Memory and Narrative in Social Theory

The contributions of Jacques Derrida and Walter Benjamin

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ABSTRACT. The author argues that contemporary social theories cannot simultaneously accommodate the diachronic and synchronic dimensions of time within their frameworks, because they reduce the complexities of social life in order to cope with them. Jacques Derrida's and Walter Benjamin's writings on memory open up the possibility of thinking about the relation between memory and narrative in multiple ways. These two theorists affirm the discontinuity and the non-recognition between past events and present discourses and analyse a broad range of possibilities in the reading of history. The author argues that the simultaneity of the diachronic and synchronic dimensions of time becomes possible only when past and present are not thought of as two separate entities, as is common practice in social theory. KEY WORDS • history • Jacques Derrida • memory • Walter Benjamin

I. Memory and Social Theory

Since Marx, at least, the links between history, society and liberty have become intertwined in social and political thought. Yet the notion that historical knowledge entails freedom is not uncontested within contemporary social theory. The grand narratives about the past, the linear history of sequential events, and the evolutionary appraisal of human beings' achievements have been strongly denounced as invented traditions, instruments of power and constraining practices.

In the last three decades of the 20th century, there have been several different

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attempts to deal with the past, no longer through history, understood as a rationalized account of a distant past, but through collective memories. As the general public became aware of the necessity of respecting people's memories and their commemoration, so too intellectuals have embraced memory as the concept capable of doing what history can no longer do: build links between past and present. The term 'collective memory', however, encompasses a number of different meanings, from more subjective and particular accounts of the past to readings of remote traces inscribed in social codes.

As a result of new approaches to the past, the work of Maurice Halbwachs on collective memory, written at the beginning of the 20th century, has been widely rediscovered and reinterpreted by historians.[1] Halbwachs established a distinction between history, as schematization and arbitrary explanation about the past, and social or collective memory, as the representation of the past within social thought (Halbwachs, 1968/1950).[2] Historians criticized earlier social and economic historical analyses for their emphasis on structural and repetitive elements, and proposed the incorporation of subjective, cultural and political aspects into the study of the past. Monuments, hymns, flags, exhibitions, autobiographies and commemorations became privileged objects of study.

Although they differ in many aspects, the concepts of collective memory always suggest that individuals retrieve the past as they interact with one another and, consequently, they imply the intertwinements between past and present, on one hand, and agency and structure, on the other. It is not surprising, therefore, that memory became a favoured concept in an understanding of the past. To anyone who follows contemporary political debates, from the Nuremberg Trials to the ethnic massacres in former Yugoslavia, it is clear that the issue of collective memory has become deeply associated with the study of social identity, nation building, ideology and citizenship.[3]

Contemporary social theory has done much to overcome the dichotomies between agency and structure. However, the solutions proposed to this classical dilemma within social thought have failed to gain wide acceptance. If we think of the great majority of even contemporary studies that focus upon the issue of collective memory, we will see that their objective is to better understand the uses and determinations of the past in current social practices. Although scholars have conceived of memory in the context of a pragmatics of remembering and forgetting, they hardly touch the question of the presence of the past that may exist beyond the individual's will, that is, of social determinations related to the past that are liable to leave a mark on an individual's subjectivity.

In this article, I will argue first that contemporary social theories, as they reduce the social world by means of a closed and circular set of concepts, fail to consider the synchronic and diachronic dimensions of time in their simultaneity. Concerning memory, their approaches remain partial emphasizing recognition, representation or transmitted meaning between past and present lived experi-

ences. As memory entails a process of differentiation within continuity, it is important to consider the limits of these approaches.

In order to develop this argument, I will, in the second and third parts of this article, draw from Jacques Derrida's and Walter Benjamin's writings on memory. These two authors think of temporality as both marking each thought or action and enabling ruptures and renewals. Having rejected the synchronic–diachronic dichotomy, they allow us to understand the limits of contemporary social thinking. Neither of them deals systematically with conceptions of time or their relationship to social theory. Yet the question of temporality is crucial for them and is present in some form in everything they wrote. For the sake of clarity, I will focus my analysis on two basic texts written on the issue of memory: *Mémoires pour Paul de Man* (Derrida, 1988)[4] and *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire* (Benjamin, 1968/1939). These texts deal with the issue of memory at the same time as conveying each author's basic premises concerning temporality.

II. Social Theory and the Diachronic–Synchronic Dichotomy

As we have seen, the work of Maurice Halbwachs on collective memory has been widely revived by social scientists. After studying with the philosopher Henri Bergson, Halbwachs renounced philosophical questions about the nature of time and psychological issues related to memory, such as those raised by Bergson himself (1913) and Sigmund Freud (1968/1920). He was the first to consider memory as a social fact, using Emile Durkheim's premise that social conventions came prior to individuals.

Instead of concerning himself with the recovery of time by perception or intentionality, Halbwachs wrote about the past reconstructed anew within collective representations. In a set of writings extending from 1925 to 1950, he set forth the central argument that individuals always rely on other people's memories to confirm their own recollections and for them to endure over time. Thus the functioning of individual memory required instruments such as words and ideas, which individuals did not invent by themselves, but rather borrowed from their milieu (Halbwachs, 1968/1950: 36). By blurring the boundaries between past and present as well as those between individual and collective memory, the sociologist established an agenda that remains valid to this day.[5]

Contemporary social scientists have attempted to understand an epoch through the investigation of testimonies, cultural practices and ongoing traditions.[6] The emphasis is on what we have not chosen, on the role developed by living traditions, that is, on shared, self-perpetuating sets of lived experiences which are transmitted across generations. The hermeneutic influence on social theories is responsible for analyses that seek to illuminate the processes of

belonging and shared beliefs that take place in contemporary societies over time. This influence is present in many ethnographic studies, not to mention the whole tradition of the history of culture. Lived and ongoing experiences, which are carried on in an unmediated way, are supposed to limit our ability to remember and to forget. In this case, interpretations of the past are made through the study of commemorative practices and symbols, which are seen as determining the present independently of their creators and authorities.

However, for Halbwachs, the study of the social frameworks of memory should be developed empirically and separately from the expressed intentions of individuals. Memory, as a bricolage of social conventions, was dissociated from both individual creativity and influences of the past (Halbwachs, 1968/1950: 15–17). His contention was that although recollections seemed to be the results of personal feelings and thoughts about the past, they existed only within social conventions of the present (Halbwachs, 1925: xvi). In short, memory was to be understood as a social fact in a very Durkheimian sense, and past experiences were those that could be perceived within current, static schemes of reference.

