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Editors

Klaus Tschira Symposia

Knowledge and Space 4

Cultural Memories

The Geographical Point of View

 Springer

Klaus Tschira Stiftung
Gemeinnützige GmbH



Cultural Memories

Knowledge and Space

Volume 4

Knowledge and Space

This book series entitled “Knowledge and Space” is dedicated to topics dealing with the production, dissemination, spatial distribution, and application of knowledge. Recent work on the spatial dimension of knowledge, education, and science; learning organizations; and creative milieus has underlined the importance of spatial disparities and local contexts in the creation, legitimation, diffusion, and application of new knowledge. These studies have shown that spatial disparities in knowledge and creativity are not short-term transitional events but rather a fundamental structural element of society and the economy.

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Editors

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The Geographical Point of View

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ISSN 1877-9220

ISBN 978-90-481-8944-1

e-ISBN 978-90-481-8945-8

DOI 10.1007/978-90-481-8945-8

Springer Dordrecht Heidelberg London New York

Library of Congress Control Number: 2011926786

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Printed on acid-free paper

Springer is part of Springer Science+Business Media (www.springer.com)

Contents

Part I Theoretical Considerations

- Cultural Memories: An Introduction** 3
Peter Meusburger, Michael Heffernan, and Edgar Wunder
- Communicative and Cultural Memory** 15
Jan Assmann
- Memory and Space in the Work of Maurice Halbwachs** 29
David Middleton and Steven D. Brown
- Knowledge, Cultural Memory, and Politics** 51
Peter Meusburger

Part II Case Studies

- The Rütli in Switzerland: Minor Memory—Major Ambitions** 73
Georg Kreis
- Sharing Space? Geography and Politics in Post-conflict Northern Ireland** 87
Brian Graham
- Memory—Recollection—Culture—Identity—Space: Social Context, Identity Formation, and Self-construction of the Calé (Gitanos) in Spain** 101
Christina West

Part III World War II in European Cultural Memories

- Seven Circles of European Memory** 123
Claus Leggewie
- Halecki Revisited: Europe's Conflicting Cultures of Remembrance** 145
Stefan Troebst

Remembering for Whom? Concepts for Memorials in Western Europe 155
 Rainer Eckert

Family Memories of World War II and the Holocaust in Europe, or Is There a European Memory? 171
 Harald Welzer

Annihilating—Preserving—Remembering: The “Aryanization” of Jewish History and Memory During the Holocaust 189
 Dirk Rupnow

History/Archive/Memory: A Historical Geography of the US Naval Memorial in Brest, France 201
 Michael Heffernan

Places and Spaces: The Remembrance of D-Day 1944 in Normandy . . 233
 Sandra Petermann

“Doors into Nowhere”: Dead Cities and the Natural History of Destruction 249
 Derek Gregory

Part IV Postcolonial Cultural Memories

Violent Memories: South Asian Spaces of Postcolonial Anamnesis . . . 287
 Stephen Legg

Spacing Forgetting: The Birth of the Museum at Fort Jesus, Mombasa, and the Legacies of the Colonization of Memory in Kenya . . 305
 Denis Linehan and João Sarmento

Part V Pre-modern Cultural Memories

Landscape, Transformations, and Immutability in an Aboriginal Australian Culture 329
 Robert Tonkinson

Person, Space, and Memory: Why Anthropology Needs Cognitive Science and Human Geography 347
 Jürg Wassmann

Abstract of the Contributions 361

The Klaus Tschira Foundation 371

Index 375

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Jan Assmann, Prof. Dr. Department of Egyptology, Heidelberg University, 69117 Heidelberg, Germany, Jan.Assmann@urz.uni-heidelberg.de

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Part I
Theoretical Considerations

Cultural Memories: An Introduction

Peter Meusbürger, Michael Heffernan, and Edgar Wunder

The revival of public and scholarly interest in collective cultural memories since the 1980s has been a genuinely global phenomenon and is somewhat paradoxical. Memory is a form of temporal awareness more readily associated with traditional, nonindustrialized societies rather than with the globalized, mobile, and deracinated world of today, which ostensibly floats free of all historical moorings, disconnected from earlier generations and periods. Yet the rise of a self-consciously postmodern, postcolonial, and multicultural society seems to have reanimated memory as a social, cultural, and political force with which to challenge, if not openly reject, the founding myths and historical narratives that have hitherto given shape and meaning to established national and imperial identities. This trend, initially accelerated by the lifting of the censorship and political constraints that had been imposed in both the “East” and the “West” during the Cold War, has been facilitated since the mid-1990s by the Internet, the default source of information in the global public sphere. Uncovering the historical experiences of marginalized communities, previously silenced because of their ethnicity, religion, gender, or sexuality, is now a primary objective of historical inquiry. It is inspired in part by an emerging “politics of regret” (Olick & Robbins, 1998, p. 107) but also by a desire to provide a sense of historical legitimacy and depth to newly established social, cultural, and political constituencies. This change has necessitated an increased level of systematic analysis of different kinds of nontextual evidence, from oral testimonies to the many other

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nonwritten ways in which intergenerational individual and collective memories have been articulated.

The project has been a profoundly interdisciplinary endeavor, though one in which space, place, landscape, and geography have loomed large. As French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1950/1980) observed over a half a century ago, collective memory “unfolds in a spatial framework” (p. 140) and is explicable only by interrogating how the past is “preserved in our physical surroundings” (p. 140). He was referring to the built environment as a repository of conscious and unconscious collective memories, but his wider argument about the intrinsic spatiality of memory can be explored through the cultural and social practices, activities, and enactments that symbolically reinforce or challenge the collective memories inherent in physical landscapes, practices that frequently provide the core emotional attachments linking communities to their environments.

Text or Image?

