, and coexist, but they may also transform into one another. We anticipate that further research on the memory dynamics in and around organizations can generate important insights to further develop the uses-of-the-past approach.

Our paper seeks to characterize the field of OMS and uncover the main lines of inquiry into the ways that remembering and forgetting shape, and are shaped by, organizations and organizing processes. We posit that a more comprehensive understanding of remembering and forgetting in and around organization can foster the development of related approaches such as historical organization studies and uses-of-the-past, as well as re-energize existing theories such as organizational learning and organizational identity. The recognition that there are multiple ways that the past can be interpreted and represented has fueled the current studies of organizational memory. In addition to the dominant, functional approach that views memory as an important component of organizational learning, we

explore three, other approaches, interpretive, critical and performative, each with their own particular understanding of organizational memory. In what follows, we discuss four perspectives (Table 1) on organizational memory in contemporary OMS. We explore their main assumptions and reflect upon each approach by showcasing articles published over the past decade. In particular, we offer a thorough discussion of an exemplar article of each approach that has been published in *Organization Studies*.

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Organizational Memory Studies: Four Perspectives

Functional perspective

The functional perspective has its origins in the early studies of organizational memory (Cyert & March, 1963). For adherents of this approach, organizational memory serves a specific function in the organization. In other words, functional organizational memory research is focused on how to access, deploy and manage organizational memory to enhance efficiency, foster innovation, and generate competitiveness. Memory, however, is not a monolithic database, but rather a collection of different types of “retention bins”, such as employees, routines, structures and organizational culture (March & Olsen, 1975; Walsh & Ungson, 1991). These different retention bins have specific functions and they interact with each other to provide organizational members with the appropriate information preserved from the past. From this perspective, memory serves specific goals of an organization, such as aiding product development (Moorman & Miner, 1998), standardizing operational

procedures (Cyert & March, 1963), or transferring knowledge (Tsang, 2008). Functional research has also looked at forgetting (de Holan, 2011). In particular, two dimensions of forgetting have received the lion's share of academic discussion. The first is the utility of forgetting. That is, the importance and value of forgetting so that space is available for new knowledge. The second is the process of unlearning outdated or otherwise undesirable knowledge (Hedberg, 1981; Nystrom & Starbuck, 1985). This line of research has faced some criticism in that the negative aspects of forgetting, such as the unintended depreciation of knowledge, could still be useful in some circumstances (Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2011). For example, there have been instances where safety-oriented routines have been deprioritized because of mounting cost-pressures. Cost-driven decisions that encourage forgetting have, consequently, led to potential pitfalls such as accidents (e.g. the Challenger disaster) or wrongdoing (e.g. Ford Pinto) (Haunschild, Polidoro & Chandler, 2015).

The functional perspective on organizational memory is exemplified in *Organization Studies* by the work of Marina Fiedler and Isabell Welpel (2010). In their paper, they explore how an organization's structure influences knowledge retention and storage. The authors conceptualize organizational memory as "a structure of repositories in which different forms of knowledge are stored, and from which knowledge can be retrieved" (Fiedler & Welpel, 2010, p. 382). Though many functional investigations of organizational memory approach the topic from a post-positivist perspective to social science (Coraiola & Murcia, 2019), at the time of publication few quantitative studies had been conducted.

The authors found support for their hypotheses after surveying more than 100 high-level managers of corporations. They determined that organizational structure – the standardization of processes and the specialization of tasks – positively influences an organization's capacity for knowledge retention and storage. Fiedler and Welpel (2010)'s

empirical study has generated further discussion on the effect of organizational structure on the utility of memory (e.g. Kmiecik, 2019).

Their other important contribution was the emphasis on the processes involved with organizational memory. In particular, they linked the codification of information and the use of electronic communications to organizational remembering. This finding emphasizes the importance of traces of the past and how such traces are understood and disseminated within specific groups for remembering. The authors also underscore the complexity and fragmentation of organizational memory when they critique Walsh and Ungson (1991) for their characterization of organizational memory as a collection of distinct retention bins. Their critique, although not as comprehensive as some later investigations (e.g. Cutcher et al., 2019; Foroughi and Al-Amoudi, 2020), foreshadows a key discussion in future OMS research.

Fiedler and Welpé's (2010) study is important to the development of OMS. Their paper, in particular, highlights both the significance and the limitations of the functional approach. These scholars assume, for instance, that "organizational memory is ultimately the result of processes rather than substances" (p. 383). Many studies since have further expanded upon the importance of substance (e.g. material objects) for remembering and forgetting. Anteby and Molnar (2012) showed the importance of official company documents as mnemonic traces in organizational identity maintenance. Decker (2014) demonstrated how architecture matters for organizational remembering practices in her investigation of corporate buildings of banks and retailers in Nigeria and Ghana. Cutcher and colleagues (2019) also explain how certain types of organizational memories are generated and upheld through corporate portraits associated with power relations. In cases such as these, traces of the past become intertwined with mnemonic processes, resulting in significant roles for both in the production of organizational memory (Mena et al., 2016). Regardless, by providing

some answers for *how* organizations remember, Fiedler and Welppe (2010) inspired others to ask more political questions of organizational memory such as what, why, and how organizations remember.

