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EDITORIAL

Memory and anxiety: A sociocultural approach

Introduction to the Special Collection

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Collective anxiety in media, mind, and memory

This editorial launches the *Memory, Mind & Media* special collection on 'Memory and Anxiety'. We employ a broadly sociocultural approach to explore anxiety as a collective phenomenon and to situate it in the broader literature on memory and future thinking. We argue that anxiety is more than the collectively reported feelings of worry or a disorder that is tied to an individual's mental and bodily states. Rather, we propose to diversify (see Navaro-Yashin, 2017 on 'diversifying affect') our understanding of anxiety and its relationship to memory, by focusing on anxiety not only as an individual mental disorder, but as a collective condition situated in culture and politics. Our effort to explore memory–anxiety nexus is one way of attending to the collective conditions under which anxiety prevails in the form of narratives, feelings, and behaviours shaped by the sociocultural and political forces. As such, scrutinizing anxiety's relationship to memory would mean, at the very least, paying attention to the ways in which anxiousness about the collective future is expressed in vocabularies and practices that have to do with the culturally entrenched narratives about the past.

Anxiety is a silent pandemic – a disturbance spread globally in response to looming or rebounding disasters from COVID-19 to climate change,[1] to wars, to post–Cold War nuclear

[1] See the World Economic Forum Report: Fleming, S. (2019) 'This is the world's biggest mental health problem – and you might not have heard of it', World Economic Forum, 22 January. Available at: https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/01/this-is-the-worlds-biggest-mental-health-problem/ (accessed 31 July 2025). With the rise of climate anxiety popular media is filled with reports and editorials, including advice for self-help tips, see for instance Tolentino, J. (2023) 'What to Do with Climate Emotions', The New Yorker (Annals of a Warming Planet), 10 July. Available at: https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-a-warming-planet/what-to-do-with-climate-emotions?utm_source=nl&utm_brand=tny&utm_mailing=TNY_Daily_071023&utm_campaign=aud-dev&utm_medium=email&utm_term=tny_daily_digest&bxid=5bd67f5824c17c10480359cb&cndid=49347587&hasha=123069de6d387c9082827360ac372f05&hashb=59673d0e91e635cacace5d18e33f2992af1c840d&hashc=186400aa1a4a7a5dcf726d8bc1d81e400f6f7d067d050eef67fd4d94f4ea95a1&esrc=OIDC_SELECT_ACCOUNT_PAGE (accessed 31 July 2025). Or Psychology Today piece on healthy responses to climate anxiety: Killian, K. D. Ph.D. (2023) 'Healthy responses to climate change and climate anxiety', Intersections blog, Psychology Today, 5 August. Available at: https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/intersections/202308/healthy-responses-to-climate-change-and-climate-anxiety

threats. While anxiety disorders have long been proclaimed as the most common mental disorders in the United States, its pervasiveness is related to the Covid pandemic,[2] especially noticeable among youth across the globe.[3] According to various studies, anxiety is a leading mental health issue[4] that varies with gender, race, and class.[5]

Perhaps it is in response to these statistics that a burgeoning popular discourse gives centre-stage to globally circulating anxieties. As Rebecca Lester notes, recently, there has been a lot of *anxiety about anxiety* because of its media attention (in press). This new 'Age of Anxiety'[6] prompts many questions, such as: Why is there such a global upswing in the attention given to anxiety? Is there a rise in the collective experience of anxiousness on national and transnational scales tied to the global political predicaments of our age? If so, are our anxieties situated in the specific socio-political contexts, tied to specific memories of traumatic pasts, or do we learn through popular culture, internet, and social networks what anxiousness must feel like as a result of constantly being bombarded by the global media narratives about anxiety epidemics, mental disorder symptoms, and their remedies? This is not to overlook the fact that anxiety is inherent to being human, but how we identify (or not), name, self-diagnose, and experience anxiety can be shaped both by cultural and by media discourses.

Furthermore, a rising 'clickbait' oriented industry uses AI algorithms to diagnose anxiety disorders based on scrolling habits or consumer proclivities. These domains are used to self-identify and self-treat various kinds of anxieties (Monteith et al., 2024). Especially in places where diagnosis and therapy are inaccessible, social media influencers on TikTok and other platforms have become enabling alternatives for the youth that not only raise awareness but also contribute to the 'glorification of mental illnesses' among Gen Z (Ahuja and Fichadia, 2024).

