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The University of Padua and the Anti-Jewish Laws*

Giulia Simone**, Giovanni Focardi***

Abstract. The paper examines the impact of fascist racial laws on the University of Padua, focusing on their effects on professors, students, and administrative staff. Before 1938, the university was a hub of openness and integration for the Jewish community, with many Jewish professors and students. However, the introduction of racial laws led to the dismissal of 51 faculty members and the expulsion of around 70 students, causing significant damage to scientific research and the academic structure. The laws also introduced courses based on racist theories and banned educational materials authored by Jewish scholars. During the Italian Social Republic, persecution intensified, with some members of the academic community arrested and deported to extermination camps. After the war, the reintegration of Jewish professors was slow and partial, hindered by societal indifference and reluctance to address past injustices. Few professors returned to Padua, while others chose not to or were excluded. In recent years, the University of Padua has taken steps to commemorate these tragic events, including installing Stolpersteine (stumbling stones) and dedicating spaces to persecuted scholars, fostering remembrance and further research into its historical role during the fascist era.

Keywords: Fascism; Jews; Padua; Racism; University.

Riassunto. Il saggio esamina l'impatto delle leggi razziali fasciste sull'Università di Padova, e le loro conseguenze su professori, studenti e personale amministrativo. Prima del 1938, l'università era un centro di apertura e integrazione per la comunità ebraica, con molti professori e studenti ebrei. Tuttavia, l'introduzione delle leggi razziali portò al licenziamento di 51 membri della facoltà e all'espulsione di circa 70 studenti, causando danni significativi alla ricerca scientifica e alla struttura accademica. Le leggi introdussero anche corsi basati su teorie razziste e vietarono il materiale didattico scritto da studiosi ebrei. Durante la Repubblica Sociale Italiana, le persecuzioni si intensificarono, con alcuni membri della comunità accademica arrestati e deportati nei campi di sterminio. Dopo la guerra, la reintegrazione dei professori ebrei fu lenta e parziale, ostacolata dall'indifferenza della società e dalla riluttanza ad affrontare le ingiustizie del passato. Pochi professori tornarono a Padova, mentre altri scelsero di non farlo o furono esclusi. Negli ultimi anni, l'Università di Padova ha intrapreso iniziative per commemorare questi tragici eventi, tra cui l'installazione di Stolpersteine (pietre d'inciampo) e la dedizione di spazi agli studiosi perseguitati, promuovendo la memoria e ulteriori ricerche sul suo ruolo storico durante il periodo fascista.

Parole chiave: Fascismo; Ebrei; Padova; Razzismo; Università.

1. Introduction

Due to its unique historical and scientific circumstances, the University of Padua offers a very interesting case study, as it allows us to understand in detail how the racial laws were applied to a particularly well-defined academic and student context.

After the unification of Italy, the city of Padua and its university promoted openness and an early attitude of emancipation towards the local Jewish community. This approach could be seen not only

* This article has been jointly researched and written: paragraphs 1, 2, 4, 8 are by Giovanni Focardi; paragraphs 3, 5, 6, 7 by Giulia Simone. The tables were compiled by both. The differences between the Italian and British/US academic systems make it difficult to map job titles from Italian to English. We have adopted the following solutions: 1) *professore ordinario* = full professor; 2) *libero docente* = lecturer (with or without stipend); 3) *incaricato* = contract lecturer. The term *incaricato* describes the individual responsible for the delivery of classes and they could be at the level of full professor, lecturer, or assistant; 4) *Aiuti medici* = Junior consultants; 5) *assistente di ruolo* = paid assistant; 6) *assistente volontario* = voluntary assistant; 7) *borsista* = grant holder.

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in the academic world (for instance, the University of Padua had two Jewish rectors: Emilio Morpurgo from 1880 to 1882 and Vittorio Polacco from 1905 to 1910)¹, but also in society. In 1904 Giacomo Levi Civita, a Jew, was elected mayor and was to become one of the most important figures in the history of the city². Padua was also home to the Rabbinical College, considered « the most important centre of Jewish "culture" in Italy in the nineteenth century»³.

Padua prospered culturally, economically, and socially thanks to the presence of the Jewish community, which provided the city with a dynamic political elite and avant-garde entrepreneurial role models⁴. The University of Padua, the only one in the *Tre Venezie* area until 1938, also experienced this vibrant openness which led to many Jews becoming professors and students there⁵.

The theme of the racial laws in connection with the University of Padua has already been studied from many different angles. Angelo Ventura, the author of numerous pioneering articles and fundamental essays, reconstructed how the academic administration managed events in 1938, particularly with respect to full professors⁶; subsequently, Giulia Simone analysed the anti-Jewish political practices of the Fascist regime within the University, especially with respect to non-permanent teaching staff and students who were known to have died in extermination camps⁷. The most recent work was published in 2018, eighty years after the enactment of the antisemitic legislation: the analysis strived to shed light on the process of replacing dismissed professors and on their reinstatement into the academic world⁸.

In addition to the aforementioned studies, two other publications of fundamental importance stand out: the personal diaries of Carlo Anti, who was rector from 1932 to 1943 and who took on the task of applying the racial laws within the University, and the autobiographical memoir of Giuseppe Gola, rector of the University of Padua during the Resistance⁹.

This article is an update on the history of the University of Padua during the period of the antisemitic laws and the years to follow. For this purpose, numerous sources and publications have

¹ Cf. *Clariores. Dizionario biografico dei docenti e degli studenti dell'Università di Padova*, by Piero Del Negro, Padua, Padova University Press, 2015, *ad vocem* and relative references; Giulia Simone, Adriano Mansi, *Alla prova della contemporaneità. Intellettuali e politica dall'800 a oggi*, by Carlo Fumian, in *Patavina Libertas. Una storia europea dell'Università di Padova (1222-2022)*, Padua-Rome, Padova University Press-Donzelli, 2021. Vittorio Polacco would later become senator in 1910.

² The Giacomo Levi Civita administration lasted 12 years. On Giacomo Levi Civita cf. *Giacomo Levi Civita e l'ebraismo veneto tra Otto e Novecento*, by Mariarosa Davi and Giulia Simone, Padua, Padova University Press, 2015. On the "bloccarda" administration cf. Margherita Carniello, *Padova democratica. Politica e amministrazione negli anni del blocco popolare (1900-1905)*, Padua, s.e., 1989.

³ Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, *Appunti sul Collegio rabbinico di Padova*, in *Giacomo Levi Civita e l'ebraismo veneto tra Otto e Novecento*, by Mariarosa Davi and Giulia Simone, Padua, Padova University Press, 2015, p. 35.

⁴ As for the Paduan and Veneto regional context where prominent figures such as Leone Wollemborg and Emilio Morpurgo worked, cf. Silvio Lanaro, *Società e ideologie nel Veneto rurale (1866-1898)*, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1976; Ariel Viterbo, *Dall'Unità d'Italia alla Prima Guerra Mondiale*, in *Il cammino della speranza. Gli ebrei e Padova*, by Claudia De Benedetti, vol. II, Padua, Papergraf, 2000, p. 75-106.

⁵ Trieste became a «Regia Università» in 1938 whereas Venice was a University Institute with the only a Faculty of Economics and Commerce.

⁶ Angelo Ventura, *Carlo Anti rettore magnifico e la sua università*, in the Centre for the History of Padua University, *Carlo Anti. Giornate di studio nel centenario della nascita (Verona- Padova-Venezia 6-8 marzo 1990)*, Trieste, Lint, 1992, pp. 155-186, now republished in Angelo Ventura, *Intellettuali. Cultura e politica tra fascismo e antifascismo*, with introduction by Emilio Gentile, Rome, Donzelli, 2017, pp. 143-170; Id., *Le leggi razziali all'Università di Padova*, in *L'Università dalle leggi razziali alla Resistenza, Giornata dell'Università italiana nel 50° anniversario della Liberazione (Padova, 29 maggio 1995)*, Padua, Cleup, 1996, pp. 130-204 (re-published by Padua University Press, 2013, pp. 87-144; all references are made to this edition).

⁷ Giulia Simone, *Studenti e docenti ebrei espulsi dall'Università di Padova*, «Quaderni per la storia dell'Università di Padova», 47 (2014), pp. 165-182.

⁸ Pompeo Volpe, Giulia Simone, «*Posti liberi*». *Leggi razziali e sostituzione dei docenti ebrei all'Università di Padova*, Padua, Padova University Press, 2018.

⁹ Accademia di Agricoltura Scienze e Lettere of Verona, *I diari di Carlo Anti, Rettore dell'Università di Padova e Direttore Generale delle Arti della Repubblica Sociale Italiana*, complete text, by Girolamo Zampieri, Verona, Accademia di Agricoltura Scienze e Lettere of Verona, 2011; Giuseppe Gola, *Il mio rettorato (1943-1945)*, introduction and notes by Chiara Saonara, Treviso, Antilia, 2015.

been consulted. Those published by the University itself, such as Yearbooks, have proven to be quite unenlightening on the topic under discussion, due to the omissions and silence in the public domain, where the dismissal of Jewish lecturers and the expulsion of Jewish students were never a topic of interest. In addition to printed publications, the personal files of professors were also consulted. These documents can be found in the historical archives of the University of Padua and in the Central State Archive in Rome. Lastly, the minutes from the Academic Senate and Faculty Council meetings, which mention the dismissal of full professors, were also examined. As for the students, papers printed by the university student Fascist group (*Gruppo Universitario Fascista* [GUF]), entitled “The Bo”, were particularly interesting due to their hard-line antisemitic content.

2. Fascist Padua

While during the liberal era the local context was characterised by the successful integration of the Jewish community into city life, the rise of fascism put an end to it. An increasing number of instances of hostility against Jews was registered, so much so that in 1926, after the attack on the Duce, a handful of fascists devastated two synagogues in the city¹⁰.

Even when such hostility was not openly manifested with violence, anti-Semitic undercurrents were still alive: according to Ernesto Cianciolo, Prefect of Padua, one could feel «antisemitism brewing» in the city. Donato Donati, a distinguished jurist and professor at the University, former nationalist and then fascist, was to suffer the consequences of this situation. In September 1926 he was a frontrunner in the race to become the new rector, but was eventually rejected so as not to upset the «very Catholic Padua»¹¹. There were no doubts about Donati’s fascist beliefs seeing as, just two years earlier, in 1924, he had personally founded the School of Political and Social Sciences, which would become a faculty in 1933, with the aim of training Blackshirt officials for the fascist State¹². In the year when the government passed the decree that led to dictatorship, the fact that Donati was Jewish prevailed over his political beliefs, making him an outsider in society¹³. Instead, Emilio Bodrero, who was already a deputy and part of the fascist hierarchy and married to Nina Romanin Jacur, a converted Jew and member of one of the most important families of the Jewish community in Padua, was considered the preferred candidate¹⁴.

Consequently, the academic environment was completely immersed in this social and political context. Since we are referring to university professors and students, who were well educated and informed individuals, it is only natural to wonder how much they really knew about what the fascist regime was up to and about the planning of the racial campaign which followed the conquest of Ethiopia in 1936¹⁵. Historiography agrees that this was a turning point¹⁶: after that war, the first racist measures were conceived, planned and implemented. They were aimed at racial segregation and

¹⁰ Chiara Saonara, *Una città nel regime fascista. Padova 1922-1943*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2011, p. 179.

¹¹ The quotations are from the report sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs by the Prefect Cianciolo on the 26th September 1926: cf. Chiara Saonara, *Una città nel regime fascista*, quote, p. 243.

¹² Giulia Simone, *Fascismo in cattedra. La Facoltà di Scienze politiche di Padova dalle origini alla Liberazione (1924-1945)*, Padua, Padova University Press, 2015.

¹³ For the origins of fascist anti-Semitism refer to *La svolta antiebraica nella storia del fascismo italiano* by Angelo Ventura in «Rivista storica italiana», 2001, I, pp. 36-65, currently re-edited by Id., *Il fascismo e gli ebrei. Il razzismo antisemita nell'ideologia e nella politica del regime*, Rome, Donzelli, 2013, pp. 3-45.

¹⁴ With reference to Emilio Bodrero cf. *Clariores*, quote, p. 63. The University Centre for the history of Resistance and Contemporary Period (CASREC), houses the *Emilio Bodrero & Nina Romanin Jacur* papers.

¹⁵ Refer to Saverio Gentile, *La legalità del male: l'offensiva mussoliniana contro gli ebrei nella prospettiva storico-giuridica (1938-1945)*, Torino, Giappichelli, 2013; and Giuseppe Acerbi, *Le leggi antiebraiche e razziali italiane ed il ceto dei giuristi*, 2nd enlarged and revised edition, Milan, Giuffrè, 2014 (1^o ed. 2011).

¹⁶ On fascist racism in East Africa cf. *Nel nome della razza. Il razzismo nella storia d'Italia (1870-1945)*, by Alberto Burgio, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1999; Enzo Collotti, *Il razzismo negato*, in *Fascismo e antifascismo. Rimozioni, revisioni, negazioni*, by Id., Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2000, pp. 355-376. As for the introduction of racist notions into the academic world cf. Giulia Simone, *Razzismo in cattedra. Il caso dell'Università di Padova*, «Rivista di storia dell'educazione – Periodico del Centro Italiano per la Ricerca Storico-Educative», 2, 2019, pp. 113-132.

separation – including physical segregation, which can be seen from the urbanisation projects and architectural planning of Addis Abeba, which segregated Italians from Ethiopians¹⁷.

As early as 1937, people spoke about «race» both inside and outside the Ministries, in the Duce's secretariat, even in the colonies themselves and in the rest of the Italian peninsula. Despite the fact that the transition to state anti-Semitism was neither obvious nor necessary, it was Mussolini himself who, on 18th of September 1938, declared that «the racial problem was a long time coming [...] And related to the conquest of the Empire»¹⁸.

Considering that in 1938 anti-Semitism was not unexpected, it is hard to imagine that professors and lecturers in the academic environment really did not notice the rising tide of anti-Judaism inside and outside of the university lecture halls. Perhaps this explains why in 1937, Donati, the Dean of Political Science, decided to address a meeting at the Academic Senate:

«Donati would like the University to take on a primary role in welcoming S.E. Badoglio. The Marshal should be received in the Aula Magna by Faculty Members, who have the right and the duty to welcome the leader of the victorious and conquering army of the Empire back to his homeland. In addition, the re-consecration of the Aula Magna, which was desecrated by De Monzie, former minister, freemason and demo-communist, must be a good enough reason for choosing this location».

The rector declared that the reasons set out by Donati spoke for themselves¹⁹.

Anatole de Monzie was a French politician belonging to the Republican Socialist Union, a party close to the radical sphere; several times a Minister, De Monzie was also a pacifist (and perhaps that is why Donati expressed himself in those terms). He became a minister of the government led by Eduard Daladier in 1938. By pronouncing these words, Donati seemed to be making a public confession. In the meantime, correspondence between two university professors, Carlo Arturo Jemolo and Mario Falco, initially expressed surprise, then bitterness and finally fear about the way the fascist mass media were orchestrating the campaign against the Italian Jews²⁰. It was almost as if Donati wanted to make his colleagues forget – or at least overlook – his belonging to the Jewish community.

3. Dismissed and Expelled

The racial laws affected all members of the University: professors, administration staff and students alike.

In 1996, by carefully piecing together facts from different biographies, Angelo Ventura managed to identify 49 members of the University's teaching staff who were dismissed for various reasons²¹; a later study of new documentation found in the archives and the simultaneous publication of new memoirs²² identified two additional members of staff who were dismissed: Felix Braun and Anita Cavidalli. Hence, there were 51 Jews out of 528 full or freelance [part-time, contract, assistant] professors (9.6%) working at the University. Not all were dismissed immediately and there were some special cases: Luigi Jacchia was registered in 1938 as a Jew, he appealed and was reinstated at University of Padua in 1940; Arturo Loria, son of a catholic mixed marriage was dismissed only in 1943. Then there was the case of Cesare Musatti, a real bureaucratic plot: he was reported, dismissed, declared as not being part of the Jewish race and, finally, not reinstated for political reasons²³.

¹⁷ For historiography references on establishing an apartheid regime in East Africa cf. Silvia Falconieri, *Razzismo e antisemitismo. Percorsi della storiografia giuridica*, «Studi storici», 1/2014, pp. 155-168.

¹⁸ Cf. *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini* 29. *Dal viaggio in Germania all'intervento dell'Italia nella Seconda guerra mondiale 1° ottobre 1937-10 giugno 1940*, by Edoardo e Duilio Susmel, Florence, La Fenice, 1959, p. 144.

¹⁹ Padova. University General Archive (from now on AGAPd), *Senato accademico*, minutes from the sitting dated the 10th November 1937.

²⁰ Arturo Carlo Jemolo, *Lettere a Mario Falco*, t. II, (1928-1943), by M.V. Missiroli, Giuffrè, Milan, 2009, pp. 349-385 (from the 25th December 1937 to the 31st December 1938).

²¹ Cf. Angelo Ventura, *Le leggi razziali all'Università di Padova*, quote.