Interpretive perspective

An interpretive perspective to organizational memory builds upon organizational hermeneutics (Deetz, 1985). Research from this perspective aims to understand how organizational participants attach meaning to different aspects of the past through different practices of remembering and forgetting. A core distinction between interpretive and functional perspectives on organizational memory is that interpretive scholars assume the past does not exist *per se* except through interpretations of mnemonic traces, such as records, artefacts, and stories.

Narrative and storytelling approaches (Gabriel, 2000; Czarniawska, 1997) dominate the interpretive study of memory in organizations. However, there are some instances where non-verbal aspects of collective memory, such as material objects (see, for example, Bell & Taylor, 2016), have also been investigated. Interpretivists criticise earlier functional studies of organizational memory for largely failing to appreciate the plurality of voices and interpretations in mnemonic processes (Smith & Russell, 2016; Foroughi, 2020). Collective memories, they argue, emerge from multi-authored processes (Foroughi, 2014; Ybema, 2014), which is shaped not only by the strategic, rhetorical work of managers but also by other actors' subsequent interpretations and modifications over time.

The *Organization Studies* paper that best exemplifies the interpretive approach is Foroughi's (2020) ethnographic study, examining how the founding story of a European non-profit organization was retold and reconstructed. The paper argues for a polyphonic approach to study organizational memory. Tracking diverse voices taking part in the reconstruction of

founding stories of this NPO, the author develops a view of organizations as compositions of multiple mnemonic communities with distinct identities and collective memories.

A central notion in this paper is the concept of ‘localisation’ (Halbwachs, 1992). As individuals remember an incident, they ‘locate’ themselves in the perspective of that group (often unconsciously), and “adopt its interests and follow the slant of its direction” (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 52). Foroughi (2020) shows that retellings of an organizational founding story should be seen as localised memory narratives that allow for the projection of different vernacular identities in organizations. In so doing, this research complements earlier research which examined the impact of founding stories on organizational identities (see Basque & Langley, 2018).

This study further develops Halbwachs’ work by drawing on psychodynamic theory (Glynos, 2008; Fotaki, 2009) and the notion of ‘fantasy’—emotionally significant (unconscious) wishes for fulfilment, sustaining the idea of an imaginary (collective or individual) self. Foroughi (2020) explores the effect of having discordant fantasies about the future on collective memories and group behaviour and theorizes how idealised collective memories—such as nostalgic narratives (Brown & Humphreys, 2002)—can strengthen respective social identities by quelling the anxieties and disappointments resulting from the impossibility of realizing certain social fantasies. His findings indicate that different mnemonic communities in an organization may maintain different narratives about organizational past- such as founding events- which stems from these discordant fantasies and their different understanding of the ‘correct’ and ‘proper’ identities that the organization should uphold. Foroughi (2020) concludes that although managers might hope that mnemonic tools, such as official founding stories, encourage employees to identify with their organization and its values, in reality this may not be the case. As he explains, “it was the

existing vernacular identities and the different views on the new managerial control regime that influenced how the employees remembered the founding story” (p. 16).

The paper, while distinctively grounded in a psychoanalytic approach, is representative of the broader interpretive perspective to OMS because of its embrace of multiple, and at times dissonant, co-existing and competing, voices in an organization (see also Ybema, 2014; Adorisio, 2014; Garcia-Lorenzo, 2019). For instance, Ybema’s (2014) ethnographic study in a Dutch publishing company describes how different versions of the past put forward by different parties converged at times and collided at others to fit their rhetorical arguments in support of, or in opposition to, proposed organizational changes. Elsewhere, Do, Lyle and Walsh (2019) discuss the processes of communal memory work surrounding a defunct manufacturing organization in South Bend, Indiana. The closure of the organization left thousands of its employees jobless and evoked strong feelings among the South Bend residents. Do, Lyle and Walsh (2019) show how changes in residents’ feelings over 50 years were reflected in an amalgam of emotive memories, ranging from nostophobia—a desire to escape the past—to nostalgia—a yearning for a bygone past. They show that such emotive memories were ‘negotiated’ over time (Sturken, 1997), through communal memory work. Their historical analysis echoes the findings of previous sociological research on memory (e.g. Schwartz, 1991; Olick, 2007) which shows that the recollection of the past changes depending on current social and economic conditions.

Overall, interpretive approaches to OMS show the complexity of polyphonic mnemonic processes by drawing attention to the negotiated process of memory construction in which multiple mnemonic actors and mnemonic communities are involved. These studies also sometimes highlight the competing agendas linked with ‘politics of memory’ (Olick, 2007), but their analysis nonetheless often does not contain a detailed analysis of power and

asymmetrical relationships that influence memory construction – something emphasized within the critical perspective.

