

## The Cultural Sociology of Memory: Neo-Freudian Impressions

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“...in the group too an impression of the past is retained in unconscious memory-traces.”

-Sigmund Freud (*Moses and Monotheism*)

On November 30, 1952 West German President Theodor Heuss traveled to Bergen-Belsen to dedicate a memorial and deliver a speech. Two months earlier, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer had signed a treaty in Luxembourg detailing an unprecedented indemnity agreement between West Germany and Israel. Heuss was already an experienced speaker about Germany's Nazi past, and much praised for his eloquence and probity. Several times over the previous years, Heuss had warned his countrymen not to deny their collective past and to face what had been done in their name. But on this first visit by a leader of the newly founded Federal Republic to an extermination camp, in the context of tense political negotiations, and with World Jewish Congress President Nahum Goldman at Heuss' side, the moment was unusually fraught.

Heuss began as he had several times before, with a warning to those who believed he should not acknowledge any collective responsibility for the Nazi crimes: “... the refusal [to give the speech], the evasion inherent in a "no" would have seemed cowardly to me, and we Germans will, shall, and must, it seems to

me, learn to be brave when faced with the truth, and that particularly on a soil drenched and devastated by the excesses of human cowardice..." So far, so good. What followed, however, is perhaps more surprising. Heuss went on to remind that Germans too suffered in just such camps in 1945 and 1946 (eliding the difference between extermination and prison camps), and continued to suffer at the hands of the Communists (this was, of course, a common refrain in postwar German rhetoric). While he refuted the claim that this comparison would wipe out the need for Germans to remember, he did so in a way that did not wholly eliminate the relativization: "...to point to the injustice and brutality of others in order to furnish an excuse for oneself is a method," he said, "adopted only by those who lay no claim to moral standards." Referring ambiguously to both perpetrators and deniers, however, Heuss stated: "Such people are to be found among all nations, among the Americans as well as among the Germans or the French and so on. No one nation is better than another. There are people of every kind in each nation. [Even] America is not "God's own country"..." Heuss' main point was a warning to anyone who felt superior to Germany and inclined to judge it harshly:

It seems to me that the tariff of virtue with which the nations equip themselves is a trite and pernicious thing. It endangers the clear and decent sense of patriotism which will support everyone who consciously lives in history, and which may lend pride and

assurance to anyone who perceives the great events, but must not be allowed to seduce us into the apathy of Pharisaic self-assurance.

Two elements of this statement are particularly striking: First, why, given his location, was Heuss lecturing the world about its hypocrisy? And second, why was he doing so in reference to the Pharisees? The Pharisees, an ancient Jewish cult, appear in Matthew 23:13, “How terrible for you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees! Hypocrites!” Also, the Parable of the Pharisee in Luke 18:9-14 gives the Pharisees as an example of “people who were sure of their own goodness and despised everybody else.” Indeed, Heuss’ relativising strategy and reference to the Pharisees was widespread in the German discourse since 1945, appearing across the political spectrum and in a wide variety of contexts. The Swiss/German theologian Karl Barth: “It will not be easy to make clear to [the Germans] that we mean them well, that we are turning to them without conditions, that we want to meet them not as the Pharisee did the publican, and that nevertheless, in this respect, we cannot yield them an inch.” Or Cardinal Frings of Cologne: “When men judge men—particularly victors, the vanquished—Pharisaism very easily results.” Or the Catholic political commentator (and former Nazi prisoner) Eugon Kogon: the honest German should not worry about condemners from outside but “allows them the victor’s triumph even when they have gone the same or similar way that has made him guilty, and does not consider himself the toll collector: ‘Lord, I thank you that I am not like that Pharisee over there!’” It is there in the liberal philosopher Karl

Jaspers as well, who criticized the exiles, such as Thomas Mann: “At times we seem to hear a Pharisaical note in the charges, from those who perilously made their escape”; or when he warns those who were not Nazis not to be too self-satisfied: “We dissociate ourselves from the Pharisaism of those who think the mere absence of a party badge makes them first-class people.” And there are many more examples.