Perhaps it is not incidental that 'Anxiety' appeared as a new character in a sequel to the animation movie 'Inside Out 2'.[7] Anxiety emerges as an addition to the original core team of emotions (Joy, Fear, Anger, Disgust, Sadness) and becomes a disruptive force in the life of a teenage girl. As it brings along unsettling emotions such as Nostalgia, Embarrassment, Envy, and Ennui, anxiety reshuffles her repertoire of feelings in order to supply her with terrible scenarios about the future. Curiously enough, anxiety's power is tied to its ability to rearrange memories, so that it can make fundamental changes in the young girl's identity.

At the same time, beyond anxiousness that roams around the globe under the umbrella of 'mental disorders', there are modalities of anxiety that are uniquely tied to specific

[2] After the Covid-19 pandemic there was 25% increase in anxiety, according to the World Health Organization World Health Organization (2022) 'COVID-19 pandemic triggers 25 % increase in prevalence of anxiety and depression worldwide', World Health Organization news release, 2 March. Available at: https://www.who.int/news/item/02-03-2022-covid-19-pandemic-triggers-25-increase-in-prevalence-of-anxiety-and-depression-worldwide (accessed 31 July 2025).

[3] On youth mental health see Vestal, C. (2022) 'As teen mental health worsens, schools learn how to help', Stateline (The Pew Charitable Trusts), 18 April. Available at: https://stateline.org/2022/04/18/as-teen-mental-health-worsens-schools-learn-how-to-help/

[4] See 1990–2019 global disease burden study https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0165032721010983#:~:text = The%20burden%20of%20anxiety%20disorders%20at%20the%20global%20level,to%2039.32%20million)%20in%202019

[5] On the effects of perceived discrimination and racism on black mental health, see Wu, J. (2020) 'Racism's effects on Black mental health', *The Savvy Psychologist blog, Psychology Today*, 7 October. Available at: https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-savvy-psychologist/202010/racisms-effects-on-black-mental-health (accessed 31 July 2025).

[6] For an insightful perspective on the New Age of Anxiety through the lens of affect theory see Sedgwick, E.K. (2019) 'Affect theory and the new age of anxiety', *The New Yorker*, 25 March. Available at: https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/03/25/affect-theory-and-the-new-age-of-anxiety (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

[7] Mann, K. (Director). (2024). Inside out 2 [Film].

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sociocultural and political experiences. These anxieties shape collective thought and practice before inhabiting individual minds as mental or affective 'illnesses'. Some of us have explored historicized anxieties (Batiashvili et al., in press; Middleton, 2013; Batiashvili, 2022) that are intimately tied to the historical experiences and collective memories of the group. Historicized anxieties have various – culturally specific – modalities, which means that they appear through other symptoms (on cross-cultural symptoms of anxiety, see Hofmann and Hinton, 2014), through distinct narratives and feelings (Batiashvili et al.), alternative vocabularies of worry (Khalvashi, 2023; Tran, 2023), and at times acquire a collective body through social practices and events (Jackson and Everts, 2010).

Our special collection builds on this body of literature and seeks to come up with more nuanced conceptual paradigms and concrete methodologies through which anxiety's sociocultural aspects can be explored. The collaborative research project on memory and anxiety emerged as part of the interdisciplinary effort in collective memory studies (funded by James McDonnell Foundation since 2020[8]). In 2021, the collective memory collaborative led by Roddy Roediger and James Wertsch brought together a group of memory scholars that included psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and media researchers with an aim of forging new interdisciplinary cooperations. It was during our regular sessions that one of us, having experience in working on anthropological approaches to anxiety (Batiashvili et al. in press), initiated conversations about the kinds of anxiety that memory scholars so often encounter – whether it is anxiety related to disputes about the past, politics of forgetting and remembering, contested and traumatic memories, or national narratives.

