

Introduction to the special issue: Slowly shifting toward slow memory

Memory Studies

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Abstract

This article introduces the special issue *Slow Memory Studies*, which emerges from the COST Action “Slow Memory: Transformative Practices for Times of Uneven and Accelerating Change.” In a world defined by rapid technological, socio economic, and political shifts, the concept of slow memory offers an alternative analytical framework that foregrounds gradual, often imperceptible transformations shaping everyday life. Rather than centring spectacular events or crises, slow memory highlights non-eventful, embodied, and situated forms of remembering that unfold across long temporal horizons. Drawing on interdisciplinary collaboration among scholars of work, welfare, and methodologies of memory, this special issue demonstrates how slow memory provides new ways to understand deindustrialization, care systems, and the lived experiences of marginalized communities. The contributions explore how memory operates within slow moving processes such as economic restructuring, erosion of welfare infrastructures, and intergenerational transmission of trauma, showing how these processes remain largely invisible in dominant narratives. By engaging with feminist, participatory, artistic, and curatorial approaches, the articles also illustrate the methodological possibilities of slow memory as an ethical and political practice. Collectively, the issue argues for a reorientation of memory studies toward temporalities of slowness that enable more inclusive, attentive, and socially just forms of remembering.

Keywords

care, deindustrialisation, introduction, methodologies, slow memory

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A quarter of a century into the new millennium, we live in an age of profound contradictions. While the world accelerates and becomes increasingly interconnected through ultra-fast digital networks, it is simultaneously marked by deepening socio-economic divisions and inequalities. We face viral pandemics, chronic illnesses, aging populations, rapid species extinction, the automation of work, widening disparities, and the gradual erosion of national care systems alongside political upheavals and the loss of long-held certainties. Adapting to these challenges and building resilience requires drawing on past experiences and cultural resources—a process that calls for pausing, reflecting, and remembering well.

It is in response to these conditions that this special issue, entitled *Slow Memory Studies*, emerges as a collaborative outcome of the COST Action “Slow Memory: Transformative Practices for Times of Uneven and Accelerating Change” (CA20105). Bringing together over 300 scholars and stakeholders from more than 40 countries across diverse disciplines and sectors, the Action sought to foster interdisciplinary research and dialogue on how societies remember and respond to gradual, often imperceptible transformations that significantly impact societies and individuals (for full details, see <https://www.slowmemory.eu>). This Action focused the attention of scholars, policymakers and cultural professionals on alternative paths to build resilience in the face of contemporary rapid-response culture. Through transnational and interdisciplinary discussions, we addressed urgency, emergency, crisis and acceleration by drawing together the multi-sited, “event-less” and slow-moving phenomena (Wüstenberg, 2023: 3) that can best be studied by slowing down our research methods, to afford capacity building, knowledge generation and impact activities. Inspired by “slow science” (Stengers, 2018), we sought to develop an alternative kind of social remembering.

In order to develop theory and methodologies to address slow memory through interdisciplinary conversations and engagement with stakeholders, we met regularly over the 4-year funding period, both virtually and in person. The central principle of the overall project was to slow down our meeting and research practices, so as not to contribute to the culture of overwork and burnout that characterizes contemporary academia. The main aim of the Action was to trigger a new discovery phase in memory studies by providing a platform for incubating networked, transnational, multi-disciplinary research that engaged systematically with the insights of environmental science, Indigenous epistemologies, peace studies, and political economy.

Throughout the Action, each working group published working papers, as well as individual and collaborative journal articles, special issues, book chapters, podcasts, reports, a virtual exhibition, teaching resources and an edited volume entitled *Slowing Down Memory studies: Theory and Practice of Remembering for Transformative Change* (Wawrzyniak and Wüstenberg, 2026). All of these publications are Open Access and can be found on the publications page of the Slow Memory website.

Three working groups within the Slow Memory COST Action have collaboratively developed this special issue, each focusing on a specific aspect of memory and social transformation. These are the working groups on the transformation of work, transformation of welfare and on training and capacity building (which is referred to as methodologies of slow memory in this special issue). Researchers from the working group on transformation of work examine the decline of large-scale industry and the changing nature of the modern workplace, exploring how memory practices can make visible economic transitions experienced unevenly and gradually. By integrating economic modeling with oral history techniques, this group develops new modes of narrating and visualizing socio-economic change. Researchers from the working group on transformation of welfare investigate slow-moving transformations within diverse care contexts including childcare, elderly care, and mental healthcare. The group seeks a deeper understanding of “slow” memory practices performed in formal and informal care settings. Researchers from the working group focused on

training and capacity building aim to create a shared understanding of slow memory as an approach and methodology utilized to comprehend global and local grand-scale transformations.