Clearly, “Pharisaism” is a more common referent in sophisticated German speech than it is in English, though not common enough even in German that one would expect to find it quite so frequently, especially not from those with established anti-Nazi credentials. Nevertheless, the word is important not simply for its appearance, but for the purposes to which it was put and the larger constellation of reflexes it indicated. Indeed, this obscure reference to a biblical Jewish cult to warn the world against judging Germany too harshly was associated with another trope, namely that Germany was not only being treated badly, but that, in the process, Germany had taken the place of the Jews. The fact that postwar Germans considered themselves to be victims is well-established in the historical literature (e.g. Moeller 2002). But the degree to which the public discourse made that claim with reference to being like the Jews has been less noticed. To give just a few emblematic examples:

- Bishop Theophil Wurm, criticizing occupation policies: “To squeeze the German people together in an ever more crowded space and to reduce its possibilities for life as much as possible cannot, in fundamental terms, be

evaluated any differently than the extermination plans of Hitler against the Jewish race.”

- Exile writer Thomas Mann: "Perhaps history has in fact intended for them [the Germans] the role of the Jews, one which even Goethe thought befitted them: to be one day scattered throughout the world and to view their existence with an intellectual proud self-irony."
- Philosopher Karl Jaspers again: “A world opinion which condemns a people collectively is of a kind with the fact that for thousands of years men have thought and said, 'The Jews are guilty of the Crucifixion.’” And, in a different context, “The political question is whether it is politically sensible, purposeful, safe and just to turn a whole nation into a pariah nation [the term Max Weber developed to characterize the Jews], to degrade it beneath all others, to dishonor further, once it had dishonored itself.”
- And finally, legal theorist Carl Schmitt: “As God allowed hundreds of thousands of Jews to be killed, he simultaneously saw the revenge that they would take on Germany; and that which he foresees today for the avengers and those demanding restitution, humanity will experience in another unexpected moment.”

I document this phenomenon—the claimed reversal of the Germans and the Jews—in great detail in my book, *In the House of the Hangman*. My question here, however, is how to explain it.

Perhaps the most obvious answer, or at least the easiest explanatory reflex, is to say that these commentators and their cohorts were deploying a variety of classically Freudian defense mechanisms. Most obviously, the pervasive claims that Germans were the new Jews seem to be textbook cases of displacement and projection; elsewhere, particularly in efforts by German commentators to “explain” National Socialism as a disease of the West generally, intellectualization, relativization, and rationalization seem to be at work. The problem, however, is that whether or not psychoanalysis is well-suited to explaining the dispositions of individuals, it seems like it should not be the obvious choice for explaining why so many speakers reached in the same rhetorical directions, lest we speak of some kind of epidemic. Defense is the reflex of a threatened psyche. Is this the best contemporary scholarship can do to explain what are surely cultural over and above psychological processes, consistencies of a discourse rather than of a mere collection of free individual speakers? If the now enormous scholarly discourse on “social” or “collective” memory—whether anthropological, sociological, or literary (cultural)—has been worth even a part of the resources that have been invested in it in recent years, surely there must be other models than a reduction to individual psychology!

In fact there are, and I will trace some of their outlines in what follows. The crux of the solution, I make clear through a reading of Freud and the

Egyptologist Jan Assmann, is to theorize “unconscious” dimensions of memory at a level that supercedes that of the individual. In dialogue with Freud, Assmann and a number of others have sought to show that there are “unconscious” elements in cultures as well as in individuals and thus to theorize the “unconscious” aspect of memory at the level of the collectivity. In turn, I draw on this work to show that these unconscious elements shape horizons of understanding whereby speakers might deploy the same tropes in defense not only of their solitary egos, but of cultural identities more generally. As Assmann makes clear, “cultural memory” is no mere metaphorical extension of individual memory. Cultural memory is born of collective identity, constitutes it in time, and in turn serves it, though usually not in straight-forwardly instrumentalist ways. As such, Assmann’s theory provides a corrective to the presentist implications with which Maurice Halbwachs founded the contemporary study of “collective memory,” though as I will also argue, Assmann overstates the opposition of his “cultural” understanding of memory to Halbwach’s more sociological emphasis.