There is a commonplace critique of structural functionalism and system theory that points out their inability to deal with novelty and the dynamic aspects of social life. We also face a far-reaching critique of culturalism for its inability to account for the influences of structural social formations upon individuals. To these criticisms collective memories respond by setting the limits of a local group, nation or ethnic community. The general criticism of both static frames of reference and unconstrained flows of living tradition has given rise to new conceptions of space–time dimension within social theory, which are associated with the attempts to transcend the division of structure-orientated and action-orientated theories. To name just a few authors who have been very influential in contemporary sociological theoretical debate, Norbert Elias (1982/1939), Pierre Bourdieu (1979) and Anthony Giddens (1984), despite their different conceptual approaches, have the merit of describing the reproduction of lived experiences within a network of social practices.

Therefore, contemporary concepts of memory are much more complex than Halbwachs could have anticipated. They construe memory as a kind of performance in which the act of remembering does not reflect either the individual's will or social determinations, but rather the intertwining of these two forces. These latter approaches are closer to the Simmelian notion of tragedy, in which life, with all of its ambivalence, produces certain forms in which it expresses and realizes itself. The temporal dimension is understood through images that are forged, negotiated and rejected by social actors at a given moment in time (Elias, 1992/1987). Concepts of the past, whether collective memory or invented tradition, vary only in terms of the struggles and conflicts present among those who engender the collective thinking.

Giddens radicalizes this approach as he points out that the continuous recon-

struction of tradition is the result of the decline of local authorities and face-to-face encounters. According to him, an un-anchored subjectivity has emerged in late modernity. Territories that exceed the limits of shared locales, the emergence of high mobility, speed, free-flowing information and a global communicative network are all responsible for creating individuals who have been *disembedded* from former traditions. Such individuals do not have to face the constraining effects of ongoing traditions, but merely the unpredictable boomerang effects of the consequences of their attitudes. Accordingly, the social actor of late modernity is seen as a free-floating actor, detached from tradition (Giddens, 1994). Although in both Elias's configurational approach (Elias, 1982/1939) and Bourdieu's definition of *habitus* and *structure structurée* (Bourdieu, 1979: 191), the effects of the frameworks of temporal reference upon social actors receive much more attention than in Giddens's structuration theory: they are always thought of as symbolic constructions of the past by knowledgeable agents.

If authors like Elias, Giddens and Bourdieu have solved classic dichotomies within social theory, the theoretical attempt of these latter authors to couple the synchronic and diachronic dimension of time within social interaction is not enough. The concepts of synchronic and diachronic time will be developed in the following sections, but preliminary definitions might be an awareness of time that is thought of as the result of an individual's perception in a given moment of the present, and to a dimension of time that cannot totally be perceived by individuals, because these latter are conceived as an inherent part of the temporal horizon respectively. The focus on contingent aspects of social life is just one more reduction of its complexity. The focus on a pragmatic concept of *habitus* is correctly concerned with the explanation of the condition of becoming. Further, it yields some crucial notions such as those related to the unpredictability of the present and the encompassing of an open future. Yet I would like to point out that these theories circumscribe the effects and determinations of either lived experiences or future possibilities to the sphere of a decision taken in the present by individuals in interaction. Concepts such as integration and belonging are analysed in terms of needs, interests, choice, and risk calculations. Consequently, although Halbwachs's concept of memory reduces it to a static social fact, it is not surprising that his writings continue to be a source of important analyses within social science.[7] My point is that the conceptual apparatuses that focus on structural, subjective or contingent aspects of social life cannot circumscribe the whole relationship between time and society. I suggest, therefore, that there is always a concept of time underwriting sociological theories, so that what is at stake here is not the creation of a temporalized sociology, as proposed by social thinkers (Baert, 1992), but rather the establishment of the limits of sociological theories as they reduce the complexities of temporality. As I said before, I will take into account the different

concepts of time in current sociology through the different constructions of memory. The concepts of collective memory, like any other in social science, bring up the issue of representation (Todorov, 1995; Ricœur, 2000). The intertwinement between synchronic and diachronic elements of time implies both the social constructions of time, and the dimension of time that is not wholly contained within them. This happens because individuals cannot be dissociated from time. Examining Derrida's and Benjamin's critiques of both the idea of an un-anchored subject who remembers and of an un-anchored memory detached from its expression, will illustrate the consequences of the reductionism of social theory in its attempts to cope with the complexities of social life.

III. Derrida and the Inability to Tell Stories from our Memories

> 'I have never known how to tell a story.
> And since I love nothing better than memory and Memory itself, Mnemosyne, I have always felt this inability as a sad infirmity. Why am I denied narration? Why have I not received this gift (*doron*) from Mnemosyne?' (Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires pour Paul de Man*, 1988: 27)

Between January and February 1984, three weeks after the death of his friend Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida gave some lectures on memory, which were published two years later. I will develop my analysis of Derrida's thoughts with the help of these insightful texts about memory. He opens his lectures with the following question: Why do those who love Mnemosyne lack the ability to tell stories? Is it possible to narrate a history out of our memories? To answer these questions we need to carefully consider his lectures on memory.

Many other texts unravel the interweaving between memory and imagination, since this is a question related to Derrida's notion of *différance*, which underscores writings such as *La carte postale*, *De la grammatologie, Resistances de la psychanalyse* or *Mal d'archive*. Moreover, I concur with Rapaport's observation that the question of time is crucial to a philosophical understanding of deconstruction (Rapaport, 1989). In what follows, the focus will be on Derrida's lectures on the specific subject of memory, since later I will compare his writings with Benjamin's reflections on memory. It is important to stress, however, that whether talking about memory, history or psychoanalysis, Derrida's consistent tendency is the deconstruction of the politics of various texts. He is always pointing out that there is no narrative without control and that the deciphered text itself already offers an explanation of itself. As he develops these arguments, he dismantles the notions of time underlying current philosophical thought. As we will see, he criticizes current philosophical traditions for retrieving time within a metaphysical, universal and objectified framework. Another point to be clarified is that it is not the aim of this article to go over

Derrida's debate with different philosophical traditions. Rather than an exploration of the set of aporias within the philosophical debate, there will just be references to some core ideas about time that have been associated with the works of such philosophers as Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger.

In his lectures on memory, Derrida argued that we could not talk about 'memory' in itself, but only in terms of 'in memory of', and, further, that this condition dismissed both death and immortality (Derrida, 1988: 43–4). He rejected the idea that death and immortality, as well as any kind of knowledge of them, could be achieved through 'memory'. He depicts memory as a repetition that in its movement always presents as novelty, that is, as *différance*. He criticizes, therefore, all attempts to build associations between fixed entities in the past and the present, because for him there is an inescapable novelty, which is not free from what he calls the order of name, inherent to every act of repetition. For Derrida, memory entails irony in its representation of the past, which for him means tolerance rather than insolence, as one might suppose.