Critical Perspective

A third set of articles in OMS take a critical approach to memory. OMS papers from this approach typically (although not necessarily) stem from Critical Management Studies (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992). Critical Management Studies typically explore the manifestations of managerial and organizational power, offer reflexive critiques, and make attempts to unveil the struggles underlying the political dynamics of managerialism (Fournier & Grey, 2000).

A critical approach to OMS thus emphasizes the use of memory by organizations and organizational actors – usually corporations and their managers – to assert dominance and control over other actors, such as employees or activists, both inside and outside the organization (Mena et al, 2016). Scholars who embrace this view are particularly interested in questions that pertain to the politics of memory and the underlying struggles that exist because of the imposition of a hegemonic memory, as well as the contingent suppression of alternative memories (Mena & Rintamäki, 2020; see also Durepos et al, 2020).

Sørensen's (2014) paper in *Organization Studies* is illustrative of this critical approach to OMS. Through a technique of juxtaposition from art theory (comparing two pieces of art to unveil underlying counter-narratives), this paper examines how organizational aesthetics can impose a dominant, 'mainstream' memory about the organization's past, while suppressing (but not completely destroying) marginal counter-memories. A central construct in the paper is the notion of 'collective instruction' (building on Sontag, 2003), which Sørensen links to collective memory. That is, collective instruction is the process by which people are instructed, by organizations among others, to think and see the past in one monolithic, dominant way. This view differs from the interpretive approach described

previously. Specifically, a critical approach to collective memory argues that social remembering does not emerge from the ground up through co-constructed interactions of people and groups. Collective memory, from a critical perspective is, in fact, something that can be ‘stipulated’ and imposed upon others by those who possess power (Sørensen, 2014, p. 288).

Sørensen further argues that our reactions to art enhances this dominant, collectively instructed way of thinking because our attendant, emotional reactions to art are only sentimental in a ‘kitsch’ way – rather than an earnest affect – “to such an extent that they have ceased to make any distinct sense or impression” (Sørensen, 2014: 286). As such, the author demonstrates how organizations can play a central role in this collectively instructed sentiment about the past, explaining that organizations can become the “vehicles [...] of politics of circulation” (Sørensen, 2014: 281) and a catalyst of this learned sentimentality. In particular, he looks at how icons of art – but also branding, for instance – shape collective memory and how these icons can be used and manipulated by organizations to shape collective memory – building on extant notions of mnemonic traces and their use by powerful actors (see Zerubavel, 1996, or Nora, 1989. For a critical application to OMS, see Mena et al, 2016).

Yet, Sørensen also highlights, through juxtaposition, that we are, sometimes, able to promote the emergence of counter-memories to the collectively instructed view. He demonstrates how two pieces of art, a photograph of a Jewish boy, hands in the air, forced by SS soldiers from the Warsaw ghetto in 1943 and Paul Klee’s painting *Angelus Novus* (1920), can be disruptive to the dominant, collective memory. In particular, Sørensen explains how the instructed view (the Jewish Holocaust) of these two pieces of art can be challenged because other minorities were also exterminated during the Holocaust (e.g., communists, the Roma, homosexuals). By re-assembling elements of the pieces of art, “repeated and arranged

in a different manner, juxtaposed as it were” (Sørensen, 2014: 284) a new, powerful, counter-memory can emerge.

Sørensen’s study is representative of the broader critical perspective to OMS, although his approach (organizational aesthetics) is particular to this paper. Fundamental to the critical perspective is that a dominant, institutionalized view of the past is imposed upon members of different, less powerful (mnemonic) communities and societies by more powerful and dominant actors (see also Olick, 2007; Misztal, 2003). For instance, others have explained how the tobacco industry attempted to erase the harmful effects of smoking from the public’s collective consciousness (Coraiola & Derry, 2020). Similarly, Popp & Fellman (2019) examine how power and interests differ within corporate archives according to which organizational stakeholder claim is examined. The authors show that archive owners (often corporations and the top management teams that lead them) have the power to control these archives yet there is often little interest in exerting this control. In contrast, the historian has little power over these traces of the past, yet has significant interest in examining and controlling the content of the archive.

Cutcher et al (2019) take a similar critical approach to memory when they examine the reproduction of extant power relationships and the dominant view of the past. Like Sørensen, they study the power of pieces of art and, more generally, material traces of memory (Nora, 1989). Their study examined how commemorative portraits, often appearing in the hallways of organizations, reproduce existing organizational hierarchies and power structures. They determine that these traces impose particular views of the past on organizational members, thus limiting attempts to make organizations more egalitarian.