### *Freud’s Cultural Sociology*

Ironically, then, the place to start the search for non-individualistic explanations of the cultural reflexes identified above is with Freud himself, and the sociological (sic) thinking he inspired. While the sociological Freud is apparent in many of his writings, it is perhaps clearest, or at least most directly relevant, in his strange and controversial last book, *Moses and Monotheism*. For

present purposes, Freud's substantive claim in *Moses and Monotheism*—that Jewish identity is founded on the repressed memory of their having murdered Moses, itself a return of the repressed memory of patricide at the foundation of all culture—is less interesting than the theoretical struggles this assertion caused for Freud. The problem is this: we understand—have a theory of—how the repressed returns in the neurotic individual; it is stored—and repressed—in the brain as memory-traces. Where individual memory is concerned, as long as mind is preserved by brain, the individual's past remains potentially active for the individual's present (and often at odds with the individual's conscious desires and interests). How, then, might this work at the level of the collective? As Freud put it, “In what form is the operative tradition in the life of peoples present—a question which does not occur with individuals, since there it is solved by the existence of unconscious memory-traces of the past.”

Since Freud asserts that the memory of patricide remains repressed but present in Jewish culture, there seem to be only two possibilities. First, explicit transmission: A tradition could be based on “conscious memories of oral communications which people then living had received from their ancestors only two or three generations back who had themselves been participants and eye-witnesses of the events in question... knowledge normally handed on from grandfather to grandchild.” The problem is that no long-term cultural identity, certainly not one with a repressed patricide at its core and preserved over millennia, could be easily maintained in this way. There is no written record of the patricide Freud claims to have discovered, and it is not obviously present in

the oral tradition. Freud rejects as well Ernst Sellin's theory that explicit knowledge was held through the ages by the priestly class. Such knowledge, Freud argues, would not be enough to seize the imaginative powers of the masses when it was re-presented to them.

The second possibility is that repressed memory is somehow preserved in a people without being either written or orally transmitted. "There exists," Freud in fact asserted, "an inheritance of memory—traces of what our forefathers experienced, quite independently of direct communication and of the influence of education by example." But through what mechanism? Freud's answer is that "The masses, too, retain an impression of the past in unconscious memory traces." To be sure, Freud notes carefully that "It is not easy to translate the concepts of individual psychology into mass psychology"; something *similar* may have happened in the history of the human species as in the life of the individual, but that is not to say the processes are identical: The processes we study here in the life of a people are very similar to those we know from psychopathology, but they are still not quite the same." Freud thus speaks of an *analogy* between individual and "mass" processes, and is careful to reject the idea of a "collective unconscious." "The content of the unconscious," he argues, "is collective anyhow." It remains to be seen, however, what this could mean.

A number of key concepts and arguments for the study of collective memory are thus already apparent in this extremely brief account of Freud's most challenging book. Freud notes the differences between written and oral traditions, pointing out that "What has been deleted or altered in the written version might

quite well have been preserved uninjured in the tradition. Tradition,” he notes, “was the complement and at the same time the contradiction of the written history.” As a result, “the facts which the so-called official written history purposely tried to suppress were in reality never lost.” This is a useful generalizable insight indeed. Additionally, Freud takes account of learning processes of imitation and repetition in ways suggestive for later theorists who insist on the role of incorporated as well as inscribed memories. Furthermore, given his subject matter in *Moses and Monotheism*, as well as in the earlier *Totem and Taboo*, Freud makes clear that elements of the collective past—whether transmitted in the written record or oral tradition or otherwise—recede very far into the history not only of the group, but of the human species as a whole: the complex sexual-aggressive conflict he sees played out in the founding and refounding of Jewish identity is itself but a reflection of more archaic residues, as well as forming a background for the formation of subsequent religious mythologies like the Christian and Muslim. Collective memory thus includes much more than what can be explicitly acknowledged in the record or lore of a people: memories are deep and primal as well as manifest and contemporary.

If Freud has thus posed the question of collective memory in a seminal manner, as well as provided key terms for a thorough sociological and communications-theoretic analysis of transmission, his own answer to the challenge he poses has been more controversial; indeed, the sometimes more, sometimes less confident formulations of the answer in his strangely constructed book (really a series of connected manuscripts often covering and recovering the

same ground) indicates Freud's own doubts, or at least his awareness that his theory was at best unelaborated and challenging to the status quo.