All senses can generate and retrieve memories, and it is moot to debate whether texts have greater significance than images do in the formation of memory or vice versa (A. Assmann, 2009, pp. 179–240; J. Assmann, 1992, 1995). Although texts are often more influential in that function, analysis clearly shows that the pictorial and spatial domains have primacy in the “memory industry,” political propaganda, and the manipulation of collective memory. But why are images more suitable for manipulating public perception than complex and elaborate texts? One explanation is that the ability to perceive and interpret patterns and traces such as footprints emerged much earlier in human evolution than either language or the ability to read texts (Liebenberg, 1990). In early human history survival relied on a sleuth-like ability to grasp situations; interpret spatial configurations and colors; and judge and anticipate risk from the gestures of others humans, the body language of animals, and the color of plants.

A second reason for the superiority of images when it comes to manipulating public perception is that they can simultaneously convey wider ranges of information than is possible with oral or written language, which imparts information linearly or sequentially. Although politically loaded slogans can have an effect similar to that of a visual image, a person generally takes longer to read a text (deliberate cognition) than to grasp and interpret the meaning of a symbol or image (automatic cognition). Advertising, propaganda, and the design of monuments all draw on automatic cognition, which “relies heavily and uncritically upon culturally available schemata—knowledge structures that represent objects or events and provide default assumptions about their characteristics, relationships, and entailments under conditions of incomplete information” (DiMaggio, 1997, p. 269). These schemata are representations of knowledge and at the same time are mechanisms that simplify cognition and structure information-processing.

Third, visual images can, under certain circumstances, efface and elide language and cultural barriers to allow meanings and messages to be understood across communities otherwise divided by their abilities to comprehend written texts. In other contexts, however, visual symbols such as flags, graffiti, and murals can accomplish the exact opposite, demarcating territory, laying claim to divided space, and asserting the power of certain narratives and interpretations in proscribed arenas. Such versatility leads directly to a fourth explanation of the power of images to mold public perception: They symbolically make visible that which is otherwise hidden or inexplicable. Images are particularly well suited to rendering abstract concepts such as gods, spirits, fame; or even desirable ideals, attributes, and emotions such as patriotism, heroism, bravery, strength, dignity, joy, tragedy, pathos, and pain. As Klein (2000, p. 132) states, an early meaning of memory lies “in the union of material objects and divine presence.” Kokosalakis (2001) offers, a similar reminder: “Through symbols the material becomes spiritual and the spiritual becomes empirical and is communicated in visible form” (p. 15354).

A fifth reason for the preeminence of images and monuments in the shaping of collective perception is that they are arguably more open than language is to a wide variety of interpretations. They can often subtly invoke ideas, meanings, and sensibilities that would be more difficult to represent in a simple textual narrative. Some monuments come to have multiple layers of meaning and ambiguity over time, sometimes becoming the focus of deeply ironic or subversive public demonstrations that champion values diametrical to those that the monument originally embodied. An example is London’s Trafalgar Square, designed in the early nineteenth century to express the unassailable permanence of Britain’s imperial power. The massive British rallies held there by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament during the 1950s arguably helped convert the site’s built environment into a landscape now firmly associated with the late twentieth-century peace movement and public protest. A spatial ordering of images makes it possible to insinuate connections, coherence, or similarities that could never remain unchallenged in texts. As Kansteiner (2002) notes, “one of the reasons for the privileged status of images in memory construction derives from their exceptional ability to close, and at times even obliterate, the gap between first-hand experience and secondary witnessing” (p. 191).

The sixth reason why the visual and the spatial occupy such a prominent place in memory resides in the power of images to address unconscious or subliminal cognitive processes; to remind one of unfulfilled wishes and barely perceived longings; and to induce or reinforce disgust, prejudice, fear, and hatred. Simplifying a complex reality to a set of simple images and symbols makes it possible at least to attempt manipulation of the individual and collective consciousness at an emotional and subconscious level. Cultural memory is, therefore, “as much a result of conscious manipulation as unconscious absorption” (Kansteiner, 2002, p. 180). According to Merikle (2000) “subliminal perception occurs whenever stimuli presented below the threshold or limen for awareness are found to influence thoughts, feelings, or actions. . . . [T]he term has been applied more generally to describe any

situation in which unnoticed stimuli are perceived” (p. 497). Psychological experiments involving persons under general anesthesia have shown that unconsciously perceived information can remain in the memory for a considerable time.

This finding suggests “that unconscious perception may have relatively long-lasting impact if the perceived information is personally relevant and meaningful” (Merikle & Daneman, 1998, p. 16). Reber (1993) has even argued that implicit learning is “the acquisition of knowledge that takes place largely independently of conscious attempts to learn and largely in the absence of explicit knowledge about what was acquired” (p. 5)—a position endorsed by Merikle and Daneman (1998) in several psychological experiments on implicit learning that show how people can acquire complex knowledge about the world without consciously trying to do so. Reber (1993, p. 18) also holds that these unconscious cognitive processes tend to generate beliefs that are more robust and fundamental than those stemming from explicitly cognitive processes. Drawing on experiments on implicit memory, Anderson (1983) has distinguished between “declarative knowledge,” which is self-reflective and articulable, and “procedural knowledge,” which guides action and decision-making but typically lies outside the scope of consciousness (see also Reber, 1993, pp. 14–17). There is now ample evidence that implicit, nonreflective, procedural, and unconscious functions are, in terms of evolution, much older, more robust, and less age-dependent than explicit, reflective, declarative, or conscious functions. Infants are able to learn about their social, cultural, familial, physical, and linguistic environments without support from conscious strategies for acquisition (Reber, 1993, p. 97; Squire, 1986). Neuroscientific research also demonstrates that optical signals are processed in different areas of the brain and that “responses in the amygdala likely provide a quick and crude, unconsciously processed, affectively charged evaluation of the environment that prepares an organism for immediate action” (Cunningham, Johnson, Gatenby, Gore, & Banaji, 2003, p. 640).