²² Cf. Giulia Simone, *Studenti e docenti ebrei espulsi*, quote, pp. 170-172 for the biographies. Anita Cavidalli wrote about her experience at the University of Padua and how she was forced to leave because of the racial laws in «*Tu ritorneresti in Italia?*», Torino, Rosenberg & Sellier, 2000.

²³ Cf. Angelo Ventura, *Le leggi razziali all'Università di Padova*, quote, pp. 129-132.

The scholars who were mostly affected by the racial laws can be divided into five different categories based on their qualification. These categories were identified by the dicastery and implemented by the Rector, Carlo Anti, who was not particularly interested in people's official roles, focusing on making sure that no Jewish professors remained at the University:

- Full University Professors: 5 out of 67 (7,4%), of which 3 from the Faculty of Law (Donato Donati, Adolfo Ravà, Marco Fanno);
- Professors Emeriti: 2 out of 9 (22,2%), one of them was appointed Senator of the Kingdom (Enrico Catellani): they were removed from the University Yearbook and were not allowed to participate in any form of academic life;
- Lecturers ("liberi docenti"): 29 out of 198 (14,6%), one was a woman (Gemma Barzilai);
- Assistant Professors: 12 out of 170 (7%), five were women (Costanza Sullam, Maria Romano, Ada Fano, Anita Cavidalli e Ninette Façon);
- Adjunct Lecturers: 3 out of 84 (3,5%): Felix Braun, Alberto Goldbacher, Armando Levi-Cases.

In some cases, members of the same family were dismissed: Anita Cavidalli, voluntary assistant professor at the Institute of Glottology was dismissed together with her husband, Renato Salmon who was, in autumn 1938, assistant Professor of Industrial Chemistry, a freelance lecturer in Applied Chemistry and a University Professor of Electrochemistry at the Faculty of Engineering. Costanza Sullam was in 1936 an Assistant at the Institute of Chemistry and her father Angelo was a freelance lecturer in Economics and Remediation Legislation.

Even Professors Emeriti were not spared from being expelled, one being Enrico Catellani, who had been Senator since 1920. From an age standpoint, evidence shows that some of the dismissed were two freelance lecturers over 70, 13 were under 60, 6 under 50 and 24 well under 40: this goes to show that Jewish scholars within the University (5 were women - 10% - a significant number for that time) not only were the youngest members of staff, but also that their presence was constant throughout the decades, the youngest being Anita Cavidalli, who was only 23 years old. Furthermore, we note that 11 scholars were under 30: another issue worth considering, since the University was depriving itself of young and brilliant minds, with an immediate and, probably even more insidious, long-lasting effect on its future. It is hard to imagine what might have come out of research based on Roberto Finzi's work had there been the possibility to compare the situation within other Universities and their Faculties, some more affected than others²⁴. Lastly, the Faculties that were most hit by these dismissals were Medicine and Surgery (22), Mathematical, Physical and Natural Sciences (13), Law & Arts (both with 7 expelled professors), Political Science (2 law university professors) and Engineering (3 dismissed)²⁵.

Only one person was dismissed from the University Administration staff: Daniele Calabi, an engineer and architect who worked for rector Anti to build the twentieth-century university: he developed several university buildings in the city and designed the astronomical observatory in Asiago²⁶.

A large number of students were also expelled: in the 1937-1938 academic year 139 enrolled students (both of Italian and foreign nationality) were Jewish out of a total of 3313; immediately after the introduction of the racial laws the number decreased to 74. The total number of foreign Jewish students in Padua was the same as the Italian Jewish students: in 1937-1938 there were 67 of them, 5 of which were German²⁷. Prior to the introduction of the racial laws, the fascist regime had

²⁴ On the concept of damage in this context, cf. Roberto Finzi, *L'università italiana e le leggi antiebraiche*, new, enlarged and revised edition, Rome, Editori Riuniti, 2003 (I ed. 1997).

²⁵ Giulia Simone, *Le leggi razziali e la sostituzione dei docenti ebrei all'Università di Padova*. In *Ebrei, medicina e Università di Padova*. Edited by Edward Reichman & Fabio Zampieri. Padua: Padova University Press, 2025, pp. 97-119.

²⁶ Cf. Angelo Ventura, *Le leggi razziali all'Università di Padova*, quote, p. 164; about Calabi refer to Maria Cecilia Ghetti, *La nascita dell'osservatorio astrofisico di Asiago*, held at the *Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Cento anni di astronomia in Italia 1860-1960*, Rome, Bardi, 2005, pp. 359-386.

²⁷ Simone, *Studenti e docenti ebrei espulsi dall'Università di Padova*, quote, p. 182.

encouraged foreign students to enrol into Italian universities. They were even exempt from paying university fees; the fact that Padua welcomed German students reflects the traditional relationship that Veneto universities had with the German world, in terms of historical ties and geographical vicinity²⁸.

The discriminatory policies undertaken by the regime, especially towards foreign Jews, were applied quickly²⁹: at the opening ceremony of academic year 1939-1940, Anti announced that the previous year

«about sixty Jewish students, especially foreign students [...] have dropped out or interrupted their studies without being replaced by other students. This has not influenced our University greatly because since I started as Rector I have gradually reduced the number of Jewish students who were, in fact, often undesirable. I opposed their demand on special treatment, not be too harsh on them, but I had to defend the honour of our University. Numbers have been reduced from 250 in year XI to 171 in year XVI before the introduction of the racial laws and this year they have dropped to 121³⁰».

4. Replacements

The question of replacements – we shall limit ourselves to the 5 ordinary professors – concerns the victims of racial persecution and all those who were involved due to their academic position.

Thanks to a recent study based on a vast bibliography, but also, on meticulous and thorough archive research, it is now possible to see in detail what forces were put into play in Padua – often without too much moral remorse – in order to fill the vacancies left by the dismissal of Jewish professors³¹.

Despite painting the picture of an arid academic environment, often fearful and sometimes unscrupulous, it is necessary to clarify the question of “damage”³². Padua differed from other Universities which, due to the racial laws, allowed less qualified lecturers to enter their teaching staff. The choices made by Faculty Councils, shared by Rector Anti and implemented by Minister Bonatti, were made on the basis of the scientific validity and capabilities of the candidates who were to replace the dismissed scholars. Indeed, in the aftermath of 1938, Antonio Rostagni, Giuseppe Capograssi, Norberto Bobbio, Francesco Rèpaci, all highly respected professors, came to lecture at the Bo in Padua. The political leanings of some of the then substitutes, such as Bobbio, were not totally in line with the fascist dictatorship, and they found themselves working alongside fascists [people who did not express any opinion about the Fascist regime] who in 1943 became antifascists, such as Manara Valgimigli and Concetto Marchesi³³.

The substitutes were, therefore, valid candidates on paper and, from the documents consulted in the archives, they maintained contact and relationships with the dismissed professors after 1938 and throughout the war. The only exception was the Faculty of Medicine, where Tullio Terni was replaced by Giovanni Bruno, who turned out to be a very negative person: as Anti wrote in his diary in 1945,

²⁸ The relative majority mechanism was in place in the faculty of Medicine, due to the restrictions imposed on Jews who practised the profession in several countries: Klaus Voigt, *Il rifugio precario. Gli esuli italiani dal 1933 al 1945*, Scandicci, La Nuova Italia, 1993, pp. 220-228.

²⁹ On the discriminatory acts carried out in the University, such as «separating» Jews and non-Jews students during oral exams, cf. Simone, *Studenti e docenti ebrei espulsi dall'Università di Padova*, quote, pp. 175-176.

³⁰ The quote is found in *Le leggi razziali all'Università di Padova*, quote, pp. 115-116 by Ventura, which explains the difference between the numerical data proposed by the Rector and the data found in the documents produced by the students' offices: Anti ambiguously presented figures referring to foreign students without race distinction.

³¹ This refers to the work of Pompeo Volpe, Giulia Simone, “*Posti liberi*”, quote.

³² Roberto Finzi, *Le leggi «razziali» e l'Università italiana*, in *L'Università dalle leggi razziali alla Resistenza*, quote, pp. 31-85.

³³ Luciano Canfora, *Il sovversivo. Concetto Marchesi e il comunismo italiano*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2019.

Bruno was a «thief, fake and immoral»³⁴. He did not last very long though: while Anti did dismiss and replace the Jewish scholars, he also worked very hard to make sure that the University kept its excellent reputation. Anti, whenever necessary, as with Bruno, continued his crusade to ensure that the University of Padua remained at the forefront based on merit. The work carried out by Terni in previous years was at stake. If Bruno was not good enough to stay, he had to be removed; in 1941 he was replaced by Luigi Bucciante who was a much more suitable substitute for Terni.

Compared to the damage to scientific research on a national level, especially with regard to some specific fields (such as Physics), at that moment in time replacing ordinary professors did not seem to impact negatively the quality of the University³⁵; however, after a couple of years only, also due to the war, there was clear evidence of a decline with regard to both the teaching and the University structure. However, still today we are lacking studies that effectively “quantify” the damage caused by the 51 dismissals and subsequent replacements: the substitutes were able to apply for the “new” posts, not only thanks to a scientific curriculum appropriate to the tradition of Padua but also thanks to the pressures/influences of the ministerial authorities and the academic consortiums of which the substitutes themselves were members. All this allowed the regime to declare that nothing had been lost in terms of scientific progress and prestige and that there were valid Aryan substitutes for the Jews³⁶.

Anti chose to replace the dismissed scholars with qualified Aryan professors, thus confirming his strategy to lead a quality University, also in the face of the changes caused by the dictatorship³⁷.

5. 1938-1945: The racist years both inside and outside the University

The racial laws affected mainly one category of persons, leading to their expulsion. However, they also affected the organisation of the University itself. Scholarships were reclaimed, and grants named after people who were now defined as from the «Jewish race» were not renewed or accepted. Scholarships, such as those sponsored by the Elia Lattes Foundation, which awarded 450 lire to a Law student and an Arts student³⁸ were accessible to all students regardless of nationality or religion. In other circumstances, however, scholarships were awarded to Jewish students by Jewish cultural institutions: this was the case for the «Fasana Salomon Alhadeff» foundation which, for more than 10 years, offered scholarships of 3.500 lire a year to freshmen coming from the Jewish community in Rodi and later to freshmen coming from the «native Israelites from the Aegean Islands»³⁹.

Jewish financiers were no longer tolerated in the Paduan academic world, therefore, the way in which the Rector Anti and the Academic Senate managed the prize money offered that year by the «Elia Lattes Foundation» in memory of Abraham and Moisé Lattes, Oriental studies scholars philologists from Venice, was pretty unusual. The prize money was awarded to a graduate in «Lettere» (Arts graduate) whose dissertation focused on philology and history: the prize was coveted given that it consisted of 450 lire, and could amount to as much as 1,000 Lire, provided that the

³⁴ *I diari di Carlo Anti, Rettore dell'Università di Padova e Direttore Generale delle Arti della Repubblica Sociale Italiana. Trascrizione integrale*, by Girolamo Zampieri, Accademia di Agricoltura, Scienze e Lettere of Verona, 2011, pp. 186-187.

³⁵ On the story Bruno in Padua cf. “*Posti liberi*”, quote, pp. 59-62.

³⁶ Refer to the article *Come coprire i vuoti* by anonymous in the Journal *University Life*, dated the 5th October 1938, no. 1, p. 3 which Giuseppina Fois analysed, “*Vita universitaria*”, una rivista per l'università italiana, in *Università e formazione dei ceti dirigenti. Per Gian Paolo Brizzi, pellegrino dei saperi*, by Giancarlo Angelozzi, Maria Teresa Guerrini, Giuseppe Olmi, Bologna, Bononia University Press, 2013, pp. 599-611.

³⁷ Cf. Mario Isnenghi, *Carlo Anti intellettuale militante*, in the History of the University of Padua Center, *Carlo Anti, Giornate di studio nel centenario della nascita (Verona-Padova-Venezia 6-8 marzo 1990)*, Trieste, Lint, 1992.

³⁸ If there were any restrictions, they were income-related: as was the case for the 400 Lire grant awarded by the «Evelina Melli Polacco» Foundation to students of the Faculty of Engineering. Where 2 or more candidates were assessed as being of equal merit, the «poorest» one was preferred. Cf. Scholarship Applications in AGAPd, *Atti del Rettorato*, b. 319.

³⁹ Call for entry for study grants found in the AGAPd, *Atti del Rettorato*, b. 319, «Fondazione Fasana Salom Alhadeff».

dissertation was published. Anti posted the notice with the competition rules on 23rd December 1937 and students were to apply by 30th November 1938. Meanwhile, a year had passed, the racial laws had been brought into force, university scholars were dismissed and freshmen from the «Jewish race» were no longer admitted. The Lattes prize, however, did not seem to be affected by these external events; two applications were received and sent by the rector to the Dean of the Arts Faculty who, in turn, appointed a commission to approve the content. This was on 9th December 1938. The commission decided that both topics were valid: indeed, they decided that it was possible to split the prize money in case of two noteworthy candidates. The proposal was also accepted by the Academic Senate who was called upon to confirm the decision made by the Arts Faculty. However, the scholarship selection process came to a sudden halt: on 23rd December the scholarship allocation process was suspended, and it was decided not to award the prize for the academic year 1938-1939⁴⁰. What to do with the winners who had participated in the selection process before the racial laws came into force? The Academic Senate was fully aware that the candidates did «not belong to the Jewish race» and decided that it was a pity for two young and promising Aryan students to lose the prize money⁴¹. The case was sent to the Ministry of National Education. The situation was resolved in the best way possible: the Academic Senate raised the prize money to 1.000 lire, and declared both Aryan candidates as winners. They were awarded 500 lire each to be collected after the publication of their dissertation. By the end of 1939 both had published their work: Arnaldo Momo, graduated with Natale Busetto and published *La Lirica di Torquato Tasso. Amor de Lohn* and as seen by the scholarship contest regulations indicated in the title page that the work had won «the ‘Abramo and Moisé Lattes’ prize, oriental philologists from Venice, of the [sic!] Elia Lattes Foundation»; whereas the other winner, Luisa Pietrogrande, graduated with Giuseppe Fiocco and also published her work on Girolamo dal Santo with Olschki, a Jewish publisher of Prussian origin.

The racial laws also influenced the courses that were made available and, therefore, also the entire student body. In 1938, new degree courses appeared in the Yearbook to study race and discrimination techniques: the statistician Gaetano Pietra took on the role of Professor of «General Demography and Comparative Demography of Races»⁴². This new subject matter was taught at the Faculty of Political Science where Pietra replaced Donati as Dean⁴³. In 1938 one of Pietra’s students, Giovanni Ferrari, taught «General anthropometry and comparative anthropometry of races» and «General Health statistics and Comparative Health Statistics of Races»⁴⁴. Even the anthropologist Raffaello Battaglia held a course relating to the racial laws called «Colonial Geography and Ethnography». He also taught «Biology of the Human Races» within the Faculty of Science.

These new courses were not very popular within the student body despite the fact that «Demography of Races» was relatively easy to pass, only 4 out of 103 failed during the academic year 1938-1939; numbers continued to drop in the following years (from 64 in 1940-1941 to 8 in 1942-1943)⁴⁵. Very few students, almost always less than 10, went on to take the other two exams in the race module, also because these subjects did not require a dissertation to be written. Students

⁴⁰ Since 1926 the Veneto Science, Art & Literature Institute also sponsored dialectology studies through a study grant named after the philologist Elia Lattes: contrary to what happened at the University of Padua, in 1939 the call for entry was still published. Cf. Carlo Urbani, *Tra scienza e coscienza. L’Istituto Veneto di fronte alle leggi razziali*, «Atti dell’Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti», Volume CLXXIII (2014-2015), Class of Moral Science, Art & Literature, p. 99.

⁴¹ AGAPd, *Atti del Rettorato*, b.325, «Premio Elia Lattes 1938-1939», memorandum for the Academic Senate, 9th March 1939.

⁴² On the contrary, in 1939-40 the «Hebrew and Comparative Semitic Languages» module was removed from the Arts curriculum, despite there being 9-10 participants in the previous two years. In the mid-thirties «Military Culture Studies» was introduced and from 1940-41 «Chemistry of War».

⁴³ Anna Treves, *Il nesso inscindibile tra demografia e razza e l’ambiguità dei demografi*, in *Antisemitismo in Europa negli anni trenta. Legislazioni a confronto*, by Anna Cappelli and Renata Broggin, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2001, pp. 252-260; and Carl Ipsen, *Demografia totalitaria: il problema della popolazione nell’Italia fascista*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1997.

⁴⁴ Giulia Simone, *Fascismo in cattedra*, pp. 66-68.

⁴⁵ The *Prospetto degli esami speciali di laurea e diploma* section of the Yearbook shows the number of exams passed or failed by subject.

graduated in subjects related to the colonies, but this was not the case for students studying topics of racism as they were complementary and not fundamental subjects.

However, these subjects did remain part of the university curriculum also in the years following 1945: indeed, more than 20 exams in «Biology of Human Races» and «Colonial Geography and Ethnography» were taken every year, while during the academic year 1946-1947 exams on «General and Comparative Anthropometry of Races»⁴⁶ were taken at the School of Statistics.