In one way or another, studies on memory have closely followed the definitions of *mnēmē* and *anamnēsis* outlined by Aristotle in *De memoria et reminiscentia*. To simplify somewhat, we might say that the former is related to a simple evocation of the past and the latter to an active reproduction of the past. Bergson also defined two concepts of memory along the same lines: memory as *durée* and memory as imagination. The first was associated with those actions which resulted from a continuous learning process. In this situation the past was part of the present. In contrast, the second entailed the *souvenir* or representation of a certain fact that happened in the past (Bergson, 1913). Here there is retrieval of the past in a certain moment of the present. How are these two ways of relating to the past intertwined? The problems concerning the definitions of memory involve how different forms of time consciousness can be related. To what extent is the act of telling stories, which involves *anamnēsis*, that is creative thinking and imagination, opposed to *mnēmē*? How to relate *durée*, continuity in habits and forms, to representation?

If we accept that memory involves the new in every act of repetition, we must also accept that memory cannot unproblematically retrieve past experiences, reconstruct the past as it was then, or be associated with the transmission of unchanging traditions through time. To clarify these three arguments, I will first emphasize Derrida's critique of the belief in a recognition between past and present as well as the consequent association between awareness of the past, that is, historical knowledge, and freedom. Second, I will show that he is quite explicit in his affirmation that individuals are not free to remember or reinvent the past. Third, I will analyse his arguments against the belief that ongoing traditions can perpetuate themselves into the present.

In the first lecture about memory, Derrida argues against the Hegelian dialectical concept of history. To Derrida, recognition of the past is not possible.

As Derrida reads Hölderlin's poem, *Mnemosyne*, he describes memory as an 'impossible mourning' or 'mourning in default' (Derrida, 1988: 27–57). There is no mourning or there is mourning in default because the object of mourning does not exist independently, instead lives in 'us'. He says that memory does not have an object in itself to be remembered and, therefore, we can never hope to uncover this object. He is critical, therefore, of approaches that consider memory as the retrieval of a past as though it were an entity detached from the present. As he writes about mourning in default, he writes about mourning without any subject to be mourned.

Derrida criticizes the possibility of recognition between past and present and the idea that the retrieval of the past can bring the promise of knowledge and freedom. These ideas are based on the belief that there is a dialectic between thought and reality. He argues that Hegel, in his *Encyclopedia*, committed a mistake when he opposed *Erinnerung* to *Gedächtnis* and linked them by dialectical thought. Hegel defined *Erinnerung* as reminiscence, that is, the memory capable of interiorizing lived experiences.[8] Memory was the poetic experience of death, the relation with the essence of being, which was thought within a non-temporalized past. By contrast, *Gedächtnis* was defined as simultaneously reflexive memory and the mechanical faculty of memorization. For Derrida, there is no dialectical relation between them, because these terms do not exist separately from one another. As memory is a continuous movement, 'in memory of' rather than 'memory' in itself, it is not possible to think of the recognition of two different moments in time. There is no past independent of the present, as there is no present independent of the past. Memory can never rescue the past through reflexivity, since there is no past in itself to be rescued.

Thus the meaning of the past cannot be the result of a process of knowledge based on the dialectical relation between *Gedächtnis* and *Erinnerung*. For Derrida, the belief that history enables the emergence of a consciousness capable of establishing the conditions of autonomy and freedom is in itself impossible. His main point is that the legitimization of narratives is contemporary to the act of narrating and never comes out of the past itself. The concept of temporality in Derrida's work means that past, present and future cannot be thought of as separate terms.

The second aspect that I would like to emphasize is that, for Derrida, there is no absolute death. Consequently, in addition to the absence of someone to be mourned, there is also the absence of someone who mourns. The philosopher refuses the idea that memory could be considered the result of a psychological faculty. For him we are never *we-ourselves* (Derrida, 1988: 49). As we have seen, memory has represented the alternative to the determinacy of normative thinking. It is believed that memory differs from history because it is capable of attaching emotions to facts, and in this way it is capable of retrieving the past as lived experience. In contrast, Derrida affirms that the remembering subject

cannot be considered independent of what has been done and of what has taken place. To think of memory as the reinvention of the past would be another mistake, because memory is never circumscribed by the narcissistic fantasy of our subjectivities. Any attempt to analyse memory as the exclusive result of interactions between remembering and forgetting that take place in the present would be mistaken. Derrida clearly rejects an experience which pretends that it is entirely present to itself in any particular time.

Therefore, Derrida denies to individuals the ability to retrieve the past not only because the past does not exist in itself, but also because he has emptied the concept of memory from any allusion to subjectivity as a self-enclosed entity. For him, the past would never allow itself to be reanimated within consciousness. As individuals remember, they do not have the ability to see anything with new eyes, since they are inscribed in a chain with different and unpredictable meanings. There is a law beyond any kind of interiorization or subjectivity (Derrida, 1988: 53–7).

The denial of creativity is crucial for Derrida. To completely recreate the past is impossible because if there is no death, neither is there anyone to remember. There is no creation of the past, which does not carry in itself the determinacy of the latter. In the same way that the movement to reanimate the dead does not bring them back, the movement to kill them does not succeed in their complete elimination. In a book that Derrida wrote about the presence of Marx in contemporary thoughts, a book that was misinterpreted by the time it was published, there is the reiteration of his belief that there is no absolute death (Derrida, 1993). Derrida explains that the thoughts, body, voice, look and soul of the dead other, although in the form of signs, symbols, images and mnemonic representations – that is, separate fragments – will never be completely dead and will live in us. The presence of the dead body in us means that we are not given the gift of creativity.

Derrida's critique of creativity may be better considered as we take into account such writings as 'Le signe et le clin d'œil' (Derrida, 1967b: 67–77).[9] In it, Derrida analyses Husserl's lectures on *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* and criticizes Husserl's belief that nonpresence and otherness are internal to presence. According to him, Husserl's notion of temporality privileges the actual present, the now, and is therefore unable to give an account of continuity, transcendental temporalization and the notion of *durée* (Derrida, 1967b). He points out that it is no accident that Husserl's writings confirm the dominance of the present and reject the 'after-event' which is the structure of temporality implied throughout Heidegger's and Freud's texts.