Foroughi and Al-Amoudi (2020) provide a different take on the role of power in shaping collective memories by looking at mechanisms that can ‘unintentionally’ manufacture ‘silent memories’. They show that seemingly onnocus managerial decisions, such as change

management initiatives, can silence employees by making their memories ‘unusable’ and ‘uprooted’ and effectively dissolving their social frameworks of memory (Halbwachs, 1992). Whilst resulting collective forgetting can be unintentional and not manufactured by management deliberately, nonetheless can cause suffering for employees whose memories are becoming useless and uprooted. Elsewhere, Mahalingam, Jagannathan, and Selvaraj (2019) have explored the injustice and injury Dalits—people considered at the bottom of the hierarchy in Indian caste system—were subjected to in the clean-up following the 2015 Chennai floods. Dalits suffered numerous injuries, both physical and emotional, as the official narratives of the flood generated collective memories that overlooked their contributions. In response, Dalits produced a series of counter-memories to nurture their dignity. The authors demonstrate how marginalized communities can resist powerful groups through memory work that questions the dominant narrative. In sum, Mahalingam et al. (2019) warn that privileging universalized memories can potentially hamper marginalised groups efforts to advance their dignity claims.

Overall, critical approaches to OMS aim at unveiling unequal power structures and dynamics. The goal is to explore, and ideally change, how these relations of power crystallize in a hegemonic and institutionalized view of the past which is sustained by varied material and symbolic artefacts and practices. And although these views of the past can, in some circumstances, be contested by less powerful actors, the process of promoting counter narratives of the past is difficult and fraught with obstacles and challenges.

Performative Perspective

The fourth perspective we identified in the literature is performative. Performativity is related to Austin’s (1962) attempt to define how language ‘does’ things in the world. His efforts paved the way for future scholars to argue that reality is not out there to be described

but occurs through the way we ‘perform’ it (e.g. Searle, 1969; Butler, 1990). A variety of perspectives on performativity have emerged over the years in management and organization studies. For example, Gond, Cabantous, Harding, and Learmonth (2016) show how discussions of what is being performed have moved away from the discursive and ideational toward discussion focused more on material and concrete aspects of reality. Further, Orlikowski and Scott (2015, p. 700) advanced the idea of discursive-material practices to characterize our “ongoing, dynamic, relational enactment of the world” as a way to combine insights from both approaches.

The performative approach to organizational memory is distinct because memory is conceived of as a performance. The performative approach rejects an essentialist view of memory in favour of a relational ontology (Emirbayer, 1997) of the past. Performative OMS researchers seek to understand how memory is accomplished through material-discursive practices (Orlikowski & Scott, 2015). In this sense, memory is not a given but is the very issue that needs to be ‘explained’ through performance. That is, memory is not preserved from the past and transmitted into the future nor is it a matter of contesting interpretations about the past or struggles over power. Memory, in this sense, is the ongoing enactment of that past. The past exists to the extent that it is performed through remembering and forgetting discursive-material practices.

Memory, therefore, is a process of doing and this takes shape through the interlinked practices of multiple social actors or the negotiated discursive-materialization that takes place through human interaction. In this sense, the past, present, and future of memory have no reality outside of human activity. It is through these activities that memory is simultaneously brought to life and transformed. Lubinski’s (2018) analysis of the evolving historical narratives told by German companies in India provides an interesting example. Writing within the tradition of rhetorical history research, she uncovered the way a cherished past of

an Aryan society was performed to bring together Germans and Indians into an imagined community (Anderson, 1983). The performative power of this memory lasted until the past authored by the Nazis clashed with the collective memory of Indians. A performative approach to memory, as noted by this example, explores how ideas, discourses, and material practices are performed and how performances affect the construction of a mnemonic dimension of reality. The importance of this approach can be seen in current demonstrations against racism and demands for the removal of monuments associated with it in the United States and elsewhere in the world. These acts highlight the central performative role of celebrations in the formation of our collective identities and the symbolic power of monuments in producing a shared sense of the past. What is under fire in these demonstrations is not the centrality of the characters or even the factuality of past events. What is being questioned is the way these figures are to be remembered (or forgotten). There is a recognition that statues and monuments are not silent background figures but in fact active keepers of a taken-for-granted past. This past has, to some, become loathsome. The activism and protest around public remembering (e.g., name changing, statue removal) is an illustration of the way memory is performed through discursive-material acts.

A performative approach to memory is illustrated in Blagoev et al (2018)'s recent *Organization Studies* paper which explored the entanglements of digitization and remembering at the British Museum. Their research is distinctive to the extent that they conceive the entanglements between narratives and material artifacts as central to the study of organizational memory. They do not look just at the ability of the British Museum to retain records from the past, the processes of interpretation that redefine the meanings of those records, and the intentions and prejudices that are brought forward by the personnel at the museum when remembering the past. Instead, their goal was to theorize the mutual constitution of memory as the activity of remembering the past (*Gedächtnis*) and a

technology for remembering (*Speicher*) to explain the process of digitization at the British Museum. The question that motivated their research was “how material objects shape evolving processes of organizational remembering” (Blagoev et al, 2018, p. 1758). In the spirit of performativity theory, they assume that memory is an ongoing accomplishment that takes place in the present as the past is enacted in different ways through various technologies of remembering.