About fifty between professors and researchers were relieved of their duties, together with approximately 70 expelled students: considering that there were just over 500 members of the Paduan community, we can easily comprehend how the Jewish families in the area⁴⁷ were deeply affected by the situation. When we include University staff and freelance professors (on which there are still few studies⁴⁸) as well, it is easy to understand how the entire Paduan bourgeoisie became affected by the legislation. Like elsewhere in Italy, there were Aryan people in Padua who enjoyed speculating about how many properties would be sold off cheaply because the owners were forced to do so: a study carried out at that time, estimated that 40% of landowners were members of the Jewish community. The speculators also hoped that the new racial laws would change that percentage. The authors of the study were from the same university: Pietra, director of the scientific publication *La ricchezza privata delle Venezie [The Private Wealth of the Venetian Area]*, signed the introduction of the edition on wealth in the Padua province. The research was carried out by his pupil Alfredo De Polzer who would later become a professor at the University of Bologna as well as a member of the Resistance in the ranks of the Communist Party.

Both Pietra and Battaglia took it upon themselves to disseminate racism, even outside the lecture halls of the University; with the support of Rector Anti, the professors planned and organised the first racial exhibition in Italy in Padua (which was never inaugurated)⁴⁹.

Without a doubt, the University Student Fascist Group (GUF) amplified the situation: on 27th January 1938, when there was still no talk of racial laws, they posted a series of newspaper clippings with anti-Semitic undertones on the students' bulletin board⁵⁰. Anti removed the material, limiting the anti-Semitic tones of Gustavo Piva's academic year inauguration speech. Gustavo Piva was the GUF's secretary and had the task of speaking on behalf of the students at the ceremony⁵¹. One of the GUF's newsletters was «il Bo», renowned for its violent attacks on the Jewish community.

Several Jewish professors were also authors of books, handouts and manuals used by universities and schools; they were, therefore, greatly affected by the racial laws. Editors were prohibited from publishing and selling material written by Jews, even if partly written together with Aryan colleagues. This persecution was conducted very thoroughly under the direct control of the Minister of National Education, Giuseppe Bottai⁵².

⁴⁶ *Annuario 1946-47 [Yearbook 1946-47]*, pp. 131-132 and 141.

⁴⁷ Chiara Saonara, *Il fascismo padovano e gli ebrei*, in Giacomo Levi Civita e l'ebraismo veneto tra Otto e Novecento, quote, p. 98.

⁴⁸ On Jewish Lawyers in Padua and in the Veneto region cf. Giovanni Focardi, *Magistratura e fascismo. L'amministrazione della giustizia in Veneto (1920-1945)*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2012, pp. 182-194.

⁴⁹ On the organisation of the exhibition and material from the A.O.I., cf. Giulia Simone, *Fascismo in cattedra*, pp. 103-105.

⁵⁰ Simone Duranti, *Lo spirito gregario. I gruppi universitari fascisti tra politica e propaganda (1930-1940)*, introduction by Enzo Collotti, Rome, Donzelli, 2008; Luca La Rovere, *Storia dei Guf. Organizzazione, politica e miti della gioventù universitaria fascista 1919-1943*, introduction by Bruno Bongiovanni, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2003.

⁵¹ Cf. Mario Isnenghi, *Carlo Anti intellettuale militante*, in the Centro per la Storia dell'Università di Padova, *Carlo Anti, Giornate di studio nel centenario della nascita (Verona-Padova-Venezia 6-8 marzo 1990)*, Trieste, Lint, 1992, p. 236. On the GUF cf. Federico Bernardinello, *Fra goliardia e inquadramento. Gli universitari padovani negli anni Trenta*, by Francesco Piovan, Luciana Sitran Rea, *Studenti, Università, città nella storia padovana*, Notes from the Conference (Padova, 6-8 febbraio 1998), Trieste, Lint, 2001, pp. 649-691.

⁵² Monica Galfré, *Il regime degli editori. Libri, scuola e fascismo*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2005, pp. 148-161.

6. The persecution of lives

Academic freedom was violated, and, during the Italian Social Republic, the persecution of rights went on to become the persecution of lives.

Professors and students belonging to the «Jewish race» and continuously referred to as such in all academic documentation after 8th September 1943, were persecuted: item 7 of the Verona manifesto claims that «those belonging to the Jewish race are foreigners» and, therefore, should be treated as enemies.

The Jewish professors at the University of Padua had very different fates: some of them, like Donato Donati, managed to flee to Switzerland and escape the concentration camps; others, like Marco Fanno, hid in the Abbey of Praglia near Padua and decided to be christened. Others were arrested and taken to a villa in Vo' Vecchio in the Euganean Hills (Colli Euganei), which was used to incarcerate Jews in 1943. Among the first group of Jews to be interned there on 3rd December 1943 was Professor Alberto Goldbacher, who was deported on 24th October 1944 and killed upon arrival in Auschwitz on 28th October⁵³.

There was another Professor from Padua who perished in the extermination camps: Augusto Levi, a Physics Assistant Professor at the University of Padua from 1907 to 1910, who later became a freelance lecturer in Experimental Physics and Head of Physics Applied to Medicine. He was arrested in Padua on 27th January 1944 together with his wife Giovannina D'Italia and their sixteen-year-old son, Alvisio. The three were interned in Vo' Vecchio, where they began their last journey through the prisons in Padua and *Risiera di San Sabba* in Trieste, until their arrival in Auschwitz and Dachau from where they were never to return⁵⁴.

There are limited sources on the fate of Jewish students enrolled at the University of Padua, therefore, it is not possible to have a comprehensive list of the people who were expelled and persecuted. To date, research has identified five students from the University of Padua who were deported to extermination camps: Giorgio Arany (1919-1944) from the Faculty of Engineering; Giuseppe Kroò (1919-1945) from the Faculty of Science; Paolo Tolentino (1917-1944/45?), probably from the Arts Faculty; Nora Finzi (1909-1944/45?) and Desiderio Milch (1923-1944). Among them, only Arany and Finzi managed to graduate, respectively, from the Engineering Faculty and from the Arts Faculty (the latter with a dissertation on the History of Religions)⁵⁵.

7. The return to Padua: difficult, partial, non-existent

After the war, reintegrating Jewish survivors was generally perceived with irritation throughout Italy, even by the anti-fascist themselves. Repairing the damage inflicted on the Jews was not among the priorities of the first republican legislature of 1948: in fact, the fascist racial legislation was completely abrogated only in 1987, almost half a century after its introduction⁵⁶. Within the Italian Jewish communities itself, during the first years after the Liberation, people tended not want to know

⁵³ Francesco Selmin, *Nessun giusto per Eva. La Shoah a Padova e nel Padovano*, Sommacampagna, Cierre; Padua, Centro Studi Ettore Luccini, 2011.

⁵⁴ Augusto Levi taught Classical Studies for many years at the Tito Livio High School in Padua. After losing all his teaching jobs due to the racial laws, he set up and acted as Principal of the Jewish schools in Padua and Venice (in collaboration with Alberto Goldbacher, Vice President of the Community): cf. *“Alunni di razza ebraica”. Studenti del Liceo-Ginnasio “Tito Livio” sotto le leggi razziali*, by Mariarosa Davi, Padova, s.i.t., 2010; Daniel Fishman, *Le classi invisibili. Le scuole ebraiche in Italia dopo le leggi razziste (1938-1943)*, by Patrizia Baldi, CDEC, Milan, 2019, pp. 61-62.

⁵⁵ On the vicissitudes of the four students cf. *Studenti e docenti ebrei espulsi dall'Università di Padova*, quote, pp. 176-179 by Giulia Simone.

⁵⁶ Mario Toscano, *Dall'«antisorgimento» al postfascismo: l'abrogazione delle leggi razziali e il reinserimento degli ebrei nella società italiana*, in *L'abrogazione delle leggi razziali in Italia (1943-1987)*, Rome, Servizio studi del Senato della Repubblica, 1988, pp. 21-65.

the fate of those who disappeared in 1943-45; instead, they preferred not to remember what happened immediately after 1938.

On a legislative level, the first measures concerning the reintegration of ordinary professors dismissed for political and racial reasons date back to January 1944 and were issued right up until May 1946, before the election of the Constituent Assembly on 2nd June 1946. Legal provisions required that university professors be reinstated in the University they had belonged to in 1938. Therefore, the faculties that had expelled professors (all except for Pharmacy) were to be reorganised accordingly. It was, however, up to the dismissed professor to apply for reinstatement and they could be considered as “additional resources” if the position was already occupied by someone else. Fanno, Ravà and Donati managed to obtain the professorship they held in 1938⁵⁷, whereas Terni was awarded the post of Professor of Histology and Embryology in the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery and his substitute, Bucciante, taught Human Anatomy.

In truth, no-one returned to Padua apart from Fanno: Rossi did not even apply for reinstatement. He preferred to remain in the United States, the country that took him in 1938; Ravà stayed in Rome where he had fled during the persecution; Donati, after returning from Switzerland, decided to remain in Modena, his birth town, where he died in 1946; instead, Tullio Terni saw a tragic end: he was accused of perjury and expelled from the *Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* [a prestigious Italian Science Academy] on charges of being a «fervent fascist». He committed suicide in Florence on 25th April 1946⁵⁸.

The sudden death of Terni provoked profound sadness among the Italian academic world and, in Padua, several commemorations were held in memory of the scholar⁵⁹. This was a stark contrast to the cold and indifferent climate of 1938 when he was dismissed⁶⁰. After the war, there was a great sense of unity: the academic corporation consoled and forgave itself for what had happened without questioning personal choices made by individuals on how they treated the dismissed scholars in 1938 and on their return. The racial laws were seen as an excursus, a divagation and the individuals who suffered the outrage, such as Marco Fanno, wanted to remove that particular chapter of their life. They preferred to return to their job without mentioning it. Others, however, did benefit greatly from the desire to not remember the racial laws. The statistician Pietra replaced Donati as the Dean of the Faculty but remained unscathed from the purging process and continued to teach in Padua. Like the rest of Italian society, all anti-Semitic professors quickly removed any trace of their political choices made at the turn of 1938: after the Second World War, Pietra became a Senator for the *Democrazia Cristiana* and was never accused of anti-Semitism. Similarly, Paolo Fortunati, one of Pietra's pupils in the Thirties, and subsequently assistant to Balbo and Nello Quilici in Ferrara, took on the post Professor of Demography and Comparative demography of the Races in 1938, yet in the post war period he had no trouble in being elected into the ranks of the Italian Communist Party and becoming

⁵⁷ G. Focardi, *La Facoltà di Giurisprudenza (1945-68)*, in *Dall'università d'élite all'università di massa, L'Ateneo di Padova dal secondo dopoguerra alla contestazione sessantottesca*, by A. Lazzaretto and G. Simone, Padua, Padova University Press, 2017, pp. 147-48.

⁵⁸ On the fate of the dismissed scholars who did not go back to Padua, with the exception of Marco Fanno, who was reinstated at the Faculty of Law, cf. Pompeo Volpe, Giulia Simone, “*Posti liberi*”, quote. On the tragic fate of Tullio Terni cf. Angelo Ventura, *Tullio Terni, l'Università di Padova e l'epurazione all'Accademia dei Lincei*, in *Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, La memoria ritrovata. Giornata in ricordo di Tullio Terni e Mario Camis (Roma, 12 marzo 2004)*, Rome, Bardi («Minutes from Accademia dei Lincei conferences, 212»), 2005, pp. 13-61, now re-edited by Angelo Ventura in *Il fascismo e gli ebrei*, quote, pp. 179-235.

⁵⁹ Luigi Bucciante, *Tullio Terni (Commemorazione pronunciata nella seduta della Società Medico-Chirurgica di Padova il 14 novembre 1947)*, in *Università degli Studi di Padova, Annuario per l'anno accademico 1946-47. DCCXXV dalla fondazione*, Padova, s.i.t., 1947, pp. 193-202 and Alfredo Margreth, *Il nostro debito verso Tullio Terni, fondatore della cattedra di Istologia e Embriologia a Padova*, in *La memoria ritrovata*, quote, pp. 53-63.

⁶⁰ On the notice of service suspension, cf. Giulia Simone, *La sostituzione dei cinque ordinari ebrei*, in Pompeo Volpe, Giulia Simone, “*Posti liberi*”, quote, pp. 33-69.

a Senator⁶¹. Racism vanished into thin air, and university students, victims and persecutors all acquitting themselves was the general trend.

8. Remembrance and research

Eighty years after the promulgation of the racial laws the academic world felt the need to question itself, not only about the bureaucratic mechanisms that led to expelling Jewish university professors and students, but also about the participation of the entire academic body, who often played an active and acquiescent role in dismissing scholars and finding appropriate replacements. This behaviour did not reflect the motto of the University, which was developed – irony in history – during the fascist era (*Universa Universis Patavina Libertas*)⁶².

These events were extremely complex and varied, therefore, historical research and studies are still essential to get a better understanding of what exactly happened.

Furthermore, we all need to remember. While after the Second World War Universities tried to “clear their conscience” for decades, now the time has come for them to question their past and ask themselves just how much the cultural world succumbed to the will of the regime.

Today the University of Padua remembers those tragic events with complex and mixed feelings. The first tangible sign of a change in sentiment was when, on Holocaust Memorial Day in 2014, a plaque was placed in memory of the tragic events of 1938. Since then some rooms at the University have been named after the scholars who perished from the persecution: today the library for Economic studies is dedicated to Marco Fanno and, in 2017, the Faculty of Mathematics paid tribute to Tullio Levi Civita by naming itself after him. On 27th of January 2018, the University of Padua was the first University in Europe to dedicate six *Stolpersteine* (so called “stumbling stones”) to the memory of the two professors and four students mentioned above, who were killed in the extermination camps; an additional stumbling stone was dedicated to a fifth student, Desiderio Milch, on 27th January 2022⁶³.

Remembrance and research go hand in hand, and we hope that when the University celebrates its 800th anniversary in 2022, it will shed more light on those dark and dubious days. Indeed, there is a number of sources that are still not available to scholars, such as the State Police Fund in the State archives, where documents still need to be catalogued. Furthermore, not many memoirs or private papers of professors who worked in Padua during fascism have been made public yet.

Due to these limitations, the events described above mainly deal with the history of the University of Padua; only in a few cases – such as for the five expelled ordinary teachers – was it possible to depict the personal story of those who went through those events. Much is still to be studied, understood and discussed.

⁶¹ As regards Padua cf. Maurizio Reberschak, *Epurazioni? La commissione di epurazione dell'Università di Padova (1945-46)*, in *Europa e America nella storia della civiltà. Studi in onore di Aldo Stella*, by Paolo Pecorari, Treviso, Antilia, 2003, pp. 425-448; Pompeo Volpe, Giulia Simone, “*Posti liberi*”, quote. For a national overview, cf. Giovanni Montroni, *La continuità necessaria. Università e professori dal fascismo alla Repubblica*, Milan, Mondadori, 2016; Mattia Flamigni, *Professori e Università di fronte all'epurazione. Dalle ordinanze alleate alla pacificazione (1943-1948)*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2019, Giovanni Focardi, Adriano Mansi, *A proposito di università ed epurazioni dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale: storiografie a confronto*, in «Annali di Storia delle università italiane», n. 2, 2021, pp. 85-111.

⁶² Cf. Piero Del Negro, *La Facoltà di Giurisprudenza di Padova (1938-1950). I docenti, il quadro istituzionale, le scelte politiche*, in *Giuristi al bivio. Le Facoltà di Giurisprudenza tra regime fascista ed età repubblicana*, by Marco Cavina, Bologna, Clueb, 2014, p. 116.

⁶³ Mariarosa Davi, Giulia Simone, *Le pietre d'inciampo a Padova*, by Mimma De Gasperi, Padua, Padova University Press, 2024.