As anxiety entered the group discussions of the McDonnell Collective Memory Collaborative, many of us were struck by the evident and yet unacknowledged presence of anxiety in all our research areas. People who study a wide range of topics such as trauma, difficult pasts, intrusive memories, monument wars, or future cognition encounter the topic of anxiety all the time. The realms that memory scholars deal with are saturated with collective angst about questions such as: *who we are as a nation? how should we interpret and portray the past? who owns the rights to national memories? how should we deal with historical traumas and difficult pasts such as genocide or civil war?*

Examples of the collective *anxiety about the past* are all around us today. In the United States, for instance, critical discussions of racism or sexism almost by necessity ignite memory wars on the historical legacies of founding fathers, slavery, first colonies, native Americans, and many more. 'The 1619 Project' is one such example of an attempt to recentre the history in order to reimagine national identity.[9] Various efforts to reframe and restructure historical narratives in museum exhibitions, for instance, or the tensions around removing or replacing monuments, can also be seen as an expression of collective anxiety that is not just about what is in the past, but the one that grapples with the question: *Who are we as a collective?* These tensions perpetuate political agendas because they are, in fact, indicative of more fundamental discords about the questions of identity and the collective future of the group. Quite often fuelled by past experiences and voiced through narratives about the past, clashes of polarized future scenarios can be evident in slogans such as Make America Great Again that question the vision of alternative progressive agendas. Memory becomes an anxious terrain when the future is at stake, because we use narratives about our collective past as scripts for contemplating both *who we are* and *what we can do.*

[8] More on the project see https://www.jsmf.org/grant/2020–2021/

[9] On "The 1619 Project" see Hannah-Jones, N. (2019) 'The 1619 Project: "The Idea of America"', *The New York Times Magazine*, 14 August. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html (Accessed: 3 June 2025)

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Yet, in memory studies, these anxieties are seldom addressed (if at all) on their own right. They are there without being acknowledged or scrutinized as a phenomenon that is different from the clinical notion of anxiety. Whilst there is growing media attention given to anxiety epidemics, mental health crises, generalized anxiety disorders, and so forth, these reports mainly focused on the condition that perpetuated on the level of individual mental and bodily experiences. Indeed, anxiety is often portrayed as a disorder that may be triggered by the social milieu but is nevertheless treated as an emotional and mental distress rooted in an individual's biographic trajectories.

The instances in which anxiety sweeps over populations in waves are usually attributed to the collectively shared conditions of uncertainty (Eklundh et al., 2018), rapid socio-economic transformations (Zhang, 2020), threatening environments (Moses, 2022), proliferation of violence (Das, 2007), information overload (Albertson and Kushner, 2015), and many more. With the rising statistics of anxiety cases worldwide, we saw how in popular media, anxiety became a diagnostic catchphrase for acknowledging the global predicaments of our age. But even in the narratives about the 'Age of Anxiety' (first coined in the context of World War One by Auden, 1947), anxiety's definition in terms of its sociocultural underpinnings and ramifications seemed to remain unquestioned.

This epistemic loophole was precisely the departure point of our conversations on memory and anxiety. Immersed in the discussions about memory, identity narratives, and future thought, we asked: Could we talk about anxiety that is manifested not in individual disorders and is not expressed as excessive worry causing mental distress to an individual facing their screen or walking down the crowded streets, but something that exists beyond individual minds and bodies and is expressed in collective behaviours other than worrying? This question was, in fact, rooted in a number of epistemic traditions in anthropology, sociology, cognitive sciences, as well as interdisciplinary scholarship on affect theory and philosophical thought on anxiety itself, all of which have, in different ways, tried to eschew methodological individualism. For instance, in memory scholarship, there is a longstanding tradition of thought that differentiates individual memory from collective memory (Wertsch and Roediger, 2008).

Scholars of memory from Halbwachs (1992) to Wertsch (2002, 2021) have long argued that memory – both in individual mind and in collective life – is mediated by cultural tools, and most often its functioning relies on media and technologies that serve as prosthetics to our cognitive functions. What is key to collective memory is that it may have a life of its own outside individual minds and brains and dwell in archives (Assmann, 1995), physical places (Nora, 1989), collectively shared mental templates (Werstch, 2008) or bodily habits (Connerton, 2006).

In a related way, the scholarship on affect theory (White, 2017) and anthropological treatment of feelings/emotions (Ahmed, 2014) has long argued that affective states on the collective level are not reducible to individual feelings, and they may prevail as embodied intensities that dwell beyond individual bodies, in physical environments (Navaro-Yashin, 2012), in infrastructure (Larkin, 2013), or material objects (Bennett, 2010), and atmospheres (Stewart, 2011) to which we are attuned at times in subliminal modes. These objects, which move or distress us, produce affect not necessarily as an acknowledged and conscious experience. Rather, they emit like a low-intensity vibration that weighs on the collective life.