Blagoev et al. argue that artifacts, as well as written texts and oral forms of memory, have materiality and by the entanglement of “materiality and practice [...] constitute memory” (Blagoev, 2018, p. 1761). To theorize the mutual constitution of user and object through their relationship, they draw on the notion of affordances (Gibson, 1977). Their analysis reconciles the views of the past as a constraint and a resource for action as it is activated for present purposes. In other words, the affordances of the “sticky” past provide the conditions for which remembering takes place whilst remembering the past simultaneously affords particular meanings to the technologies of remembering under use. This is a departure from Abbott’s (2001) suggestion that the past has a dual nature: on the one hand, the past is constrained by the ‘stickiness’ of past memories and material remnants (Fine, 2012); on the other hand, it is open to reinterpretation and every generation feels compelled to write its own version of the past.

Through the analysis of four core episodes in the history of digitization of the British Museum, Blagoev et al (2018) highlight the enmeshed relationship between memory as activity, in the form of narratives about the past, and memory as technology, in the form of material remnants. For example, in the first episode they suggest that although computers were introduced as research tools, people quickly recognized their potential as technologies of memory. A common problem for museums is how best to record and retrieve information about their collections because paper-based technologies of remembering are too labour-

intensive. Computers offered workers at the British Museum a possible solution to this difficulty. The conversion of computers from research technologies into mnemonic technologies was facilitated by a narrative about the Museum's inability to maintain quality records because of scarce resources. The size of the collections, the ancient practice of registering objects in accession order, and the heterogeneity of the artifacts were perceived as inherited constraints from the past. The materiality of computers, combined with the narrative about resource scarcity, allowed the British Museum to render a specific view about the past. In so doing they were able to promote the development of new affordances and orient the process of repurposing existing resources. This performance, the interplay between the material and the discursive, solved their difficulties related to the maintenance of organizational memory.

As illustrated by this case, a performative perspective on organizational memory emphasizes how the past takes shape through the entanglement of material-discursive practices and how these practices influence both social and organizational worlds. Performative approaches, thus, have the potential to enhance our understanding of organizational memory. The ongoing enactment of the past through discursive-material practices informed by previous episodes of remembering offers a distinctive approach to understanding how the past, present, and future are intermingled through remembering and forgetting in and around organizations. For example, Kaplan and Orlikowski (2013) used some of these insights to analyze how temporal framing is central to strategy formulation. Temporal work, or the way actors mobilize past, present, and future discursively, is connected to the way organizational actors define their present context and expectations about the future through remembering and forgetting. Similarly, Dacin, Munir and Tracey (2010) emphasized the performativity of material and bodily memory. They elaborate on the performative, corporeal role of traditional practices involving rituals and artifacts in the

process of subjectification and identification that leads to the maintenance of the British class system. Both cases demonstrate how the discursive-materialization of the past through enacted interaction sheds new light on the role of mnemonic practices in the performativity of the past.

Discussion and Future Directions for OMS

As can be seen from our review, there have been substantial shifts in how OMS has been conceived. Our review of the different exemplar papers in *Organization Studies*, and other related work published in the last decade (2010-2020), organizes the OMS literature into four different perspectives. The goal of this paper has been to offer new insights on OMS as a way to encourage new avenues for future investigation and research.

As research on OMS expands into new and unmapped terrain, we want to outline some emerging challenges in the field. Below we identify three key areas that are important for further establishing the field while simultaneously leading to new and interesting debates about the nature and processes of memory in organizations. We discuss these areas deploying the approaches to studying organizational memory we have outlined in this paper. In so doing, we hope that we can help set the agenda for future research.

Construct clarity

The most urgent area for further development in OMS will be in the construction and development of clear and discrete constructs. There are two distinct, but related, reasons for this, both stemming from the growth of the field. The first one is that OMS as a field is quite diverse and, at times, OMS scholars do not embrace or discuss each other's ideas. That is, the diversity of the field has meant that OMS scholars do not properly engage with different perspectives on memory. This results in limited theoretical conversations across different perspectives. Further theoretical collaboration needs to take place between those applying

functional perspectives and those applying constructionist perspectives drawing on social memory studies if the field is to continue to grow and develop.

Mena and colleagues (2016), for instance, draw extensively on both functional studies on organizational memory as well as social memory studies in theorizing how both corporations and their stakeholders come to forget organizational wrongdoing. This paper highlights the benefits of further bridging different perspectives. On the one hand, researchers that take a functional perspective can enhance their theorising by considering the historical context of organizational memories, the power dynamics involved in generating organizational memories and the resulting tensions that may influence the salience of these memories. Similarly, researchers taking non-functional perspectives can engage with questions of how different memory repositories ('retention bins') function in practice, and how these bins might interact with each other to constitute organizational memory. The study by Blagoev and colleagues (2018) discussed previously is an example of how technologies (functional-material aspect of the organization) and their users interact to construct organizational memory.