Appendix: List of dismissed scholars in 1938

According to age, job title and Faculty

2 Emeritus professors (*); 5 full professors

Catellani Enrico*	84	Law
Donati Donato	65	Law
Fanno Marco	58	Law
Ravà Adolfo	60	Law
Terni Tullio	59	Medicine
Rossi Bruno	33	Maths, Physics and Nat. Sciences (MPNS)
Levi-Civita Tullio*	50	MPNS

44 Junior consultants, lecturers, [*liberi docenti* = associate professor] contract lecturers, assistant professors, fellows
[44 Aiuti (*medici*), *incaricati*, *liberi docenti*, *assistenti*, *borsisti*]

Law 3		Medicine & Surgery 21	
Ravà Paolo	27	Barzilai Gemma	43
Ravà Tito	28	Castiglioni Arturo	64
Sullam Angelo	57	Dalla Torre Giacomo	36
		Denes Giulio	37
Philosophy & Arts 7		Ercoli Nicolò	33
Braun Felix	53	Fano Ada	29
Cevidalli Anita	23	Jacchia Luigi	36
Façon Ninette (Nina)	29	Jacchia Paolo	55
Musatti Cesare	41	Jona Giuseppe	72
Reichenbach Giulio	52	Kock Carlo	45
Sabbadini Salvatore	65	Macchioro Gino	39
Zolli Israel	57	Morpurgo Edgardo	66
		Olper Leone	35
MPNS 9+1		Ravenna Arrigo	59
Bytinski Salz Hans	35	Ravenna Ferruccio	57
Curiel Eugenio	26	Rimini Edmondo	71
De Benedetti Sergio	26	Sacerdote Gabriele	41
Levi Augusto	54	Saraval Umberto	45
Pincherle Leo	28	Seppilli Alessandro	36
Romano Maria	25	Supino Luciano	32
Schreiber Giorgio	33	Winternitz Leopoldo	39
Sullam Costanza	25		
Viterbi Emilio	47	Engineering 3	
Dismissed in 1943*		Goldbacher Alberto	55
Loria Arturo	29*	Levi-Cases Armando	59
		Salmoni Renato	32

According to position⁶⁴

Dismissed professor	Position in 1938	Replaced by (from 1938 to 1945)
Catellani E.	Professor Emeritus of Law	--
Levi-Civita T.	Professor Emeritus of MPNS	--
Donati D.	LAW a) Full Professor of Constitutional Law POLITICAL SCIENCE b) Dean c) Lecturer in Constitutional Law d) Lecturer in Political Philosophy	LAW a) -- ⁶⁵ ; Carlo Esposito (from 1939-40 to 1944-45) POLITICAL SCIENCE b) Gaetano Pietra (1938-39); Enrico Guicciardi (from 1939-40 to 1941-42); Mario Viora (January-October 1942); Lionello Rossi (from 1942-43 until July 1945) c) Carlo Esposito (from 1939-40 to 1940-41; then inactive) d) Giuseppe Capograssi (from 1938-39 to 1939-40); Norberto Bobbio (from 1940-41 to 1944-45)
Fanno M.	LAW a) Full Professor of Corporatist Economics (<i>Economia politica corporativa</i>) b) Director of the Department of Economics POLITICAL SCIENCE c) Lecturer in Corporatist Law d) Lecturer in Colonial Economics	LAW a) Francesco Antonio Rèpaci b) Francesco Antonio Rèpaci POLITICAL SCIENCE c) Francesco Antonio Rèpaci (from 1938-39 to 1942-43); b) Francesco Antonio Rèpaci (from 1938-39 to 1939-40); Gaetano Pietra (1940-41); Francesco Antonio Rèpaci (from 1941-42 to 1944-45)
Ravà A.	LAW a) Full Professor of Philosophy of Law b) Lecturer in Private Law c) Lecturer for the Civil Law workshop at the Post-Graduate Legal Training School d) Director of the Philosophy of Law and Comparative Law Department POLITICAL SCIENCE e) Lecturer in Principles of Private Law f) Lecturer in History of Political Thought ⁶⁶	LAW a) Giuseppe Capograssi (from 1938-39 to 1939-40); no one in 1940-41 ⁶⁷ ; Norberto Bobbio (from 1941-42 to 1944-45) b) Francesco Santoro Passarelli (from 1938-39 to 1941-42); Walter Bigiavi (1942-43); Alberto Trabucchi (from 1943-44 to 1944-45) c) Inactive d) Giuseppe Capograssi (from 1938-39 to 1939-40); Norberto Bobbio (from 1940-41 to 1944-45) POLITICAL SCIENCE e) Francesco Santoro Passarelli (from 1938-39 to 1941-42); Walter Bigiavi (1942-43); inactive f) Marino Gentile (from 1938-39 to 1944-45)
Rossi B.	a) Full Professor of Experimental Physics b) Director of the Physics Department	a) Antonio Rostagni (from 1938-39 to 1944-45) b) Antonio Rostagni (from 1938-39 to 1944-45)
Terni T.	a) Full Professor of Human Anatomy b) Director of the Human Anatomy Department	a) -- ⁶⁸ ; Giovanni Bruno (from 1939-40 to 1940-41); Luigi Bucciante (from 1941-42 to 1944-45) b) Giovanni Cagnetto (1938-39); Giovanni Bruno (from 1939-40 to 1940-41); Luigi Bucciante (from 1941-42 to 1944-45)

⁶⁴ Each person is identified *in primis* by the role mentioned by the rector Carlo Anti at the time of dismissal. Then, as many of the dismissed staff had more than one role in the University in 1938, these other roles are also mentioned.

⁶⁵ In the academic year 1938-39 Enrico Guicciardi was given the task of teaching Constitutional Law (unpaid).

⁶⁶ Appointed to the Political Science faculty.

⁶⁷ The course is held by Norberto Bobbio, as pro-tempore full professor.

⁶⁸ In 1938-39 Gaetano Ottavini was appointed as course professor.

Dismissed scholar	Position in 1938	Substituted by (from 1938 to 1945)
Barzilai G.	Lecturer in Obstetrics and Gynaecology	--
Braun F.	Lecturer in German Language and Literature	There were no lecturers in this subject in the academic year 1938-39; Bonaventura Tecchi (from 1939-40 to 1941-42) From 1942-43 to 1944-45 this subject was taught by Carlo Antoni, as pro-tempore full professor
Bytinschi S. H.	Grant holder at the Institute of Comparative Zoology, Anatomy and Physiology (Umberto D'Ancona director)	-- ⁶⁹
Castiglioni A.	Lecturer in History of Medicine	--
Cevidalli A.	Voluntary assistant	--
Curiel E.	a) Assistant professor of Rational Mechanics to the Chair of Maths b) Paid assistant in Mathematics Education and History	a) Kotzan Ervino (from 1938-39 to 1939-40); then inactive b) Ugo Morin (from 1938-39 to 1942-43); then inactive
Dalla Torre G.	Lecturer in Special Pathology	--
De Benedetti S.	Paid assistant at the Physics Department (Bruno Rossi, director)	--
Denes G.	Lecturer in Bacteriology	--
Ercoli N.	Paid assistant at the Pharmacology Department (Egidio Meneghetti, director)	-- ⁷⁰
Façon N.	Assistant/teacher in Romanian language	Alexandrina Mititelu (from 1938-39 to 1944-45)
Fano A.	a) Voluntary assistant at the Hygiene Department (Oddo Casagrandi, director) b) Lecturer in Food Chemistry at the Public Hygiene School (Oddo Casagrandi, director)	a) -- b) Carmen Conti (1938-39); Mariano Rossi (from 1939-40 to 1940-41)
Goldbacher A.	Lecturer in Special technologies	Mario Mainardis (from 1938-39 to 1944-45)
Jacchia L.	a) Professor of Special Pathology b) Junior consultant at the General Clinical Medicine (Antonio Gasbarrini, director)	a) -- b) Giulio Sotgiu (1938-39). In academic year 1939-40 Luigi Jacchia returns to his post ⁷¹ .
Jacchia P.	Professor of Pediatrics	--
Jona G.	Professor of Special Pathology	--
Kock C.	Professor of Ophthalmology and Oculistics	--
Levi A.	Professor of Experimental Physics	--
Levi-Cases A.	Lecturer in Industrial Mechanical Plants	Igino Tessari (from 1938-39 to 1944-45)
Macchioro G.	Professor of Special Pathology	--
Morpurgo E.	Professor of Psychiatry	--
Musatti C.	a) Freelance professor of Experimental Psychology b) Appointed to the Experimental Psychology department c) Acting director of the Experimental Psychology department	a) -- b) Inactive in 1938-39; from 1939-40 with Carlo Berlucchi the course is renamed Psychology c) Umberto D'Ancona (1938-39); Carlo Berlucchi (from 1939-40) ⁷²
Olper L.	a) Professor of Surgical pathology b) Assistant professor of General Surgery (Gian Maria Fagiani, director)	a) -- b) Giovanni Austoni (from 1938-39 ⁷³ to 1941-42)

⁶⁹ The Fellowship was offered by the *Academic Assistance Council* of London. There were no winners for this scholarship, which originated from abroad.

⁷⁰ Not replaced by an assistant professor. Aldo Cestari and Lanfranco Zancan are there as pro-tempore assistants; Renato Santi is a special pro-tempore assistant.

⁷¹ After being declared «not a member of the Jewish race», in a note by the Ministry of the Interior of 23rd October 1939.

⁷² With Carlo Berlucchi, the Department is transferred to the Clinic of nervous and mental diseases.

⁷³ The director of this Clinic changes in this year, with the appointment of Guido Oselladore.

Pincherle L.	a) Professor of Theoretical physics b) Appointed to the Theoretical Physics department c) Appointed to the Mathematical Physics department	a) -- b) -- ⁷⁴ c) Ernesto Laura
Ravà P.	Voluntary assistant	--
Ravà T.	Fellowship holder at the Private Law Institute (Francesco Santoro Passatelli, director)	--
Ravenna A.	Professor of Paediatrics	--
Ravenna F.	Professor of Special Pathology	--
Reichenbach G.	Professor of Italian Literature	--
Rimini E.	Professor of Otorhinolaryngology	--
Romano M.	Fellowship holder at the Comparative Zoology, Anatomy and Physiology Department (Umberto D'Ancona, director)	Anna Pasquali (from 1938-39 to 1939-40); Paola Gambaro (1940-41)
Sabbadini S.	Professor of Latin Language and Literature	--
Sacerdote G.	Professor of Special Surgical Pathology	--
Salmoni R.	a) Professor of Applied Chemistry b) Assistant Professor at the Applied and Industrial Chemistry Department and at the Sugars Experimental Section (Domenico Meneghini, director)	a) -- b) -- ⁷⁵ ; in 1939-40 Vittorio Muratori; in 1940-41 Andrea Scipioni
Saraval U.	Freelance professor of Dentistry and Prostodontics	--
Schreiber G.	a) Freelance professor of Comparative Zoology, Anatomy and Physiology b) Assistant professor at the Comparative Zoology, Anatomy and Physiology Department (Umberto D'Ancona, director) c) Appointed to the Comparative Anatomy Department (Sciences faculty)	a) -- b) -- ⁷⁶ ; Enrico Vannini (from 1940-41) c) Giacinto Ciaccio (from 1938-39 to 1939-40); Giulio Muratori (from 1940-41 to 1941-42); Enrico Vittorio Staudacher (from 1942-43 to 1944-45)
Seppilli A.	a) Freelance Professor of Hygiene b) Assistant Professor at the Hygiene Department (Oddo Casagrandi, director) c) Appointed to the Microscopy, Bacteriology and Immunology Department at the Public Hygiene School (Oddo Casagrandi, director)	a) -- b) -- ⁷⁷ ; Mario Franco (from 1939-40) c) Mario Franco (from 1938-39)
Sullam A.	Professor	--
Sullam C.	<i>Pro-tempore</i> assistant professor at the Chemistry Department (Carlo Sandonnini, director)	-- ⁷⁸ ; Mario Fioretti (1939-40); Mario Da Via (1940-41)
Supino L.	a) Professor of Anatomy and Pathologic Histology b) Voluntary assistant at the Medical Department (Antonio Gasparrini, director)	a) -- b) --
Viterbi E.	Professor of Chemistry	--
Winternitz L.	Professor of Special Pathology	--
Zolli I.	a) Contract/assistant Professor of Hebrew Language and Literature b) Appointed to the Hebrew and Comparative Semitic Languages Department	a) -- b) -- ⁷⁹

Also dismissed in 1943:

Loria A.	Junior consultant to the Physics Department (Antonio Rostagni, director)	--
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⁷⁴ The Theoretical Physics chair is given to Gian Carlo Wick, as pro-tem full professor, in 1938-39.

⁷⁵ In 1938-39 no one is appointed as assistant professor: there are a junior consultant (Enrico Crepaz), a pro-tem assistant professor (Andrea Scipioni), and a voluntary assistant (Marino Bertolini).

⁷⁶ In 1938-39 and in 1939-40 no one is appointed as assistant professor: There are a junior consultant (Giacinto Ciaccio), and a pro-tem assistant professor (Sigismondo Madeyski).

⁷⁷ In 1938-39 there are no junior consultants: there is an assistant professor (Mario Franco); and a pro-tem assistant professor (Carmen Conti).

⁷⁸ In 1938-39 there are no pro-tem assistant professors.

⁷⁹ In 1938-39 this course is no longer existing; however, examinations continue.

Introduction to Special Section: Critical Theory and Memory

Introduzione all'inserto speciale: Teoria critica e memoria

Massimo Caon*, Luca Corchia**

Abstract. This special section – with essays by Simone D'Alessandro, Daniel Valente Pedroso de Siqueira, and Benedetta Pozio – addresses the relationship between memory and critique as one of the key issues of the present, bringing Critical Theory and Memory Studies into dialogue in light of contemporary digital transformations. Building on the Frankfurt School's insight that memory is a field of struggle, the contributions conceptualize memory not as a passive repository of the past, but as a sociotechnical and normative practice shaping collective judgment and action. Through analyses ranging from platform memory and algorithmic colonization to Habermas's theory of cultural memory and a Benjaminian reading of Marrano crypto-Judaism, memory emerges as a critical infrastructure, a public good, and a counter-history of absence. The essays converge in arguing that memory, increasingly governed by platforms and market logics, calls for new forms of institutional protection, practices of resistance, and an updated critical vocabulary. From this perspective, memory appears as the contemporary form of critique: a dispositif capable of interrupting historical continuity, preserving gaps and silences, and reopening the possibility of emancipation in the present.

Keywords: Critical Theory; Memory; Digital Infrastructures; Platforms; Social Critique.

Riassunto. Questo inserto – con saggi di Simone D'Alessandro, Daniel Valente Pedroso de Siqueira e Benedetta Pozio – esplora il rapporto tra memoria e critica come uno dei nodi centrali del presente, mettendo in dialogo la Teoria critica e i *Memory Studies* alla luce delle trasformazioni digitali contemporanee. Muovendo dall'intuizione francofortese della memoria come campo di lotta, i contributi mostrano come essa non sia un semplice deposito del passato, ma una pratica sociotecnica e normativa che struttura la capacità collettiva di giudizio e azione. Attraverso casi che spaziano dalla *platform memory* e dalla colonizzazione algoritmica alla teoria habermasiana della memoria culturale, fino alla lettura benjaminiana del cripto-giudaismo marrano, la memoria emerge come infrastruttura critica, bene pubblico e controstoria dell'assenza. I saggi convergono nel sostenere che la memoria, oggi governata da piattaforme e logiche di mercato, richiede nuove forme di difesa istituzionale, pratiche di resistenza e un aggiornamento del lessico della Teoria critica. In questa prospettiva, la memoria si configura come la forma contemporanea della critica: un dispositivo capace di interrompere il *continuum* storico, custodire le lacune e riaprire nel presente la possibilità di emancipazione.

Parole chiave: Teoria critica; Memoria; Infrastrutture digitali; Piattaforme; Critica sociale.

Introduction in English

At the heart of this special section lies one of the major issues of our present time, namely the relationship between memory and critique. As key concepts of twentieth-century thought, it has become increasingly difficult today to reflect on either of them without considering at least two areas of research—respectively, a field of studies and a theoretical paradigm—that explicitly take their names from the notions of “memory” and “critique”: Memory Studies and Critical Theory. From a chronological perspective, the essays collected here fully embrace this suggestion, ranging from

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Walter Benjamin to the most recent analytical frameworks developed to understand emerging forms of digital memory.

If the twentieth century bequeathed to Critical Theory the insight that memory is a field of struggle, the present adds a paradox: we remember more than ever, yet increasingly less together. In this issue, memory appears as a political stake and a communicative practice, as a counter-history of absence, and as a space of rupture capable of interrupting historical necessity. This is the horizon in which Benjamin encounters Habermas and platforms transform the archive into infrastructure: a laboratory in which the concepts of the Frankfurt School are reactivated and put to the test in the digital age.

The thread connecting the contributions is the idea of memory as critical infrastructure: not a simple repository of the past, but a sociotechnical and normative *dispositif* (in the Foucauldian sense) that enables or disables the collective capacity to understand, judge, and act. Across all the essays, memory is emancipated from an individual psychological model and treated instead as a practice: negotiated on platforms, defended as a public good, preserved in the silence of exile, and reactivated in the present as a rupture of the historical continuum. This thesis—memory as praxis rather than archive—updates the categories of Critical Theory (mediation, ideology, culture industry, instrumental rationality) by confronting them with platform capitalism, algorithmic colonization, and the crisis of tradition. Critical memory as an infrastructure of resistance: the three essays converge in showing that memory is a mediation among subjects, technologies, and institutions; a norm that orients judgment; a counter-narrative that breaks the linearity of power; and a practice of beginning that enables action. By updating Frankfurt School categories—culture industry, instrumental rationality, ideology—to the platform society, the contributions outline a theory of memory capable of dismantling algorithmic opacity, defending the public sphere, inhabiting absence as an ethics of the fragment, and opening a space of freedom in the present. In short: memory is the contemporary form of critique.