At the heart of the controversy, and Freud's hesitations, is the claim that "There probably exists in the mental life of the individual not only what he has experienced himself, but also what he brought with him at birth, fragments of phylogenetic origin, an archaic heritage." In answer to his own question about what might constitute this inheritance, Freud offers "the universality of speech symbolism" and "thought-connections between ideas which were formed during the historical development of speech and have to be repeated every time the individual passes through such a development." More important, however, is an even more radical claim that "the archaic heritage of mankind includes not only dispositions, but also ideational contents, memory traces of the experiences of former generations." Concrete ideas—in this case, repressed memories—thus seem to be passed on not merely because they are taught and told, but in some way like a genetic inheritance.

Indeed, here is where Freud evokes the concern of critics (beyond those who question his historical assertions). In particular, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi finds in Freud's account no clear mechanism whereby a long-term repressed memory of patricide could be preserved. Without recourse to the illegitimately mystical "collective unconscious" that Freud denies, Yerushalmi believes Freud is committing the error of "cultural Lamarckism," the belief—long discredited in biology—that acquired characteristics are heritable. Indeed, Freud notes the problem himself, but answers it only with vague insistence: "The present attitude

of biological science... rejects the idea of acquired qualities being transmitted to descendents. I admit, in all modesty, that in spite of this I cannot picture biological development proceeding without taking this factor into account.” Freud goes on to offer a theory about the conditions under which a primal memory first enters into the archaic heritage—“when the experience is important enough, or is repeated often enough”—as well as in what circumstances this repressed archaic memory might become active again in the life of the group—“the awakening...of the memory trace through a recent real repetition of the event...” But one can well understand and appreciate Yerushalmi’s concerns. How exactly does the “unconscious” work to pass on collective memories without being a “collective unconscious”? And is Freud rejecting that anti-Lamarckian position of Darwinian biology or does he somehow find an adequate accommodation?

Both Richard Bernstein and Jacques Derrida have provided a vigorous defense of Freud’s account against Yerushalmi’s attack. Before turning to Assmann’s more fundamental and generative retheorization, it is worth looking just a bit more closely at what more Bernstein and Derrida believe can be said on behalf of Freud’s historical but not “collective” unconscious.

### *Defending Freud*

According to Bernstein, Yerushalmi is correct to notice that “The true axis of the book [*Moses and Monotheism*]... is the problem of tradition, not merely its

origins, but above all its dynamics.”<sup>1</sup> To be sure, Freud’s account of an identity-defining Jewish unconscious is complex, but Bernstein defends Freud vigorously against Yerushalmi. Freud was well aware, Bernstein points out, that his analogy between human neurosis and the course of Jewish history is problematic and requires an argument. Bernstein’s defense of Freud thus has two features. First, Bernstein emphasizes that, although Freud consistently rejected doctrines of a group or collective unconscious, he was right that there is in fact something about intergenerational transmission of trauma that invokes pre- and un-conscious as well as conscious dimensions: “What is communicated from one generation to the next,” Bernstein writes, “is not only what is explicitly stated or what is set forth by precept and example, but also what is unconsciously communicated.” The problem for Bernstein is that

Unless we pay attention to these unconscious dynamics of transmission, we will never understand the receptivity (and resistance) to a living tradition. What is repressed in the memory of a people is never “totally” repressed in the sense of being hermetically sealed off from their conscious lives; there are always unconscious memory-traces of what has been repressed. This is why there can be a ‘return of the repressed,’ a

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<sup>1</sup> Richard J. Bernstein, 1998. *Freud and the Legacy of Moses*. New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 35. My understanding of Freud’s complex book owes an unrepayable debt to Bernstein’s explication.

return that can break out with great psychic force in an individual *or* in the history of a people.<sup>2</sup>

If we do not look harder at Freud's account, Bernstein thus argues against Yerushalmi, we will be without an answer to his ineluctable question.