These arguments do not mean that texts are generally less important memory systems than images are but rather that texts have different qualities and different purposes than images. The visual and the spatial are, however, probably more susceptible to simple manipulation and propaganda than texts are. A monument, by its very location in a public space, becomes an element in a wider landscape of “visible . . . material objects invested with authoritative credibility” (Rowlands, 1993, p. 142). It can send its original or imputed message whenever it becomes the center of attention, though this ability depends on regular reenactments. As Robert Musil famously observed, monuments often take on a strangely invisible quality if the person or event recalled no longer resonates with current cultural or political concerns (Musil, 1987). Indeed most monuments, statues, or political architecture eventually collapse into ruins or survive only as a historical, conserved legacy of an ancient era whose values and sentiments inform the present only in the most general terms.

By contrast, texts stored in libraries or archives do not possess the same public immediacy as a memorial or monument and can be neglected for decades. But they do not necessarily forfeit their importance in the long run. Moreover, printed texts normally exist in many copies, so even if destroyed or censored in one place, they

will survive at other locations. Texts have generally aided the long-term conservation of a culture, as already foreseen in ancient Egypt, whose political elites were convinced that their written documents would outlast their built environment as the ultimate legacy of their civilization (A. Assmann, 1996, p. 124). Although books are more easily destroyed than a built environment is, their sheer number provides a greater measure of permanence against the ravages of time (A. Assmann, 2009, pp. 190–197; Míšková, 2005, p. 237). Indeed, writing is about more than merely recording and maintaining. Drawing on Gadamer (1960), A. Assmann (1996) notes that a text has “the miraculous capacity not only to preserve but also to generate” (p. 125) and that

[i]n the material process of cultural transmission, [writing] has a singular status. The remainders and ruins of past lives, of buildings, of tools, the equipment of tombs—all of this is shaken and eroded by the storms of time. Written texts, however, if they can be deciphered and read, contain a pure spirit that speaks to us in an eternal presence. The art of reading and understanding written traces is like a magic art. . . in which space and time are suspended. In knowing how to read what is transmitted, we are partaking of and achieving the pure presence of the past. (Gadamer, 1960, p. 156; translation by A. Assmann, 1996, p. 126).

A. Assmann (2009, pp. 138–142) has applied this distinction to *Funktionsgedächtnis* (functional memory) and *Speichergedächtnis* (storage memory), arguing that images serve the former; texts, the latter. Functional memory works as a form of legitimation, delegitimation, and distinction, and has a political potential to support both the official memory of those in power and the subversive counter-memories of the oppressed. This form of memory provides genealogies and moral dichotomies and requires performance and representation in public space. Storage memory, by contrast, has a longer-term cultural authority, is less influenced by those in power, and has correspondingly less immediate political utility. The border between functional memory and storage memory is permeable, of course, for the latter has the potential to transform into the former or otherwise influence it. But whereas functional memory is connected to existing power relations, storage memory depends on institutions such as libraries, archives, universities, and museums, in which it is stored and conserved and from which it can ultimately be retrieved.

Power, Memory, and Public Space

The memory of events or historical figures can be kept alive through regularly repeated commemorative processes and through the creation of monuments, museums, parades, rituals, street names, graffiti, and murals. This observation is consistent with neuropsychology, which teaches that the memory for events is intertwined with the memory for places, a connection that largely explains why most mnemonic devices are related to places, spaces, or spatial signifiers. This relationship between memory, images as codified memories, and structured space was established in the ancient world through the concept of *ars memorativa*

(A. Assmann, 2009, pp. 158–162, 298–339), by which mnemonic devices are based on repetition, rhythm, reference points, and spatial ordering (Poirion & Angelo, 1999, p. 37). As Fiedler and Juslin (2006) remark, “[e]ven intelligent people are not very good at the metacognitive task of monitoring and correcting sampling processes. They . . . normally take their information sample for granted and hardly ever reason about whether their sample has to be corrected” (p. 13). Connerton (1989) and Wright (2006) argue instead that the social process of remembering requires a bodily practice of commemoration, often in the form of ritualized performances. Buildings, squares, statues, and street names “facilitate commemorative performance by reproducing and producing social relations” (Wright, 2006, p. 50). Reiterated performances and rituals inscribe meaning to places, which, in turn, give meaning and structure to action (Maran, 2006, p. 13). Place-bound rituals and cultural artifacts renew historical associations and knowledge systems, solidifying them in the conscious and the subconscious mind. For these reasons, what Smith (1996) calls the “territorialization of memory” (p. 448) can be detected in virtually all cultures. The renowned art of memory used by Australian aboriginal societies is rooted in a landscape continuously brought to life through geographical mnemonics (Basso, 1996). Most other societies—both traditional and modern—have regular recourse, both serious and playful, to sacred mountains where gods or ancestors are believed to reside or to have communicated with priests, to holy rivers as sources of purification, and to other venerated sites. Throughout the world, monuments, statues, and symbolic landscapes act as mnemonic devices; as the storage vessels of cultural identity and information; as educational and other communications media; as triggers for sensations, emotions, and sensibilities; and as “spatial anchors for historical traditions” (Foote, Tóth, & Árvay, 2000, p. 305).

But memory is always elusive. Most historical narratives are provisional: continually reshaped by new experiences and new knowledge and positioned within shifting centers and asymmetries of power. Narratives are contingent and depend on particular cultural systems of meaning that vary in space and time. As Saler (1998) has shown, provisional historical narrative can be deeply discomfiting, and most political regimes always seek to stabilize these accounts: “essentialist narratives are . . . highly effective politically: they are clear, unambiguous, capable of galvanizing emotional commitments and stimulating action in ways that provisional narratives often cannot” (p. 594). When new historical research endangers a predominant narrative, power elites frequently seek to counteract these developments by fixing memories associated with the previously accepted versions of events. Vested interests go to great lengths to advance their preferred version of history for future generations. Places of remembrance are, in effect, mnemonic schemes for immobilizing the past in fixed sequences (Hutton, 2000, p. 538). Monuments of granite or marble are in themselves deeply suggestive of continuity or eternity. Symbolizing a sense of immutability and a closure of history, they are prime anchors in the political manipulation of history and the invention or reinvention of cultural traditions (see, for example, Azaryahu & Kellerman, 1999; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983).