The essay by Simone D'Alessandro, devoted precisely to this latter issue, analyzes the relevance of platform memory and the algorithmic colonization of individual and collective memory in relation to their traditional (and “analog”) selective–negotiation function. It also proposes a framework to support future empirical research on the topic. The author emphasizes how online platforms are not merely tools for storage, but sociotechnical ecosystems that mediate and restructure collective and individual memory through algorithmic logics oriented toward the monetization of attention. In this context, memory loses its performative and narrative character and assumes the form of a constantly alterable archive-database. This process generates emergent effects such as polarization, the spread of fake news, and the removal of content that is not functional to dominant models, configuring a form of “governance by opacity” that reduces transparency and critical capacity.

Based on a theoretical comparison of international studies, the essay shows how digital memory is characterized by instability, fragmentation, and dependence on algorithmic infrastructures. Empirical examples—from Holocaust memory to online conspiracy communities, up to AI functions embedded in mobile devices—illustrate the colonization of the past operated by platforms. Finally, the author proposes a conceptual model for analyzing the attributes, mechanisms, and consequences of platform memory, suggesting practices of resistance such as undesign, reinvention, and workarounds. However, these strategies require advanced skills, raising questions about whether the defense of a non-digitized memory risks becoming the privilege of an elite.

The conclusion of the essay highlights a radical transformation: memory shifts from a performative and narrative practice to a digital archive governed by algorithmic and commercial logics. This shift is not neutral, since platforms do not merely preserve the past, but select it, reframe it, and at times erase it, thereby shaping collective and individual representations. Memory thus becomes a service embedded in the attention economy, where the criterion of optimization is not informational quality but dwell time and engagement. The result is a governance by opacity that exercises power not through explicit impositions, but through the definition of the cognitive contexts within which

judgments and decisions are formed. Moreover, the essay stresses that digital practices leave a permanent residue: even offline, our ways of remembering are shaped by interaction with algorithmic devices and archives. In the face of this colonization, strategies of resistance—hacking, undesign, reinvention, workarounds—emerge, but they require high levels of expertise, raising the question of whether the protection of non-digital memory may become a privilege of the few. Ultimately, the essay invites reflection on a future in which analog memory risks becoming a luxury, while digital memory—unstable and fragmented—becomes the norm.

The contribution by Daniel Valente Pedroso de Siqueira offers an in-depth examination of Jürgen Habermas's work, with particular attention to the relationship between his theory of communicative action and his more recent work on the genealogy of postmetaphysical thought. More specifically, drawing on the latter, the contribution highlights the normative potential of cultural memory within Habermas's theory, while also discussing possible institutional solutions to the pathologies of contemporary democratic deliberation. Starting from the distinction between system and *Lebenswelt*, the author argues that memory is not a static repository of facts, but an intersubjective process of critical reworking and translation, indispensable for symbolic reproduction and democratic legitimacy.

In dialogue with *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* [*The Theory of Communicative Action*] (1981) and with Habermas's genealogy in *Auch Eine Geschichte der Philosophie* [*Also a History of Philosophy*] (2019), the essay shows how sedimented cultural contents—values, narratives, rituals—constitute normative reserves that, when discursively reactivated, nourish the collective capacity for critique and moral orientation. The analysis identifies three forms of colonization of memory: bureaucratic colonization, which reduces remembrance to administrative protocols; mercantile colonization, which transforms it into a consumable spectacle; and algorithmic colonization, which fragments and personalizes narratives through platform logics, eroding memory's integrative and deliberative function. This “third wave” marks a qualitative turning point: algorithms do not merely select what is visible, but reconfigure the very grammar of remembrance, subordinating it to criteria of profit and attention.

In the concluding section, the author proposes defending memory as a democratic public good through deliberative forums, legal safeguards, regulation of digital infrastructures, and educational practices oriented toward critical reflection. Only by preserving memory in its communicative dimension—open, plural, and contestable—can the pathologies of modernity be countered and the emancipatory promise of democracy kept alive. As the essay shows, the relationship between memory and power is intrinsically conflictual. Memory is never neutral: it constitutes a field of symbolic struggle in which the survival or silencing of narratives is decided. The forms of colonization described—bureaucratic, mercantile, and algorithmic—demonstrate how power operates not only through control of material resources, but also through the management of time and meaning. Memory is a political *dispositif*: whoever controls its infrastructures controls the conditions of possibility of public discourse and, consequently, of democracy. The contemporary challenge lies in the fact that such control is no longer exercised exclusively by states or public institutions, but by private platforms operating according to profit logics, fragmenting the past into personalized flows and depriving memory of its integrative function. Defending memory as a public good therefore means defending the collective capacity for critique and resistance, preserving spaces of contestation and interpretive plurality. Ultimately, the struggle over memory is a struggle for justice: without critical memory, the present collapses into an eternal now governed by efficiency and attention, while the future loses its possibility of emancipation.

The essay by Benedetta Pozio offers an interpretation of Marrano crypto-Judaism through the lens of Walter Benjamin's philosophy, showing how the condition of exile constitutes both a fracture and a site through which new spaces can be opened within the linear flow of time. The condition of the Marranos—Iberian Jews forced into conversion and clandestinity—is presented as the paradigm of

an “anamnesis without an object,” a form of memory deprived of ritual contents yet invested with an ethical imperative. Deprived of texts, communities, and liturgies, the Marranos developed minimal and secret practices, transforming remembrance into gesture, silence, and encrypted transmission. Far from being mere conservation, this form of memory becomes a political and theological resistance to historicist linearity, embodying the “weak messianic power” evoked by Benjamin: the possibility of redeeming the ruins of the past through an act of remembrance that interrupts the homogeneous time of the victors.

The essay shows how Marrano secrecy, resonating with Benjamin’s occult theology, requires an allegorical hermeneutics capable of reading absence and fragment as active forms of signification. Marrano memory does not preserve content, but rather the very form of transmission: a fidelity to absence that, even when emptied, keeps the intergenerational bond alive and opens onto a diasporic cosmopolitanism. From this perspective, remembrance becomes task and promise, a gesture that, though devoid of substance, safeguards the possibility of justice and redemption. Pozio concludes that such memory, inscribed within the fracture of tradition, is not nostalgia but critical force: a messianic *dispositif* that transforms loss into expectation and silence into counter-narrative, opposing triumphalist teleologies and restoring to the past its demand for redemption.

The conclusions of Pozio’s contribution assume decisive theoretical significance. Marrano memory is not conceived as a mere residue of a broken tradition, but as a critical *dispositif* capable of cracking historical linearity and reactivating the messianic promise inscribed in time. “Fidelity to absence” becomes the core of this reflection: what is preserved is not the ritual content—now lost—but the pure form of transmission, a bond that resists erasure and that, precisely in its emptiness, generates meaning. From this perspective, Marrano silence is not mere deprivation, but a politico-theological gesture that challenges the teleology of the victors and opens a breach in the homogeneous temporality of historicism. Pozio shows how such emptied and encrypted memory embodies the “weak messianic power” evoked by Benjamin: a potentiality that does not lie at the end of time, but erupts in the instant, transforming fracture into an occasion for redemption.

Marrano counter-history, far from being nostalgic, takes the form of a practice of resistance and a diasporic cosmopolitan horizon, in which justice and hope persist as ever-open tasks. In sum, the conclusion reiterates that memory, even when reduced to pure form, retains the capacity to interrupt the historical continuum and to reactivate the ethical bond with the past—a bond that does not merely remember, but demands a response to the claim for justice that arises from the ruins of history. Pozio thus consolidates a theoretical framework in which Marrano memory, stripped of ritual and institutional contents, affirms itself as a pure form of transmission capable of cracking the teleology of the victors and reactivating a “weak” messianic temporality in the Benjaminian sense. The thesis does not coincide with the melancholic survival of fragments, but with a performative counter-history: gesture, silence, and encrypted narration do not reconstitute the lost integrity of tradition, but produce meaning precisely through lack, transforming absence into an ethical bond and responsibility toward the defeated of the past.

In this framework, memory is neither archive nor repertoire of signs; it is a task that interrupts the historical continuum and reopens, in the present, the possibility of justice. Marrano secrecy, far from being a residue, functions as a hermeneutic *dispositif*: it compels us to read the unsaid as an index of resistance and to recognize, in the intermittence of remembrance, the very condition of its political and theological efficacy. Thus, fidelity to the form of transmission—though emptied of content—establishes a diasporic continuity that holds together generations and displaced places, converting loss into a threshold: a passage point in which memory, stripped bare, acquires normative power and becomes an exercise in counter-temporality, capable of breaking historicist homogeneity and safeguarding the demand for redemption.

Whereas the philosophical–sociological reflection of Critical Theory and the early Memory Studies of the last century had progressively emancipated the concept of “memory” from a strictly subjective dimension, presenting it as a social phenomenon with extraordinary critical potential, the effects of the digital revolution at the dawn of the twenty-first century appear to call this theoretical trajectory into question. Algorithmically filtered access to information and communication, together with the effects of the most recent socio-economic pathologies affecting human communities, now presents an unprecedented scenario with respect to the traditional filtering function of memory, as described by Umberto Eco in his reflections on Borges’s *Funes the Memorious*. What persists—as the essays collected here aim to demonstrate—is the potential of human memory to take up the challenge and to reassert itself as a critical and transformative praxis of the world.

The present time compels Critical Theory to shift its focus from the question of “what we remember” to that of “how, and through what, we remember.” Memory is not merely content; it is a social form and an infrastructure: codes, standards, and architectures of visibility that determine the fate of remnants. It is precisely here that a first task emerges: to develop a critique of infrastructure adequate to today’s culture industry. It is no longer sufficient to denounce ideology at the narrative level; it is necessary to show how ideology is sedimented in regimes of evidence produced by metrics, rankings, and protocols of preservation and oblivion. The Frankfurt School tradition can thus be reactivated as a critique of infrastructural reason: the entanglement of technical optimization and attention governance that today bends shared temporality, establishes the priorities of the past, and normalizes its gaps.

Future research should move in this direction by hybridizing social philosophy, media sociology, data science, and legal studies—not in order to add a “digital chapter” to theory, but to reforge the critical lexicon itself, rethinking the concepts of industry, ideology, and instrumental rationality as industries of memory, climates of evidence, and rationality embedded in platforms. This infrastructural turn corresponds to a second, normative and institutional movement: defending memory as a public good. If memory underpins the capacity to understand and to judge, access to the past cannot be left to the contingency of private choices or to the curatorial ethics of cultural institutions alone. Safeguards are needed: procedures of traceability and contextualization, public criteria for de-indexing, minimum standards of preservation, and arenas of reasoned contestation that allow minorities and marginalized communities to intervene in dominant narratives. Here, Critical Theory—historically attentive to the conditions of the public sphere—can contribute to designing forms of discursive legitimation specific to digital archives: not merely technical transparency, but the justifiability of visibility choices in light of public principles. Research must translate these demands into experimental governance models: civic laboratories of memory, mixed curatorial councils, independent audits of recommendation algorithms, and protocols of “essential memory” for materials that ground democratic deliberation.

Yet an even subtler stake is involved, one that concerns an ethics of the fragment. Fracture, silence, and absence are not merely indices of loss; they can become generative norms. The Benjaminian tradition teaches us that remembering does not mean filling gaps, but preserving lack as a mark of responsibility toward the defeated. In this light, a program emerges that is both theoretical and practical: to develop a pragmatics of counter-archiving capable of making absences operative without aestheticizing them. Museums, schools, and public media can design *dispositifs* in which voids are made explicit, contextualized, and discussed—rooms of the unsaid, maps of gaps, multi-voiced narratives—so as to transform absence into a demand for justice rather than a fetish. For Critical Theory, this means formalizing criteria capable of distinguishing when silence accuses and when it conceals, when it opens a possibility and when it forecloses discourse. This too constitutes an urgent field of empirical research: defining interpretive metrics and evaluative protocols that can help cultural institutions recognize and responsibly work with absences.

Finally, Critical Theory cannot limit itself to unveiling structures; it must stage interruptions. It is here that a politics of beginnings becomes relevant. Future research will need to design and evaluate operational formats—slow pedagogical paths, non-extractive interfaces that generate epistemic curiosity and controlled divergence, deliberative spaces in which memory functions as a practice of clarification rather than as an identitarian repertoire. A Critical Theory adequate to the present is called upon to become a form of minimal institutional engineering: not the construction of total systems, but the maintenance of thresholds where thought and action can meet.

All this implies, in the background, a reformulation of the vocabulary itself. We no longer speak merely of culture industry, but of industries of memory; not merely of ideology, but of the climatization of evidence; not merely of instrumental reason, but of infrastructural reason; not merely of emancipatory praxis as a great rupture, but of policies of beginning as the art of micro-interrupting necessity. This shift in perspective does not renounce the Frankfurt School legacy, but relaunches it where the boundaries of the sayable and the visible are decided today: in the architectures of remembrance and the institutions that sustain them. In the end, the essays do not offer a closed framework, but a methodological wager: a Critical Theory of infrastructural memory capable, at once, of dismantling the automatisms of selection, defending the public presuppositions of transmission, and beginning from ruins and gaps—because it is from the care of remnants that the present finds the courage to open the future. If memory is today the most concrete form of critique, then the task before us is dual and inseparable: to remember in ways that make action possible, and to act in ways that restore to remembrance its emancipatory vocation. Everything else—technical apparatuses, institutional models, educational practices—is but the patient construction of the conditions under which this double movement can occur.

Introduzione in italiano

Al cuore del seguente inserto riteniamo si trovi una delle grandi questioni del nostro presente, ossia il rapporto tra memoria e critica. Concetti-chiave del pensiero del XX secolo, risulta certamente difficile oggi riflettere attorno a essi senza considerare almeno due ambiti di ricerca (rispettivamente un settore di studi e un paradigma teorico) che proprio dalla nozione di “memoria” e da quella di “critica” prendono il nome: i *Memory Studies* e la Teoria Critica. Dal punto di vista cronologico, i saggi qui presentati raccolgono appieno tale suggestione, spaziando da Walter Benjamin ai più recenti *frameworks* analitici per la comprensione della nascente memoria digitale. Se il Novecento ha consegnato alla Teoria critica l'intuizione che la memoria è un campo di lotta, il presente aggiunge un paradosso: ricordiamo più che mai, ma sempre meno insieme. In questo fascicolo, la memoria appare come posta in gioco politica e pratica comunicativa, come contro-storia dell'assenza e come spazio di rottura capace di interrompere la necessità storica. È l'orizzonte in cui Benjamin incontra Habermas e le piattaforme trasformano l'archivio in infrastruttura: un laboratorio in cui i concetti della Scuola di Francoforte vengono riattualizzati alla prova dell'era digitale.

Il filo che annoda i contributi è la memoria come infrastruttura critica: non semplice deposito del passato, ma dispositivo socio-tecnico e normativo che abilita o disabilita la capacità collettiva di comprendere, giudicare e agire. In tutti i saggi, la memoria si emancipa dal modello psicologico individuale ed è trattata come pratica: negoziata nelle piattaforme, difesa come bene pubblico, custodita nel silenzio dell'esilio, rilanciata nel presente come rottura del *continuum* storico. Questa tesi – la memoria come *prassi* e non come *archivio* – aggiorna le categorie della Teoria critica (mediazione, ideologia, industria culturale, razionalità strumentale) confrontandole con *platform capitalism*, colonizzazione algoritmica e crisi della tradizione. Memoria critica come infrastruttura di resistenza: i tre saggi convergono nel mostrare che la memoria è mediazione tra soggetti, tecnologie, istituzioni, norma che orienta il giudizio, contro-narrazione che rompe la linearità del potere e pratica di inizio

che abilita l'azione. Aggiornando le categorie francofortesi – industria culturale, razionalità strumentale, ideologia – alla *platform society*, essi delineano una teoria della memoria capace di smontare l'opacità algoritmica, difendere la sfera pubblica, abitare l'assenza come etica del frammento e aprire nel presente uno spazio di libertà. In breve: la memoria è la forma contemporanea della critica.

