

Introduction: social memory and hypermodernity

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The terms “collective memory” and “social memory” have been appearing in the literature of sociology since the beginning of the discipline’s institutionalisation in the late nineteenth century (we shall return to this point), and have stimulated a wide range of conceptual analyses since the mid-twentieth century. Moreover, between the 1920s and 1940s they were systematically theorised by Maurice Halbwachs,¹ an author whose work in this field was rediscovered only fifteen years ago. They are now, in the twenty-first century, firmly embedded in common knowledge. In French, for example, a Google™ search for the Durkheimian term *fait social* (social fact), conducted in mid-July 2008, revealed that there were 10.2 times more web pages from general sources than there were scholarly articles or documents indexed by Google Scholar™, whereas for the Halbwachsian term *mémoire collective* (collective memory), this factor was more than three times higher, at 35.4. Hence, within the general domain of social memory (as opposed to the more specialised domain of scholarly memory), the term “collective memory” yielded results three times higher than one of the most emblematic terms of sociology.² It is precisely in the course of the last fifteen years that this increase has taken place, as Figure 1 indicates. The graph is based on lexicometrical sequences calculated by means of Google Ngram™ from the American English corpus digitalised by Google Books™.³

Globalising collective memory

Should we be surprised by this increase? So extreme and widespread were the atrocities of the twentieth

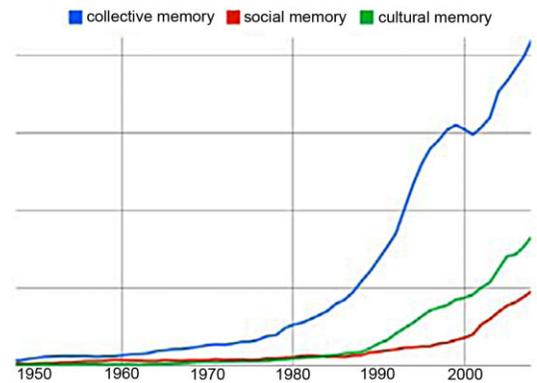


FIGURE 1. Annual proportions, by date of publication (1950–2008), of the texts in American English digitalised by Google Books™ up to 2010 and which contain the terms “collective memory”, “social memory” and “cultural memory”.

century that with the passing of time, the victims were compelled to bear witness so that later generations would maintain a shared memory of these horrors and, as part of the same process, experts and analysts of the forms this maintenance took would construct an elaborate corpus of knowledge. Of course, the Shoah and the other crimes perpetrated by the Nazi regime left a permanent scar on twentieth-century human consciousness; but there were many other examples of totalitarian barbarity and several genocides. Moreover, profound changes occurred in the more general consciousness, which could henceforth contemplate the horrors of wars that were once presented as epics of heroism, as well as the shameful history of slavery, colonial exploitation, and abject complicity in American and European dictatorships in both West and East.⁴ And there is more, for when drafting this sordid inven-

tory, we tend to think first of political and military violence. But collective memory also encompasses economic disasters, health crises, and the intimate horrors of sexual violence. Contemporary consciousness seeks ways to cope with these cruel *phenomena*, to cope with infamy, and often with its own limitations.

The current focus on issues of memory is intense, but such issues were not neglected in the more distant past. Indeed, this is why the sociological approach is so valuable: we are obliged to acknowledge that every society, every community with a shared destiny, lives through the collective memory it maintains. Religious and military institutions once exercised a kind of quasi-monopoly over the maintenance of the legitimate memory of political and military violence. Artists and thinkers sometimes competed with them, which seems all the more incredible given the power of these institutions. The cultural and technical order is now very different: we are all confronted with a constant stream of images from the past. They may be more or less authentic, or reinvented, but it matters little. Everyone has the technical means to mobilise them easily; cultural industries and great media enterprises ceaselessly produce sophisticated aids, material and virtual, for the memories we share in diverse ways. To be sure, earlier generations also had a public, communal, and even family memory of the worst violence of the past, as the various ways in which the memory of religious wars is maintained throughout Europe amply demonstrates. What is unique to us today is the inexhaustible supply of material generated by new technologies, its accessibility, and the fact that ex-

periences of the horrors of the twentieth century are shared on a global scale.

The globalisation of social memory – accompanied by profound mutations in national and local collective memories – extends to academic research into the phenomena of social and collective memory. The change of scale has in the latter case led to profound modifications of the ways in which specialised texts and ideas circulate at international level. The principal aim of this issue is to respond to this situation once we have noted the existence of two separate dynamics which, when combined, can only enhance the present current of research. In effect, research into phenomena of collective memory now tends to be institutionalised in the form of “memory studies” (Gensburger 2011; Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy 2011), notably in the English language. This process has been affecting numerous academic fields for several decades: according to the logic of “studies”, specialists from various disciplines focus on a specific domain. The advantage of this approach is of course the maintenance of a high level of specialisation and the formation of research communities and international networks which can process the latest developments in the domain.