Because space is not homogeneous in its functions and representational meanings, and because spatial ordering and spatial arrangements inevitably imply

hierarchies, political regimes and elites seek to control the distribution of emblematic images in public space. Some places are more visible, prestigious, frequented, or symbolically significant than others. To be effective, mnemonic devices need to be specifically designed and deliberately located to channel public attention to certain events and interpretations and, crucially, to prevent future generations from ever even becoming aware of selected historical events. In this sense all memorials are simultaneously about remembering and forgetting. The opportunity and ability to draw public attention to specific issues, persons, objects, historical events, or places and to divert it from others is one of the most fundamental instruments of state power. Like a well-conceived theater set, a successful commemorative landscape spotlights only certain parts of the scene, leaving some actors and events obscure. Jubilee celebrations and rituals of intimidation alike are staged at prominent public venues with the aim of impressing people, achieving a collective catharsis, demonstrating the superiority of a given political idea, revealing the powerlessness of individuals or groups, and eliciting emotions favorable to those in power. After occupying Hungary in 1945, Soviet forces chose two locations for their most important monuments in Budapest, Gellért Hill (citadel) and Szabadság tér (Freedom Square). To every historically minded Hungarian, they were (and are) potent symbols of repression suffered during the Habsburg era. The flag-carrying Soviet soldier atop Gellért Hill represented the power, ideology, and self-confidence of the new communist regime and could be seen from most major vantage points across the entire city. Szabadság tér, the most prominent square in the city's fifth district, is the traditional center of political and economic power of Hungary.

The importance of controlling the imagery and symbolism of public space is the main reason why the overthrow of a dynasty or political regime or the conquest of new territory is almost invariably accompanied by the deliberate erasure of icons and symbols associated with the former system and the creation of new ones in their place. One can interpret the entire European cultural landscape in terms of these politically motivated cycles of creative destruction and renewal, a process that has involved monuments, statues, museums, and other features of the built environment. Imposition of new street and place names, demolition of monuments and landscapes, even the exhumation of the graveyards of forcibly removed or murdered communities have been part of systematic attempts to annihilate certain facts from the memory of future generations. Most totalitarian systems use anonymous mass graves to bury executed dissidents and those killed during ethnic cleansings. The dead are stripped of their names and identities, and their burial grounds are kept secret to prevent these locations from becoming memorial sites in the future. Indeed, such regimes do not even need the dead to construct their myths about undocumented histories past or present. Fascist Italy established war memorials in regions of South Tyrol (e.g., near Mals in Vinschgau and in the Eisack Valley near Bozen) to demonstrate to the members of the local population that they had been conquered in war, even though no military action had actually occurred in that region during World War I. By inscribing the surfaces of these memorials with the names of soldiers who had "died" in action, the regime sought to give credibility and authenticity to their territorial claims and to imply that the blood of Italian soldiers had been

spilled in a national struggle in this location. Birthdates were omitted to prevent observers from checking the veracity of these claims. It should be noted, however, that democracies, too, have sought to cover the tracks of their deeds. It is telling that the US Congress voted in May 2004 to raze the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and to replace it with a new building.

Locating Memory

The impact a monument has on emotions or cognitive processes depends not only on its artistic appearance and the observer's prior knowledge but also on the symbolic prominence of its location and the environment or architectural setting in which it is embedded. The intended message of a memorial can change radically, even invert, if its environmental setting is altered, for example, by the close proximity of a more recently erected monument with a different message or by relocation of the original monument.

Designers of monuments often face the problem that the propaganda message they intend to impart is transformed over time. A striking example is the monument to the "Soviet Union's liberation of Budapest" on Szabadság tér in Budapest, directly across from the United States Embassy. The post-Communist Hungarian government officially agreed that this Soviet monument would not be removed, but it remains a source of contention within the local population and has been vandalized several times. These circumstances have necessitated the structure's enclosure within a protective fence and the occasional deployment of guards there. Needless to say, these measures undermine the original message, which is diminished further by the clear line of sight from this spot to the more recent monument honoring Imre Nagy, the leader of the 1956 Revolution, who was executed by the communist regime. Nagy, his back turned to the Soviet monument, looks toward two symbols of liberation movements, the Hungarian Parliament and Kossuth Square, where huge demonstrations in 1956 and 1989 called for more freedom and democracy and where secret police shot Hungarian demonstrators in 1956.

Relocating rather than simply destroying statues erected by despised former regimes indicates a certain tolerance of and historical distance to former adversaries. But the strategy can have unexpected consequences, changing the meaning of the first site and the new one, for they both disclose a great deal about the status that current authorities accord a monument's original message. Moving statues or museums from peripheral areas to more prestigious central locations indicates enhanced appreciation. An instructive example is the decision to move the Museum of the American Indian from its original New York headquarters at 155th and Broadway—in north Manhattan, far from the tourist trail—to a downtown address, the George Gustav Heye Center, in 1994. Ten years later it was moved again, to the epicenter of the national system of museums on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., between the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum and the US Capitol Building.¹