Il saggio di Simone D'Alessandro, dedicato esattamente a quest'ultimo tema, analizza la rilevanza della *platform memory* e della colonizzazione algoritmica della memoria individuale e collettiva rispetto alla loro tradizionale (e “analogica”) funzione selettivo-negoziale, proponendo inoltre un *framework* per supportare future ricerche empiriche sul tema. L'autore evidenzia come le piattaforme online non siano semplici strumenti di archiviazione, ma ecosistemi sociotecnici che mediano e ristrutturano la memoria collettiva e individuale attraverso logiche algoritmiche orientate alla monetizzazione dell'attenzione. In questo contesto, la memoria perde la sua natura performativa e narrativa, assumendo la forma di un archivio-database costantemente alterabile. Tale processo genera effetti emergenti quali polarizzazione, diffusione di fake news e rimozione di contenuti non funzionali ai modelli dominanti, configurando una “*governance by opacity*” che riduce la trasparenza e la capacità critica. Il saggio, basato su una comparazione teorica di studi internazionali, mostra come la memoria digitale sia caratterizzata da instabilità, frammentazione e dipendenza da infrastrutture algoritmiche. Esempi empirici – dalla memoria dell'Olocausto alle comunità complottiste online, fino alle funzioni AI dei dispositivi mobili – illustrano la colonizzazione del passato operata dalle piattaforme. Infine, l'autore propone un modello concettuale per analizzare attributi, meccanismi e conseguenze della *platform memory*, suggerendo pratiche di resistenza quali *undesign*, reinvenzione e *workarounds*. Tuttavia, tali strategie richiedono competenze avanzate, sollevando interrogativi sulla possibilità che la difesa di una memoria non digitalizzata diventi privilegio di un'élite. La conclusione del saggio mette in luce una trasformazione radicale: la memoria, da pratica performativa e narrativa, diventa un archivio digitale governato da logiche algoritmiche e commerciali. Questo passaggio non è neutrale, perché le piattaforme non si limitano a custodire il passato, ma lo selezionano, lo riformulano e, talvolta, lo cancellano, orientando così le rappresentazioni collettive e individuali. La memoria si configura come un servizio, inserito nell'economia dell'attenzione, dove il criterio di ottimizzazione non è la qualità informativa, ma il tempo di permanenza e l'*engagement*. Ne deriva una “*governance opaca*” che esercita potere non attraverso imposizioni esplicite, ma mediante la definizione dei contesti cognitivi entro cui si formano giudizi e decisioni. Inoltre, il saggio sottolinea che le pratiche digitali lasciano un residuo permanente: anche offline, il nostro modo di ricordare è plasmato dall'interazione con dispositivi e archivi algoritmici. Di fronte a questa colonizzazione, emergono strategie di resistenza – *hacking*, *undesign*, reinvenzione, *workarounds* – che però richiedono competenze elevate, sollevando interrogativi sulla possibilità che la tutela di una memoria non digitalizzata diventi privilegio di pochi. In definitiva, il saggio invita a riflettere su un futuro in cui la memoria analogica rischia di essere un lusso, mentre la memoria digitale, instabile e frammentata, diventa la norma.

Il contributo di Daniel Valente Pedroso de Siqueira offre uno sguardo approfondito sull'opera di Jürgen Habermas, con particolare attenzione al rapporto tra la sua teoria dell'agire comunicativo ed il recente lavoro sulla genealogia del pensiero postmetafisico; più specificamente, a partire da quest'ultimo lavoro, il contributo mostra il potenziale normativo della memoria culturale entro la teoria habermasiana, discutendo al contempo potenziali soluzioni istituzionali per le patologie della deliberazione democratica contemporanea. Partendo dalla distinzione tra sistema e *Lebenswelt*, l'autore sostiene che la memoria non sia un deposito statico di fatti, ma un processo intersoggettivo di rielaborazione e traduzione critica, indispensabile per la riproduzione simbolica e la legittimità democratica. In dialogo con *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (1981) e con la genealogia di Habermas in *Auch Eine Geschichte der Philosophie* (2019), il saggio mostra come i contenuti culturali sedimentati – valori, narrazioni, rituali – costituiscano riserve normative che, se discorsivamente riattualizzate, alimentano la capacità collettiva di critica e orientamento morale. L'analisi individua tre

forme di colonizzazione della memoria: la burocratica, che riduce il ricordo a protocolli amministrativi; la mercantile, che lo trasforma in spettacolo consumabile; e la algoritmica, che frammenta e personalizza le narrazioni attraverso logiche di piattaforma, erodendo la funzione integrativa e deliberativa della memoria. Questa “terza ondata” segna una svolta qualitativa: gli algoritmi non solo selezionano ciò che è visibile, ma riconfigurano la grammatica stessa del ricordo, subordinandolo a criteri di profitto e attenzione. Nella parte conclusiva, l’autore propone di difendere la memoria come bene pubblico democratico, attraverso forum deliberativi, garanzie giuridiche, regolazione delle infrastrutture digitali e pratiche educative orientate alla riflessione critica. Solo preservando la memoria nella sua dimensione comunicativa – aperta, plurale e contestabile – è possibile contrastare le patologie della modernità e mantenere viva la promessa emancipativa della democrazia. Il rapporto tra memoria e potere, così come emerge dal saggio, è intrinsecamente conflittuale. La memoria non è mai neutrale: essa costituisce un campo di lotta simbolica in cui si decide quali narrazioni sopravvivono e quali vengono silenziate. Le forme di colonizzazione descritte – burocratica, mercantile e algoritmica – mostrano come il potere operi non solo attraverso il controllo delle risorse materiali, ma anche attraverso la gestione del tempo e del senso. La memoria è un dispositivo politico: chi ne controlla le infrastrutture controlla le condizioni di possibilità del discorso pubblico e, di conseguenza, della democrazia. La sfida contemporanea è che tale controllo non è più esercitato esclusivamente da Stati o istituzioni, ma da piattaforme private che operano secondo logiche di profitto, frammentando il passato in flussi personalizzati e privando la memoria della sua funzione integrativa. Difendere la memoria come bene pubblico significa, dunque, difendere la capacità collettiva di critica e di resistenza, preservando spazi di contestazione e pluralità interpretativa. In ultima analisi, la lotta per la memoria è una lotta per la giustizia: senza memoria critica, il presente si chiude in un eterno presente governato dall’efficienza e dall’attenzione, mentre il futuro perde la possibilità di emancipazione.

Il saggio di Benedetta Pozio offre una lettura del cripto-giudaismo marrano attraverso la filosofia di Walter Benjamin, mostrando come la condizione di esilio costituisca al contempo una frattura e un luogo attraverso cui è possibile aprire nuovi spazi nello scorrere lineare del tempo. La condizione dei Marrani – ebrei iberici costretti alla conversione e alla clandestinità – è presentata come paradigma di una “anamnesi senza oggetto”, una memoria priva di contenuti rituali ma investita di un imperativo etico. Privati di testi, comunità e liturgie, i Marrani svilupparono pratiche minime e segrete, trasformando il ricordo in gesto, silenzio e trasmissione cifrata. Questa memoria, lungi dall’essere mera conservazione, diventa resistenza politica e teologica contro la linearità storicista, incarnando la “debole forza messianica” evocata da Benjamin: la possibilità di redimere le rovine del passato attraverso un atto di ricordo che interrompe il tempo omogeneo dei vincitori. Il saggio mostra come la segretezza marrana, in risonanza con la teologia occulta benjaminiana, richieda un’ermeneutica allegorica capace di leggere assenza e frammento come forme attive di significazione. La memoria marrana non conserva il contenuto, ma la forma stessa della trasmissione: una fedeltà all’assenza che, pur svuotata, mantiene vivo il vincolo intergenerazionale e apre a un cosmopolitismo diasporico. In questa prospettiva, il ricordo diventa compito e promessa, un gesto che, pur privo di sostanza, custodisce la possibilità di giustizia e redenzione. Pozio conclude che tale memoria, inscritta nella frattura della tradizione, non è nostalgia ma forza critica: un dispositivo messianico che trasforma la perdita in attesa e il silenzio in contro-narrazione, opponendosi alle teleologie trionfalistiche e restituendo al passato la sua domanda di riscatto. Le conclusioni del contributo di Pozio assumono un rilievo teorico decisivo: la memoria marrana non è concepita come semplice residuo di una tradizione spezzata, ma come dispositivo critico capace di incrinare la linearità storica e di riattivare la promessa messianica inscritta nel tempo. La “fedeltà all’assenza” diventa il fulcro di questa riflessione: ciò che si conserva non è il contenuto rituale, ormai perduto, bensì la forma pura della trasmissione, un vincolo che resiste alla cancellazione e che, proprio nella sua vacuità, genera significato. In questa prospettiva, il silenzio marrano non è mera privazione, ma gesto politico-teologico che sfida la teleologia dei vincitori e apre

una breccia nella temporalità omogenea dello storicismo. Pozio mostra come tale memoria, svuotata e cifrata, incarni la “debole forza messianica” evocata da Benjamin: una potenzialità che non si colloca alla fine dei tempi, ma che irrompe nell’istante, trasformando la frattura in occasione di redenzione. La controstoria marrana, lungi dall’essere nostalgia, si configura come pratica di resistenza e come orizzonte cosmopolitico diasporico, in cui giustizia e speranza si mantengono come compiti sempre aperti. In definitiva, la conclusione ribadisce che la memoria, anche quando ridotta a pura forma, conserva la capacità di interrompere il continuum storico e di riattivare il legame etico con il passato: un legame che non si limita a ricordare, ma che esige di rispondere alla domanda di giustizia che proviene dalle rovine della storia. Pozio consolida un impianto teorico in cui la memoria marrana, sottratta ai contenuti rituali e istituzionali, si afferma come forma pura di trasmissione capace di incrinare la teleologia dei vincitori e di riattivare una temporalità messianica “debole” nel senso benjaminiano. La tesi non coincide con la malinconica sopravvivenza di frammenti, bensì con una contro-storia performativa: il gesto, il silenzio, la narrazione cifrata non ricostituiscono l’integrità perduta della tradizione, ma producono significato proprio nella mancanza, trasformando l’assenza in vincolo etico e in responsabilità verso i vinti del passato. In questo quadro, la memoria non è archivio, né repertorio di segni; è compito che interrompe il continuum storico e riapre, nel presente, la possibilità di giustizia. La segretezza marrana, lungi dall’essere un residuo, funge da dispositivo ermeneutico: costringe a leggere il non-detto come indice di resistenza e a riconoscere nell’intermittenza del ricordo la condizione stessa della sua efficacia politica e teologica. Così, la fedeltà alla forma della trasmissione—pur svuotata di contenuto—stabilisce una continuità diasporica che tiene insieme generazioni e luoghi dislocati, convertendo la perdita in soglia: un punto di passaggio in cui la memoria, spogliata, acquista potenza normativa e diviene esercizio di contro-tempo, capace di spezzare l’omogeneità storicista e di custodire l’esigenza di redenzione.

Laddove la riflessione filosofico-sociologica della Teoria critica e dei primi *Memory Studies* del secolo scorso aveva progressivamente emancipato il concetto di “memoria” dalla dimensione strettamente soggettiva, presentandola come fenomeno sociale dallo straordinario potenziale critico, gli effetti della rivoluzione digitale all’alba del XXI secolo paiono rimettere in discussione tale percorso teorico. L’accesso algoritmicamente filtrato all’informazione ed alla comunicazione, nonché gli effetti delle più recenti patologie socio-economiche delle comunità umane, presentano ora uno scenario inedito rispetto alla tradizionale funzione di filtraggio della memoria consegnataci da Umberto Eco nelle sue riflessioni su *Funes, o della memoria* di Borges; ciò che persiste, come auspicchiamo i saggi qui riuniti possano dimostrare, è il potenziale della memoria umana di raccogliere il guanto di sfida e proporsi come prassi critica e trasformativa del mondo.

Il tempo presente impone alla Teoria critica di spostare l’asse dal “che cosa ricordiamo” al “come e attraverso che cosa ricordiamo”. La memoria non è soltanto contenuto, è forma sociale e infrastruttura: codici, standard, architetture di visibilità che decidono la sorte dei resti. Proprio qui si apre un primo compito: elaborare una critica dell’infrastruttura all’altezza dell’industria culturale odierna. Non basta denunciare l’ideologia a livello narrativo; occorre mostrare come l’ideologia si depositi nei regimi di evidenza prodotti da metriche, ranking, protocolli di conservazione e di oblio. La tradizione francofortese può essere riattualizzata come critica della ragione infrastrutturale: quell’intreccio tra ottimizzazione tecnica e governo dell’attenzione che oggi curva la temporalità comune, istituisce le priorità del passato e normalizza le sue lacune. La ricerca che segue dovrebbe muoversi in questa direzione, ibridando filosofia sociale, sociologia dei media, scienza dei dati e studi sul diritto: non per aggiungere un “capitolo digitale” alla teoria, ma per riforgiare il lessico critico dove i concetti di industria, ideologia e razionalità strumentale vengono ripensati come industrie della memoria, climi di evidenza e razionalità incorporata nelle piattaforme. A questa svolta infrastrutturale corrisponde un secondo movimento, normativo e istituzionale: difendere la memoria come bene pubblico. Se la memoria sorregge la capacità di comprendere e di giudicare, allora l’accesso al passato non può essere

lasciato alla contingenza di scelte private, né alla sola etica curatoriale delle istituzioni culturali. Servono garanzie: procedure di tracciabilità e contestualizzazione, criteri pubblici per la de-indicizzazione, standard minimi di preservazione, sedi di contestazione ragionata che consentano a minoranze e comunità marginalizzate di intervenire sulle narrazioni dominanti. Qui la Teoria critica, storicamente attenta alle condizioni della sfera pubblica, può contribuire a progettare forme di legittimazione discorsiva specifiche per gli archivi digitali: non solo trasparenza tecnica, ma giustificabilità delle scelte di visibilità alla luce di principi pubblici. La ricerca deve tradurre tali istanze in modelli di governance sperimentali: laboratori cittadini della memoria, consigli misti di curatela, auditing indipendenti degli algoritmi di raccomandazione, protocolli di “memoria essenziale” per materiali che fondano la deliberazione democratica. C’è però una posta più sottile, che riguarda l’etica del frammento. La frattura, il silenzio, l’assenza non sono soltanto indici di perdita; possono diventare norme generative. La tradizione benjaminiana ci insegna che ricordare non equivale a colmare, ma a custodire la mancanza come cifra di responsabilità verso i vinti. In questa luce si apre un programma tanto teorico quanto pratico: sviluppare una pragmatica della contro-archiviazione capace di far lavorare le assenze senza estetizzarle. Musei, scuole, media pubblici possono progettare dispositivi in cui i vuoti siano esplicitati, contestualizzati, discussi – camere del non-detto, mappe delle lacune, narrazioni a più voci – per trasformare la mancanza in domanda di giustizia e non in feticcio. Per la Teoria critica, si tratta di formalizzare criteri che distinguano quando il silenzio accusa e quando occulta, quando apre una possibilità e quando chiude il discorso. Anche questo è un terreno di ricerca empirica urgente: definire metriche interpretative e protocolli valutativi che aiutino le istituzioni culturali a riconoscere e a lavorare responsabilmente con le assenze.

Infine, la Teoria critica non può limitarsi a svelare strutture: deve mettere in scena interruzioni. È qui che una politica dell’inizio diventa rilevante. La ricerca che verrà dovrà progettare e valutare formati operativi – percorsi didattici lenti, interfacce non estrattive che generano curiosità epistemica e divergenza controllata, spazi deliberativi in cui la memoria funzioni come pratica di chiarificazione e non come repertorio identitario. Una Teoria critica all’altezza del presente è chiamata a farsi ingegneria istituzionale minima: non costruzione di sistemi totali, ma manutenzione di soglie in cui pensiero e azione possano incontrarsi. Tutto questo implica, sullo sfondo, una riformulazione del vocabolario. Non parliamo più soltanto di industria culturale, ma di industrie della memoria; non soltanto di ideologia, ma di climatizzazione dell’evidenza; non soltanto di ragione strumentale, ma di ragione infrastrutturale; non soltanto di prassi emancipativa come grande rottura, ma di politiche dell’inizio come arte di micro-interrompere il necessario. Si tratta di un mutamento di prospettiva che non rinnega l’eredità di Francoforte, ma la rilancia là dove oggi si decidono i confini del dicibile e del visibile: nelle architetture del ricordo e nelle istituzioni che le sorreggono. In definitiva, i saggi non consegnano un quadro chiuso, ma una scommessa metodologica: una Teoria critica della memoria infrastrutturale che sappia, insieme, smontare gli automatismi della selezione, difendere i presupposti pubblici della trasmissione e cominciare da rovine e lacune – perché è dalla cura dei resti che il presente ritrova il coraggio di aprire futuro. Se la memoria è oggi la forma più concreta della critica, allora il compito che ci attende è duplice e inseparabile: ricordare in modo da rendere possibile l’azione; agire in modo da restituire al ricordo la sua vocazione emancipativa. Tutto il resto – gli apparati tecnici, i modelli istituzionali, le pratiche educative – non è che la paziente costruzione delle condizioni perché questo duplice movimento possa accadere.

Platform Memory within Memory Platforms. A Critical Analysis of Algorithmically Mediated Memories

Simone D'Alessandro *

Abstract: Is it still possible to maintain a collective memory uninfluenced by web platforms? Can human memory, unmediated by technology, be endowed with an aura or a “*punctum*” (Barthes 1982; Benjamin 2014) as it was in the past? Is the narration of memory being progressively replaced by selective database searching? By examining international research by scholars belonging to the new perspectives of “critical data studies” (Iliadis & Russo 2016) and “critical memory studies” (Kaplan 2023), we will seek to understand how the production, archiving, and sharing of online content influences individuals’ ability to preserve the information in their memories by negotiating it with others. In this paper, we will show how technologies shape memory practices, seeking to understand whether a critical approach can develop potential practices of resistance to the colonization of our memories. The conclusions propose a “conceptual model” useful for future empirical research designs and applicable to different disciplinary fields, from sociology to cognitive psychology, from ergonomics oriented towards human-computer interaction (HCI) to Conspiracy Studies.

Keywords: Algorithmic memory; Critical memory studies; Critical data studies; Infrastructure; Platforms society.