This type of thematic grouping is well adapted to the frameworks a functionalist sociology of the sciences has assigned to academic professionalism since Talcott Parsons. It can just as well be analysed from the perspective of the Halbwachsian theory of memory: the collective memory of specialists of collective memory is thus consolidated, and this can be a guarantee of the quality of the joint endeavour. But Parsonian functionalism had

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difficulty in assessing what the Halbwachsian concept of *reworking* demonstrates much more clearly (another point to which we shall return): by manipulating the body of work on memory and shaping it around a prioritised domain, we sever more general works from their reference framework. Halbwachs, Benjamin and Ricoeur, for example, were not engaged in “memory studies”; they were philosophers who approached issues of memory as part of an undertaking which sought to establish the coherence of all the elements involved. This was particularly true of Maurice Halbwachs, who was a sociologist in the sense that he explored the renewal of philosophy in the first half of the twentieth century by means of Durkheim’s sociological method. Given the frequency of references to the Halbwachs corpus in “memory studies”, it is therefore important to emphasise the coherence of his theoretical apparatus – which falls within the province of general sociology – and to show how it operates in cases that can also be interpreted by other branches of the social sciences.

There is no simple solution here: it is not a matter of opting for “studies” to the detriment of a particular discipline – philosophy, general sociology, etc., or of standing in opposition to any specialised field. The tension between domain and discipline needs to be maintained.⁵ Likewise, the variability of this tension in the diverse working languages employed needs to be taken seriously. Here too, we are faced with the contemporary, globalised conditions that govern the exercise of scholarship. The objective heterogeneity of the social spaces in which this global scientific labour is conducted is a fact, and stands in marked contrast to the illusion, purveyed by a functionalist sociology of the sciences, of the professionalisation of disciplines or competences relevant to a specific domain. However, we still fear being ostracised, as if we had not respected the rules of an over-idealised academic community. But we must accept the society of scholars for what it is, recognise the diverse conditions that govern the profession, and adopt the most reasonable position, which means acknowledging the tension between the dynamic of “studies” and the logic of disciplinary requirements, including their variability according to working languages and geographical location. This is not simply a matter of accommodation! It is radically constructive as soon as we realise, as in the present case of social and collec-

tive memory, that empirical and theoretical censorship and self-censorship in research are themselves extremely variable and will depend on the specific relationship we maintain collectively, wherever we work, with political, military, community, and national memory. An aspect that is conceivable from the perspective of a general sociological theory of collective memory but is particularly difficult to express in a certain case, or one that has escaped attention in certain thematically or geographically specialised research, can be highlighted by another case that may, at first, have seemed very different. Therefore, the confrontation – rather than the comparison – of the different articles gathered in this issue offers a range of observations and questions that individual readers can then mobilise for their own purposes. Here again, there is no overarching stance, no all-encompassing theory, but a thoughtful contribution to an acknowledged process – the globalisation of academic research into the phenomena of social memory – formulated in such a way that every reader, no matter where, is afforded the possibility of combating the unsayable in whatever form they encounter it.

It was Adorno who reminded us that “all reification is forgetting” and the implications of such a statement certainly resonate within a hyper-modern and globalised world characterised by both the articulation of difference and its rapid homogenisation. Following from this, the homogenising effects of globalisation contain within them also the capacity to transform “global citizens” into things, but scouring or recalibrating both collective and individual memory. In other words, one’s alterity and singularity, one’s capacity to escape reification, is dependent upon one’s ability to negotiate and express memory traces that defy and challenge integrated world capitalism and empire. Memory is thus not a simple psychological phenomenon or “something one does”, but rather a space of agon wherein identity is both constructed and effaced. And although Halbwachs was correct to insist on the material and social origins of memory, his theses are called into question by a global regime that insists on imploding the social through new forms of flexibility and transforming matter into simulacra in a moment where objects and things are scoured of their meanings along with the psyches that previously cherished them. In such a context, memory cannot be considered *sui generis* or always and already there insofar as one can be

alienated from one's memories just as one is alienated from certain modes of know-how, being, and habit, in a world typified by uprooting which is both mourned and celebrated.

From collective memory to social memory and back

The point of departure for conscious manifestations of memory is recollection, in particular that of direct witnesses. This initial element is often regarded as a simple matter, but Maurice Halbwachs envisaged it in a complex, counter-intuitive way. Founded on the diversity of emotions, *the recollection of contemporaries* lacks consistency; it can be more alive or more painful for some than for others. This recollection is then inscribed in an episode of the singular relationship each person has to the past moment; in this respect it can be compared to the distinctive feature of charisma which, according to Max Weber, has as a principle the singularity, or at least what is thought to be the singularity, of the disciple's identification with the authority of the leader (Weber [1921] 1972: 142–148). It cannot be shared unless there is a transformation which involves the intervention of elements of other representations; it requires some form of routinisation. In 1941, Halbwachs employed the term *historical memory* to indicate the initial state of recollections that contemporary witnesses to past events may have shared.⁶ It is inscribed in the precise locations where the events unfolded. It calls for, in accordance with G r me Truc's work on sites that have suffered attacks (in this issue), an essentially ethnographic methodology. After the contemporary witnesses have died, all that remains is the rivalry of collective memories that are already partly formed. This initial data is crucial insofar as it makes it impossible for the historian or the sociologist to reach, directly or conjecturally, the experience of those who have gone before.⁷

Testimony, which is very different to recollection, was also conceptualised by Halbwachs. The witness must adopt a paradoxical series of antagonistic positions with regard to the social groups with which he is associated: "All testimony . . . should meet these contradictory conditions: the witness leaves the group when he observes sensitive facts, and in order to report them, he returns to the group." In addition "[the witness] must successively, and

almost at the same moment, discard and then re-assume the nature of a member of society" ([1941] 2008: 118). As we can see, the kind of testimony analysed from this sociological perspective is not simply testimony in the legal or familiar sense of the term. This distance, and the social action involved in its reduction, is clear from the case of testimony that leads to the attribution of the title "Righteous Among the Nations" to people who assisted Jews threatened by the Nazi's extermination policy, as Sarah Gensburger shows (in this issue).