At this point, Derrida's arguments are very close to Ricœur's critique of both the accessibility of anteriority by dialectics (Ricœur, 2000: 173) and the circumscription of temporality within the sphere of intentionality.[10] Yet in order to bring out the difference between imagination and *souvenir*, Ricœur draws upon

Heidegger's notion of *Dasein*, which starts off from the awareness that the representation of Being is always different from Being itself or of the truth of Being. Unlike Ricœur's, Derrida's approach is different not only from Husserl's, but also from both Heidegger's and Freud's notions of temporality. Derrida's attempt to escape the dilemma between presence and nonpresence becomes obvious as he points out that the issue in Husserl's thought is the privilege given to the actual present, the now. For Derrida, there is a conflict between philosophy, which is always a philosophy of presence, and the idea of nonpresence. The latter is not necessarily the opposite of presence, or the idea of a negative absence, or a theory of nonpresence *qua* unconsciousness (Derrida, 1967b: 70).

According to Derrida, the Heideggerian notion of being-in-time is mistaken, since it still works within the limits of the binary constitution of metaphysics. He doubted the ability of consciousness to grasp what might be understood as the text within the temporal horizon. According to him, the 'chain' to which we belong is very far from the image of the continuous flux within imagination. He writes about the 'law' of the text, which applies not only to the attempts to deal with tradition, but also to those directed towards the uncertainties of the unconscious.

Thus the third contribution to social theory of Derrida's writings on memory is his affirmation that there is no tradition or unmediated meaning throughout time to be grasped by memory. He criticizes Heidegger's merging of two concepts, which according to Derrida must be thought of separately: *Anwesenheit*, the presence of being-in-general, and *Gegenwartigkeit*, the presence of being-in-time. According to him, it is important to make the distinction, since it is this distinction that allows us to perceive that the trace is a prisoner of the text, whereas in Heideggerian philosophy, being is only a prisoner of itself. According to Derrida, Heidegger failed to perceive that the trace is not only prisoner of itself, but also a prisoner of the text, because he did not have the perception of the trace itself. In this critique, Derrida reinforces Paul De Man's arguments against the Heideggerian appropriation of Hölderlein's writings as he emphasizes that Heidegger did not make the distinction between Being and Law. There is no possibility of being-in-itself, of being-in-time, or of the ontological presence of being, as Heidegger believed, but only the possibility of naming an order.

Derrida has dedicated a considerable part of his writings to the task of radicalizing the Freudian concept of trace and subtracting it from what he names the metaphysics of presence. He has insistently proposed the deconstruction of Freud's attempt to uncover the truth of the unconscious. In 'Freud et la scène de l'écriture', considered by him the elaboration of arguments already established in *De la grammatologie*, he had already indicated this main objective (Derrida, 1967a: 293–340). In *Mal d'archive* (1995), Derrida deals specifically with

Freud's concept of death drive, traumatic situations and memory. But before going further in his analysis, some points about Freud's theories must be set out.

As we know, in 'The Interpretation of Dreams', Freud pointed out that 'consciousness' and 'memory-traces' were mutually exclusive systems or processes of the psyche. Whereas the former received and answered the perceptual stimuli but retained no trace of them, the latter transformed momentary stimulus of the former into permanent memory traces but retained no consciousness of it. They were, however, part of the same system (Freud, 1968/1900, 5: 509–621). In a later work, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', Freud presented a more complex version of the same argument. He described the death instinct as a 'freely mobile' process, which presses towards energetic discharge. The death instinct was different from the type of 'bound' nervous processes that he had previously described as pleasure and reality principles. When the death instinct – that is, the very conservative nature of any living substance – fails, the conscious-reflexive acts also fail to answer external stimuli. Then, a stimulus from outside, if powerful enough, could break through the protective shield, turning on a new source of stimulus from within ourselves (Freud, 1968/1920, 18: 12–3).

Freud thought of the death instinct as a kind of defence against external stimuli that had some independence from the pleasure and reality principles (Freud, 1968/1920, 18: 35). To the extent that Freud differentiated the death instinct from the pleasure principle and considered the former prior to the latter, he was not merely describing two sorts of 'drives' or 'instincts' capable of interrelating with one another, but attributing different natures to them. To Freud, the defensive function of the death instinct was mute, irreducible and prior to pleasure. He emphasized that although the death instinct did not contradict the pleasure principle, it did not confirm it either (Freud, 1968/1920, 18: 36). There is a disjunctive way of being here that is described as being inside ourselves and not only in the process of writing. Freud clearly described consciousness as separate from the process of the imprinting of memories. Besides, he showed that becoming conscious and leaving behind a memory-trace were processes incompatible with each other, although they belonged to one and the same system.

In *Mal d'archive*, Derrida deconstructs Freud's opposition between memory-trace and consciousness. In this text, the philosopher establishes the distinction between the Greek concepts of *mnēmē* and *anamnēsis*, and the archive. This latter would follow the definition of *hypomnēma*, that is, a documental or monumental apparatus. According to Derrida, Freud worked with the idea of a psychic archive, *hypomnēsis*, distinct from either *mnēmē* or *anamnēsis* (Derrida, 1995: 37–8). Like the past, which does not exist in itself to be retrieved by the historian, the archive does not exist in itself either, and, therefore, it cannot be triggered by memory. For the philosopher, the archive is the house of knowledge, it is what constitutes knowledge through power, but also what does not exist in itself.

Derrida attempts to show the paradox in Freud's definition of the death instinct, which at the same time as it permits and conditions archivization also incites the annihilation of memory and commands the effacement of the archive. As the death instinct threatens every archival possibility, Derrida names it 'le mal d'archive' (Derrida, 1995: 27). The archive, therefore, is what takes place at the place of the original; it does not exist without a place of consignation, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority (pp. 25–6).

At this stage, it is no surprise to note that for Derrida the archives are always related to the outside, since the meaning of what is archivable is always co-determined by the structure that archives (Derrida, 1995: 37). In *La carte postale* it is very clear that for Derrida psychoanalysis is just a text that like any other must be seen as shot through with *différance*. If the archives do not exist, it is possible to conclude that neither does a science of the archives. Derrida questions the psychoanalytic deciphering for its attempt to decipher a text, when the latter, the deciphered itself, already explicates itself, when it says more about itself than the deciphering, and especially when the deciphered text inscribes in itself additionally the scene of deciphering (Derrida, 1980: 441–524). He doubts psychoanalysis' ability to discover the unconscious, just as he doubts the ability of memory to discover the past, and the ability of science to discover the truth. According to Derrida, a science of the archive must include the theory of this institutionalization, that is to say, the theory of the law, which begins by inscribing itself in the institutionalization and the theory of the right which authorizes this same institutionalization (Derrida, 1995: 15). When Derrida stresses that the institutive and conservative function of the archives is the violence of power, he echoes Benjamin's 'Zur Kritik der Gewalt' (Derrida, 1995: 19; Benjamin, 1978/1955). We will notice that for Benjamin, too, violence is present in texts that mark out subjectivities and behaviours rather than in their original drives or essences of being.