Riassunto. È ancora possibile mantenere una memoria collettiva non influenzata dalle piattaforme web? La memoria umana, non mediata dalla tecnologia, può essere dotata di un’aura o di un “*punctum*” (Barthes 1982; Benjamin 2014) come lo era in passato? La narrazione della memoria viene progressivamente sostituita dalla ricerca selettiva nei database? Esaminando le ricerche internazionali condotte da studiosi appartenenti alle nuove prospettive dei “critical data studies” (Iliadis & Russo 2016) e dei “critical memory studies” (Kaplan 2023), cercheremo di capire in che modo la produzione, l’archiviazione e la condivisione di contenuti online influenzano la capacità degli individui di conservare le informazioni nella loro memoria negoziandole con gli altri. In questo articolo mostreremo come le tecnologie modellano le pratiche della memoria, cercando di capire se un approccio critico possa sviluppare potenziali pratiche di resistenza alla colonizzazione dei nostri ricordi. Le conclusioni propongono un “modello concettuale” utile per futuri progetti di ricerca empirica e applicabile a diversi campi disciplinari, dalla sociologia alla psicologia cognitiva, dall’ergonomia orientata all’interazione uomo-computer (HCI) ai “Conspiracy Studies”.

Parole chiave: Memoria algoritmica; Critical memory studies; Critical data studies; Infrastructure; Platforms society.

1. Introduction

The human agency of memory is amplified by the connectivity between consumers and producers of memories (Hoskins 2011). This connectivity blurs the line between collective and individual memory. This phenomenon requires the introduction of new conceptualizations of memory processes.

Hoskins, for example, introduces the concept of the memory of the multitude (Hoskins 2017). This implies that the traditional user-centred approach is unproductive. Memory does not reside in the folds of individual brains, but in the relationship between space, time, information, and matter (Barad 2007, ix). It can also mean that memory no longer exists as a performative act, but as a relationship between a digital archive and its users, both human and nonhuman.

Focusing on individual actors and how they utilize platform affordances fails to understand the changes brought about by the growing autonomy of memory infrastructures. Nonhuman algorithmic actors influence the process of renegotiation and selection of dominant themes (Hepp 2022; Hintze & Dunn 2022) by removing or softening important elements of human memory.

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Understanding the role of memory infrastructures is crucial to developing critical perspectives on the relationship between digital technology and memory, including from a postcolonial perspective (Keightley 2022) or identifying the discrimination of certain individuals and groups by platforms (Cahn *et al.* 2019; Noble 2018; Urman & Makhortykh 2022). Recent research shows, for example, that Holocaust memory has been profoundly transformed by digital archives and online social media platforms (Bar-Gil 2025). Other research shows how platforms can consolidate or renegotiate stereotypes and biases related to rape and other forms of violence (Velte 2024). It is necessary to question the user-centred approach (currently prevalent in *Memory Studies*) and integrate perspectives centred on the concepts of infrastructure and archive. Memory infrastructures and archives represent the starting point for a critical analysis of the opaque powers hidden behind algorithmic logics.

The fundamental shift toward the use of technological infrastructures is linked to the invention of printing (Connerton 2009, 4), which facilitated the codification and preservation of the past, making the transmission of memories more accessible to the general public, encouraging processes of forgetting, or diminishing the need to re-communicate information about the past (Esposito 2008; 2017). However, the web has accelerated the processes of enabling/disabling (D'Alessandro 2024), the constraints and assemblages of mnemonic practices, overturning the classical meaning of the concept of memory. Memory technologies can bring about sudden political, cultural, and economic upheavals (Makhortykh 2023). In this scenario, platforms become sociotechnical infrastructures that strategically and functionally cage memory (Van Dijck 2010). Remembering becomes a service to be managed and archived (Gillespie 2010, 348) according to organizational, economic, and cultural logics of use (Helmond 2015, 1). But the digital archive does not correspond to the procedural and analogical memory processes of communities that remember outside of online systems. The platforms' interest in our past is tied to a business model. Platformization implies the penetration of economic, governmental, and infrastructural extensions into ecosystems (Nieborg and Poell 2018).

We are in the midst of a process of colonization of our personal and collective past for commercial purposes. We will increasingly depend on our technological colonizers for access to our memories. But in the construction of memory, platforms are not neutral intermediaries.

Memories become data, and data transform into memories (Prey & Smit 2019; Jacobsen 2021; Jacobsen & Beer 2021; Smit 2024). In this scenario, could the platformization of memory also alter other (analogical) forms of memory preservation?

Platform algorithms mediate nearly every critical aspect of everyday life, not only memory, but also healthcare and employment management, shaping users' experiences through automated decisions. Do human users possess the tools to recognize fundamental algorithmic biases (Overbye-Thompson & Rice 2025) and develop strategic countermeasures? In this research, we will show how technologies shape memory practices and whether contemporary critical debate can be useful in developing practices of resistance or counteraction to the colonization of our memories.

2. Methodology

This paper's methodology is structured as a secondary qualitative comparative study of contemporary critical theories that no longer adopt a human-user-centered perspective. The primary sources for the research are pre-existing academic studies from the emerging perspectives of critical data studies and critical memory studies.

Specific empirical examples of platforms and technologies are also used:

1. Holocaust memory; 2. discussions on the Flat Earth Society on forums and Reddit; 3. the AI capabilities of the Google Pixel 8 smartphone.

The selection criteria for the studies examined are as follows: a) The selected authors adopt a critical perspective that shifts the focus from the user to memory infrastructures and archives, aiming to understand how opaque powers and algorithmic logics influence the preservation and negotiation

of memories. b) The topics examined illustrate the ways in which non-human algorithmic actors reconstruct or reformulate judgments about memory and how technologies shape memory practices.

The research's technique is based on critical analysis and the uncovering of the structures and ideologies underlying digital platforms, particularly the deceptive metrics that aim to drive engagement and monetization. This approach seeks to highlight the transformation of memory into a service to be archived and managed to strategically manage an attention economy.

Finally, the paper identifies possible practices of resistance to the colonization of memories: a) undesign, b) reinvention, and c) workarounds.

These practices imply the development of technological and cognitive skills on the part of the user. This observation raises the question of whether, currently, only a select elite might be able to counter algorithmic distortions, turning the resistance of “non-digital memory” into a luxury of the ruling classes. Paragraph n. 3 will examine a series of case studies to demonstrate how digital platforms are opaque ecosystems that actively shape human memory and decision-making, exercising power through algorithms. The platform society uses digital archives to make functional selections for specific business models, altering perceptions and choices. Algorithmic optimization is based on engagement (dwell time), not information quality. This generates emergent effects such as polarization and the spread of fake news, constituting “governance by opacity” given the uncontrollable complexity of the systems. According to critical scholars, this dynamic leads to the alteration or removal of parts of collective memory (e.g., the different treatment of Holocaust memory online, pseudoscientific conversations about flat earth, conspiracy theories, etc.), making it an object of consumption, polarization, and monetization. Furthermore, the technology enables the manipulation of personal memories (in this case, we examine the Google Pixel 8 device and its algorithmic features: *Magic Editor*, *Magic Eraser*, and *Best Take*).

In paragraph n. 4, we attempt to describe how the collective memory constructed by traditional mass media is gradually being replaced by a more unstable and ephemeral algorithmic memory.

This transition involves replacing narrative with the archive-database. The archive is no longer a place of classification subject to successive selections by human agency, but a techno-mathematical procedure subject to alterations primarily dictated by an artificial agency. Faced with this new “colonization” of memory and remembrance, resistance practices such as undesign, reinvention, and workarounds are emerging. However, these strategies require advanced technological and cognitive skills, raising the question of whether only an elite can truly counter the distortions of digital memory.

The conclusions propose a “conceptual model” that could be useful for future empirical research designs. This comparative and qualitative theoretical research aims to observe *Platform Memory* as a “process of ontological transformation of remembrance,” where the performative act of collective memory is replaced by a permanent sociotechnical archive managed by nonhuman algorithmic actors within proprietary ecosystems. This memory is intrinsically oriented toward the monetization of attention and the shaping of behaviours that determine a colonization of the past that persists even when the individual is disconnected.

3. Web Infrastructures Make Memory a Constantly Evolving Process

Platforms are not just technology companies, but sociotechnical ecosystems that orchestrate information, economic, and cultural flows on a global scale. They do not simply provide services but rather create closed environments where the rules of the game are defined, the content to be made visible is decided, and certain relationships are strengthened at the expense of others.

In parallel, the emergence of technologies such as generative artificial intelligence, large-scale linguistic models (LLMs), and deep neural networks is enabling the generation of new artificial cognitive systems. These systems process content, make autonomous decisions, and influence opinions, using and manipulating digital memory archives to make selections that serve a business model or the creation of a new movement of ideas. Systems promise to facilitate our understanding

of the world, but they alter human perceptions, desires, choices, and “memories of choices” made in the past. According to critical scholars, contemporary power is exercised through the shaping of information environments. It does not act by imposing orders from above, but by shaping the contexts within which decisions are made through guidance and nudges stimulated by algorithms.

Algorithms, at their most basic level, are instructions for solving or performing a problem or task, typically in a repetitive manner. The term algorithm refers to computer code containing a series of instructions used to operate a particular technology.

Artificial intelligence (AI) applies algorithms to perform specific types of intelligence, such as language processing, content creation, human learning, or planning. From hiring (Kuncel et al. 2013) to probation sentences (Laqueur and Copus 2022), algorithms are created with the goal of making our lives safer and more comfortable, but they do not benefit everyone equally.

They reshape not only how we judge, but also how we reconstruct our memory of what has happened to guide subsequent judgments or facilitate decisions and choices. This type of power is the more effective the more invisible it is. It manifests itself in suggestions, in the priorities established by automatic rankings, and in the metrics that define the success or failure of information, a product, even a personal identity. In this scenario, traditional governance tools are inadequate.

The systems that govern our existence have become so extensive and opaque that even those who design them cannot understand all their dynamics (Esposito 2022). This is the phenomenon that some critical analysts call “governance by opacity”: systems produce unwanted or uncontrollable effects, but their complexity prevents effective intervention or clear accountability.

The contemporary paradox is that we have immense computing power and sophisticated modeling tools, but we lack governance. Furthermore, we lack a cultural orientation that helps humans recognize the limits of predictions, system errors, and the reworking of memories.

Numerous scholars in critical studies and critical memories studies examine, in their research, the self-deception caused by the relationship between humans and digital platforms with respect to the following themes: complexity reduction, management of power and memory, comfort zones, and the home-based world (Iliadis & Russo 2016; Borghi & Marrone 2022; Kaplan 2023).

Humans believe they can reduce uncertainty by seeking easy memory and decision-making solutions, while digital ecosystems increase complexity and opacity. To better understand the phenomenon, it’s useful to look at a specific example, focusing on the behaviour of social feeds.

Observation of personalized social feeds reveals that, for the same topic, more polarizing content tends to receive greater visibility.

There’s an anomaly between the stated goal of informing and the actual result of polarization or the engagement it incentivizes. Social content ranking algorithms prioritize engagement not for ethical or informational reasons, but because increased interactions generate greater advertising revenue. This hypothesis can be verified by analysing the correlations between ranking parameters and economic metrics. It’s enough to compare two versions of a video recommendation algorithm: one optimized for dwell time and the other for information diversity.

By measuring which of the two versions generates greater pluralism in the content viewed and less exposure to extreme content, we discover that the polarization effect occurs more strongly with recommendation algorithms optimized to ensure users stay connected longer. These algorithms enable more efficient advertising planning and incremental management of our attention.

Platforms have built an attention economy where mass media exchange information and entertainment for user dwell time, which, in turn, is monetized through advertising (Franck, 2018).

Officially, algorithms are designed to offer relevant content and improve the user experience.

But empirical data analysis shows that the primary optimization criterion is engagement, not information quality or balance.

This orientation produces well-documented emergent effects: polarization of opinions, accelerated spread of fake news, reinforcement of cognitive biases, and removal of content that is not useful for maintaining its online presence (even when it is part of the collective memory).

It is in these cases that the critical scientific method makes visible what the system tends to conceal.

Scholars belonging to the field of critical studies seek to uncover the behaviour of deceptive metrics and the objectives of narratives that serve to maintain the status quo. A theoretical example of the critical uncovering of this distortion had already been expressed before the advent of platforms, with Goodhart's law: when a measure becomes a goal, it ceases to be a good measure (Goodhart 1975).

Applied to today's system, this critical consideration reveals the following statistical aspect: if a system declares its goal to improve service quality and uses time spent on a platform as a metric, it will end up designing mechanisms that maximize permanence even at the cost of reducing the actual quality of content or fuelling behavioural addictions.

In this sense, the scientific method of observing platform behaviour is a critical tool, but also an act of cultural and political resistance that opposes opacity, rejects simplifications, and asserts the right/duty to demand transparency of the hidden business model.

Critical studies reveal that power is exercised not only by controlling resources or imposing laws, but also by deciding which mental models become dominant and which representations of reality establish themselves as indisputable truths.

To construct a specific dominant mental model, it is necessary to remove a part of memory that is not functional to this process.

Thus, the removal and alteration of memory become an object of exchange for the management of power and the monetization of attention.

Does this process of altering and removing collective memory risk altering our memory even when we don't use platforms? Here too, specific examples are needed to understand the phenomenon.

Makhortykh (2021), analysing Holocaust memory, shows that search engines prioritize images related to Auschwitz, while downplaying content related to other concentration camps. While this may be explained by Auschwitz's importance as a symbol of the Holocaust, it is also due to the fact that Auschwitz is often sought as a popular destination for so-called "dark tourism". For Makhortykh, "this lack of clarity is worrying, considering that algorithm-based decisions define how visible and, consequently, recognizable specific aspects of the past will be" (Makhortykh 2021, 182). In this case, decisions affecting people continue to be driven by the web even when they are not online.

The removal or emphasis of certain aspects of memory that are systematically distorted by algorithms enters into post-algorithmic memory processes. Pilati et al. (2024), comparing discussions on flat-Earth beliefs in two virtual venues - the official forum of the Flat Earth Society and its thematic sub-Reddit community - note that collective memory and the systems of scientific knowledge fuelled by recollection are continually renegotiated by web infrastructures that become new memory infrastructures. The Flat Earth Society Forum reproduces discursive repertoires that simulate the scientific method: users write detailed posts, cite sources (however imperfect), and construct elaborate, albeit false, theories. It is a virtual world that produces pseudoscience using, apparently, the same method as official science, strategically manipulating what is true and what is false, adding and removing selected memories from digital archives.

Reddit tells a completely different story: conversations are faster, more emotional, and less coherent. Users don't want to construct systematic theories, but memorable slogans, viral memes, and polemics. In this case, the community seeks not truths or alternative memories, but contrasts. While the forum, with its permanent archives and slower pace, promotes the construction of coherent explanations, even if they're incorrect, the Reddit platform generates a mythical, emotional, and destructive narrative. Reddit is a social news and content aggregation website, where registered users (called redditors) can post links, text, images, and videos.

This content is organized into thematic communities called "sub-Reddits". Users can upvote or downvote content, influencing its visibility within the platform. This type of social media, based on the ephemeral flow of circles and the attention economy business model, generates what scholars call "conspiracies without theory": content designed to be captivating and divisive rather than convincing.

In this case, we are witnessing a complete destruction of official memory, distorted to achieve other ends. The forum prioritizes pseudoscientific discourse, while the sub-reddit promotes

antagonism and uncontrolled escalation. While in a “forum” it is still possible to counter-argue to restore collective memory about a specific phenomenon, on a “sub-Reddit” this strategy of counterarguments through fact-checking does not work. The sub-Reddit transcends the concepts of truth, source reliability, and coherence. Without these stable pillars, how is it possible to build a shared collective memory?

A study by Smit et al. (2024) examines the effects of the Google Pixel 8 smartphone and its new algorithmic features: “Magic Editor”, “Magic Eraser”, and “Best Take”.

These features promise radical flexibility, allowing users to: a) reposition people and objects within images; b) enhance colours and textures; c) combine similar photos into a single composite image, to prevent people from blinking; d) reduce noise from cars or wind in videos. While such effects can already be achieved with software like Photoshop, some scholars believe that such applications are “just one example of a more profound way in which artificial intelligence (AI) could alter our very conception of the past” (Smit et al. :1). This means that the “camera roll of the future” could lose the small fragments of texture that allow us to remember certain events from the past as they actually happened (Warzel 2023).

This further example illustrates that digital technologies, smartphone devices, and social media platforms bring about two radical changes: a) they provide a space in which mediated memories can be permanently stored, edited, and revisited (Van Dijck 2007); b) they shape the way these memories are automatically produced, collected, and how they become relevant to people in everyday life (Annabell 2023).

The infrastructures that enable the transmission of memory proceduralize this memory through the archive. The archive becomes the source, but also the place where memory is reconfigured, losing the performative aura of human recollection. How, then, is it possible to maintain a memory that is not affected by this process even when outside the web platform?

In the next section, we will see how critical scholars seek to describe, understand, or propose forms of resistance and opposition to the colonization of memories.