Armed with these two elements, we can go on to develop the idea of *social memory*, that is, the work of the people that make up diverse reference groups, and therefore the work of society, in which the memory of the past and the meaning of what it contains are woven. Halbwachs usually attached the adjective "social" to the word "memory" when discussing society in general, and applied the adjective "collective" when dealing with a specific group, one which has been explicitly identified and whose sociological description is important to the analysis. In this respect Halbwachs followed Durkheim, and in neither case does "collective" indicate a rudimentary crypto-Marxism. It should also be noted that it makes little sense to pluralise the term ("social memories"), for it characterises the most general position of the problem of memory from the sociological perspective, even if this level of generality may appear to be somewhat amorphous and lacking a positive collective life (see [1941] 2008). In other words, social memory is the vaster collective memory, the memory that has been least shaped by the former collective action of a more or less homogeneous group or by diverse social groups. Everybody draws material from social memory in order to form the sense, and indeed the idea, of history. The unbridled development of material supports for social memory that began in the twentieth century (the sociology of technology would certainly measure it as exponential), its impact on the media, on the cultures of the fixed, cinematographic and virtual image and on literary memory, all represent opportunities for new and methodical research into the polymorphous domain of social memory.⁸

As Paolo Jedlowski's study of the memory of Italian colonialism shows, social memory is constructed from a combination of elements of public memory and the interventions of critical, indeed self-critical memory (in this issue). A little less than a century ago, social memory could be imagined as

a waterway on the sluggish current of which the hardened memories of social groups floated like rafts of timber ([1925] 1994, p. 289). Given the range of contemporary technological aids, the waterway has developed a combination of fast-running currents and cross-currents: the raft is tossed on the rapids of the modern media. Is social memory thus condemned to drift helplessly on turbulent waters? This concern is in itself enough to justify a re-examination, under conditions appropriate to the twenty-first century, of the ebb and flow of social memory. When recording the turbulence, storms and perils of various waterways and seas, we do not ignore the existence of the ocean. The ocean is where we learn to navigate, to understand the powerful currents that represent the phenomena of collective memory, and to act accordingly.

Unlike social memory, *collective memory* is, in strict terms, characteristic of the group or community that sustains it, whether deliberately or not. Duration has shaped a shared experience which governs a shared relationship with the vestiges of the past. In other words, the shared duration that has been accomplished invests these traces with meaning and shapes their interpretation as it is relevant to the communal experience under consideration. Strictly speaking – although it would be rigorous and perhaps contrary to the rhetoric of “storytelling” – we should not therefore employ the term “collective memory” unless we make it clear what community of effective historical experience we are implicitly referring to, and we should also clarify the period during which this collective memory has been formed. For example, this is not only the collective memory of musicians, but also the collective memory formed *by* musicians between the creation of Wagner’s oeuvre and 1939 ([1949] 1997, ch.1).

Thus the vast edifice of social memory is sustained by the diversity of collective memories. As an example, Wikipedia, when taken in its entirety, is a splendid manifestation of the hypertextual expression of globalised social memory as it currently exists. But as soon as we open an article, switch between languages, or move from one cross-reference to the next, we are forced to note that the corpus is anything but harmonious or even coherent. In effect, every article proceeds from the dynamic of a specialised collective memory (which may even be restricted to a marginal group) or from the tension between the diverse memories grouped under the same heading. A printed diction-

ary affords the reader a degree of stability, but with Wikipedia the tensions between collective memories are manifest. This is often apparent when we click on the online history of each article, something that we once attempted to ascertain by scrutinising the unpublished variants that preceded the printed version of a manuscript. The overall perspective confuses the more traditional or specialised reader. Moreover, the relation between the realisation of social memory and manifestations of specialised collective memories is changing. The people who regulate the various levels of Wikipedia’s hierarchy tend to aim for the consolidation of the whole, whereas specialised contributors tend to place more emphasis on the jurisdictions covered in the articles. The system is capable of evolution, with the edifice (social memory) dominating the prevailing currents of its structure (collective memories), or flexing under their constraints until it breaks up into specialised “wiki” multiples.

Cultural memory or the culture of memory?

To what extent can we speak of *cultural memory*? That the term is most frequently employed in the German-speaking world (*kulturelle Gedächtnis*) is due to reception of the work of Jan and Aleida Assmann, who sought to define the idea by referring initially to *The Social Frameworks of Memory* ([1925] 1994), that is, to the first stage of Halbwachs’ theory, and therefore to positions which he constantly revised in order to arrive at the concepts we are recapitulating here. Jan Assmann has used Egyptian archaeology to identify very ancient and more recent forms of a scholarly memory of antiquity (J. Assmann 1992, 1995). Aleida Assmann has studied some of the current modalities of cultural memory (A. Assmann, 1999, 2006; A. Assmann and Hart 1993). This body of work branches off from the first Halbwachsian theory of memory (that of 1925), and the sociologist himself went on to follow another path. The Assmanns focus on the concept of collective memory in relation to written culture, whereas for twenty years, Halbwachs (caught as he was between his two masters, Émile Durkheim and Henri Bergson) concentrated on the more general relations between matter, memory, and consciousness. One would therefore observe the existence of a scholastic rivalry between “collective memory”

and “cultural memory” which has, in part, contributed to a larger theoretical misunderstanding.