Special issue

The concept of slow memory theoretically underpins and frames the collection of articles featured in this special issue. Coined and developed by Jenny Wüstenberg (2023), the term seeks to reorient the analytical focus in memory studies—away from the prevailing emphasis on traumatic events and sudden ruptures, and toward slow-moving, cumulative processes of remembering that are often diffuse, embodied, and embedded in everyday life. Rather than focusing on spectacular or singular events, slow memory directs attention to what Wüstenberg (2023) calls the “eventless transformations” (p. 3) that shape societies over long durations, including socio-economic shifts, environmental degradation, changes in welfare structures, and gradual processes of marginalization and forgetting. Thus, the slow memory concept is both anchored and flexible, with slowness denoting the struggles of memory against forgetting amid “accelerated change,” and attendant phenomenon of modernity’s “social acceleration” (Rosa, 2013).

At its core, slow memory foregrounds temporality as a central analytical category. It challenges the idea that memory work is always most urgent in relation to crisis and catastrophe. Instead, it invites us to consider how memory operates in sync with “slow violence” (Nixon, 2011), intergenerational transmission, and the *longue durée* of institutional or structural changes. This emphasis also intersects with other scholarly currents such as “slow science” (Stengers, 2018), decolonial methodologies, and feminist ethics of care, all of which resist the pressure of acceleration and productivity in knowledge production and instead value attentiveness, patience, and relationality. The slowness emphasized here does not simply refer to chronological duration, but to the lived experience of gradual, often fragmented and ambivalent change. It points to transformations that unfold beyond the temporal horizon of political cycles or media attention, yet profoundly shape people’s daily lives, identities, and futures. This temporality challenges memory studies to rethink what counts as an event or rupture and what as a process or practice worth remembering and researching.

Three key theoretical ideas characterize the framework of slow memory, and are relevant for this special issue: (a) non-eventfulness, (b) situatedness and embodiment, (c) political and ethical commitment. First, slow memory emphasizes forms of remembering that are not oriented around spectacular or singular events, but are instead embedded in processes that unfold gradually and imperceptibly, such as the dismantling of welfare and care infrastructures or the erosion of labor rights. These long, often creeping processes and practices tend to escape public commemoration or institutional recognition but remain vital to social remembering. Second, slow memory acknowledges the material and embodied dimensions of memory work. It draws our attention to how memory is embedded in physical environments (e.g. deindustrialized sites or care institutions) and carried through everyday practices by people. This situatedness implies that memory work is always context-driven and historically informed. Finally, slow memory calls for an ethical and political commitment toward social justice. It recognizes that memory practices are interventions in the present, capable of reinforcing or contesting hegemonic narratives. By drawing attention to slow and often invisible forms of harm or erasure (e.g. the coercive dimensions of psychiatric hospitalization), slow memory highlights memory practices that foreground lived experiences, long-term injustices, and intergenerational trauma—practices that can foster public acknowledgment of marginalized histories, and the gradual reshaping of collective memory.

In this sense, slow memory is not simply a descriptive term, but a normative and methodological proposition. It invites memory studies scholars to reflect on how the field defines its objects of

study, which memories are centered, and which are marginalized. It asks scholars and practitioners alike to slow down and attend carefully to other kinds of memories.

Responding to the call for slow memory, these articles examine specific sites and communities where long-term social and political transformations have left deep traces. These include former mining communities facing economic decline and psychiatric institutions affected by deinstitutionalization to name but a few. Drawing on the concept of slow memory, the contributors examine how long-term processes of marginalization, economic restructuring, and the withdrawal of state support affect people's lives, not through dramatic ruptures, but through ongoing, gradual processes. The articles demonstrate how memory practices can intervene in contexts of slow-moving transformations by making visible lived experiences of those most affected, while also helping to imagine and create more just futures that counter processes of marginalization and erasure.