With all that in mind, we wondered if collective anxiety can equally be considered as a culturally and historically situated phenomenon that affects us even when it has no roots in our individual mental experiences and even when we do not experience it as an *attack* of irrational and objectless fears. If collective anxiety is something that is not necessarily tied to individual minds, where in the collective's life can we look for it?

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When collectives are anxious: Bridging memory, anxiety, and future thought

Editors of this collection have come from an experience of studying national narratives as mediums of collective memory (Wertsch, 2021). We have explored how collective memory narrative underlies identity anxieties (Batiashvili, 2022) and serves as the basis of future cognition (Topçu, 2021). We dealt with distinct socio-political, cultural, and historical contexts (Russia, The United States, China, Turkey, Georgia, and the broader Caucasus) in which conflicting narratives seal out or clash with one another, or the memory narratives that voice counter-truths and are 'bivocal' in their conception of identity (Batiashvili, 2018), or the narratives that rely on distinct kinds of memory to conjure collective future scenarios.

In fact, the linkage we saw between anxiety, memory, and identity was reinforced by the philosophical, especially existentialist and phenomenological thought on anxiety (for a comprehensive overview of the philosophical history of anxiety, see Bergo 2021 and a forthcoming essay for this collection). Philosophers from Kierkegaard to Heidegger to Tillich have contemplated anxiety first and foremost as the primal quality of one's experience of the self. Anxiety is not a feeling of worry directed at an external threat, but is a frame of mind – an ontological disposition – that hovers over the question of *who am I?* and *what am I capable of?* This questioning of one's moral, ethical, and existential potentiality is inevitably tied to past experiences, to the knowledge that one has about the world in which it is immersed (which for us is manifested in collective memory narratives), but anxiety itself is a forward-leaping condition. Being 'ahead of itself' is how Heidegger describes the state in which one finds oneself in anxiety (Heidegger, 1962) in a sense that one experiences the present (and the self) in an intense anticipation of the future while scripting future possibilities based on past scenarios. Thus, coming from this line of philosophical thought and rooted in memory studies scholarship, our approach to anxiety is understandably tied to the notions of collective memory, identity narratives, and future thought. What do we mean by this?

Narratives mediate memory and anxiety

Conceptually, our scholarship pivots on the notion of 'narrative template' developed by James Wertsch (2021) – a collectively shared script that mediates remembering. Narrative templates are cultural and cognitive instruments that connect individual and collective minds and are perhaps the most important cultural tools humans have for making sense of the social world. In addition to being cognitive instruments, they underpin individual and collective identity projects. As a result, doubts about the story a group uses to make sense of itself amount to doubts about their identity, a recipe for anxiety.

The narratives of interest here exist in surface form as audible or written texts, but they also exist as schematic narrative templates that derive from having been socialized into contexts permeated by countless stories. Narrative templates are posited by analysts to understand patterns of human discourse and thought that reflect what Bartlett and Frederic (1977) called the 'effort after meaning'. As members of nations or other collectives, individuals rely on a core set of narrative templates to support the imagined communities to which they belong, which sets them off from other such communities.

In contrast to syllogistic reasoning and other forms of abstract thinking, narratives are 'natural' in the sense that learning to tell stories, at least at a basic level, does not require formal schooling. Furthermore, there are no known cultures in which narratives are not familiar and widely used. But this does not mean that narratives are simple or without internal organization. Indeed, they have a complex internal organization in the form of a 'plot' built around a beginning, middle, and end. The logic of emplotment 'grasps together'

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(Ricœur, 2004) information about temporally distributed events into a single organized whole and assigns events and characters meaning by virtue of their place in a story.

The 'sense of an ending' (Kermode, 2000) in a plot is particularly important in giving meaning to events. The First Battle at Bull Run in the American Civil War, for example, took on a much different meaning after the war ended than when it occurred in 1861. The very fact that 'first' became part of its eventual appellation means that its full significance came into view only as the story progressed to its end. In general, the significance of events and characters often comes into focus only when a narrative concludes. Peter Brooks describes this as part of the 'strange logic' of narratives where 'the end writes the beginning and shapes the middle... [and] everything is transformed by the structuring presence of the end to come' (Brooks, 1984, xi).