This kind of misunderstanding, induced by the circulation of theoretical studies in various languages – notably French, English, and German – occurs so frequently in intellectual history that it is quite reasonable to regard it as one of the necessary conditions for the formulation and circulation of theories. It is clear that the maintenance of a sociological memory, the bearer of the history of scholarly thought on collective memory, can itself be taken as a specific case of collective memory, that of a specialised scholarly memory. By the end of the nineteenth century, the point at which the discipline of sociology emerged, the notions of “collective memory” and “social memory” had become interwoven. Indeed, for the French positivist Guillaume De Greef, history was the “recording organ of the collective memory” from which religions drew their social functions (De Greef 1893, ch.1). In Chicago, a few years later, it was precisely this aggregative function of human experience that captured the attention of the sociologist George Edgar Vincent: “At any given moment the traditions of a society, economic, legal, religious, scientific, artistic, and political, may be thought of as social products forming in the aggregate the ‘social memory’” (Vincent 1897, p.15). Vincent was attentive to the work of his contemporaries, and especially to Durkheim, but he drew his idea directly from De Greef’s social transformism (De Greef 1895, p.9), and justified it by means of Gabriel Tarde’s theory of imitation, which is where we come across the term “social memory”: “Imitation . . . corresponds exactly to memory; in effect it is in the form of social memory, which is essential to every action, necessary at any given moment of social life, that memory constantly and essentially operates in the mind” (Tarde 1895, p.123). By drawing together strands from De Greef, Durkheim, and Tarde, Vincent demonstrated an eclecticism that would have astonished his Parisian contemporaries. Halbwachs could not adopt such a composite social metaphysics. As already mentioned, beginning with the work of Durkheim and De Greef, he focused on the flaws he perceived in the work of his Paris-based seniors, and was also fully aware of the research then being conducted by Bergson and Lévy-Bruhl. Unlike Vincent, who federated inconsistent theories, he deliberately sought to refine concepts of social time, social space, and collective memory in order to create a

robust theoretical framework, a process that involved the integration of some of the debates concerning the renewal of the philosophy of knowledge – if not its phenomenological subversion – that flourished during the 1920s and 30s. It is therefore possible to link the discussion of collective memory to some of the issues that pre-occupied leading continental philosophers in the mid-twentieth century, as the wide range of philosophical references in the articles collected for the present issue indicate. At this point, however, we should refer to the final scene of Orson Welles’ *The Lady from Shanghai* (1946): the theoretical labyrinth is a perilous hall of mirrors.⁹

From a strictly Halbwachsian point of view, *kulturelle Gedächtnis* possesses all the properties of collective memory as the sociologist understood it, or at least in terms of the maintenance of forms of culture. This also applies to more recent forms, whether literary, cinematographic or artistic. That is quite clear in the article Sabine Moller devotes to the modalities of cultural memory in the United States, using the film *Forrest Gump* (1994) and its reception as an example (in this issue). But, we may argue, anything concerning a system of representations can be reduced to a question of culture. It is not quite as simple as that, unless we adopt a culturalist hypothesis regarding the definition of social facts. As we know, the point is a delicate one and has stimulated much debate. Strict adherence to the final version of the Halbwachsian framework reveals that cultural memory of the sort discussed by the Assmanns sometimes concerns certain aspects of scholarly and intellectual memory (in the sense that it may be conveyed by specialists or literary groups), while at others it concerns more general aspects of social memory. Rather than exchange the designation of the concept for a term that is itself susceptible to misunderstanding, we prefer to clarify the conceptual framework that Halbwachs refined in several stages. Moreover, a further difficulty would arise if we applied the concept of cultural memory. In German, there are two academic registers: *Sozialwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften*. *Kultur* falls within the province of the second. Social facts, however, are the business of the social sciences. In order to extricate ourselves from the traps set by different languages we can turn to Reinhart Koselleck, who notes that the temporalities accepted by what we understand as social history and those covered by intellectual history do not necessarily have the same rhythms

(Koselleck 1972, 1986). This brings us back to Halbwachsian territory: the differentiation of social time and space.

The dynamics of “reworking” (*remaniements*)

Halbwachs preferred to focus on social dynamics, hence his profound revision of Durkheim’s sociology. The disciple developed concepts of time and social space, shaping them as he refined his theory of collective memory (Jaisson 2008). The work he conducted between the 1920s and 40s was a response – as surprising as it may seem today, when sociology and the various “studies” proclaim their autonomy and ignore their dependence on other domains – to the debates in Europe stimulated by developments in physics and philosophy, new approaches to concepts of time and space.