In the second place, Bernstein seeks to place Freud's strange book—written as the storm clouds were gathering for the darkest night in Jewish history by a scientist who had spent his entire life struggling with the meaning of his Jewishness—in an ongoing line of inquiry into the operation of tradition. In this way, Freud's strange historical assertions appear part of a less questionable tradition of inquiry into Jewish identity. Jean-Paul Sartre, for instance, sought to explain the conundrum of Jewish identity in related manner: the essence of Judaism, Sartre argued, was not its theological content but Jew's claim to chosenness and the punishment the Jews have received for this claim. Unlike Sartre, however, Freud believed the essence of Judaism was more than just these two clear elements: More fundamentally, the essence of Judaism was to be found in its complex "family romance," with the retrospectively discoverable trauma and doubling at its core, and the peculiar dynamics these generated throughout the ages. In this regard, Judaism is paradigmatic of all religion, which Freud argues grows from primal fear, guilt, and repression. But for Bernstein, Freud's effort to understand the simultaneous suffering and persistence of his people is an obvious and important endeavor.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59. Emphasis added.

Furthermore, Bernstein argues, Freud's effort—as apparently bizarre as its historical claims may be—is best understood as an early moment in the contemporary tradition of hermeneutic philosophy—particularly the work of both Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer—a tradition from which “We gain a new appreciation of the role of narrative and storytelling in our everyday lives and in the human disciplines.” This tradition, Bernstein argues, also teaches us “to appreciate the preconscious dimension of tradition” because “there is much more to any vital tradition than lies within our field of consciousness.”<sup>3</sup> This contemporary tradition, Bernstein implies, would not be possible without Freud's assertions on behalf of the unconscious.

However, the question of how this pre- or unconscious dimension operates in collectivities through history, without such a claim implying the kind of “collective unconscious” Freud consistently rejected or cultural Lamarckism Yerushalmi suspected, remains to be solved, and Bernstein does not provide more than extra clarity on the question and trust in the line of inquiry. To provide further defense of Freud, Bernstein draws on the prior intervention of Jacques Derrida, whose book *Archive Fever* also intervened against Yerushalmi's reading. Like Bernstein after him, Derrida began by arguing that Freud was careful to distinguish “between acquired characters (‘which are hard to grasp’) and ‘memory-traces of external events... All that Freud says,” Derrida continues, “is that we are receptive to an analogy between the two types of transgenerational

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 62-63.

memory [the two types being tradition and repressed traumatic memory]”<sup>4</sup> Freud is thus not, in Derrida’s reading, arguing that memory-traces are the same as inherited genetic characteristics, only that they operate in an analogous way: *like* genes, they are handed down from generation to generation without being explicitly or intentionally transmitted and often without being visible for many generations; but this is only an analogy.

Derrida is a believer in Freud’s account of this transmission and seeks to retheorize it in his own terms. Instead of the genetic, Derrida refers to the “archival.” By “archive” (and the associated “archive fever” of his title), Derrida is not referring to anything as material as a physical repository, but to the operation of tradition in such a way that does not have to be explicitly told or enacted, but also contains vast latent deposits (what Derrida calls “characters and traces”) with the potential to appear long after they were stored and often without any record of them having been stored at all: “These characters and traces could well follow... quite complicated linguistic, cultural, cipherable, and in general ciphered transgenerational and transindividual relays, transiting thus through an archive, the science of which is not at a standstill.” Derrida thus emphasizes the obscure characters of the process—its ciphered qualities; but he does not do more than merely claim (with implied reference to the Freudian tradition) that we have progressed in our ability to decipher these relays.

The question of “the archive” for Derrida is thus “a question posed by Freud to which we *must* generate an answer.” Unfortunately, again, despite

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<sup>4</sup> Jacques Derrida, 1996. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 35.

Derrida's claim that the "science" of "the archive" has not been at a standstill, his discussion, like Bernstein's, does not in my reading go much beyond a defense of Freud's most general assertions to provide concrete sociological or culture-theoretic tools for the analysis of "the archive." To be sure, his description of the problem is compelling:

Without the irrepressible, that is to say, only suppressible and repressible, force and authority of this transgenerational memory... there would no longer be any essential history of culture, there would no longer be any question of memory and of archive, of patriarchive or matriarchive, and one would no longer even understand how an ancestor can speak within us, nor what sense there might be in us to speak *to* him or her, to speak in such an *unheimlich*, "uncanny" fashion, to his or her ghost. *With it.*"

But isn't calling the process uncanny already an abdication of Freud's challenge—to explain? Redeem Freud we must, though neither Bernstein nor Derrida, in my reading, provides a clear recipe for such an explanation.