Narratives about past events usually have a final, concrete ending, but in some cases, narratives that guide our thinking have conclusions that remain unspecified. This is the case for 'aspirational narratives' that guide how we imagine the projected life story of individuals or groups. Instead of having a concrete final conclusion such as that found in a narrative about a historical battle, these narratives have an imagined outcome or 'telos' in the future. For an individual, this could be an aspirational life story about becoming a teacher or good parent, and for a nation, the telos might be a strong, respected nation, or a beacon of democracy.

Alongside positive teloi, it is possible to envision a negative future course of events as a telos. Apocalyptic narratives are a case in point, as are 'grievance narratives' that envision unending retribution as the main goal of the future. The sense of an ending in these latter narratives focuses on harming or even destroying others, and they are frequently a mainstay in the discourse of populism.

Aspirational narratives shape not only our understanding of what *is*, but what *should* be. The moral philosopher MacIntyre argued that we decide what we should do by knowing what stories of which we are a part (1984). If the basic American story is about a city on a hill, that tells the community what it should do to live up to it. The narratives we use in this regard are seldom the product of individual inspiration. Instead, they are drawn from a 'stock of stories' that provide a society's 'initial dramatic resources' and distinguish it from other societies (MacIntyre, 1984). Different communities can have quite different dramatic resources, which can be the source of misunderstanding and conflict.

To sum up, narratives are powerful and ubiquitous cultural tools that shape discourse, thought, and identity. Narrative templates play an especially important role because they function in automatic, unconscious ways that escape our attention, making them hard to detect and manage. Their influence can be so powerful that they can seem to do some of our thinking and speaking for us, and efforts to bring these stories into question amount to a challenge to identity, worldview, and the source of anxiety.

Memory narratives shape future thought

Scholars of collective memory have long explored various ways that collectively interpreting the present or conjuring up the future, including political/social possibilities, are shaped by narratives of the past. Building on Tulving's (1985) conceptualization of mental time travel, a significant body of literature has emerged over the past two decades, focusing on episodic memory and future thinking (Szpunar, 2010; Schacter et al., 2017). Utilizing diverse methodological tools such as case studies of amnesia, behavioural experiments, and neuroimaging, this line of research consistently demonstrates a strong connection between remembering the personal past and imagining the personal future. Schacter and colleagues, through the *constructive episodic simulation hypothesis*, further argue that future thinking is an

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essential component of the memory system, wherein individuals draw upon their personal past to creatively construct and envision their personal future (Schacter and Addis, 2007).

How about the collective future? Do people rely on their remembrances of the collective past when they envision the collective future? The newly emerging psychological literature on collective mental time travel addresses these questions (Merck et al., 2016; Szpunar and Szpunar, 2016; Topçu and Hirst, 2022). Research focusing on personal and collective cognition (Shrikanth et al., 2018), national memory and future thinking (Öner and Gülgöz, 2020; Topçu and Hirst, 2020), implicit temporal trajectories (Yamashiro and Roediger, 2019) all show that despite certain differences between these two temporalities, there is a marked connection between collective remembering and future thinking. Through experimental studies, Topçu (2021) also shows that when people remember the collective past through national narratives, they are more likely to imagine the collective future along the lines of these narratives.

How does all this work relate to collective anxiety? Social psychological literature on collective angst speaks to this question to some extent. Wohl and colleagues define collective angst as 'a group-based emotion that stems from concern for the future vitality of one's social group' (Wohl et al., 2012, 379). They utilize psychological scales to measure people's experience of collective angst for their social groups. Their work shows that an increased experience of collective angst leads to both negative attitudes towards the outgroup and strengthening behaviours towards the ingroup (Wohl et al., 2012). Collective angst is also related to the temporalities discussed throughout this introduction. When people perceive discontinuity between their groups' past and present, they feel more collective angst (Jetten and Wohl 2012). The remembrance of past injustices to the collective group also leads to an increased experience of collective angst for the group's future (Wohl and Branscombe, 2009; Wohl et al., 2010). Another finding that underscores the strong connection between memory and anxiety is the significant relation between collective angst and collective nostalgia (Smeekes et al., 2018).