Halbwachs took great interest in the phenomenological trend in German philosophy (chiefly the work of Cassirer, Husserl, and Heidegger) (Brian 2008). However, he knew the risks of creating speculative dialogues between contemporary thinkers and their successors in hopes of moving beyond the amnesia that plagued their conceptual itineraries. But when we turn to the Halbwachsian analytical framework, we may retrospectively note the existence of a word that has a specific meaning, one that applies to most of the operations discussed in the corpus that deals with collective memory. It is the word “reworking” (*remaniements*). In effect, how does the action of time operate? In what space do the combined actions of those who make up a community, the actions that produce its collective memory and distinguish it from other groups, take place? Their application points are the vestiges of the past which, from a Durkheimian perspective, have two modalities: material sites and systems of representations. In both cases, Halbwachs restates such collective action by means of the term “reworking”: “reworking[s] of the material structures of society” (1938a, p.181) and the reworking of the frameworks of memory ([1925] 1994, p.237).

He thus describes the *reworking of traditions*, and responds in passing to certain objections once raised by the historian Marc Bloch, notably concerning Saint Mark’s formulation of Christian doctrine ([1941] 2008). For instance, reworking is occurring in Europe today, as national memories are supplanted by a budding European memory.

This process is analysed by Benjamin Nienass and Ross Poole (in this issue): “Creating a European memory will be part of creating a European identity, one that recognises an identity with the historical past, even one fragmented by political borders and rivalries, but also a difference from it”.

But there is also the *reworking of places*. This is, first of all, the *reinvestment of places* by a new form of collective memory rather than their simple annexation by means of the material and violent grip the members of a group maintain on the vestiges of the past. Reinvestment is achieved through a mobilisation and symbolic reorganisation of places; it can indeed occur through annexation, but is more often the result of a reworking of traditions ([1941] 2008, pp.134–7). Moreover, it is also a system of transactions insofar as reinvestments are not free: they induce exchanges between the groups involved, accompanied by symbolic effects which are highlighted as such in Halbwachs’ three texts on memory. Transactions are not necessarily conducted on an equal footing, and their assessment probably depends on the perspective adopted. Whatever the case, Halbwachs set himself the task of studying their effects.

Finally, there are *moments of consolidation*. Halbwachs observes that the recurrence of experiences, even heterogeneous ones, in a particular location favours the consolidation of collective memory ([1941] 2008, p.145). He also envisages competition between places and between traditions. “Concentration in one particular place, the dividing up of space, duality in contrasting regions: these are the familiar means that groups of people employ, not only churches but also other communities, families, nations, etc., to establish and organise their recollections of places and, beyond that, of time, events and people” ([1941] 2008, p.147). Consequently, a collective memory will endure over the course of centuries because it has, necessarily, been divided up; because it can travel back and forth between places, conveyed by separate elements of tradition. Strictly speaking, this circulation and competition constitutes the collective life of memory. Thus, there is no place of memory which is not ephemeral just as there is no claim to memory which is not competitive ([1941] 2008, pp.148–150). In the twenty-first century, this stage of consolidation may be modified by the creation of the knowledge economy and its economic and legal ownership. This is the question approached by Susanne Küchler (in this issue). If

we restrict the issue to the phenomena of marketisation, the prognosis is pessimistic, but it suggests, bearing in mind that every economic transaction is based on a transaction between present, past, and future, that economic activity develops its own mechanisms for exercising memory ([1949] 1997, pp.222–223), and therefore that we are faced with a conflict between constituted and mobile collective memories.¹⁰ In such a situation, the outcome is hard to predict.

The structural and mobile conception of social groups that Halbwachs sketches briefly in a few pages is particularly fertile, for it enables us to articulate a site and its material vestiges, the social time pertaining to a group which identifies itself through a shared memory, its rhythms, and the landmarks it may share with other social times, and, finally, the spatialised structure of competition between discrete groups.¹¹ However, we should return to questions of places and how they relate to memory, questions for which the collective study led by Pierre Nora (Nora 1984–1992) opened a new historiographical register in the 1980s, although it tended to focus on sets of problems which now appear to be overly simple, a danger that Lucette Valensi envisaged fifteen years ago (Valensi 1995). In this issue, G r me Truc examines the sites of attacks where the arbitrary nature of the violence perpetrated often seems to defy expression. Such sites are highly appropriate for revealing the tensions and conflicts provided that we analyse both “what places do to memory” and “what memory does to places” (see this issue).

Social memory and the logic of action

The fact that early twenty-first century sociology accords great importance to the social theory of *action* calls for a word of caution. Halbwachs modified his use of the term between 1925 and 1941. As described in his first book, groups, frameworks, and collective memory are susceptible to collective action. This “action” is understood as an effect in the way that a mechanic would describe the action of a lever ([1925] 1994, pp.VI–VII). In his second book, “action” is reserved for acts carried out by human beings. He therefore discarded his initial Durkheimian approach as he refined his conceptual scheme, which is another reason to avoid lumping Halbwachs and Durkheim

together, although many commentators find it convenient to do so. By 1941, action was a matter of individual acts. But in truth, this has little to do with the philosophy of action. There are no grounds for drawing a memory-based theory of collective action from the Halbwachsian corpus, for that would be to confuse examination of the effects of reworking collective memory (their phenomenology) with analysis of the human actions that produce them (their praxeology). But such confusion is not uncommon and fosters the sociological error which invests groups with the attributes of individual action. This is why the effects of collective memory are so frequently and erroneously treated according to a simplistic praxeology of collective action which reduces them to manifestations of political or military force.