Conversely, moving highly symbolic objects from prestigious central places to the periphery of a city signals a rejection of their original meaning, even if relocation preserves them from demise. After the withdrawal of Soviet troops in June 1991, there was intense public dispute in Hungary about what to do with the statues and monuments glorifying the political and ideological culture of the communist system. The first reaction of most Hungarians was to destroy what were widely seen as vestiges of an unwelcome tyranny. It was generally agreed that these works had been imposed on squares and cities by an oppressive Stalinist system against the will of the Hungarian people. Yet a radical iconoclastic policy would have caused new conflicts and social rifts within Hungarian society, so the Budapest Assembly eventually left it up to each district of Budapest to decide the fate of the sculptures in its jurisdiction. When the idea of a “Statue Park” was first proposed, both left- and right-wing groups protested, and none of Budapest’s districts expressed a willingness to provide a home for the figures. Finally, Tétényi plane, a former military area situated on the city’s outermost fringe in the 22nd District, was selected for most of the major statues. In June 1993, two years after the withdrawal of the Russian troops, this property belonging to the Hungarian Ministry of Defense celebrated its opening as a public outdoor museum. The new location of the Soviet-era monuments, however, indicated both political disdain for the old system and desire to confine the 42 most politically loaded statues to a small area, which was been imbued ever since with an ideological pathos bordering on the comic and the kitsch.

Content of the Book

This volume is structured into five main parts. Part I focuses on theoretical considerations. Part II consists of three case studies whose aim is to apply these concepts to three very different contexts: the founding myth of a nation, contested memories relating to a civil war, and oral traditions that operate beyond national narratives. Part III delves into various aspects of European cultural memory during World War II. Part IV examines cultural memories in postcolonial contexts outside Europe. Part V offers insights on cultural memories in tribal, nomadic societies.

Part I opens with Jan Assmann’s chapter on the histories and different connotations of the terms *cultural memory*, *communicative memory*, and *social memory*, an exploration that shows them to be rooted in different theoretical traditions. The next chapter by David Middleton and Steven D. Brown revisits Maurice Halbwachs’s seminal contribution to this conceptual debate. The third chapter, by Peter Meusburger, raises the question of whether well-educated people of the twenty-first century will be as susceptible to simple manipulation by media and state propaganda as the illiterate or poorly-educated societies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In the first case study of Part II, Georg Kreis’s chapter discusses the Rütli as a common place of reference and national heritage for the founding national myth Switzerland. The chapter by Brian Graham examines the Northern Ireland conflict

from the perspective of contested cultural memories. Christina West in her chapter then analyzes the orally transmitted cultural memories of the ethnic group known as the Gitanos (gypsies).

Part III begins with a chapter by Claus Leggewie, who asks what the constituencies of an emerging pan-European cultural memory are. The same question is then considered in the chapter by Stefan Troebst, whose distinction between four different, geographically based cultures of remembrance in Europe draws on the work of Oskar Halecki. Chapters by Rainer Eckert and Harald Welzer address the cultural memories of World War II, examining their common features and differences across a number of European countries and considering whether that pivotal twentieth-century conflict provides a historical resource for a common European identity. The next chapter by Dirk Rupnow discusses an attempted annihilation of cultural memory by examining the Nazi regime's "Aryanization" of Jewish history and memory during the Holocaust. Michael Heffernan and Sandra Petermann in their chapters provide accounts of contested cultural memories in wartime France, and Derek Gregory's chapter reconsiders how allied bombing campaigns against Germany have shaped British and German memories.

Part IV comprises two chapters on postcolonial cultural memories: one by Stephen Legg, who writes about India, and the other by Denis Linehan and João Sarmiento, who examine the matter in an African context. The two chapters in Part V, by Robert Tonkinson on Australian aboriginal society and by Jürg Wassmann on his personal experiences among members of the Iatmul tribe in Papua New Guinea, provide anthropological perspectives on how cultural memory works in traditional, nonwestern societies.

We are very grateful to the Klaus Tschira Foundation for funding our enterprise. We are equally thankful to Christiane Marxhausen (Department of Geography, Heidelberg University), who was in charge of organizing our symposia, and to David Antal, whose excellent work as technical editor is highly appreciated. Despite diligent effort, we have not been able to locate all the copyright holders of the figures that appear in this volume and ask that any legitimate claims be addressed to the series editors.

Note

1. The George Gustav Heye Center is now a permanent museum in New York City and one of three facilities of the National Museum of the American Indian, which operates under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution.

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Communicative and Cultural Memory

Jan Assmann

The past exists, if it can be said to exist at all, in a double form: as a sedimentation of relics, traces, and personal memories and as a social construction. This dual nature characterizes the personal past that is with us human beings not only as internal memory traces and external memory symbols of every sort but also as an image or narrative that we construe and carry with us as our autobiographical or episodic memory. As the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs has shown, even our autobiographical memory is a social construction that we build up in communication with others. Arguably, it is strictly personal only in its first aspect, as a sedimentation or unstructured archive (Halbwachs, 1925/1985). As a social construction, the past conveys a kind of connective structure or diachronic identity to societies, groups, and individuals, both socially and temporally. Memory is what allows us to construe an image or narrative of the past and, by the same process, to develop an image and narrative of ourselves. This form of memory seems to be a specifically human faculty. Clearly, animals also possess a memory, but the link between memory and identity—the “autonoetic” function of memory, which provides the connective structure that characterizes both a person and a society—seems to be a specifically human characteristic based on the exclusively human faculties of symbolization and communication. A human self is a diachronic identity “built of the stuff of time” (Luckmann, 1983, p. 69). At both the collective and the personal levels, human memory brings about a synthesis of time and identity, which may be called a *diachronic identity*. It is this identity that allows human beings to orient themselves personally and collectively in terms of the future, the past, or both. Because of our memory, we are able to think in temporal horizons far beyond our birth and our death.

