

Redaktion *Variations*  
 Literaturzeitschrift der Universität Zürich  
 Deutsches Seminar der Universität Zürich  
 Schönberggasse 9  
 CH – 8001 Zürich  
[variations@rom.uzh.ch](mailto:variations@rom.uzh.ch)  
<http://www.variations.uzh.ch>

## Call for Papers: *Variations* 28 – Environment, Science, Memory

The balsam fir tree also remembers. If caterpillars or moose browse its needles, the nibbling assault lodges itself in the chemical makeup of the tree, in a manner analogous to the changes in a chickadee's nerve cells after a near miss with a predator. The tree's subsequent growth is more heavily defended by unpalatable resins, like a bird turned jumpy by its bad experience with a hawk. The fir also remembers air temperatures dating back nearly a year, a memory that helps the tree to know when to winterize its cells. [...]  
 Roots and twigs have memories of light, gravity, heat, and minerals. (Haskell 2017: 37)

Memory and different forms of environment have long been understood to be closely connected. More recently, with notions such as 'planetary memory' shifting into focus (cf. Bond et al. 2018), the interrelation between memory and environment has received particular emphasis (Gülüm et al. 2024). As Gülüm et al. put it in "Memory and Environment," altered frames of perception pertaining to epistemology, category, and scale "invite us to understand memory and environment as embedded, co-constitutive, and co-constructed" (2024: 4). As such, science plays a crucial role in shaping our understanding of how memory is reconstructed across diverse environmental contexts, including natural and cultural landscapes. Indeed, Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley note in *Postcolonial Ecologies* that the environment can be understood as standing witness to human history (2011: 4), the result of which is a landscape that has been altered observably. The traces of the past, embedded in culture, mythology, and natural materials, are remembered and constructed by those with the respective knowledge. Correspondingly, Donna Haraway argues in *When Species Meet* that the human body itself is privy to a long history of interacting with other living beings (2008: 5), a history we can access using tools from the humanities but also natural sciences.

Memory and environment are connected not only because they can be thought of as 'embedded, co-constitutive, and co-constructed,' but also because both take a similar, highly productive position in scholarly discourse. Specifically, discussions of both memory and environment in the fields of literary and cultural studies are routinely positioned on the threshold to the natural sciences. Ecocritical thinking, for instance, cannot operate without taking recourse to the natural sciences. As Eva Horn and Hannes Bergthaller note in *The Anthropocene: Key Issues for the Humanities*, "[we] start from the assumption that the insights of the natural sciences form an indispensable basis for an adequate understanding of the Anthropocene" (2020: 5). Similarly, Susan Nalbantian insists, in *Memory in*

*Literature: From Proust to Neuroscience*, that her study “opens up links between the literary and the scientific in a time in which integrative approaches between the disciplines are at the cutting edge of knowledge” (2003: 2). Memory and environment are, thus, connected not only intrinsically, but also through their distinctive propensity for eliciting research practices that negotiate the boundaries between the humanities and the natural sciences.

In light of this, then, the 28<sup>th</sup> issue of *Variations* aims to examine how notions of science contribute and shape our understanding of memory and environment and how literature and culture, in turn, engage with scientific negotiations of these realms.

We invite contributions that explore the intersections of environment, science, and memory with possible questions including but not being limited to:

- How do scientific discourses inform and (re-)configure our thinking about memory and the environment, including notions of ‘natural,’ ‘artificial,’ or technologically shaped environments?
- How do the humanities offer subjective concepts of environments and surroundings that incorporate interpretation, perception, and experience – dimensions that, in turn, become relevant for scientific inquiry?
- How are environments narratively and sensorially constructed in literature, culture, and art, and how are they (or their construction) linked to memory?
- How do memory and science figure in the context of conservation?
- What role do climate science and ecological modeling play in shaping cultural memory?
- What are the colonial and postcolonial dimensions of environmental memory and landscape transformation and, in particular, the role of scientific discourse in legitimizing the exploitation and transformation of colonial environments?
- How do non-human agents and networks shape biological and ecological memory and, in particular, literary and cultural representations of this interplay?
- To what extent do dimensions of trauma, displacement, and memory become relevant in the context of climate change and ecological collapse?

Contributions may engage with literary texts, visual culture, philosophy, environmental humanities, science and technology studies, and memory studies. We welcome theoretical and methodological reflections as well as case studies and comparative analyses.

Abstracts (300-400 words) and a short bio may be sent to *Variations* until June 15<sup>th</sup> 2025 at the following address: [variations@rom.uzh.ch](mailto:variations@rom.uzh.ch). We accept articles in German, English and French. Applicants will be notified about acceptance or rejection of their proposals in July 2025. The completed articles are to be sent to the editors no later than December 1<sup>st</sup> 2025 and must not exceed 32,000 characters. Please note that *Variations* also welcomes literary and artistic contributions such as drawings, collages, and photographs that engage with the topic of concern.

## **Bibliography**

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