*From The Unconscious to Culture*

Is Derrida correct that the science of the archive has not been at a standstill? If so, why is it still so easy to take recourse in individual-level psychoanalytic explanations for the cultural reflexes illustrated in the postwar

German case? While Derrida does not specify exactly which work he is referring to as the science of the archive which has not been at a standstill, perhaps the most important theoretical framework since the seminal work of Maurice Halbwachs a half century earlier (to which Derrida does not refer) is that of the Egyptologist Jan Assmann and his associates (most significantly Aleida Assmann). The Assmann circle's work, while still relatively unknown in Anglo-American memory discourses (due mostly to its slow translation history) has emerged as a dominant paradigm in European, particularly German, scholarship, and provides, in my opinion, one of the most promising avenues for solving the explanatory challenge my German example, as just one case, poses.

Assmann's work indeed shares many concerns and perspectives with Freud's. At the very beginning of Assmann's theory, for instance, is a deeply existential claim about memory that has obviously Freudian overtones:

The original form, in a manner of speaking the fundamental experience behind every distinction between yesterday and today... is death. Only with its end, with its radical incontinuity, does life become past in such a way that it gives rise to a memory culture. One could almost here speak of the first act (*Urszene*) of memory culture.

Assmann's point, beyond the violent impulses at the core of human self-understanding and the archaic roots of collective identity, is that even something as fundamentally individual as a personal biography is already deeply social:

The difference between... the remembrance of the individual that gives a perspective on his life from old age and the commemoration of that life from the retrospective view of posterity makes clear the specifically cultural element of collective remembering. We say that the dead one "lives on" in the memory of posterity as if this has to do with a natural continuation deriving from its own power. In truth, however, it is a matter of an act of resuscitation which the dead owes to the determined will of the group not to allow him to fade away but to persist as a member of the community by virtue of remembrance and to carry him forward into the on-going present.

We do indeed, as Derrida asserts, speak with the dead, and in their uncanny fashion they speak to us. For this reason, Assmann states clearly that "Our expansion of the concept of memory from the realm of the psyche to the realm of the social and of cultural traditions is no mere metaphor." Even more emphatically, "What is at stake is not the (illegitimate) transfer of a concept derived from individual psychology to social and cultural phenomena, but the

interaction between psyche, consciousness, society, and culture.” As Freud argued, the unconscious is “collective anyhow.” Assmann shows how.

Assmann’s turn from the more conventional concept of “collective memory” articulated in 1925 by Maurice Halbwachs to his own concept of “cultural memory” derives as well from his agreement with Freud. As Assmann wrote at the end of his *Moses the Egyptian*,

Freud’s greatest discovery and lasting contribution to this discourse is the role which he attributed to the dynamics of memory and the return of the repressed... one should acknowledge that the concepts of latency and the return of the repressed are indispensable for any adequate theory of cultural memory. They need, however, to be redefined in cultural terms. Freud reminded us of the fact that there is such a thing as “cultural forgetting” or even “cultural repression.” Since Freud, no theory of culture can afford not to take these concepts into consideration. The old concept of tradition has proved insufficient.

As Assmann wrote earlier in his foundational text, *The Cultural Memory*, and very much in line with Freud’s understanding, “The case of commemorating the dead as the earliest and most widespread form of memory culture at the same time makes clear that we are dealing with phenomena that are not adequately grasped with the usual concept of ‘tradition.’” Something more existential is clearly at

stake, the province of the id rather than the ego. But as Freud showed, the id contains historical and evolutionary as well as psychic content.