A shift toward slow memory as an analytical framework also requires a rethinking of our methodological approaches. At stake is not only what is remembered, but also how our research methods shape what is remembered, and who gets to be a subject of memory. In this special issue, we focus on methodologies that challenge invisibility, marginalization, and silences in collective memory. These methodologies acknowledge that memory is a social process shaped by power dynamics and material conditions. They ask about what remains untold or unrepresented in dominant historical narratives, and seek to trace those memories that reside in the margins of gendered, classed, racialized, nation-centered or ableist frameworks of remembrance.

The *Slow Memory Studies* contributors work with methodological approaches that are participatory, situated, and attentive to the lived experiences of those affected most by long-term, gradual, and often invisible societal transformations. Their research seeks to co-create knowledge in ways that are grounded in long-term engagement and ethical commitment. This involves working with affected communities over extended periods, building trust, and allowing memory work to unfold slowly, according to the rhythms of lived experience. It also involves using creative forms of expression, including visual arts and storytelling practices, as both research methods and sites of collective knowledge production. These methodological approaches intersect with slow memory methodologies (see also Allen and Braber, 2026), engaging with power structures and social justice to dismantle hierarchical narratives and memories, and to open public dialogue about symbolic systems and practices of social remembrance. Thus, the central aim is to examine memory with its forms of representation and social function across time and space.

Several contributions to the special issue illustrate how these methodologies work in practice, engaging in storytelling approaches, narrative analysis, ethnographic approaches, and arts-based practices as methods of slow memory research. They advance memory studies scholarship by centering the concept of slow memory as a lens to examine processes of social transformation that unfold gradually over time. Central to this approach are the three aforementioned interconnected ideas: first, an emphasis on non-eventfulness, which shifts attention to changes that develop slowly and often remain absent from public memory; second, the recognition of situatedness and embodiment, highlighting how memory is deeply embedded in specific environments, everyday practices, and material conditions; and third, a political and ethical commitment that views memory as an active intervention in the present, with the potential to contest exclusion and promote social justice. The contributions gathered here illustrate how slow memory attends to the lived experiences of those most affected by slow-moving transformations such as economic restructuring, deindustrialization, and evolving care systems. They also emphasize the responsibilities of memory studies scholars to critically reflect on the impact of their own methods and interventions, acknowledging how research practices influence what is remembered, who is heard, and how memory work can be conducted with ethical commitment, care and sensitivity to the particular contexts and participants involved.

The special issue is divided into three sections which reflect the working groups which have been involved with the project, and consists of “Methodologies of Slow Memory,” “Slow Memories of Care,” and “Slow Memories of Deindustrialization.”

Part I: methodologies of slow memory

The contributions in this section emerge from the collaborative work of the Slow Memory working group, which is committed to training, capacity building, and methodological innovation. They examine how slow memory methodologies can be applied across diverse contexts, including digital interventions, participatory museum practice, narrative reconstruction, feminist historiography, visual literacy, and curatorial experimentation. This section explores slow memory as both a theoretical concept and a practical methodology, investigating how deliberate, reflective, and temporally extended engagement with memory can generate new insights into cognition, social life, and cultural heritage.

Slow memory methodologies adopted here focus on how knowledge of memory is produced, mediated, and sustained across social, cultural, and technological contexts. They attend to the rhythms, temporalities, and affective registers through which the past is recalled, silenced, or reimagined, raising questions about how memory operates in public and private domains, shapes the history of the present, and informs collective and individual orientations toward the future. Slow memory approaches also draw attention to questions that remain unasked and to memories that are unrepresented, forgotten, or situated at the margins of gendered, classed, racialized, nation-centered, or ableist frameworks of remembrance. They seek to understand how memory is produced through lived experience, language, and processes shaped by intersecting axes of disadvantage and privilege. These methodologies attend to personal and collective memory, to the roles of the state and the family, and to the potential of slow memory to generate situated forms of seeing, knowing, and remembering. In doing so, they seek knowledge production from the standpoint of the underrepresented, fostering forms of slow memory constituted from below.

Memory is socially mediated (Halbwachs, 1992) and contingent on social positions shaped by multiple axes of inequality, including gender, race, class, and nationality. Slow memory methodologies intersect with feminist epistemology, visual methodologies, museology, and information technology, pushing the boundaries of research and expanding the applications of the slow memory concept. They enable engagement with multiple, partial perspectives, accounting for how social structures and identities shape memory and the construction of meaning across the past, present, and future.

