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Key Lecture

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Gathering memories and memorial fieldwork



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In this presentation, I address:

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- The conceptualisation and uses made of the notion of collective memory in social psychology, particularly from a methodological point of view.
- Some research avenues enabling the collection of memory "traces", as a fertile and rich approach to field research.

Contextualisation

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- ✓ The concept of "memory" is polysemous.
- ✓ It has taken off in recent years, and new concepts have emerged such as the "tyranny of memory" (Nora, 1993) or "memory boom " (Blanck, 2009).
- ✓ It is currently seen by some as a concept "in crisis" (Brockmeier, 2010).

Theoretical background and new developments

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THE CURRENT PICTURE

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- Haas & Jodelet (2000): comprehensive inventory of the collective memory.
- At that time, three major trends stood out:
 - ✓ The domain of social cognition
 - ✓ Social constructionism
 - ✓ Representations and social thought

For the last 10 years or so:

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- Growing concern for social and collective memory in social psychology.
- A trend that revives a pre-war interest thanks in particular to the pioneering work of Halbwachs (1925, 1941, 1950) and Bartlett (1932).
- A long-standing polarity between intra-individual and social approaches .

Collecting memory

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- The object of memory constitutes a vast field of research which has occupied social scientists (history, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, etc.) for over 20 years.
- In psychoanalysis and cognitive psychology (neuroscience) the field of memory has been studied for a long time.
- In social psychology, such attention is recent: **four study trends** currently predominate

1. Memory as a representation of the past

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- A research field related to social cognition.
- Works related to social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), inter-group relations (Liu & Hilton, 2005) or theories of emotion (Branscombe & Doosje, 2004).
- The emotional dimensions of the representation of the past or the psychological description of painful past experiences are studied.

- Researchers make use of the representational imagination of the groups interviewed by situating participants in scripted stories.
- The method of scripts or questionnaires for cohorts of student-psychologists is often used.
- The past has often not been experienced by the subjects: it is represented.
- Research: conflict, violence, reconciliation (Licata & Klein, 2005; Volpato & Licata, 2010).

2. Memory as conversation

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- A research field from the work of Bartlett (1932) in his work on **social conventionalisation**.
- Memory takes shape in conversation (Middleton & Edwards, 1986), it is a **conversational practice** (Brown & Middleton, 2008).
- At methodological level, the researchers suggest "remembering together" and reminisce together concerning an event, a film, photos ...

3. Memory as a family culture

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- An innovative field of research from literary studies, centred on **generational** memory.
- Based on the work of Hirsh (1997) from the collection of drawings by Holocaust survivors' children .
- Researchers work on what they term the post-memory. E.g. the "Maus" comic strip by Art Spiegelman.
- The theme of **resilience** is sometimes emphasised, creating links between this trend and psychology ...

4. Memory as a reflection of social thought

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- Memory is understood here as a whole, a **dynamic** social entity, setting the framework for its operation and the conditions for its reconstruction in the present.
- Influenced by the work of **Halbwachs**.
- Dynamic aspect of memory and coordination of the three timeframes (Jodelet, 1992).
- Memory as a mediator of subjects' social and individual **identity** (Kalampalikis, 2007).

- No clearcut separation between individual memory and collective memory.
- Several collections bring together the work of social psychologists (Laurens & Roussiau, 2002; Viaud, 2003; Deschamps, 2009; Levasseur, 2010; Demoures, 2010) who are doing much groundbreaking work on this notion.
- Another important field of work articulates the dimensions of identity, memory and space, illustrating the **essential role of space** and urban places in the understanding of collective mechanisms and memory content (Arruda & De Alba, 2005; Jodelet, 1982; Haas, 2004).

Research trend	Population concerned	Dynamism of memory collection	Methodologies
Social cognition and intergroup relations	Cohort comparisons between groups and between generations	The subjects did not experience the event referred to; they are interviewed at intra-individual level.	Essentially quantitative (questionnaires, experiments, text analysis)
Conversational practices of "joint remembering"	Small group, often family.	Collective memory exists only in conversation.	Qualitative (focus groups, interviews)
Social thought and representations	Groups with a defined social, identity and spatial position	The group in question has experience of the event	Quantitative and qualitative (questionnaires, mind maps, focus groups, interviews, observations)
Post-memory: cultural and generational memory	Small group: family, generational	The subjects did not experience the event but learned of it from a third party: the family.	Qualitative (observations, narrative and literary analysis)

How to investigate collective memories?

- With the development of the **field survey** offering the possibility of comparing **memory traces** using **triangulation**.

Towards the collection of memory traces

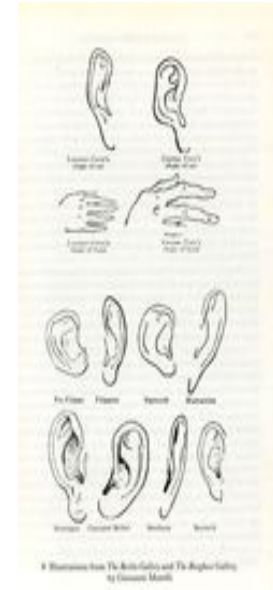
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- This involves working on the social processes of **transmission** and **reconstruction** of memories in the present moment.
- The notion of **traces** is regularly evoked in work on memory in neuropsychology, philosophy and psychoanalysis, for example.
- References to this concept can be found in the Italian historian **Carlo Ginsburg** (1986, 2007, 2010).

The clue-based method of C. Ginsburg



Ginsburg cites the example of art historian Giovanni Morelli (1816-1891), who used methods worthy of a **detective** to identify the origin of a picture.



Rather than observing the work as a whole, he focused on the **less obvious, less specific details**, (nose, ears, nails, hands) that would serve as evidence when identifying the work of a specific painter.

"The art connoisseur is comparable to the detective who discovers the perpetrator (the picture) on the basis of evidence invisible to most people. "

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**Phrase attributed to Sherlock Holmes by author
Conan Doyle**

Quoted by C. Ginsburg (1986, p. 222)

The quality of the eye of the beholder

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- We can emphasise the importance of the method of **observation** to the investigation.
- We need to work on a method of interpretation based on discrepancies, silences and gaps considered to be **revealing**.
- **Triangulation as a method** of comparing data, as the sum or accumulation of clues, provides the researcher with evidence of a contrasting and rich object .

The role of triangulation

- Triangulation is a form of methodological stance (Flick, 2009) used by some researchers as part of their field studies (Jodelet, 2003; Haas & Kalampalikis, 2010; Masson & Guillou, 2010; Apostolidis, 2008; Caillaud, 2010).
- It involves a diversification of perspectives
- The researcher collects traces (invisible, silent, incongruous) to produce a more detailed study of the phenomenon.

To follow this afternoon ...!

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**Research into the collecting of memories
within a specific urban area.**

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