Collective memory is never the simple tool of political actions whose effects express the achievement of an arbitrary will. To the contrary, it is what drives social reworking and reconstitution. In this respect, political actors are obliged to feign an ability to organise, something their commentators, whether critical or supportive, are so prompt to accord them.¹² But another question immediately arises: “If such action is determined by the accumulation of past events, how is it possible to produce something which has not already been inscribed or programmed and therefore foreseeable given our knowledge of this past, a factor which surely diminishes its novelty?” Bruno P quignot thus approaches the issue directly (in this issue) by examining the extent to which the Halbwachsian theory of collective memory constitutes a social dynamic (on this subject, see also Cl ro 2008).

One of the most topical aspects of Halbwachs’ theory concerns identifying the effects of migrations on the collective memory of migrants, settled groups, and newcomers. The successive reworking that collective memory undergoes when people migrate stems from the need to preserve a memory despite the circumstances of dispersal ([1941] 2008, pp.129–130). In other words, the geographical migration of the components of a group, the fragmentation of the shared experiences that characterise its principle components, and the fact that members may feel the need to reform the group – if not physically, at least symbolically – engender cycles in which reworking occurs on site and elsewhere. This process reinforces symbolisation considerably; everyone takes part in the name of the group “as it should be”, that

is, at the risk of multiple conflicts of interpretation which involve particular identities, the collective identity of the group and those of its components.

At the point that we can, like Emilio Martínez Gutiérrez (in this issue), employ the term “memory without place” with regard to rural populations uprooted from their traditional environment and urbanised in the context of post-war economic growth in Spain. Gutiérrez echoes Halbwachs, whose father had elected to leave Alsace after its annexation by Germany following the Franco-Prussian war of 1871. (According to the Halbwachs scholar Lewis A. Coser, Halbwachs’ family came from Alsace rather than from Lorraine. Both provinces were annexed by Germany and constituted the imperial province of Alsace-Lorraine 1871–1918.) As we know, deracination is a major feature of the analysis of colonial and economic alienation conducted by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Sayad, 1964). This brings us to another sombre teleology: as Sarah Gensburger argues in her study of how the title of “Righteous Among Nations” is constructed and attributed, through the same memorialising mechanisms, social and geographical circulation may come to contribute to social valorisation.

History and memorial conflicts

Here we touch upon the foundation of the production of *historical narratives*. The first question is whether, in the midst of these circulations, and the tensions engendered by processes of symbolisation, he who claims to be writing about the past can actually transcend the hermeneutic circle. The answer is probably no, in so far as the historian always constructs new narratives and that his oeuvre is shaped by the nature of the materials deployed in his research and its methodology. But the circle can be broken as soon as we acknowledge the fact that the historian is tested by place, that his writing is also a process of construction, that his gestures are transmitted in many ways other than through his narrative – through his skills and experience, the tensions and dialogues he maintains with other historians and other specialists, the work his texts stimulate, his texts in the form of material objects, their place in libraries, his investigations and professional tools, which all function as elements of non-narrativised data or evidence which can only be considered metaphorically.

In other words, the distinctive feature of the particular type of collective memory produced by professional historians, *the memory of historians*, is its foundation in scholarly forms of epistemological construction and control. And of course, these are products of the particular history of historiographical thinking.¹³ This is far from being an exclusively literary affair, as some would claim. Mathematicians form their collective memory no differently; they may activate shared conventions that are sometimes specific to their own discipline and, in many cases, found in other sciences as well, but the process is always governed by the most general mechanisms of collective memory. Halbwachs drew attention to this point ([1949] 1997, p.212), and Caroline Ehrhardt provides a systematic demonstration of it in her study of the memory of the iconic mathematician Évariste Galois (1811–1832) and his legacy in the fields of group theory and algebraic geometry (in this issue).

Various forms of expertise are involved in the course of *memorial conflicts*, notably those of jurists, authors, and indeed all cultural producers or “entrepreneurs of memory” (Namer 1987). The student of social and collective memory cannot construct a hierarchy of these memorial competencies, but can only note the forms of tension that arise among them, the conflicts occasioned by their encounters, and the effects of such conflict. The contents of the present issue offer many examples of this approach. But this depiction of contemporary tensions is not an inventory; it aims to foreground the dynamics of and role played by particularly active social agents, whether as individuals or as routinised entrepreneurs of memory. We can only agree with Paolo Jedlowski: “The quality of public memory is dictated by the texts in circulation. Advocates of self-critical memory are in the minority, but they possess an ethical value that should not be ignored” (in this issue). Indeed common sense and a shared psychic life also form the locus for the ethical, particularly when bound to shared collective representations and material cultures. And while cosmopolitan memory, the infusion of the global into local matter and memory processes, may function as a means of thinking ethics and memory after “sharedness”, the fact of the matter is that global deterritorialisations and circulation also disrupt and destabilise the fixity of territories, place, and objects, thus forcing us to reflect on the possibility of morality and memory without place or locus.