Like Foucault, and Nietzsche before them both, Derrida does not believe that social and political thinkers can bring the past into the present, either by recognition, or by the interpretation of its form or content without carrying all the constraints that are within the present. History, oral history, cultural history, tradition, memory, reflexive memory, mnemonic memory, psychoanalysis, none of them hold the possibility of going beyond the order of name. The same goes for the proposals of the relatively open future within reflexive imagination. Such attempts to deal with memory can only lead to the creation of a concept that entails a teleological version of either the past or the future, with the ensuing political implications.

The concept of time in Derrida's writings yields the understanding that there are no fixed things or absolute subjectivities about which we can think. As he writes that we can only refer to 'in memory of', he writes about *différance*, with the letter 'a', as a way of explaining that there is a movement of continuous

production of differences without ever achieving identity. For him, if there is the archiviolithic drive, this is never present in persons, neither in itself nor in its effects (Derrida, 1995: 25). He emphasizes, therefore, the movement of rupture, disjunction and heterogeneity. His main reference is the context, that is, the law within which we are inscribed.

Concerning memory, it is possible to say that as it relates to text it cannot be freed from the order of name, text or narrative. Memory as an act of being is inscribed in traces, or survivals of a past, which mark every ongoing inscription. It does not have any concrete existence in itself and it is always contiguous to the act of being narrated. Memory is discontinuous and always related to the act of being narrated. We have the illusion that memory carries duration, but the legitimization of memory is in the act of the narrative itself. We just have the illusion that memory, like narrative, holds continuity. In short, we do not make stories out of our memories, because memories exist only within our narratives.

Derrida's interpretation stresses the awareness that there is no dialectical movement or binary association between the act of telling stories and our memories. In view of that, he thinks of memory as always contemporary to the act of the narrative of itself. He does not consider what comes before the present, because this would be beyond one's thoughts and knowledge. As one thinks of the past, one thinks of origin and foundation, and memory does not refer to origin. There is no meaning to be grasped from the past outside the order established in the present, although the present order cannot be freed from the past either. There is something that 'comes to pass and takes place'. There is no past to be discovered, just as there is no subject free of the marks of the past to recreate it.

It is noticeable that the opposition between what are named as 'synchronic' and 'diachronic' dimensions of time within social thought, in which temporality either emerges through intentionality or represents a dimension beyond its limits, is deeply rooted in philosophical thought. Although it is not possible to build direct links between philosophical thought and current sociological theories, it is difficult to deny that philosophers anticipated much of what is being developed in current sociology.

The parallel between Husserl's *Internal Time-Consciousness* and Heidegger's *Being and Time* and the notions of temporality developed by current trends in social theory can be found in multiple ways. On the one hand, there is the belief that memory results mainly from reflexivity, which encompasses the temporal marks of anteriority. On the other, there is the conviction that this process of reflexively retrieving the past is always incomplete, since we are time-bound and historically situated individuals. Derrida has deconstructed these dichotomies by giving up the issue which has troubled western thought since Plato: the search for the foundations that are absent from the text. Central for the argument followed here, however, is his weaving of the threads that constitute the notion

of time. Let us now turn to the work of Walter Benjamin. Although many of his assumptions about time are quite different, he also wrote about the non-continuity and the non-recognition between past and present events.

IV. Walter Benjamin and the Inability to Make a Story Out of Memories in Modern Times

> 'Memoration can make the incomplete (happiness) into something complete, and the complete (suffering) into something incomplete. That is theology; but in memoration we discover the experience (*Erfahrung*) that forbids us to conceive of history as thoroughly a-theological, even though we barely dare not attempt to write it according to literally theological concepts.' (Benjamin, 1989/1982: 61)

In an essay entitled 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire',[11] Benjamin (1968/1939) analysed Marcel Proust's definition of two different kinds of memory: voluntary and involuntary. While voluntary memory meant the remembering that was in the service of the intellect, involuntary memory was associated with simple evocation. Voluntary recollection of past events referred to intentional conservation of the past, creation of the past anew, and as such to an essentially new creation of the present. Benjamin associated voluntary memory with *Erlebnis*, a concept described by Willhelm Dilthey as the human experience of life. According to Benjamin, Dilthey attempted to put together the permanent content of what was experienced and the immediacy with which something is grasped. That is to say that something becomes an experience, not insofar as it is experienced, but because the condition of being experienced makes a special impression that gives it lasting importance.

Benjamin related Proust's involuntary memory to *Erfahrung*, and associated it with the experience that enters tradition. The experience of time that is possible through involuntary memory is not the one that will find identification with a past event, but the one that will be perpetuated as transmitted meaning within tradition. Benjamin's understanding of *Erfahrung* was very close to the concept of tradition described by hermeneutic approaches. We can take, for example, Hans-Georg Gadamer's definition of the essence of the hermeneutic experience. According to him hermeneutic experience is possible only in the condition of recognizing the otherness within human relationships. One can reflect on oneself only within a living relationship to tradition. For Gadamer, too, *Erfahrung* indicates that there is a meaning that can be transmitted only in time, because experience is a process that lives within tradition. Only within tradition, which represents a genuine partner in dialogue and to which we belong, is it possible to accept that certain kinds of knowledge can be transmitted (Gadamer, 1991/1960: 346–62).

As we examine Benjamin's writings, it becomes clear that the concepts of

involuntary and voluntary memory hold strong parallels with those already described in the previous section, from the Greek notions of *mnēmē* and *anamnēsis* through to Bergson's definitions of two kinds of memory. In order to elucidate the way Benjamin interwove voluntary and involuntary memory, and thus his view of temporality, I will first outline Benjamin's critiques of some current trends of philosophical thought, which in many ways echo Derrida's remarks. As will be clear, Benjamin, like Derrida, did not believe that it is possible to tell stories out of our memories. The concepts of temporality underlying their writings hold some striking affinities. They both reject the premise of a continuous and homogeneous temporality as well as the pragmatic notions about the reconstruction of the past.

Unlike Derrida, however, who has dedicated his life-work to developing the concept of *différance* in a direct dialogue with the philosophical tradition, Benjamin gave major emphasis to the investigation of what he called 'phantasmagorias' or 'dream-images'. He never proposed his approach as a philosophy of life. Moreover, he argued against the universalization of any concepts of experience and contended that none of them could be the epistemological basis for knowledge. The project to which he dedicated most of his research, the *Passagen-Werk*, entailed the disclosure of the imprints of the 19th century's changes in intimate areas of life and work in Paris. He focused on a catalogue of themes and a gallery of types, which varied from warehouses to the *flâneur*.