Together, these articles highlight the temporal, ethical, and social dimensions of remembering, showing how slow approaches foster inclusion, critical awareness, and imaginative engagement with the past, present, and future. By bringing together perspectives from history, sociology, gender studies, museology, information technology, and memory studies, the articles in this section demonstrate the productive intersections between disciplines, methodology, and practice. Each contribution engages with the challenge of researching, representing, and sustaining slow processes of remembering in a world increasingly defined by acceleration and immediacy.

Exploring the effects of storytelling on memory as a cognitive process, Isabel Machado Alexandre develops a method that offers Alzheimer’s patients “remembering moments” to test whether they could help in slowing down the progression of the disease. Using a computerized application that incorporates slow memory exercises designed to stimulate cognitive functions and sustain engagement among people with dementia, and involving both health professionals and users, Alexandre demonstrates how deliberate and continuous engagement enhances long-term

retention and emotional connection. Her work shows how slow memory can be enacted as a therapeutic, ethical, and participatory practice of care.

Vicky Karaïskou applies the concept of visual literacy as a methodological tool to inquire into the sources of assumptions and perceptions, examining how visuals participate in the storytelling of the past, shape perceptions of the present, and influence the transmission of knowledge and the imagination of the future. Investigating visibility as a key sensory regulator of perception, imagination, and anticipation through the lens of slow memory, Karaïskou reveals the effects of slowness in the processes of seeing, interpreting, and meaning-making. Her work highlights the intersections of temporality, ethics, and cultural memory, proposing visual literacy as a pathway toward more equitable and imaginative futures.

Vjollca Krasniqi draws on feminist methodologies to propose innovative ways of researching the history of state socialism. Krasniqi adopts the slow memory approach, focusing specifically on the category of gender to engage with the writings of state-socialist women historians in Kosovo and to unpack the hegemonic power structures that have relegated gender perspectives and women's history to a marginal position in institutional history, collective memory, and knowledge production. Her work demonstrates how slow remembering can recover neglected histories, reframe epistemic hierarchies, and contribute to inclusive memory practices, while also offering a model for attending to silenced voices in other historical, political, or cultural contexts.

Libora Oates-Indruchová develops a narrative technique she frames as "imagined conversations," allowing readers to immerse themselves in the life worlds of Czech and Hungarian scholars working and writing under pervasive censorship, in which even the word itself was censored, and to follow their slowly developing or eroding careers and creative acts of resistance. By foregrounding collective experiences and tracing the gradual transformations of institutions, individuals, and textual work, Oates-Indruchová's method demonstrates how slow memory can reveal the temporal, ethical, and affective dimensions of knowledge production under political constraint, emphasizing endurance, resistance, and creativity in contexts of control.

Alice Semedo examines curating as both a methodological and conceptual framework through the lens of slow memory. She defines slow curating as a space of negotiation, transformation, and resistance, shaped by the interplay of objects, contexts, and participants. This approach challenges dominant knowledge structures, positioning memory and heritage as co-constructed and continuously evolving. For Semedo, slow curating functions as both an epistemic and political act, enabling dissent, unlearning, and radical inclusion. By adopting the slow memory paradigm, Semedo argues that curatorial practice shifts from static preservation to a participatory, fluid process of meaning-making, deepening understanding of memory, heritage, and social knowledge.

These contributions extend the theoretical and methodological reach of slow memory by showing how it can be practiced, embodied, and reimagined across disciplines and social contexts. They foreground the centrality of temporality, relationality, and justice in memory work, offering new frameworks for understanding how remembrance unfolds in lived experience, institutions, and everyday life. By situating slow memory at the intersection of theory and practice, this issue highlights new possibilities for inclusive and imaginative approaches to memory research.

Part II: slow memories of care

Transformations in care systems, often gradual and uneven, generate practices of remembering that reflect lived realities of vulnerability. These transformations, marked by the slow erosion of public welfare systems, the deinstitutionalization of mental health services, and shifting ideas about responsibility and support, raise important questions for memory studies scholarship. What kinds of memories emerge in care contexts that are often marked by invisibility, silence, or social

exclusion, and how can these memories be identified and engaged with? How can institutional and non-institutional practices of care foster forms of remembering that are slow-paced and situated? And which actors, including caregivers, care recipients, and artistic collectives, are involved in shaping these memories, sometimes in resistance to stigmatization and marginalization?