This connection between time, identity, and memory operates at three levels: the inner (or individual); the social, and the cultural (see Table 1). At the inner level, memory is about the human neuropsychical system, the individual’s personal

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Table 1 The connection between time, identity, and memory

Level	Time	Identity	Memory
Inner	Inner, subjective time	Inner self	Individual
Social	Social time	Social self, person as carrier of social roles	Communicative
Cultural	Historical, mythical, cultural time	Cultural identity	Cultural

memory, which until the 1920s was the only form of memory to have been recognized as such. At the social level, memory is about communication and social interaction. It was Halbwachs's great discovery that human memory depends, like consciousness in general, on socialization and communication and that memory can be analyzed as a function of social life. Memory enables us humans to live in groups and communities, and living in groups and communities enables us to build a memory (Halbwachs, 1925/1985). During those same years, psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud (1953–1974) and Carl Gustav Jung (1970–1971) were developing theories of collective memory but still adhering to the first (the inner, personal) level, looking for collective memory in the unconscious depths of the human psyche rather than in the dynamics of social life. At the cultural level, the art historian Aby Warburg (1925/2003) seems to have been the first scholar to treat images, that is, cultural objectifications, as carriers of memory (Ginzburg, 1983). His main project was what he called the “afterlife” (*Nachleben*) of classical antiquity in Western culture, and he termed this project *Mnemosyne*, the ancient Greek term for memory and the mother of the nine Muses.

As an art historian, he specialized in what he called *Bildgedächtnis* (iconic memory), but the general approach to the reception of history as a form of cultural memory could be applied to every other domain of symbolic forms as well (Gombrich, 1981). The literary historian Ernst Robert Curtius, for example, applied it to language, inaugurating a new field of research that he termed *Toposforschung* (topos research; e.g., Curtius, 1948). Among these early theorists of cultural memory, Thomas Mann should be mentioned for his four Joseph novels (1933–1943), which are the most advanced attempt at reconstructing the cultural memory of persons living in Palestine and Egypt in the Late Bronze Age. By the same token, the novels conjure up European cultural memory and its Jewish foundations in times of antisemitism (J. Assmann, 2006b). Neither Warburg nor Mann, however, used the term cultural memory, for it did not emerge until the late 1980s. It is, therefore, only within the last 20 years that the connection between time, identity, and memory in their three dimensions of the personal, the social, and the cultural has become more and more evident.

The term *communicative memory* has been introduced in order to delineate the difference between Halbwachs's concept of collective memory and the understanding of cultural memory presented in A. Assmann and J. Assmann (1989) and J. Assmann (1988, 1992). Cultural memory is a form of collective memory in that a

number of people share cultural memory and in that it conveys to them a collective (i.e., cultural) identity. Halbwachs, however, was careful to keep his concept of collective memory apart from the realm of traditions, transmissions, and transferences that I propose to subsume under cultural memory. I preserve Halbwachs's distinction by breaking his concept of collective memory down into "communicative" and "cultural" memory but insist on treating the cultural sphere, which he excluded, as another form of memory. I am, therefore, not expanding or diluting Halbwachs's concept in a direction that for him would have been unacceptable. Nor do I argue for replacing his idea of collective memory with the notion of cultural memory. Rather, I distinguish between the two forms as two different *modi memorandi*, or ways of remembering.

Culture as Memory

Cultural memory is an institution. It is exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms that, unlike the sounds of words or the appearance of gestures, are stable and situation-transcendent. They may be transferred from one situation to another and transmitted from one generation to another. Unlike communicative memory, cultural memory is disembodied. In order to function as memory, however, its symbolic forms must not only be preserved but also circulated and re-embodied in a society. The disembodied status of cultural memory is another reason why it was not recognized as a form of memory until recently. Memory, the argument runs, requires a mind. Things like the madeleine immortalized by Marcel Proust (1931/1982, pp. 46–47) or monuments, archives, libraries, anniversaries, feasts, icons, symbols, and landscapes cannot have or carry memory, for they lack a mind.

This objection, however, rests on a complete misunderstanding. Neither Proust nor Halbwachs nor anyone else who speaks or writes of collective memory has ever asserted that collective or cultural memory "exists in something that has no mind." Dishes, feasts, rites, images, texts, landscapes and other things do not "have" a memory of their own, but they may remind their beholder, may trigger that person's memory because they carry the memories that he or she has invested them with. Groups do not have a memory in the way an individual does, but they may make themselves a memory by erecting monuments and by developing a variety of cultural techniques (mnemotechniques) that support memory or promote forgetting (A. Assmann, 2006).

Memory, which people possess as beings equipped with a human mind, exists solely in constant interaction not only with other human memories but also with outward symbols. Human memory is embodied, and it requires a brain as the material carrier of its embodiment. In addition it is embedded, and it requires social and cultural frames for its embedment. *Memory* is not a metaphor for embedment but rather a metonym for physical contact between a remembering mind and a reminding object. Halbwachs acknowledged social frames only, but it seems obvious that human memory is also embedded in cultural frames, such as the landscape or townscape in which people grew up, the texts they learned, the feasts they celebrated, the

churches or synagogues they frequented, the music they listened to, and especially the stories they were told and by and in which they live. This interaction between a remembering mind and a reminding object is why the realm of these things and especially the things meant as reminders (mnemonic institutions) must be included in the concept of memory.

This institutional character does not apply to what Halbwachs called collective memory and what I propose to rename *communicative memory*. Communicative memory is noninstitutional. It is not supported by any institutions of learning, transmission, or interpretation, nor is it cultivated by specialists or summoned or celebrated on special occasions. It is not formalized and stabilized by any forms of material symbolization. It lives in everyday interaction and communication. For this very reason communicative memory is of fairly limited duration.

Change in constellations and frames brings about forgetting; the durability of memories depends on the durability of social bonds and “frames.” Halbwachs, in his work before 1941, does not seem to be concerned with the social interests and power structures that are active in shaping and framing individual memories. In his last work on collective memory, however, he shows a keen awareness of institution and power (Halbwachs, 1941). That book, written and published during the German occupation of Paris, deals with the transformation of Palestine into a site of Christian memory by the erection of all sorts of memorials after the adoption of Christianity as the state religion by the Roman empire. In this work Halbwachs crosses the line that he himself drew between *mémoire* and tradition and shows to what degree this kind of official memory depends on theological dogma and how much it is formed by the power structure of the church.