The second reason is that there is still confusion around different constructs. For the field to continue to develop and grow further theoretical development will need to take place. The current theoretical conversations about organizational memory are primarily based on discussions that occur in other disciplines about memory and the past. OMS currently borrows terms and constructs from psychology, computer science, social memory studies, trauma studies and cultural studies. As a new field of study, this approach has proven to be fruitful and productive at stimulating discussions about how organizational memory works and why memory impacts organizational actions. Nevertheless, for OMS to continue to develop, we argue that there is a need to further refine and clarify the constructs that are used to specifically discuss memory in and around organizations. For example, work can still be

done to refine constructs such as mnemonic communities (Foroughi & Al-Amoudi, 2020), mnemonic traces (Do et al., 2019), memory work (Mena & Rintamäki, 2020), and social memory assets (Foster et al., 2011). There are potential avenues forward. The construction and evolution of mnemonic communities over time would be one; around what types of organizational issues do they form? What kinds of dynamics and boundaries do they develop within organizations? Memory work could be clarified through further typologies of different forms of memory work as well as teasing out distinctions and relationships between remembering and forgetting work. Furthermore, what kinds of conditions are there for memory work to be (un)successful? Memory traces could be further clarified through a proper typology of various types of memory traces and their relationship between each other, and what their roles in memory processes are, building for instance on the broad categorization between textual, material and oral forms outlined by Schultz & Hernes (2013). As the field matures and develops further, it will be incumbent upon scholars to refine the definitions of these constructs.

In addition to refining core constructs, we advocate for greater clarity in the way that management and organization scholars talk about history, memory, and the past. Efforts to distinguish the past from the perception of and narratives about the past have been developed elsewhere (Bucheli & Wadhvani, 2014; Weatherbee, Durepos, Mills, & Mills, 2012). There have been fewer efforts to distinguish between the associated constructs of history, memory, and knowledge (i.e., Coraiola & Murcia, 2019; Decker, Rowlinson & Hassard, 2020). In particular, we believe that it will be crucial for further theorizing for scholars to delineate and distinguish between these constructs. For example, rhetorical history (Suddaby, Foster & Quinn-Trank, 2010) is often discussed as both a historical narrative (i.e., Lubinski, 2018) and as a mnemonic trace (i.e., Oertel and Thommes, 2015). This imprecision suggests that there is still the need to clarify what history and memory look like in organizations and how this

impacts organizational actions and decisions. In this paper, we have attempted to clarify these distinctions here by defining OMS and distinguishing four specific approaches to studying organizational memory.

One path forward is to further develop the connections between social memory and organizational memory. Future research will need to determine if there is a strong and definite distinction between social memory and organizational memory and how this difference influences organizational members, managers, customers and stakeholders. Refining the core constructs of OMS and elaborating appropriate methodological approaches to operationalize these constructs empirically have the potential to lead to new and interesting findings.

Boundary conditions

In addition to the development of clear, core theoretical constructs for OMS, research should focus on identifying key boundary conditions that influence organizational remembering and forgetting. Current research, particularly studies espousing the functional approach (e.g. Fiedler & Welpe, 2010; Haunschild et al., 2015), have been focused on identifying how memory practices work within organizations. For example, recent research has demonstrated how memory influences the persistence of organizational identity and identification (Anteby & Molnar, 2012; Foroughi, 2020; Ravasi et al., 2019), the management of change and innovation (Erdogan, Rondi, & De Massis, 2020; Hatch & Schultz, 2017; Foroughi and Al-Amoudi, 2020), the strengthening or weakening of organizational reputation (Foster et al., 2011), and the evisceration of unethical acts (Coraiola & Derry, 2020; Mena et al., 2016). Yet, despite the strength of these works, questions still remain as to the particular boundary conditions that facilitated the operation and impact of memory work and organizational memory. Research in all four perspectives can further

engage the boundary work in their own right. Scholars taking each perspective can debate what factors or conditions might influence the differential impacts of organizational memory and memory work in different organizations. For instance, under what conditions does organizational memory facilitate significant organizational change and when does an organization's memory create barriers that are difficult to overcome? Furthermore, how do actors manage and navigate contradictions between official and unofficial organizational memories? How do these mnemonic contradictions impact organizational strategies? Similarly, how does the hierarchical position of actors influence the meaningfulness of their memories for the organization and their impact on organizational memory? Finally, what are the limits to the manipulation of memory? What is the role of power in processes of remembering and forgetting, and why some versions of history become more dominant than others? In sum, there is still work to be done to examine different aspects of memory in organizations, and how it interacts with other organizational processes.

Empirical engagement

Lastly, we argue that there needs to be more serious empirical engagement with organizations as sites of research (whether the organization itself or its interfaces with other actors or spheres) on remembering and forgetting. As the field has developed over the past decade, there have been more discussions of, and opportunities for, empirical discussion about organizational memory. Nevertheless, for OMS to fully mature as a field, theoretical concepts and ideas need to be explored in organizational settings. Much of the pioneering research that expanded the boundaries of OMS emerged from discussion about non-organizational settings such as sites of public commemorations (e.g. Allen & Brown, 2015). Though finding and generating empirical material is rarely easy, some of the most obvious avenues include corporate (and other, such as media) archives, interviews, physical sites, and observations (essentially, ethnographic methods). Archives have been a popular source of material for

OMS scholars (e.g. Anteby & Molnar, 2012), and especially large organizations often have extensive corporate archives, and sometimes employ archivists. In-depth interviews can provide a way for capturing competing memories of shared pasts (e.g. Aeon & Lamertz, 2019), and can be particularly effective when combined with archival or ethnographic data, or exploration of physical sites (Cutcher et al., 2018; Decker, 2014). Ethnographic studies that combine a variety of different types of data can also provide highly informative research on OMS (Foroughi, 2020; Foroughi & Al-Amoudi, 2020). This type of research enables the study of the performative aspects of organizational memory. For instance, the study of organizational practices and observations combined with organizational archival data and interviews with organizational members could allow for a deeper understanding about how memory is performed.