A few remarks must be made about Benjamin's work. Although his work is becoming more fashionable with each passing year, reading Benjamin is not straightforward. He is an original thinker who did not leave followers. His work was fragmentary, mainly focused on the investigation of what he called 'dream-images' and without any attempt to set up a systematic proposal for philosophical or sociological debates. He gave well-known concepts such as history, dialectics and materialism, entirely new senses.[12] His lifetime was dedicated to the gathering of quotations, reflections, notes, details about 19th-century Paris. Another problem is that Benjamin left bilingual manuscripts, employing a still unknown system of classification, and the files were probably ordered after his death by those friends and scholars who were interested in preserving his work. What one finds today is the publication of notes, research projects, diaries, letters, essays and books in the language and form of the series editions. The Arcades complex, made up of an array of several hundred notes and reflections, is said to be either the archives or sources of his most finished writings or the basic blueprint of his montage work. The proliferating attempts to interpret and offer Benjamin's real intentions in each of these arrays of writings often result in contradictory and misguided observations. My aim here is to follow Tiedmann's comment that any study of the *Passagen-Werk* must deal with essays such as the 'Work of Art' or his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'

(Tiedemann, 1999: 929–30). These are essays in which Benjamin explicitly attempted to formulate his positions more radically in order to address his readers.

It has become customary to observe that Benjamin's theories are ambivalent and that oscillations between symbolic and allegorical perspectives make his work incoherent (Witte, 1991/1985: 182–3). Rather than judge the coherence of Benjamin's work, my principal objective here is to emphasize that he formulated some notions admirably, for instance about the incompleteness of life. In earlier writings, such as 'On Language as Such and the Language of Man', and 'On the Program of the Coming Philosophy', written in 1916 and 1918, respectively, Benjamin, as many other young philosophers of his generation, confronted Kantian and Hegelian thought (Benjamin 1978/1966, 1989/1977). Around this time, Benjamin was discussing theological issues with his friend Gershom Scholem, focusing particularly on the problems related to the essence of language. He sought a new concept of experience. To him, Kant had failed to integrate in his concept of knowledge the corresponding concept of experience; language had to be completed by a more complex concept of experience (Benjamin, 1989/1977: 9). In addition, he also detached his thoughts from the Hegelian dialectics between essence and appearance. He believed that we have a phenomenon to account for, one which is an entity and which cannot be thought of as the mirror of some hidden essence. He related life to language and affirmed that language could not be understood in metaphorical terms (Benjamin, 1978/1966: 314). Benjamin also distanced himself from Husserl's and Heidegger's philosophical grounds. He criticized their works for their emphasis on man's capacity of revealing hidden essences, and on the meaning within language that could be 'communicable per se', respectively (Benjamin, 1978/1966: 320).

From his early philosophical essays to the later theses on history, Benjamin wrote about language as an autonomous entity, a 'linguistic being', and about the incompleteness of life. This linguistic being, however, should be referred to as a 'mental being'. It is crucial to notice that although dealing with a duality, that is, the linguistic and mental being of language, Benjamin considered language, like any social phenomena, as an entity in itself, and he explained that, at the same time that language expressed the mental being, it differed from it. Despite considering language as the only possibility of knowing the mental being, since the mental being only expresses itself *in* language, he affirmed that language could never completely express the mental being. Therefore, to Benjamin, language communicated the particular linguistic being of things, but only their mental being insofar as it was capable of being communicated (Benjamin, 1978/1966: 316). As he acknowledged this radical dissociation, he thus renounced the search for truthful knowledge in a perspective that held strong theological assumptions.

In several writings Benjamin criticized the attempt to substitute knowledge for theology, as replacing the incompleteness of life with the utopia of its completeness. The gap between linguistic being and mental being was explained by means of the distance that existed between the word of God and that of 'man'. The absolute creation was only in God. As paradise was lost, and insofar as we had lost the capacity to give names to objects of nature through God, Benjamin concluded that we had also lost the capacity for spontaneous creation. To him, belief in the absolutely unlimited and infinite manner of creation was not possible any more. The analytical task was to consider the absence of God, that is, a theory of knowledge that dealt with incompleteness (Benjamin, 1989/1977: 1–12).

There was an interesting and famous correspondence between Benjamin and Max Horkheimer on this issue. Horkheimer commented that the pronouncement of incompleteness was idealistic if it did not incorporate completeness, since the past was always done and finished, arguing that those who had been beaten to death were truly dead. To this argument, Benjamin answered that it must be considered that although the events were truly concluded for a person who had lost a war, this was not the case for the winner.[13] The idea that past history is grounded on the present, that is, the essence of his conception of historical time, is laid down in his last essay, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' (Benjamin, 1968/1950: 253–64).[14]

Although Benjamin's earlier writings were strongly influenced by philosophical reflections and Jewish theology, and later ones may be associated with notions of nature and historical materialism, it is fair to say that the perspective about the incompleteness of life underscored Benjamin's whole work.[15] It was along these main lines that Benjamin criticized the concept of *Erlebnis* for merging permanent content and immediacy. In the above-mentioned essay on Baudelaire, he affirmed that this concept of experience did not comprise the whole sense of temporality, since it was always related to the sphere of a certain temporality within human life (Benjamin, 1968/1939: 155–200).

The view on the limits of the concept of *Erlebnis* is not far from Benjamin's remarks on *Erfahrung* and the Heideggerian notion of tradition. He contended that Heidegger sought in vain to rescue history for phenomenology, since he did it abstractly, that is, through the concept of historicity. History could not be considered as one more category of knowledge, because any kind of knowledge was distorted by history. In Benjamin's words, 'the historical index of the images does not simply say that they belong to a specific time, it says above all that they only enter into legibility at a specific time' (Benjamin, 1989/1982: 50). His later Theses on History may be considered as a radical criticism of historicism's method of reproducing past power structures.

Benjamin also took into account the relation between memory and consciousness in Freud's writings. However, he was neither committed to the deconstruc-

tion of the psychoanalytic model, nor interested in proving the non-existence of memory-traces. At issue was Freud's description of the incompatibility between becoming conscious and leaving behind a memory-trace. As we have seen, Freud explained that memory-traces resulted from traumatic experiences that did not enter consciousness, and that consciousness as such received no memory-traces. Consciousness and memory-traces belonged to two different systems of perception. Freud's concept of the death drive pointed to a drive that had no expression in itself, achieving expression only through actions actualized by the pleasure or the reality principles.[16] These concepts bear a strong similarity to the concepts of mental and linguistic being that we find in Benjamin's early writings. Yet as we have seen, to Benjamin, the interpretation of culture did not possess the privilege of revealing the antagonism of the instincts, which makes his analysis distinct from both the hermeneutic and the Freudian approaches.