Time Frames

Jan Vansina, an anthropologist who worked with oral societies in Africa, devoted an important study to the form in which they represent the past (Vansina, 1985). He observed a tripartite structure. The recent past, which looms large in interactive communication, gradually recedes into the background. Information becomes increasingly scarce and vague the further one moves into the past. According to Vansina, this knowledge of affairs that are told and discussed in everyday communication has a limited depth in time, not reaching beyond three generations. A more remote past is marked by either a total gap of information or one or two names remembered only with great hesitation. For the most remote past, however, there is again a profusion of information dealing with traditions surrounding the origin of the world and the early history of the tribe. This information is not committed to everyday communication; it is highly formalized and institutionalized. It exists as narratives, songs, dances, rituals, masks, and symbols. Specialists such as narrators, bards, and mask carvers are organized in guilds and must undergo long periods of initiation, instruction, and examination. Moreover, actualization of the most remote past requires certain occasions, such the gathering of the community for some celebration or other. This actualization is what I propose to call “cultural memory.”

In oral societies, as Vansina shows, the informal generational memory referring to the recent past is separated from the formal cultural memory that refers to the remote past. Because this gap shifts with the succession of generations, Vansina calls it the “floating gap” (pp. 23–24). Vansina sums up by stating that historical consciousness operates at only two levels: time of origins and recent past.

Vansina’s (1985) floating gap illustrates the difference between social (communicative) and cultural frames of memory. The communicative memory contains memories of what Vansina refers to as the recent past. They are the ones that an individual shares with his or her contemporaries. They are what Halbwachs understood by collective memory and are the object of oral history, that branch of historical research drawing not on the usual written sources of historiography but exclusively on memories elicited in oral interviews. All studies in oral history confirm that, even in literate societies, living memory goes back no further than 80 years, after which point—separated by the floating gap—come the dates from schoolbooks and monuments (rather than myths of origin) (Niethammer, 1985).

Cultural memory rests on fixed points in the past. Even in cultural memory, the past is not preserved as such but rather is galvanized in symbols, for they are represented in oral myths, conveyed in writings, and performed in feasts as they continually illuminate a changing present. In the context of cultural memory, the distinction between myth and history vanishes. What counts is not the past as it is investigated and reconstructed by archaeologists and historians but only the past as it is remembered. It is the temporal horizon of cultural memory that is important. The cultural memory of the people who share it extends into the past only as far as the past can be reclaimed as “theirs.” For that reason I refer to this form of historical consciousness as “memory,” not just as knowledge about the past. Whereas knowledge has no form and is endlessly cumulative, memory involves forgetting. It is only by forgetting what lies outside the horizon of the relevant that it supports identity. Nietzsche (1874/1960) circumscribed this function by notions such as “plastic power” and “horizon” (p. 213), obviously intending to convey what the term *identity* is generally accepted to mean now.

Institutions, Carriers

The difference between communicative and cultural memory expresses itself also in the social dimension, in the structure of participation. The participation of a group in communicative memory is diffuse. Some people know more, some less, and the memories of the old go farther back than those of the young. However, there are no specialists in informal, communicative memory. The knowledge communicated in everyday interaction has been acquired by the participants along with language and social competence. By contrast, the participation of a group in cultural memory is always highly differentiated, especially in oral and egalitarian societies. The preservation of the group’s cultural memory was originally the task of the poets. Even today, the African griots (storytellers) fulfill this function of guardians of cultural memory.

Cultural memory always has its specialists. These carriers of memory are known under a rich assortment of names, such as shamans, bards, griots, priests, teachers, artists, clerks, scholars, mandarins, rabbis, and mullahs. In oral societies, the degree of their specialization depends on the magnitude of the demands on their memory. The highest rank is accorded verbatim transmission. This task requires use of the human memory as a “data base” in a sense approaching the use of writing. A fixed text is verbally “written” into the highly specialized and trained memory of these specialists. The approach typically applies when ritual knowledge is at stake and when a ritual must strictly follow a “script,” even if that script is not laid down in writing. The Rgveda is the foremost example of a codification of ritual memory rooted solely in oral tradition. The social rank of the specialists in ritual corresponds to the magnitude of this task. They are known as the Brahmins, who constitute their society’s highest caste. It is even higher than the aristocratic class of warriors (*kshatriya*), to which the rulers belong. In traditional Rwanda, the full text of all 18 royal rituals had to be memorized by specialists who ranked as the highest notables of the kingdom. Error was punishable by death. Those three notables partook even in the divinity of the ruler (Borgeaud, 1988, p. 13).

Rituals are therefore the context in which the oldest systems of memorization or mnemotechniques arose, with or without the help of notation systems like knotted chords, churingas, and other forms of prewriting. It is interesting to see how differently various religions have behaved toward writing after the development of full-fledged systems for that new cultural technique. In the Indo-European traditions, from the Indian Brahmins to the Celtic Druids, writing is generally distrusted and shunned. Memory is held to be the far more trustworthy medium for handing down the religious (i.e., ritual) knowledge to later generations. The reason normally given for this preference is that too many mistakes may creep into a text by copying. The true reason, however, seems to be that writing always implies the danger of dissemination, the divulgence of a secret tradition to the profane and uninitiated. This distrust of writing was still very prominent in Plato’s works (Plato, trans. 1901a, 1901b). In the semitic traditions such as those of Mesopotamia, Israel, and Egypt, on the other hand, writing is eagerly grasped as an ideal medium for codifying and transmitting the sacred traditions, especially ritual scripts and recitations.