We argue that all four perspectives that we identified in this review—functional, interpretive, critical and performative—can further contribute to developing the field empirically. For example, researchers approaching memory from a functional perspective could focus on the need to understand how and why memory might be accessed and deployed by various groups for different purposes (e.g. Foroughi, 2020). These functional studies could also recognize that access to, and deployment of, memory is contingent on power relations that are embedded within the hierarchical positions of organizational members (Cutcher et al., 2019). Moreover, as research taking critical and interpretive perspectives have shown, external stakeholders may play an important part in the mnemonic processes of an organization (Mena et al., 2016; Do et al., 2019). Adding external stakeholders as a default component would likely improve the explanatory power of functional studies on organizational memory. Furthermore, taking up at least some facets of social constructionist perspectives would also help functional studies on organizational memory account for the mechanisms behind the mnemonic operations they observe such as the actual material

practices that constitute these operations (see Blagoev et al., 2018). Finally, while recent functional research has looked into general tendencies related to organizational memory (Fiedler & Welpel, 2010; Kmiecniak, 2019; Kyriakopoulos, 2011), the specific conditions for why these tendencies are confirmed in some organizations, but not in others, remain largely unclear. More in-depth case studies, in the vein of Kameo's (2017) ethnographic study of software engineers' utilization of organizational memory, are thus called for.

Interpretive OMS research has underscored the plurality of voices and interpretations in mnemonic processes. In particular, the polyphonic character of memory within organizations can reinforce or contradict the official memory of the organization (Foroughi, 2020; Foroughi and Al-Amoudi, 2020). Ideas developed in narrative theory (e.g. Wertsch, 2008; Czarniawska, 1997; Boje, 2001) can be further utilised to empirically analyse these interpretive processes. For instance, future research can extend this line of inquiry by exploring the interactions between master-narrative and counter-narratives, explicating the process of narrative contestation and consolidation (Gabriel, 2016). Future research also needs to address how mnemonic traces and practices are reproduced over time. One way forward is to engage in longitudinal research that examines closely situated practices of remembering by different mnemonic actors in organizational settings.

Organizational memory is nested within broader cultural frameworks and social systems (Coraiola, Suddaby, & Foster, 2018; Ocasio et al., 2016; Weber & Dacin, 2011) and, as such, more research is needed on mnemonic interactions and conflicts between organizations and its stakeholders. Interpretive research on OMS assumes that memory is a flexible construct where different groups vie for their own interpretations of the past (Anteby & Molnar, 2012; Rowlinson & Hassard, 1993), with limited external scrutiny or constraint. As such, interpretive OMS research can attempt to further explain how memory practices influence the relationship between organizations and other mnemonic communities such as

activists and consumers (Mena et al., 2016). Future interpretive research also can investigate the limits of the malleability of collective memories by explaining how memories are challenged, corrected, or lose their significance. Finally, one question that interpretive research on memory has broadly ignored is its ethical or normative dimensions (see Aeon & Lamertz, 2019; Stutz & Sachs, 2018; for an exception, see Coraiola & Derry, 2020). Future research should explore ethical issues surrounding remembering and acknowledge that every act of remembering the past embodies in itself a moral and normative component (Coraiola, Suddaby, & Foster, 2018; Stutz & Sachs, 2018).

From a critical perspective, and given the aforementioned importance of power within this perspective, future empirical research should examine in more depth the connections between memory and (episodic and systemic) power. In particular, relying on Fleming & Spicer's (2014) distinction, these connections should be examined in different 'sites' relevant to organizational analysis: memory as power *in*, *through*, *over*, and *against* organizations. Memory as power *in* organizations has been examined already (eg., Foroughi & Al-amoudi, 2020; Mena & Rintamäki, 2020), but further examinations should look into the dynamics and conditions of power struggles within organizations, as different groups with varying degrees of influence attempt at imposing their view of the past. For instance, future research can build on Foroughi and Al-Amoudi's (2020) work by exploring types of changes and conditions that are likely to produce 'silent memories'. Memory as power *through* organizations has also been researched. For instance, Coraiola and Derry (2020) show how the tobacco industry has used the past to suppress resistance from multiple constituencies to their lethal industry. While most research has explored similar episodic uses of such power, further empirical research should tackle more systemic instances of memory as power leveraged *through* organizations. Memory as power *over* organizations has been studied by some. Cutcher et al. (2019), for instance, explored the reproduction of existing hierarchies and power structures