Benjamin appropriated Freud's hypotheses of psychical functioning to emphasize the traumatic or 'shock' experience as *the* experience of modern times. According to him, as modern individuals face more stimuli than they can cope with, these stimuli become traumatic shocks that breach their protective shield and become part of themselves. In modernity, reflexivity is not the main characteristic of individuals, since they have lost the ability to respond to external stimuli. Rather, they are subjected to a traumatic process and their answers to that represent the result of the memory-traces that were left in the process (Benjamin, 1968/1939).

For Benjamin, history retained its primacy over memory. To better understand Benjamin's notion of history it is relevant to consider his critique of Proust's concept of involuntary memory. He criticized the concept because it was based on the assumption of continuous time. Following this, he contended that although Proust perceived that involuntary memory had a character of exception, Proust was mistaken when he suggested that it was possible to restore this kind of experience. At issue is the attempt to grasp a certain sort of experience *throughout* time, that is, the universalization of one type of experience. Benjamin stresses that this attempt was in vain. He writes therefore about different sorts of experience throughout time. The shock experience is the experience of modernity.

Benjamin was convinced that modernity could be revealed by dream-images. He attributed the task of this revelation to historical materialism, which could blast the mystical monads in which past and present were merged in a fight against the constraints of structures that reproduced themselves throughout time. The historian's instrument was not made up of interpretative or explanatory theories, nor was its object made up of social constructions created in the present. Whether talking about monads, constellations, dream-images, phantasmagorias or ur-phenomena, Benjamin is referring to the merging of

the Now and Then. In his words, 'an image is that in which the Then and the Now come together into a constellation like a flash of lightning' (Benjamin, 1989/1982: 50). Memory as collective representation was to be demolished as just another mythology of modernity. Like involuntary memory, these constellations of different meaning and different experiences in time depended on external factors to become accessible to a historical interpretation. This mystical conception of history is based on the understanding that although every past and present is synchronic with certain moments in history, history itself is the diachronic dimension that allows the legibility of the moment.

There is a group of passages that is essential to our understanding of Benjamin's notion of temporality.[17] In them, he defined the past or a historical antecedent in the sense of 'ur-phenomenon'. He was critical of tendencies that suggested that we could turn historical essences or origins into reality and achieve understanding. To him, there was no hidden essence to be revealed, for the essence was present in the appearance. In 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' (1968/1950) Benjamin argued that it would be possible to find the past through the analysis of present images.

At this stage, it should be obvious that Benjamin's and Derrida's notions of temporality have many aspects in common. For them, neither does the past cast its light on what is present, nor does the present cast its light on what is past. Accordingly, memory cannot retrieve the past, because the past is not an entity separated from the present. Like Benjamin, Derrida is a radical critic of both the idea of a hidden essence of the past expressed in the present and the idea of a transmitted meaning to be grasped throughout time. The possibility of reflexive memory being nurtured by interiorized living experiences is not part of their theoretical armature. Central for them was the association, either in the order of name or in the dream-image, between the present and the past, the now and then, the synchronic and diachronic dimensions of time, the experience of *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*. Still, how are we to name what we see, to know what the ongoing reality represents, and to remember what we have lived?

Like Derrida, Benjamin was convinced that politics retained its primacy over history. Unlike Derrida, he was interested in the righting of injustices done in the past. He believed that it was necessary to reveal the injustices of the past *through* the explosion of meaning that results from the confrontation of the images of the present. Benjamin did not associate allegory with irony, as Derrida did with his theory of *différance*. His concept of 'deconstruction' in that sense pointed out the demolition of nature itself, the demolition of ongoing realities that had to be done by the historical materialist. Therefore, for Benjamin too, the object of the historian did not depend on him, but on the ongoing movement of history itself.

V. The Limits of a Sociology of Life

We have seen that memory has replaced history as a way of retrieving the past. Yet, many authors have argued that the recent discovery of memory by a myriad of studies, memorials and all sorts of celebrations has had the predictable effect of neutralizing awareness of what happened in the past. For instance, the attempts to recast traumatic situations such as the Holocaust, the bombing of Hiroshima, the Vietnam war, and the fratricidal massacres in Yugoslavia, have created the disturbing effect of emptying the tragedy that these catastrophic events meant in the past. In Georges Bataille's words, the revelation of the bombing of the city of Hiroshima is in a sense the opposite of a revelation, since the human representation of this catastrophe is not capable of expressing the dimensions of the event. According to him, horror has no words to describe itself and feeling cannot be the point of departure for action. As one takes refuge in the world of activity, one does not solve the problems of the profound violence and the impossible horror which are basic components of human life (Bataille, 1995/1947: 228–9).

Traumatic events are not assimilated or fully experienced at the time one confronts them, because they go beyond the limits of what is acceptable. The mediation necessary to have knowledge of the event is lacking because of the collapse of witnessing and the collapse of understanding what happened at the time it happened. Yet, traumatized individuals themselves become the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess. This happens because history is taking place with no witness. Traumatic events have been considered as part of our everyday lives. As such they have been seen as the cause of repeated performances, in which witnessing cannot occur because of the very circumstance of being inside the event.

Derrida's and Benjamin's writings about memory show the impossibility of 'remembering' by either holding onto or constructing the past. For them, collective memory should be distinct from any self-sustained act of reconstruction of the past *as well as* distinct from living and unmediated traditions. Although for these authors the past is always created anew, and becomes virtually whatever societies decide, the past is not just the object of the struggle of memory among individuals. They yield the understanding that the lived past also marks out spatial and cultural boundaries, which are responsible for important aspects of social life that have been forgotten. One of Benjamin's major targets throughout his work was to show the implausibility of the politically catastrophic notion of *true* life. In 'Critique of Violence', he wrote that when heaven was reduced to a pure signifier, or empty space, this vacuum could support devastating violence (Benjamin, 1978/1955: 300).

The simultaneity of different dimensions of time is far from Weber's analysis of the disenchantment of the world, Marx's historical materialism, and

Simmel's analysis of social forms, just to list some of the main frameworks within social theory. It is equally absent from theories about detraditionalization, invented traditions and communitarian values. Whereas social theories, which have been consolidated from the beginning of the 20th century to the present day, have attempted to reduce complexity in order to cope with it, Derrida's and Benjamin's concepts of time moved in the opposite direction. They not only gave up the task of translating the multiple dimensions of time within life but also pointed out the dogmatism and destruction that occurred during the 20th century in the name of the recovery of the past. These writings enable social thinkers to better understand the limits of social theory in becoming a sociology of life.