As for Freud, for Assmann “tradition” refers to the explicit oral transmission that takes places within the horizon of about three generations. According to Assmann, this “communicative memory” is the central concern for Halbwachs, who he says focuses on the operation of “social frameworks” contained in and underwriting group identities to understand the genesis of individual memory within those social frameworks. Collective memory for Halbwachs, according to Assmann, is thus a sort of “binding” memory, and as such is subject to instrumentalization and is highly changeable. Given this reading, Assmann characterizes Halbwachs as fundamentally a social psychologist, and criticizes him for missing the important role of writing and other forms of inscription, which work against the fluidity of communicative memory in groups. There is, in other words, another dimension to memory entirely, and Assmann charges that Halbwachs misses it (though he does acknowledge Halbwachs’ late work on the *Legendary Topography of the Holy Land*, which seems at odds with this reading).

Indeed, Assmann draws his own concept of “cultural memory” in contrast to Halbwachs’ “collective memory” through a contrast between Halbwachs and the art historian Aby Warburg. According to Assmann, Warburg—who was the founding father of iconology, the study of the “afterlives” of images—was more directly concerned with history and transmission than Halbwachs. How did the old persist in the new? According to Assmann, “The presence of the old in the

new was in Warburg's view not a question of the sheer persistence of the subject matter, but one of spiritual appropriation and transfer. In culture we find the objectifications of human experiences which can spring into new life even after the lapse of thousands of years." In contrast, Assmann argues, Halbwachs "showed that the past is never able to survive as such, but can only survive if it is reconstructed within the framework of a cultural present." As a result, Assmann writes, "we might say that Warburg explores culture as a phenomenon of memory and Halbwachs explores memory as a problem of culture." This is because, Assmann claims, erroneously in my opinion, that "Being a sociologist, Halbwachs had only limited interest in the past, in the 'vertical anchoring' of mankind." Assmann rests his claim on a contrast between the nineteenth century's interest in the diachronic and the twentieth century's putative interest in the synchronic, placing Warburg in the former mindset, and Halbwachs in the later. But whatever the derivation, the contribution Assmann makes here is to show us that culture is not merely a timeless structure, but a process in time. All memory is cultural, and all culture is historical. If, as in Halbwachs' account, memory is formed within the frames of the present, we can decipher a structure of interests at work; if, however, culture is a ciphered archive of lost memories, it can create strange and surprising patterns in the present in explicable merely in terms of present interests.

For Assmann, Halbwachs is thus to be credited for taking the step "leading from the internal world of the subject into the social and emotional preconditions for memory." But Halbwachs, according to Assmann's reading,

“refused to go so far as to accept the need for symbolic and cultural frameworks.”

For this reason, Assmann argued, Halbwachs drew too sharp a contrast between collective memory on the one hand and history and tradition on the other:

“Following Halbwachs,” Assmann writes, “the collective memory is not only distinguished from history but also from that organized and objectivized form of memory that is contained under the concept of tradition. Tradition is for ...[Halbwachs] not a form but a deformation of memory.”

In reaction, Assmann distinguishes sharply between “communicative memory”—the subject matter he attributes to Halbwachs and oral history—and “cultural memory”—the conceptual origins of which he attributes to Freud, Derrida, and Bernstein: “The concept of cultural memory corresponds to what Derrida calls “archive” and Bernstein “tradition” and, like them, is indebted to Freud’s insights into the psychocultural dimension and dynamics of cultural transmission.” Freud’s objection to the “traditional concept of tradition” was that it could not grasp the peculiar historical dimension of religions and collective identities that perdure through centuries. Assmann’s concept of cultural memory responds to just this inadequacy because he agrees that “both the collective and the individual turn to the archive of cultural traditions, the arsenal of symbolic forms, the ‘imaginary’ of myths and images, of the ‘great stories’, sagas and legend, scenes and constellations that live or can be reactivated in the treasure stores of a people.” For Assmann,

This explains why we must free ourselves from the reductionism that would like to limit the phenomenon of memory entirely to the body, the neural basis of consciousness, and the idea of a deep structure of the soul that can be passed down biologically. Our memory has a cultural basis and not just a social one.

Halbwachs thus succeeded in freeing memory from the brain, Assmann argues, but not from the context of *explicit* tradition. And it was precisely Freud's point that these somehow implicit (repressed) legacies are the most generative.