Global history was neither a dialectical march of abstract concepts nor an empty sequence of dates, events, and instances. The homogenisation of time into a linear and well-organised tableau is a ruse of historicism; collective memory necessarily opposes historical memory and it is precisely the plurality and multiplicity of memory-traces that cannot recuperate the principle of identity that comprises the historical; against the progressivism that characterises homogenised temporal continuity, collective memory activates a virtual memory, transmitted by rite, which runs against the stream of the history to an arbitrary point of origin which is “not there”, “no longer there”, and “cannot be there”. As Gérard Namer suggests, “it is the notion of the trace of the past which is common to the opposing programs of history and the sociology of memory . . . what makes history and sociology converge is the notion of an average sensibility, of common sense” (Namer 2000, p.169). Memory is therefore not the “memory of something” or even a “testifying to history”, a space of common sense and the shared psychic life of an epoch, but one which necessarily opposes “programmes” of history of which the global may be considered to be the most triumphant. Common sense, moreover, is not that common at all in the presentism of the global (the refusal of the past as an ontological category and the discomfort with imagining future utopias) and like memory can only be created within a certain set of social arrangements which permit it to flourish and enter into relations with other common senses.

Thus once again we must return to biographical memory, for it is the launching pad for the process of collective memory. Anyone who sought to confine sociology to the study of aggregated phenomena would probably be surprised by the decisive importance of the individual. But Durkheimian sociology has never excluded the individual: it has simply focused on challenging the metaphysics of individual causes.¹⁴ The case of autobiographical narratives is thus worth a fresh appraisal.¹⁵ Jens Brockmeier, focusing on the collective memory of Sino-Americans, shows that the microcosm of autobiographical recollection is always inscribed in the cultural memory of the group. It is clear that the formation of memory is both personal and communal (in this issue).

But even so, when a community has reworked its collective memory to the point of establishing a distinctive public memory to sustain the historical awareness of its members, there remains the matter

of reparation. “Reparation cannot be engineered. It must make its own path” according to Karl Figlio, who analyses forms of resistance to the acknowledgement of the Nazi regime’s crimes against the Jewish people (in this issue). And if collective memory does not institutionalise or codify itself, it is precisely because it figures as the very concrete manner in which people share a certain degree of community founded on feelings of a common destiny with its origins in the past, the manner in which they imagine this past and consequentially, imagine the future.¹⁶ On the other hand, if we could govern memory by decree, we would then be able to map the future in the same way. By conceptualising the notion of social time, Halbwachs made it clear that we envisage the future by means of a detour, the collective reconstruction of the past. Michèle Baussant provides a detailed illustration of this process in her study of an association dedicated to preserving the cultural heritage of Egyptian Jews: “the construction of a heritage expresses a desire to establish and transmit the traces of the past . . . through the reconstitution of these traces and memories, individuals may be able to come to terms with a difficult stage in their lives, and indeed to embark upon a new stage of development” (in this issue).

Social memory as a ground of hypermodernity

Memory is a material and highly socially constructed form which is entirely contingent to the diachronic fluxes of history and shifting societal needs. The definitive rupture with the past and “eternity” can only be deferred through insuring the circulation of memory in “temporal society”, a memory whose ultimate objective is not strictly speaking to preserve the past, but elaborate new axes of “the past” through material traces, rites, and the psychological and social datum of the present, inducing a symbolic dynamic towards possible futures. Truly “ancient to the future”, the global question concerns the creation of mosaic traditions which refer to no absolute point of origin, but remain nonetheless capable of protecting “chains” of social and religious memory through the proliferation of frameworks which connect one to the necessary simulacrum of “absolute beginnings”, orienting one spatially, temporally, and historically. “Forgetting”, then, is

explained by the disappearance of these frameworks which results from morbid effervescence, inattention, and distraction, or a disintegration of linguistic communicability; trends that lament today many sombre authors.

The appeals to collective experience and the fortification that its memory-traces provide should always be understood as a response to socio-political transformations. Memory is a site of contestation, a means for the right to reproduce the nation in both patriotic and unsavoury manners and a means for the left to revise history and circulate counter-narratives that challenge hegemony and doxa. Both tendencies illustrate the degree to which the constellations of myth, mytho-history, can be ideologically invested and function as symbolic and concrete war machines that grapple with both tangible and intangible resources. Deracination creates the frenzy for foundations and particularly the thirst for “myths of origin” which may function as fictional schemes that narrativise collective memory through conjoining individual memory traces with larger socio-historical markers; ideology performs “memory-work” insofar as it provides sites for memory to attach itself to. These constellations of myth and memory can also be mechanisms for “imposing history”, “manufacturing memory”, and “dominating time” by effacing the plural common sense that lay at the core of new social formations. And the desire for the “One” against the multiple and the plural can create the longing mythical unities which can be easily grafted onto virtual memory; hence, one can speak of the antagonism between “dominant time” and “dominated time” (Namer 2000, p.173), the former referring to top-down political, religious, and economic orders that conquer frameworks of memory while the latter signifies the frameworks of the “popular” and the “common sensical”. The memory-work of one group can only succeed through the scouring of another groups memory. In other words, for one chain of memory to be resoldered and strengthened, other chains must be violently broken apart. Hence, both physical and discursive violence lay bare their recipients not solely through moral and bodily

injury, but through the ultimate negation of one’s quest for recognition – a recognition which depends not only the other’s desire of my desire – but on the entire landscape of my being, which is also the landscape of group memory.