The second part of this special issue takes up these questions, focusing on slow memory-making processes and practices in contexts of care with particular attention to people whose experiences are rarely included in public memory discourses: people who experience mental distress, children in institutional care, refugee populations, and others living with long-term vulnerabilities. Informed by the collaborative work of the working group on the transformation of welfare, the contributions in this section explore how slow-paced, situated, and collaborative memory practices can help render visible these lived experiences, and how they can do so ethically and with care.

Transformations of care and welfare are rarely dramatic or visible; they unfold in slow, cumulative ways. The reorganization of mental health services, the closure of institutions, or the bureaucratization of social care often happen over years or decades, producing uncertainty, waiting, and fragmentation. These slow temporalities affect not only how care is delivered but also how it is remembered. In institutional contexts such as hospitals, day centers, or refugee facilities, time itself can become a site of tension marked by long stretches of inactivity, repetition, and waiting, yet also by small, everyday acts of care and creativity that keep communities connected. Slow memory research makes these temporal dynamics visible, acknowledging that slowness itself is ambivalent: it can be experienced as a form of stagnation and waiting, but also as a condition that fosters attentiveness, creativity, and care.

To deepen our understanding of slow memory practices in care settings, we integrate the concept of slow memory with Elizabeth Jelin's (2002) notion of memory work and Mihaela Mihai's (2022) concept of mnemonic care. Jelin understands memory as an active and contested process shaped by diverse social actors engaged in struggles over recognition and representation. Jelin's research, particularly in the context of transitional justice in Latin America, highlights how memory is mobilized not simply as a record of the past, but as a form of social and political action that aims to transform the present and future. Complementing this actor-centered perspective, Mihaela Mihai introduces the notion of mnemonic care, emphasizing the slow, patient labor required to nurture a pluralistic and critical memory landscape. She calls attention to the importance of tending to communities' silences and absences, challenging dominant institutions of remembrance, and cultivating ethical memory practices. Mihai draws particular attention to aesthetic practices, including literature, film, and visual arts, as powerful means of exposing what has been marginalized, but she also insists that scholars reflect critically on the effects of their own methodologies and interventions.

Jelin's conceptualization of memory work and Mihai's call for scholarly commitment to mnemonic care—both concerning the subjects of memory we study, and how we study (with) those subjects—are vital to the understandings of memory practices in care settings developed by the contributors to this special issue. The authors highlight the active role of caregivers, care recipients, artists, activists, and other actors in shaping memory practices in care settings. They emphasize memory as ongoing work that is social and relational, deeply rooted in practices of care, and that addresses slow, uneven, and “eventless” changes in care systems and experiences. Taking seriously the scholarly commitment to mnemonic care, these articles foreground research methods that create meaningful, inclusive, and safe spaces for participation by memory subjects who are frequently overlooked or excluded.

Drawing on oral history and participatory art-based methods, Verusca Calabria explores how service users of a long-standing mental health day center in England recall the transformation of mental healthcare from institutional to community-based models. By engaging participants as

co-creators, Calabria reveals counter-memories that challenge the dominant narrative of linear progress in mental health reform. Her study shows how slow, collective memory work can uncover the neglected histories of deinstitutionalization and austerity, bringing to light the emotional and social costs of these policy shifts. By tracing how decades of underinvestment and shifting mandates have altered the center's role, the article highlights the gaps between policymaking and lived realities. It also demonstrates how slow, participatory memory practices can contest reductive stories of improvement and foreground the forms of care that have quietly sustained vulnerable communities over time.

Gloria Kirwan and Kritika Nautiyal take up similar concerns through the lens of slow memory in Irish mental healthcare. Drawing on in-depth interviews, they reveal how people living with severe and enduring mental illness often remain silent about their experiences due to fear of being disbelieved or stigmatized. Their research foregrounds how stigma, fear, and cognitive challenges shape what can and cannot be spoken about mental illness. Moreover, it highlights the ethical complexities of researching silenced or partial memories and calls for methods that can listen to hesitation, emotion, and silence as meaningful forms of testimony. Kirwan and Nautiyal show how slow, attentive research practices can create openings for people with mental illness to articulate the meanings they attach to their experiences and their interactions with mental health services, countering a history in which their voices have been marginalized or excluded.

Turning to Argentina, Marileen La Haije and Agustina Catalano examine how arts-based practices can reconfigure collective memory around mental suffering, focusing on the Argentinian film project *Los fuegos internos* (2019) as a key example of slow memory work. The collaborative film project integrates participants with lived experience of psychiatric hospitalization as protagonists, artists, and co-producers, transforming individual experiences of pain and confinement into shared artistic expressions. Through filmic co-creation, these participants reclaim agency over their own narratives and make visible forms of suffering often excluded from public discourse. In this way, *Los fuegos internos* illustrates how arts-based, participatory practices can gradually reshape the social imaginaries of mental distress, challenging the forgetting of those who experience mental suffering and opening spaces for social recognition.