An essential part of memory, according to Assmann, is thus "age-old, out of the way, and discarded" and includes "the noninstrumentalizable, heretical, subversive, and disowned." This is what Assmann means by "cultural memory," and its power makes clear why we cannot do without this additional concept: In contrast to communicative memory, cultural memory can be remarkably consistent and thus has the potential to stand in opposition to the social and political actualities of the present. It is, in this way, a "counter-present" (*kontrapraesent*) force and an "anachronistic structure," much in the way a repressed memory can be for the individual.

Nevertheless, understanding memory as a form of culture is only part of the solution. The other part is reciprocally to understand culture as a part of memory. And here Assmann's association of cultural memory with the durable macro-historical heritage in contrast to the fluidity and instrumentalism of the communicative has the potential to mislead (to be sure, Assmann's case studies

are sufficiently supple, and he has adequately warned against over-drawing the dichotomy). My point, however, is that social frameworks of communicative memory are more highly structured than Assmann's definitions imply (hence the consistency of the German discourse I discovered) and, conversely, the unconscious structures of cultural memory are more fluid, even within the space of fewer than three generations. As Derrida says, we do in fact speak with ghosts, and sometimes they seem to speak back.

Assmann's distinctions are thus simultaneously fuzzy ("tradition," for instance, is used in subtly different ways throughout his writings, as in Freud's) and too extreme (though Assmann intends them only analytically, such that the interplay between communicative and cultural dimensions is inextricable in practice). Moreover, he uses the distinction between communicative and cultural memory in the service of a macro-historical perspective as much in dialogue with writers like Jack Goody, Andre Leroi-Gourhan, Walter Ong, Reinhardt Koselleck, and others who address epochal transformations in the media of communication, as it is in dialogue with the sociologist Halbwachs: Given Assmann's perspective from Egyptology and the study of ancient civilizations, questions such as the difference between oral and written cultures, and how different inscription media inform the role of memory, play a formative role in his definitions. In these regards, Assmann's theories, and those of his colleagues, are more at the level of Durkheim's work on the division of labor than the level of a political sociology that might help us understand why postwar German intellectuals and politicians said what they said.

I would indeed like to refine Assmann's concepts and argue more strongly for Halbwachs as a cultural and political sociologist. It is nonetheless true, however, that Assmann's conceptual reaction to Freud is essential for the purpose with which I began, understanding the *culturally* structured nature of the German reflexes I outlined, which means not just their structure of interests, but their ciphered transit through the archive. For surely the strange reversals of that discourse, fitting the model of projection and displacement, are inexplicable without recourse to dimensions beyond instrumentalism or explicit tradition, just as they are irreducible to an accidental concurrence of individual dispositions. The force that leads the quoted speakers to the "Pharisaicism" trope again and again and to the strange equation of the Germans and the Jews is indeed one best understood as unconscious—not in the sense of the psyche, but in the sense of culture as a generative structure.

The preceding should not be misunderstood as a hostile critique of Assmann, but as a celebration of his theory's power even at a more micro-social level than Assmann claimed on its behalf (though both Jan and Aleida Assmann have written with great insight on the structures of postwar German memory). The Assmanns' interest in a macro, even mega-historical account of cultural memory that pays sufficient attention to the civilizational import of media is indeed a crucial corrective to Halbwachs, whose sterile modernist distinction between memory and history is both insufficient and constraining (witness the

widespread dissatisfaction with the overdrawn dichotomies of Pierre Nora, perhaps Halbwachs' most significant legatee besides the Assmanns).

But what the Assmann's have done for culture writ large, it seems to me, is required for communication writ small. Cultural sociology has as much to say about long-term structures of the unconscious as it does about the short-term negotiations on its behalf. Communicative memory and its interactions with culture are thus not to be handled as a residual category, the second-class material for a "mere" oral history. Instead, its structures of stability and dynamism are a central part of social memory studies taken as a whole. This is an enterprise which, despite the proliferation of alternatives and parts within it, I remain committed to seeing—if in a way decisively shaped by Freud, Derrida, and Assmann's insistence on the unconscious-- as an integrated enterprise. Without Assmann's emphasis on the historical content of social frameworks, all we could do as political sociologists would be decipher the common interests which led the postwar Germans to pursue the same rhetorical strategies; we could never, however, understand why they did so with exactly those terms, where those terms came from, and how those terms constituted their identities even beyond their own awareness.