I would not claim that Benjamin's and Derrida's voices are not heard in contemporary sociological debate. Some authors have dealt with the concept of memory as a kind of performativity, which suggests not only that memory comes into existence at a given time, but also that it involves reiterated practices of belonging and organized forgetting. Rather than *lieux de mémoire*, they point out the existence of *lieux d'oubli*, which stand outside the sphere of reflexive actors in their practices of remembering.[18] In these cases, it is the narrative itself, rather than actors or the cultural content, which defines and gives identity to an individual, community or nation. Individuals, with their thoughts, desires and unpredictable actions, are constituted within narratives and do not precede them. We are talking, therefore, of a sort of experience that entails repetition and *différance*. In this case the past can be grasped only in the awareness that it is impossible to have access to essence, origin. The legitimacy of narratives, as well as that of identities, does not come from the past, but from the contemporary act of narration. What is more, these narratives, as in Derrida and Benjamin, involve what is not present.

In Derrida's thinking, to the infinite collection of significations within memory there is only the infinite collection of significations of our thoughts. We could say that 'in memory of', like a traumatic experience, holds no separation between past and present and bears no witness either. Benjamin also wrote about the increase of traumatic experience in modern times. Whereas Derrida denounces a prison of meaning as ephemeral and transitory, Benjamin pointed out that past injustices must be redressed in the present. Both authors wrote about a situation in which the past never achieves recognition whatever the historical context within which it is considered. Both of them were concerned with the political consequences of the belief in this recognition. The concern with knowledge about the past is replaced by a concern with the political consequences inherent in the awareness of time. There is no past to be retrieved, there is no present facing death, only justice to be faced or done.

Many commentators consider Benjamin's writings as contradictory, or, at least, ambiguous to the extent that at the same time as he affirmed the limits of

understanding, he returned to the mediated character of knowledge. The beauty of his writings lies in the sensibility towards silent wars among different ways of being and of experiencing time. I would say that, according to Benjamin, the narrator has not completely vanished, otherwise he/she could not be perceived in modern times. The contribution of Benjamin to social theories of modernity is that he dealt throughout his work with the multiple historical conditions of human experience. We not only have disjointed expressions of life, but are disjointed ourselves. Furthermore, different forms of being-in-time change from time to time according to an array of different conditions and different rhythms.

Notes

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1. To refer to a well-known example, Pierre Nora organized and edited a massive collection of essays about what he termed 'lieux de mémoire' (Nora, 1984, 1986, 1992), in which he criticized previous historical approaches for dealing with empty narratives about the past, and proposed the study of symbolic sites constitutive of French nationhood.
2. The definitions of the differences between history and memory first established by the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs have become an important source of reflection for historians. See, for example, Nora (1984), Le Goff (1988), Davis and Starn (1989), Rousso (Rousso and Conan, 1996; Rousso, 1998), Pomian (1999).
3. There is a vast literature associating the construction of collective memories with conflicting situations, movements fostered by groups with different political interests as well as with conditions of modernity (Johnson et al., 1982; Middleton and Edwards, 1990; Samuel, 1994; Huyssen, 1995; Roth, 1995). The concept of collective memory has also become crucial for scholars who have turned their attention to questions about national identity (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Gillis, 1994; Poulot, 1997; Boswell and Evans, 1999; Smith, 1999).
4. Derrida presented his first lecture in French, but the following lectures had already been presented in English (Derrida, 1988).
5. For a recent and highly elaborate approach to the complementary aspects between a phenomenology of memory, which shows the ways by which the past is retrieved within intentionality, and memory as social phenomena, which draws upon the perception of memory within bodies, spaces and world horizons, see Ricœur (2000).
6. On the associations of the concept of collective memory, especially of the work of Maurice Halbwachs, with the *histoire des mentalités* and studies of culture, see Hutton (1988, 1993).
7. Mary Douglas has stressed the importance of Halbwachs's writings on social frameworks of memory for an understanding of structural amnesia in contemporary societies, an issue developed by her in later writings (Douglas, 1968). Richard Sennett has also drawn from Halbwachs's writings in order to analyse how col-

lective memories attached to material objects and urban spaces marked out the formation of particular subjectivities (Sennett, 1998).

8. The association between Hegel's concept of *Erinnerung* and reminiscence is also present in Vieillard-Baron's analysis of Hegel's conceptualization of a nostalgic consciousness of time (Vieillard-Baron, 1995: 57–82).
9. For the English translation, see Derrida (1973).
10. Ricœur criticizes Hegel's dialectics between the subjective and objective spirit and its realization throughout history as well as the merging of these two concepts in both Husserl's phenomenology of internal time-consciousness and the contemporary pragmatic conception of historical time (Ricœur, 2000: 53–66, 292–301). He explicitly refers to Husserl's reduction of a transcendental experience to the extreme point of interiorization of experience (pp. 131–46).
11. The essay 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' was one of the last essays written by Benjamin. He concluded it in 1939. It represents the revision of Benjamin's former exposés of the Arcades Project, in which he sought to concentrate key arguments and epistemological apparatus to present to Horkheimer and Adorno (Witte, 1991/1985: 190).
12. For two excellent analyses of Benjamin's concept of dialectics, for instance, see Buck-Morss (1989) and Tiedemann (1999).
13. This dialogue became so important to the quest of incompleteness of life that I quote part of Benjamin's answer: 'To me, an important question has always been how to understand the odd figure of speech, "to lose a war or a court case." The war or the trial are not the entry into a dispute, but rather the decision concerning it. Finally I explained it to myself thus: the events involved for a person who has lost a war or a court case are truly concluded and thus for that person any avenue of praxis has been lost. This is not the case for the counterpart, who is the winner. Victory bears its fruit in a way much different from the manner in which consequences follow defeat. This leads to the exact opposite of Ibsen's phrase: "Happiness is born of loss, / only what is lost is eternal"' (quoted in Tiedemann, 1989/1983: 182).
14. For a careful analysis of the interrelationship between Benjamin's later writings, his attempt to escape from Hitler's concentration camps and his suicide, see Witte (1991/1985: 199–205).
15. Many authors have pointed out that the metaphysical, historical-philosophical, and theological sources that were present in Benjamin's early writings and aesthetic works such as the *Origin of the German Trauerspiel* also nurtured his latter works. See, for example, Tiedemann (1999: 936); Proust (1994: 10).
16. An insightful analysis of this issue is given by Ricœur as he expounded that, by 1930, Freud had already seen that the death instinct remained a silent instinct 'within' the living organism and that it became manifest only in its social expression as aggressiveness and destruction (Ricœur, 1979: 308, 1989/1977).
17. I am referring here to one of the 36 sections of the *Passagen* manuscript, published later as 'N. Re The Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress' (Benjamin, 1989/1982: 43–83). The alphabetic classification may be the work of Adorno (Eiland and McLaughlin, 1999: xiv).
18. See, for example, Caruth (1995, 1996), Fortier (1999), Wood (1999).

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