through artefacts and memory products or traces such as pieces of art. Further research could examine memory as power leveraged directly – rather than through products – by managers and decision makers in organizations and how this impacts employees – contrasting and extending functional studies examining how managers leverage memory to enhance the performance of their organization. Finally, memory as power *against* organizations has been somewhat neglected, likely given the focus of critical studies on the overwhelming power of corporations over other types of actors. Some promising steps in this direction have been taken recently. One example is the aforementioned study of Indian Dalits by Mahalingam and colleagues (2019). Future research in this area could employ itself to look at how activists and other marginalized, less powerful actors can use the past to effect change in or by organizations (see also, van Lent & Smith, 2019). This is doubly relevant as corporations have come under increasing fire over their actions against marginalized communities and populations that have taken place in both recent and more distant past (Schrempf-Stirling et al, 2016). We would especially encourage studies in non-Western contexts, as they are woefully underrepresented even in critical OMS even though that is where a great deal of conflict between corporations and marginalized communities takes place. This recommendation pertains to OMS more broadly, not just the critical perspective.

Future empirical research can also contribute to the development of performative approaches to the study of organizational memory beyond the very brief strokes outlined in this paper. For instance, it is worth recognizing that such an approach is still being developed and there is yet no existing framework to guide the use of performative approaches to the study of organizational memory. Central to a performative view of memory is the understanding that memory is not a given nor something that is simply handed down from the past to the present. Memory is always an accomplishment that takes place in the present through material-discursive practices that involve, but are not restricted to, what is usually

conceived of as remembering and forgetting. Empirical research should be able to provide a more detailed assessment of the multiple actors and practices that underlie the production of memory. As Blagoev et al. (2018) suggest, an affordances perspective may contribute to the development of this approach. Another important direction for future research would be to provide a clearer understanding of the way actors construct boundaries between past, present, and future. The way they frame the past differs from the other temporal frames they use when referring to social reality and this has important implications for action in organizations and organizing processes. A third possible avenue for future research could look into specific events of memory. Remembering and forgetting are usually part of organizational routines. However, there are specific times in which the past of the organization is re-enacted and re-evaluated – such as in anniversaries – and new mnemonic practices put in place. Further empirical research from a performative perspective can shed new light onto how continuous and discontinuous enactment of the past impacts on the development of organizational activities and the interaction of organizations with other social actors.

Conclusion

A decade ago, Rowlinson et al. (2010) attempted to map the terrain of the new field of Organizational Memory Studies. The goal of our review was to take stock of that decade of OMS research and help set the direction for the field over the next decade. We defined OMS as a distinct field of research and have highlighted four disparate perspectives on organizational memory and how it has been studied so far. In particular, we have vividly illustrated each of these perspectives with exemplar studies published in *Organization Studies* and elsewhere. This work has helped shape our current understanding about memory practices as a way to explain how they operate and the effects they have inside and outside organizations. OMS as a diverse field of study has made, and is poised to make, substantive inroads into the crucial

understanding of remembering and forgetting in and around organizations. We look forward to the exciting decade that lies ahead for OMS research.

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Memory perspective	Conception of memory	Background	Key concern(s)	Example articles
Functional	A series of retention bins in which knowledge can be stored and retrieved from.	Classic organization studies, knowledge management, psychology.	Organizational (un)learning; knowledge retention, depreciation, transfer, obsolescence	Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2011 Fiedler & Welpel, 2010* Haunschild, Polidoro & Chandler, 2015 Kmieciak, 2019 Moorman & Miner, 1998 Walsh & Ungson, 1991
Interpretive	A polyphonic collection of parallel and sequential narratives about shared pasts that vary depending on the focal actor and over time.	Studies of collective memory, organizational hermeneutics, storytelling, sensemaking, identity, culture.	Negotiations over shared pasts; social frameworks of memory, mnemonic communities; mnemonic work.	Adorisio, 2014 Bell & Taylor, 2016 Do, Lyle & Walsh, 2019* Foroughi, 2020* Garcia-Lorenzo, 2019 Ravasi, et al., 2019 Ybema, 2014
Critical	A site for political struggles concerning the nature of shared pasts.	Studies of collective memory, theories of power, critical theory, critical management studies.	Politics of memory, counter-memories, interrogation of the past, mnemonic struggles.	Aeon & Lamertz, 2019* Coraiola & Derry, 2020 Cutcher et al., 2018* Foroughi and Al-Amoudi, 2020* Mena et al., 2016 Popp & Fellman, 2019* Sørensen, 2014*
Performative	A generative, constitutive, enacted process that produces various types of cultural and material consequences constantly manifesting in the present through performance.	Studies of collective memory, theories of performativity, actor network theory, social studies of science.	Material-discursive practices; remembering/forgetting as performance, enactment, commemoration	Blagoyev et al., 2019* Crawford et al., In press Lubinski, 2018*

Table 1. Four perspectives to organizational memory. (* = published in *Organization Studies*).