Another particularly rich site for observing the enactment of slow memory in welfare contexts is found in the institutional care of child refugees from the Greek Civil War (1946–1949) in Czechoslovakia. In their article, Kateřina Králová, Nikola Tohma, and Jessie Barton Hronešová turn to this peculiar historical context where Greek Civil War child refugees were placed in state care facilities in early socialist Czechoslovakia. They examine how these homes became long-term environments where care, ideology, and everyday routines intertwined. Drawing on personal testimonies and institutional records, they show how the children's homes generated a layered, hybrid memory shaped by structured regimes as well as improvised, affective forms of community. Former residents recall not only displacement but also daily practices that fostered belonging. By demonstrating how institutional care could function both as protection and control, the authors reveal complex legacies that still resonate today.

Part III: slow memories of deindustrialization

The final section of this issue examines how the memory of deindustrialization is shaped through storytelling, oral testimony, and cultural production. These articles explore how deindustrialization is experienced not as a discrete historical rupture but as a slow, often painful transformation that continues to shape everyday life, memory politics, and political developments. In fact, economic restructuring is intertwined with new (de)regulatory regimes and a neoliberal politics that entail a distinct framing of temporality and the meaning of the past. These developments have sometimes

shut down traditions of working-class solidarity while facilitating populist mobilization with new (and old) forms of memory politics. The reverberations of these trends are felt locally and nationally and can be fruitfully compared across a wide variety of cases across Europe.

The dismantling of industrial economies has left deep social and cultural traces: abandoned factories, shrinking towns, broken career trajectories, and fractured solidarities. Deindustrialization represents a profound rupture for communities whose identities were built around work. It reshapes social infrastructures, erodes collective certainties, and produces a sense of temporal dislocation, where the past feels more stable or more meaningful than the present. As Marx famously said in the *Communist Manifesto*, “all that is solid melts into air.” These socio-economic shifts have given rise to memory practices that reflect, reinterpret, and give meaning to experiences of deindustrialization. This special issue examines how memory practices develop in response to deindustrialization, and how the industrial past is remembered and reinterpreted today.

This section addresses the slow, long-term transformations of work, with a special focus on the decline of large-scale industry and the aftermath of these transformations. The contributions examine how deindustrialization is being narrated and remembered across different social and cultural contexts. They ask what kinds of memories remain of the industrial past and how the disappearance of that past is interpreted. Oral testimonies provide crucial insight here, not only into what people remember, but how they tell their stories: How is trauma expressed, how do individuals and communities deal with change, and how do they make sense of the relationship between past and present? This section also considers the broader narratives that communities have constructed around processes of deindustrialization: What are the most common representations and preconceived ideas associated with this transformation? To what extent are these shaped by mythicized or nostalgic accounts, and how are they mobilized in political and cultural discourses?

At the same time, the articles focus on the question of what remains in terms of cultural creation, examining literature, music, cinema, and visual arts that engage with working-class, industrial, and mining histories. These forms of cultural expression not only account for experiences of deindustrialization; they shape how it is remembered. This section provides examples of different cultural productions (such as documentaries, literature, artistic creations, and oral histories) which have been used to inform and support contemporary communities in processing loss, mourning, and imagining new futures.

Marisa Kërbizi and Tomasz Rawski examine how Albanian poetry changed during and after the fall of communism as the process of industrialization played such an important role in the creative work of this time and after the fall of communism in 1991. They discuss various ways in which the post-communist Albanian literature has addressed individual and social consequences of the violent deindustrialization of Albania that started immediately after the fall of communism. They illustrate how deindustrialization brought an already economically inefficient Albania to the edge of devastation due to closures of factories, collapse of institutions and high numbers of unemployed people. Regardless, it seems that deindustrialization did not become a dominant topic in the national literature, having been overshadowed by the traumas of the past. This article focuses on selected Albanian poetry and prose from 2004 to 2021, highlighting two essential and recurring literary themes: shattered identities and displacement.