With the pervasiveness of the post-modern narratives that have emerged over the last few decades, one gets the impression that we want to do away with the modernist gesture. Two centuries of collective enthusiasm for various radiant futures proved to be powerless against the horrors of the twentieth century, which are still difficult to express. The globalisation of historical awareness, combined with the formation of a memorial culture nurtured by an unprecedented wealth of historical information emanating from all parts of the world – contextually specific, to be sure, but still in accordance with the dynamics of social memory – is now consolidating collective memories so that at least some of what was previously unsayable can now be voiced. As a result, we are witnessing the formation of a new memorial foundation, both global and local, which is becoming characteristic of the relationship we all maintain with the elements of the past, a relationship characteristic of the present era, which could be described as hypermodern. The terms hypermodern and hypermodernity have already been readily deployed to refer to a temporal rupture or historical break. Yet modernity can never be definitively sealed, but is rather that which is constantly redefined.

Social memory and contemporary collective memories are not the reflections of a supposedly hypermodern era. They constitute the very substance of hypermodernity. Shaped by constant reworking, these memories govern what we can know of the past. They foster our conceptions of possible futures. In opposition to crepuscular post-modernism where hope is eclipsed by the arbitrariness of the instant if not by the horror of symbolic violence, the hypermodern condition continues to reject vulgar notions of progress and engages with how social memory and collective memory are indeed lines of force which cause shivers of utopianism that we are obliged to explore.

Notes

1. The reference corpus for this article is composed of the two

works published in Halbwachs’ lifetime ([1925] 1994 and [1941]

2008) and a posthumous collection ([1949] 1997). For the stages of the

formation of Halbwachs' theory, see Jaisson (2008); for his terminology, see Brian (2008). The references for the texts cited in this introduction are given in the selected bibliography in this issue.

2. Brian (2008).

3. Source: <http://ngrams.googlelabs.com>. Curve smoothing occurs over three points. The sifting of material concerns all the books published in American English between 1950 and 2008, and digitalised by Google Books™ by 2010.

4. The articles collected in this issue contain several examples, but none claim to be exhaustive. Thus the deep interest in issues of memory in Russia receives no mention (see Koposov 2010).

5. These remarks were inspired by the assessment of the "science studies" that flourished in the 1980s and 90s but are now stagnating precisely because they have neglected the more general questions with which epistemology and sociology are currently concerned (see Brian 2010). Other, and sometimes older domains, have managed to establish a better balance between "studies" and disciplines. This is particularly true of those devoted to a certain period – "Eighteenth Century Studies", for example – which have never sought to present themselves as an alternative to theory.

6. Halbwachs later employed the term in a different way by evoking what we prefer to call here the "memory of historians" ([1949] 1997, ch.3). These concepts require clarification. Halbwachs, strictly speaking, tenaciously shaped a theory of social and collective memory (Jaisson 2008) and it is important to understand the dynamic that governed the overall scheme rather than reify fragments of it.

7. Reinhart Koselleck adopts a similar impossibility as a point of departure (Koselleck 1979, 2000).

8. Sarah Gensburger recalls that in a letter to Marcel Mauss written in 1927, Halbwachs himself willingly conceded that his mind was perhaps "too preoccupied with abstractions". This is precisely the reason for his theoretical power (Gensburger 2011, p.422). However, he was prepared to tackle the most humble tasks involved in scientific endeavour. Nowadays, the question is not so much about opening up the fields that the theorist merely sketched out, but about testing his theory according to the conditions that currently influence relations between material, memory, and consciousness.

9. A vague resort to the Halbwachsian theory of memory in Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, one of the key sophisms employed by many authors working on the idea of "social construction" (Berger and Luckmann 1966, pp.103,202).

10. The way in which the exercise of economic activity constructs its own possible futures has recently been analysed by both economic sociology (Brian 2009) and economic history (Levratto and Stanziani 2011).

11. Contemporary sociology offers a comparable but separate concept, partly derived from Halbwachsian elements, of a spatialised structure of competition between agents engaged in the production of forms of meaning. This is the "field of symbolic production" developed by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1984).

12. The analysis of the term "reworking", like Halbwachs' treatment of Crusaders' entrance into Jerusalem in the 1941 book, suggests that even when subject to annexation, the memorial process is far from rudimentary. Praxeological simplicity is merely the sign of political fetishism.

13. The conditions and effects specific to this particular collective genesis constitute, according to Pierre Bourdieu (and here in the context of scientific claims made in historiography), the principle behind science's claim to rationality (Bourdieu 1991)

14. Sarah Gensburger is right to emphasise that this problematisation of the individual, sketched by Durkheim and developed in greater detail by Halbwachs, is explicitly indicated by the latter in the body of his work on memory (Gensburger 2011, p.419 points to [1925] 1994, p.112).

15. If it is still considered necessary to justify the relevance of the social sciences on biography and autobiography, we could point to the recent interest that Lévi-Straussian anthropology has taken in these matters (Fabre, Jamin and Massenzio 2010), although this branch of anthropology had tackled the question of memory thirty years earlier (Zonabend 1980).

16. However this does not mean that one should reject the importance of legislation designed to combat the denial of historical crimes, one example being the French law used to prosecute anyone who has "contested [in the press] the existence of one or more crimes against humanity as defined in Article 6 of the Statute of the International Military tribunal established by the London agreement of 8 August 1945, and which have been committed either by an organisation declared criminal in application of Article 9 of the said Statute, or by a person recognised as guilty of such crimes by a French or international jurisdiction" (République française, law no. 90–615, 13 July 1990, article 9: "Prohibition of racist, anti-Semitic or xenophobic acts"). No social science, including sociology, can ignore society's need to defend public morality.