Thus, we take as our point of departure that memory (whether of past traumas, failures, or triumphs) in its various enunciations (from communicative to embodied to materially situated) shapes identity anxieties and thus anxious anticipation of the possible future. Part of this involves contemplating anxiety as a form of future thinking without closure, trapped in memory narratives. The idea that anxiety is future-oriented, but fuelled by the memory of the past, is a common thread of thought from psychoanalytic to existentialist to cognitive approaches. Widely accepted psychological definitions tell us that, unlike fear, anxiety has no real object and is an anticipatory experience directed at possible future dangers. In contrast to nostalgia, trauma, and grief, anxiety is a forward-leaping disturbance. Yet, against the prevailing psychological paradigms, one can argue that in anxiety, the future is not merely uncertain, blurry, opaque, or outright threatening. Rather, it is a terrain of contradictory possibilities that play out in different scripts of action depending on the identity schemas that underlie these scripts.

Existing scholarly discussions around anxiety suggest the need for a stronger collaboration between the seemingly disparate lines of psychological research that focus on collective mental time travel and collective angst to have a more grounded understanding of the mind's role in sociocultural expressions of anxiety. How do cognitive mechanisms involved in memory and future thinking influence collective anxiety? When people feel anxious about existential threats like upcoming elections, climate change, nuclear disasters, and pandemics, do they engage in reconstructions of the past and imaginations of the future? How does collective nostalgia figure in people's anxiety-driven mental time travel to the collective past and future?

Some of the contributors to this collection (Batiashvili, Topçu, Wertsch, Roediger) have responded to these questions in the scope of our project. Through an interdisciplinary effort

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– informed by psychological and anthropological approaches – we designed an experimental study to interrogate the relationship between collective memory, future thinking, and anxiety. The survey was carried out in Turkey (2023), Georgia (2024), and the United States (2024) prior to the latest (2023–2024) presidential and parliamentary elections. It explored how people conjure collective future scenarios in anticipation of the decisive elections (which was the case in all three settings, given the radically polarized political contexts).

We ask what kind of possible dangers and threats these scenarios entail and how does triggering collective or personal memories intensify (or not) anxiety about the envisioned threat. The results of the study demonstrate the complex relationship between memory and anxiety. For instance, the data shows that the extent to which memory intensifies or soothes anxiety depends on the sociocultural contexts and existing identity narratives that mediate future thinking. We also saw that triggering anxiety about the possible future blurs the boundary between personal and collective past, and individual biographies become submerged in collective memory narratives (especially evident in Georgian data). Similarly, the prevalent categories of threats or dangers that people envision in one or another scenario (depending on the election outcome) have reference points to the shared collective memories, but are also reflective of the vocabularies and discourses circulating in social media or political propaganda. In general, this study revealed the need to engage in a broader dialogue between different disciplines and strands of scholarship to gain a better understanding of the memory–anxiety nexus.

Media narratives aggravate anxiety

Both our discussions and the data from our studies brought us to the questions that complicate the notion of anxiety: the ways in which it is manifested and the conditions under which it thrives. In particular, these questions concern anxiety's ability to move between cultural domains – such as collective memory and identity narratives – and psychological experiences, to transmute from the collective angst into individual mental disorders. For instance, if we use past scenarios to think up the future (as shown in the literature discussed above), does this mean that collective memory encultures us into particular kinds of anxieties by telling us what to anticipate or what to fear? Similarly, do polarized realities projected through and produced by opposed media discourses produce anxieties that shape our collective lives but are not detectable in the form of mental health problems?

The counternarratives that have proliferated in today's ideologically opposed media domains have become the major instrument of control for those in power. Emergent media wars (Happer et al., 2018) and radicalization (Hoskins et al., 2011) not only have political but also psychological ramifications. In some cases, this means creating rifts through affective (rather than ideological) polarization (which might be the case in Georgia, for instance). The role of the polarized media is extremely powerful in proliferating mutually exclusive scenarios of the past, present, and future. Each of us on a daily basis has to search through multiple accounts of 'what is happening?', 'what happened in the past?', and 'what will happen in the future?' Indeed, such polarized virtual realities, produced by both mainstream and social media narratives, set the stage for the pre-election studies we conducted in Turkey, Georgia, and the United States.