Turning to Spain, Rubén Vega and Irene Díaz Martínez examine the representations and cultural narratives of Asturian artists who deal with aspects such as uncertainty, nostalgia, resistance, and working-class identity. In the collective imagination, deindustrialization and its associated effects configure a rich, intangible heritage that acts as a source of inspiration for artistic creation in many different ways. Their paper uses excerpts from interviews with artists who express the resulting “half-life of deindustrialization” and illustrate topics around uncertainty, nostalgia, resistance, and working-class identity. Through these oral histories, the authors analyze the transition from an

industrial society to a post-industrial one and focus on how cultural creation has re-signified the culture of the working classes and the legacies of deindustrialization in the region, as well as how the past is remembered.

Taking a trans-European approach, Joanna Wawrzyniak and Natalie Braber focus on the biographical narrative interview and use this approach to examine interviews with retired European trade unionists who experienced industrial transformation, studying how they embed these processes in their particular social milieus and wider histories. This article focuses on the discussion of solidarity and how it can be understood as a slow memory concept. As it has never had a singular meaning and its uses have shifted across time and traditions, the article analyses the oral history interviews to examine how meaning can emerge through lived experience and recollection. As such, it contributes to methodological debates of memory studies more broadly as solidarity is remembered both as collective resistance and mutual support and how this has changed over time. In this way, it shows the way we can move beyond event-centered understandings to understand socially important concepts taking place amid structural change.

In the final article in this section, Zoe Konsbruck examines the contrasting narratives constructed by steel workers in the neighboring towns of Pétange in Luxembourg and Athus in Belgium, through analyzing documentaries made in these countries. The focus is on the divergent narratives following restructuring, and how these were influenced by national strategies. Whereas the Luxembourg narrative adopts a future-oriented perspective which focuses on successful transition from steel manufacturing to financial services, the Belgian narrative focuses on the past and foregrounds loss, trauma and a continuing dependence on Luxembourg. Such findings challenge prevailing interpretations by demonstrating how memory can operate differently within a shared historical process.

Conclusion

This special issue demonstrates the transformative potential of slow memory as both a theoretical lens and a methodological practice for understanding long-term social change. In a world increasingly defined by acceleration, immediacy, and crisis-driven responses, slow memory offers an alternative paradigm that foregrounds temporality, situatedness, and ethical responsibility. By shifting attention away from spectacular events toward gradual, cumulative processes, it enables scholars and practitioners to uncover histories and experiences that often remain invisible in dominant narratives—histories of care, work, and everyday life that shape identities and futures in profound yet understated ways.

The contributions gathered here illustrate how slow memory operates across diverse contexts, from mental health care and refugee institutions to post-industrial landscapes and artistic practices. They show that slowness is not synonymous with passivity; rather, it is an active, deliberate stance that resists the pressures of acceleration and creates space for reflection, dialogue, and justice-oriented interventions. Slow memory methodologies—whether participatory, arts-based, feminist, or curatorial—reveal how memory work can be co-created with communities, grounded in lived experience, and attentive to silences and absences. These approaches challenge hierarchical knowledge structures and open possibilities for inclusive, imaginative forms of remembrance that acknowledge complexity and plurality.

Importantly, slow memory is not only descriptive but normative. It calls for a rethinking of scholarly practices and institutional frameworks that often privilege speed, productivity, and spectacle. By embracing slowness, researchers commit to long-term engagement, ethical care, and relationality, recognizing that memory is never neutral but deeply entangled with power, inequality, and social transformation. This commitment extends beyond academic inquiry to cultural and

political spheres, where memory practices can contest erasure, foster solidarity, and contribute to more equitable futures.

The articles in this issue collectively argue that attending to slow-moving transformations—whether in welfare systems, labor markets, or cultural imaginaries—enriches our understanding of how societies navigate change. They invite us to reconsider what counts as an event, whose memories matter, and how research can amplify voices that have been marginalized or silenced. In doing so, they position slow memory as a vital framework for addressing the challenges of the present: environmental degradation, socio-economic inequality, and the erosion of care infrastructures, all of which unfold gradually yet decisively.


As we conclude, we emphasize that slow memory is not a finished project but an ongoing conversation. It is a call to scholars, practitioners, and communities to slow down—not as an act of withdrawal, but as a strategy of engagement that values depth over speed, attentiveness over immediacy, and justice over convenience. In times of accelerating change, this commitment to slowness offers a powerful means of remembering differently, imagining alternative futures, and sustaining hope in the face of uncertainty.

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