Even where the sacred tradition *is* committed to writing, memorization plays the central role. In ancient Egypt, a typical temple library contained no more books than may be known by heart by the specialists. Clement of Alexandria gives a vivid description of such a library, including the books that formed the stock of an Egyptian temple library—all written by Thot-Hermes himself. The hierarchical structure of the priesthood, with its five different ranks, reflected the size and importance of the literature to be memorized. The priests were not expected to read and learn all of the books but to specialize in certain genres corresponding to their rank and office.

In describing a solemn procession of these priests, Clement showed both the hierarchy of the priesthood and the structure of their library (Clemens Alex., Strom. VI. Cap. IV, §§35.1–37; see G. Fowden, 1993, pp. 58–59).¹ It was the books of the *stolistes* that served as a codification of ritual memory proper, complemented by

what Clement calls “education.” The books of the high priest, on the other hand, are said to have contained literature on the laws, the gods, and priestly education. The library was thus divided into normative knowledge, which ranks highest; ritual knowledge, which comes as a close second; and general knowledge about astronomy, geography, poetry, biography, and medicine, all of which occupies the lowest rung in this canon of indispensable literature.

[Forty-two], Clement summarizes, is the number of the “absolutely necessary” [*pany anankaiaī*] books of Hermes. Of those, 36 are learned by heart by the priests; these books contain the entire philosophy of the Egyptians. The remaining six books are learned by the pastophoroi. They deal with medicine, that is, with anatomy, with diseases, with the bodily members and organs, with drogues [drugs], with ophthalmology and with gynaecology. (J. Assmann, 2001, pp. 88–89)

There is, however, yet another sense in which the participation in cultural memory may be structured in a society: that of restricted knowledge, of secrecy and esotericism. Every traditional society has areas of restricted knowledge whose boundaries are not defined merely by the different capacities of human memory and understanding but also by issues of access and initiation. In Judaism, for example, general participation is required in the Torah, which every male member of the group is supposed to know by heart. Specialized participation characterizes the world of Talmudic and medieval commentaries, codices, and Midrash, a vast body of literature that only specialists can master. Secrecy, however, shrouds the esoteric world of kabbala, to which only select adepts are admitted (and even then only after they have reached 40 years of age).

The participation structure of cultural memory has an inherent tendency to elitism; it is never strictly egalitarian. Some individuals have to prove their degree of admittance by formal exams, as in traditional China; or by the mastery of linguistic registers, as in England; or of the treasury of German quotations (*Citatenschatz des deutschen Volkes*), as in nineteenth-century Germany. Others remain systematically excluded from this “distinguished” knowledge, such as the women in ancient Greece, traditional China, and Orthodox Judaism or the lower classes in the heyday of the German educated middle class (*Bildungsbürgertum*).

As for the media of cultural memory, there is a more or less pronounced tendency toward a form of intracultural diglossia, corresponding to the distinction between one “great tradition” and several “little traditions” as proposed by Redfield (1956, *passim*). Until the creation of Iwrith (modern Hebrew), the Jews always lived in a situation of diglossia, for their “Great Tradition” was written in Hebrew and their everyday communication took place in vernacular languages such as Yiddish, Ladino, or the various languages of their host countries. To a similar or lesser degree, this phenomenon is typical of virtually all traditional societies, be it in the form of two different (though related) languages such as Hindu and Sanscrit or Italian and Latin or of two different linguistic varieties such as Qur’anic and vernacular Arabic or classical and modern Chinese. In modern societies this binary structure tends to diversify into additional linguistic varieties as cultural media such as film, broadcasting, and television multiply. The clear-cut binary structure of Table 2 therefore does not do full justice to the modern situation.

Table 2 Communicative and cultural memory: areas of difference

Forms, dimensions	Communicative memory	Cultural memory
Content	History in the frame of autobiographical memory, recent past	Mythical history, events in the mythical (<i>in illo tempore</i>) or historical past
Forms	Informal traditions and genres of everyday communication	High degree of formation, ceremonial communication; Rituals, feasts
Media	Living, embodied memory, communication in vernacular language	Mediated in texts, icons, dances, rituals, and performances of various kinds; “classical” or otherwise formalized language(s)
Time structure	80–100 years, a moving horizon of 3–4 interacting generations	Absolute past, mythical primordial time, “3,000 years”
Participation structure	Diffuse	Specialized carriers of memory, hierarchically structured

Transitions and transformations account for the dynamics of cultural memory. Two typical directions have a structural significance and should at least briefly be mentioned in this context. One is the transition from autobiographical and communicative memory to cultural memory. The other direction concerns, within cultural memory, the move from the rear stage to the forefront, from the periphery to the center, from latency or potentiality to manifestation or actualization and vice-versa. These shifts presuppose structural boundaries to be crossed: the boundary between embodied and mediated forms of memory, and the boundary between what I propose to call “working” and “storage memories” or “canon” and “archive” (A. Assmann, 1999, pp. 130–145). Western society is living through a period of transition from communicative to cultural memory. The main problem is how to preserve the personal memories of holocaust survivors and other eye witnesses of the catastrophes that occurred in the context of World War II and how to transform them into durable forms of cultural memory that may be transmitted to later generations. The Biblical book of Deuteronomy offers a striking parallel. The problem with which Deuteronomy is concerned is how to preserve the memory of the generation who had witnessed the Exodus from Egypt and the revelation of the Law and turn it into cultural memory that can be handed down to an infinite number of future generations of Israelites. The aim of Deuteronomy is to teach what to remember and how to remember, that is, both the lesson that must never be forgotten and the mnemotechnique that ensures its continuous transmission. Moses outlines a full-fledged mnemotechnique of individual and collective remembering (J. Assmann, 1992, pp. 215–228).

The book of Deuteronomy is the foundation text of a religion based on a covenant between one single god and a chosen people. In this new religion, memory is to play the central role. It deals with a revolutionary change of cultural memory. Normally, cultural memory is not instituted this way; it accumulates and changes in the course