There is a thought-provoking body of literature concerned with how media perpetuates narratives that are intended to either assuage or engender anxiety. For instance, in relation to terrorism and climate change, Richard Grusin (2010) discusses how global media outlets project potential, possible, and hypothetical futures that are not meant to prevent anything from happening but rather to 'premediate' collective anticipation, in other words, to affectively prime audiences and maintain a low-level anxiety. On the other hand, Wendy Chun (2016) argues that the logic of networked digital media is in fact 'crisis' where

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everything that is new becomes old instantly and that everything old might become new again without a moment's notice. The 'crisis' media then engenders a sense of anxiety by creating the need to constantly keep up and constantly be on guard. This is part of the 'data attention' war that Matthew Ford and Andrew Hoskins (2022) examine, showing how media weaponizes our attention in the contexts of war and conflict as it blurs the boundary between participants and audiences.

When it comes to memory and anxiety in a context of such 'crisis' media, we also see at times a paradoxical juxtaposition of how 'the unprecedented' is often covered using the old historical templates. While Russia is the most notable case of using World War Two memory templates in its war against Ukraine, Zelizer (2022) highlights how coverage of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is essentially a recycling of Cold War strategies. Piotr Szpunar (2012) has argued that the same Cold War templates are used in the media reporting on terrorism to propagate the narratives about enemies hiding in plain sight (the 'Double' rather than the 'Other') tied to issues of premediation above.

All of this, of course, begs the question on the emergent modes of anxiety that we experience as 'users' – the role that is itself loaded with multiple ambivalences about identity, agency, involvement, and accountability. The focus on media radicalization and social networks as venues (or sources) for the emergent modes of anxiety complicates the question of anxiety's relation to memory as well as its sociocultural underpinnings. For instance, when it comes to memory in relation to digital space, one should take note of the emerging phenomena such as 'platformization of memory' (Smit et al., 2024) explored in a recently published *Memory, Mind, Media* special collection. At the same time, Hoskins (2024) outlined how generative AI has created a tipping point that brings the very notion of memory into question, since 'AI-prompted memories are generated rather than retrieved. The result is the creation of a new kind of past that never really existed before' (2). So, if the point of the sociocultural approach to anxiety is to attend to milieus of memory or narratives that frame the questions on what is happening? or what will happen? now we grapple with the question of *which memories* and *whose narratives*?

The sociocultural approach suggests that there are culturally specific aspects of anxiety, even if anxiety is, as Heidegger notes, a primary and universal existential state (1962). But at the same time, in the era of transnational media and pop-culture consumerism, there are 'travelling memories' that transcend cultural or national boundaries (Erll, 2011), as well as globally circulating anxieties that populate and collide in the shared virtual spaces. For instance, whose narratives and anxieties are revealed in popular culture narratives such as 'Oppenheimer', 'Barbie', or 'The Last of Us'? All of them point to the apocalyptic stories posed by the human-made dangers of nuclear war, plastic pollution, and pandemics. The environmentalist Tyler Austin has argued that '"Barbie" and "Oppenheimer" tell the same terrifying story', and that story is about the damage we humans have done to the planet with the use of plastic and nuclear material.[10]

Many dimensions of these anxieties, however, are not so universal. Communities that grapple with wars, severe economic crises, and starvation often do not really have space to worry about the shortening life-span of a viable planet or, more importantly, have no say in solving problems of this magnitude due to their marginalized and peripheral position. One could argue, for instance, that the movie 'Oppenheimer' is built on an exclusively American memory of nuclear fear[11]; a fear that was re-awakened by the Russian aggression in Ukraine.

[10] Harper, T.A. (2023) '"Barbie" and "Oppenheimer" tell the same terrifying story', The Washington Post, 19 July. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/07/19/barbie-oppenheimer-movies-anthropocene/ (accessed 31July2025)

[11] De Visé,D. (2022) 'Americans' nuclear fears surge to highest levels since Cold War', The Hill, 14 October. Available at: https://thehill.com/policy/defense/3687396-americans-nuclear-fears-surge-to-highest-levels-since-cold-war/ (accessed 31July2025).

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And that this fear is tied closely to the very particular white American guilt, which does not resonate with societies in, say, a small country like Georgia. Yet, the angst about the planet's future, whether expressed in eco anxieties or geopolitical ones, is transmitted and shared across societies as distinct as the United States, Georgia, Turkey, and Russia, even if they are expressed in diverse vocabularies and different intensities.

These are just some of the approaches that this collection will enable. We invite scholars who can contribute to understanding the many modalities of collective anxieties that are tied, in one way or another, to the group's collective remembering. But also, we seek to take into account the larger predicament of our age: the impact of media technologies on how anxieties are proliferated, shared, and rendered obscure or intelligible.

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