4. From the Narration of Remembrance to the Archive. Forms of Resistance or Opposition to the Colonisation of Memories

If the goal of a platform is engagement, the content promoted will be aimed at creating forms of belonging, emotional impact and retention strategies based on debates that are fuelled regardless of the sources. Engagement will also reinforce biases - in particular confirmation bias (Hergovich et al. 2010) - which fuel the echo chamber phenomenon (Quattrocioni 2016), further increasing the loyalty of groups that frequent certain websites, portals, discussion forums and social media. In many cases, the source found on the web may be altered from the outset and then archived and made available as a reference for specific groups.

Through this process, typical of digital culture, time and memory, in the classical sense of the term, disappear (Miszta Barbara 2010) and lose their aura (Barthes 1982; Benjamin 2014).

The loss of these dimensions favours a one-dimensional society, as Marcuse (1964) had already intuited, to the advantage of the dominant class. The latter, in fact, sees the past as an enemy that must be destroyed. Only by erasing the past can the present prevail without objection and become the only possible and plausible decision, even when it does not correspond to the truth.

Yet, “only by mastering the past can society have the capacity to be critical of the deceptive appearance of the present, and to do so, memory and continuous remembrance must be taken into account” (Mella 2013, 658). Cyberspace is a contemporary form of collective memory (Kansteiner 2002), but at the same time it removes or hides alternative forms of collective memory, limiting biodiversity in mnemonic manifestations.

We are witnessing confusing processes of “Blended Memory” (Fawns 2012) where technologies influence our ability to remember. Our relationship with technology influences our individual and

collective memory practices, even when we are not using devices, because what we have used or practised online remains as a residue and permanent attitude even after we have left the web.

In the recent debate among critical scholars, there has been a marked tendency to interpret digital memory as a new type of memory, labelled as mediated memory, connective memory or algorithmic memory. This is a radically different conceptualisation from the traditional one (Garde-Hansen et al. 2009; Makhortykh 2021).

Radicalising this position, Hoskins argues that the digital shift implies the end of collective memory. The author argues that the notion of collective memory is intrinsically linked to traditional mass media: “established (broadcast) media and collective memory are symbiotic” (Hoskins 2017, 91). In the broadcasting era, the collective, identified as the audience, was defined by the shared and stable consumption of a representation: the classic media event that provided both homogenisation and stability to memory. In the digital age, the “memory of the multitude” - this is the term Hoskins proposes to replace the term “collective” - does not derive from “spectatorship” but rather is created through sudden participation in a theme (event or news item).

Transitory, ephemeral, immediate and dispersed communities, formed through hyperconnectivity, generate content that is constantly modified, re-edited and altered, in a perpetual state of flux without a common thread. The memory produced by these virtual communities lacks the homogeneity and stability that are the hallmarks of collective memory.

The memories constructed by virtual communities are inherently unstable, fleeting and inconsistent.

They are also fed by alterable archives. With their permanent presence on the web, social media and forums themselves constitute sources for archives. Finally, with the current integration of AI into search engines, discussions (whether true or false) become, in turn, sources from which to draw.

It is not reliability that counts, but flow. Digital media have a characteristic that the traditional idea of social media does not necessarily possess. They construct an archival logic.

According to Hoskins, the archival ontology of digital media translates into a fundamental loss of human agency and radical unpredictability in the life cycles of memory.

Hoskins describes this unpredictability using the image of “shadow archives” that extend the potential life of our digital traces into an uncertain future. In short, digital memory appears fundamentally restless, boundless and governed by a technological logic whose temporality and affordance are essentially different – in some cases incompatible – from the traditional functioning of collective memory. The analogical collective memory provides coherence, stability, common words, shared languages and interpretations that last over time, giving identity to the group in the present, but also projecting certainty into the future.

According to Hoskins, the term collective memory does not describe but obscures “the radical transformations of memory that characterise the twenty-first century” (Hoskins 2017, 97).

Other scholars are more moderate. Mandolessi (2023, 1515), for example, assumes that digital memory does not imply the end of collective memory.

However, scholars in the critical field agree that the archive (whether true, plausible or completely false) is not synonymous with memory and should not be confused with the act of remembering. Remembering is a performative act. The archive refers to the substrate, to the condition of possibility of the act of remembering. The difference between substrate and act is exemplified by the distinction between “canon” and “archive” proposed by Assmann (2011), in which the canon represents the “active” circulation of memory that keeps the past present, while the archive refers to passively stored memory that preserves the past as past and is subject to alteration by bots that can draw selectively, pursuing an end that may not be functional to collective memory. Digital archives are not places where objects or documents are stored.

Rather, they are procedures, techno-mathematical operations that store data in a conditional form. The temporality of digital media is what Chun (2008) has defined as “enduring ephemera”, referring to the tension between the seemingly permanent nature of digital information and the fact that such information can evolve continuously until it is radically transformed, causing the original data to

disappear. In line with this argument, Lev Manovich argues that in the digital age, narrative as a cultural form has been replaced by the database: if the novel and cinema have privileged narrative as the key form of cultural expression of the modern era, the computer age privileges the database.

Many new media objects do not tell stories, have no beginning or end, and have no thematic, formal or other development that can organise their elements into a sequence. They are collections of individual elements, each of which has the same meaning as any other (Manovich 2001, 218).

Pseudo-scientific forums or social media that stray from the topic draw information from the archive-database. The archive-database becomes the foundation that replaces narrative.

Collective memory becomes an archive distributed and managed by both human and non-human agents, in a dynamic intertwining where there is no narrative that allows a community to recognise itself in a stable way. The transition from mnemonic objects to mnemonic assemblages, composed of people, things, artefacts, spaces, discourses, behaviours and expressions in dynamic relation, becomes the daily practice that stalks human beings even when they disconnect.

The new human way of remembering is influenced by the way we programme, annotate, classify, create folders, share or simply set aside useful information, always using devices.

The device acts even when it is not being used, because it always travels with the human subject.

The latter knows that they may need the device at any moment to recall what they have stored.

Therefore, the fundamental change is not so much the alteration of sources for secondary purposes - a process that also occurred in the past with traditional sources - as the inability to maintain a common repertoire. The other fundamental change is that memory is being replaced by the process of archiving and retrieval. Keyword search methods favour a selection that can fuel confirmation bias.

Kordzadeh & Ghasemaghaei (2022) note that, despite extensive research on algorithmic bias, there are few studies on how such biases influence subsequent decisions or behaviours.

Is it possible to resist the suggestions offered by archives, forums or social media? Is it possible to escape the ontology of the archive when we try to remember? Is the archive becoming the dominant infrastructure of memory? How can we counterbalance this pervasive colonisation?

Although there is currently no standardised terminology to describe strategies to combat this process, critical scholars propose various individual or collective practices to avoid “data dystopia” (Walsh 2019). Some scholars refer to “undesign” practices, examining users who attempt to remove, move, delete, inhibit or prevent certain actions proposed by technological devices or algorithmic suggestions (Pierce 2014). Other scholars examine disconnection practices alongside those of a) overturning suggestions; b) further research; c) returning to traditional sources; d) blocking functions through hacking (Herskovitz *et al.* 2023).

Hacking involves a deliberate intent to adapt a system to gain an advantage or improve functionality, but this approach does not prevent biases or modified sources from interfering.

Other scholars examine the process of reinvention, a component of innovation diffusion theory.

Reinvention refers to the adaptation or modification of an innovation after its adoption (Rogers 2003, 180). Rather than accepting or rejecting an innovation as it is, users can reinvent solutions for specific needs (Rogers 2003). This adaptive process allows users to selectively modify certain components or applications of a technology. For example, a social media user might reinvent a feed curation algorithm through behaviours such as selectively “liking” content to influence the algorithm and display more similar content (Burrell *et al.* 2019). Like hacking, reinvention encompasses the idea that users modify technologies to better suit their needs, often through behavioural adjustments, reconceptualisations, or alternative uses.

Finally, there is a school of thought that introduces the concept of “workarounds” (Wei *et al.* 2023; Overbye-Thompson & Rice 2025). Workarounds represent strategic, goal-oriented practices through which individuals creatively navigate and overcome systemic barriers or constraints (Ejnefjäll & Ågerfalk 2019). In organisational and IT contexts, workarounds emerge as intentional adaptations that enable individuals to complete tasks or restore system functionality when standard procedures are ineffective, blocked, or misaligned with practical work requirements (Wei *et al.* 2023). These

adaptive strategies are driven by users' motivations to improve efficiency, reduce transaction costs, and overcome systemic limitations (Ejnefjäll & Ågerfalk 2019).

All these resistance practices require those who resist to develop considerable skills, both technological and cognitive. Does this mean that only a small elite will be able to counteract the distortions of the algorithm and the infrastructure of digital memory?

Avoiding the distortions of digital memory dominated by archives and algorithmic suggestions becomes an action related to problem-solving skills, level of education, the time available to verify the source, and the financial resources that allow for the use of tools to verify or falsify sources.

5. Conclusions

Following a critical approach, we can affirm that the web is developing a platform memory within memory platforms. Memory infrastructures and archives represent the starting point for a critical analysis of the opaque powers hidden behind algorithmic logic. Having examined research and practices applied to technological devices, critical data studies and critical memories studies have shown how the web accelerates the processes of enabling and disabling in the assemblages of mnemonic practices, subverting the classical meaning of the concept of memory.

Remembering becomes a service to be managed and archived, but the digital archive does not correspond to the procedural and analogical memory processes of communities that remember outside of online systems. Platforms have constructed an attention economy where mass media exchange information and entertainment for user permanence, which, in turn, is monetized through advertising.

Critical studies reveal that power is exercised not only by controlling resources or imposing laws, but also by deciding which mental models become dominant and which representations of reality establish themselves as indisputable truths. To construct a specific dominant mental model, it becomes necessary to remove a part of the memory that is not functional to this process.

But does the alteration or erasure of collective memory risk altering our memory even when we don't use platforms? Following the international debate, we can conclude that our relationship with technology influences memory practices (individual and collective) even when we don't use devices, because what we have used or practiced online remains as a residue and a permanent attitude even after we leave the web. We live in a permanent sociotechnical cognitive system. In the recent debate among critical scholars, a marked tendency has emerged to interpret digital memory as a new type of memory, labelled mediated memory, connective memory, or algorithmic memory, radically different from traditional conceptualizations. Time and memory, in the classical sense of the term, disappear, losing their aura. The transition from mnemonic objects to mnemonic assemblages - composed of people, things, artifacts, spaces, discourses, behaviours, and expressions in dynamic relation - becomes the daily practice that haunts human beings even when they disconnect.

The new human way of remembering is influenced by the way we program, annotate, classify, create folders, share, or simply set aside useful information. The device operates even when not in use, because it always travels with the human subject.

The human subject knows that he or she may need the device, at any moment, to recall what has been archived. Is it possible to resist the suggestions offered by the archive, the forum, or social media? Is it possible to escape the ontology of the archive when we attempt to remember?

Is the archive becoming the dominant infrastructure of memory? How can we counterbalance this colonization? Critical scholars identify forms of resistance through practices of hacking, undesign, reinvention, and workarounds. However, these practices of resistance require the development of great skills on the part of those who resist.

Does this mean that only a small elite will have the ability to counter the distortions of the algorithm and the infrastructure of digital memory?

Will the resistance of "non-digital collective and individual memory" be the prerogative of the power elite? Will "non-digital memory" be a luxury of the ruling classes?

These questions pose new research avenues for critical theory, which continues to be a valuable tool for uncovering the deep structures and false ideology surrounding digital memory infrastructures.

Below, we propose a conceptual model that could be useful for future empirical research designs.

Components of the conceptual model of platform memory analysis in memory platforms	Definitions of the components to be analysed
Platform Memory Attributes	<i>Archival Ontology</i> Memory as a digital archive versus memory as a performative act of remembering
Mechanisms	<i>Deceptive metrics (engagement)</i> The primary goal of the system is not information quality, but rather increasing interactions for advertising purposes <i>Algorithmic Modeling</i> Algorithms guide decisions and the reconstruction of the past
Enabling / Disabling Context	<i>Platforms as Infrastructures</i> Platforms as ecosystems that strategically capture memory, functional to the business model <i>The Attention Economy</i> Memory as a service to be managed and archived, exchanged for the user's permanence
Consequences	<i>Colonization/Removal</i> Alteration and removal of parts of memory that are not functional to the dominant mental model <i>Loss of aura</i> Disappearance of time and narrative in favor of an archive-database <i>Permanent cognitive system</i> The residue of online practice becomes a permanent attitude even offline

The previous conceptual model illustrates how platforms, driven by business and engagement logic, transform the digital archive into a form of platform memory (permanently alterable) that serves the structuring of memory management platforms. The concept of Platform Memory is a critical synthesis of the following notions introduced by the critical literature:

- *Mediated Memory* (Van Dijck 2010). This focuses on the medium (the device) as a space where memories are stored and modified. Platform Memory is an evolution of this, shifting the focus from the medium to the sociotechnical infrastructure that hosts it.
- *Connective Memory of the Multitude* (Hoskins 2017). This highlights the failure of collective memory, replaced by the ephemeral and incoherent memory of the multitude, generated by the hyperconnectivity of users. Platform Memory explains why this multitude is incoherent, fragmented, and permanently unstable. Platform memory is a perverse result/consequence/effect of engagement mechanisms that incentivize polarization and fragmentation.
- *Algorithmic Memory* (Esposito 2022; 2017). This focuses on the role of algorithmic agents in the selection and reconstruction of memories. Platform Memory frames the algorithm not as an isolated actor, but as an intrinsic mechanism of the platform's business model (Governance by Opacity), whose purpose is not to remember, but to monetize.

In short, Platform Memory is the critical outcome where the economic and infrastructural logic (Platform) uses mediation and leverages connectivity to implement algorithmic agency, colonizing personal and collective memory.

The paper is a critical-theoretical synthesis and analysis of international research, but it also constitutes an experimental theoretical design because it offers a conceptual model that provides a framework for future empirical validation in specific field studies.

The conceptual model identifies and defines the following constructs: a. properties; b. mechanisms; c. enabling contexts; d. consequences of Platform Memory.

These constructs can be operationalized and tested in various research fields, such as:

1. Memory studies oriented towards the sociology of culture

In this case, the conceptual model could be useful for constructing:

a. Validation tests of the digital archival ontology, supporting empirical studies to quantify or qualify the individual perception of memory, verifying whether the past is perceived as an archive/database accessible through selective search, rather than as a fluid and performative narrative.

b. Research on the aura of recurrence. In this case, the conceptual model could be useful for experimentally verifying whether digital memories, devoid of an “aura” or “punctum” (Barthes 1982), generate a lower or higher emotional and cognitive impact than memories mediated by other traditional channels.

2. Conspiracy Studies

In this context, the model could be useful for:

a. Experimentally analyzing, on platforms like Reddit, the extent to which engagement mechanisms and algorithmic biases contribute to the colonization of historical, political, or scientific memory, favouring the visibility of marginal or conspiratorial narratives.

b. Analysing the development and operation of opaque powers and judgments, using algorithmic auditing methods to concretely reveal the contexts in which nonhuman algorithmic actors distort judgments and memory reconstructions.

3. Design Ethics and Human-Computer Interaction (HCI)

In this context, the model could be useful for testing the effectiveness of resistance practices such as undesign, reinvention, and workarounds. Future HCI studies could design experimental interfaces based on undesign and measure their effectiveness in mitigating platform dependence or reducing the impact of engagement metrics on memory and attention. These studies could also test whether technological and cognitive skills are indeed a necessary condition for resistance, and whether, consequently, the ability to maintain an uncolonized memory is the privilege of an elite.

4. Cognitive and Trauma Psychology

In this context, the model could be useful for analysing the permanent cognitive residue of online memory in offline practices. The model suggests that the residue of online practice becomes a permanent cognitive system even offline; it could inspire experimental investigations of this behavioural transfer and its implications for the formation of new memory traumas or the management of existing ones.

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Memory as Resistance to the Systemic Colonization of the Lifeworld: Contributions from Jürgen Habermas's Critical Theory of Society

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Abstract. This article conceptualizes collective memory as a communicative practice capable of resisting the systemic colonization of the lifeworld, taking as its central reference Jürgen Habermas's critical theory of society. Building on *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (1981; 1988), it argues that the symbolic and normative reproduction of the lifeworld depends on communicative processes that preserve and reinterpret culturally sedimented resources – such as narratives, values and rituals – which are fundamental both for collective self-understanding and for democratic legitimacy. In contrast to conception that reduce memory to a passive repository of facts, the article contends that memory should be understood as an intersubjective practice in which recollection and the re-actualization of the past take place through communicative interactions oriented towards mutual understanding. In dialogue with Habermas's later work, *Auch Eine Geschichte der Philosophie* (2019a; 2019b), the article emphasizes how his genealogy of semantic contents – tracing the “migration” of religious meanings into the secular horizon – demonstrates the importance of cultural memories as normative reserves. Far from being residues of an absolute past, such contents – when discursively preserved and critically reinterpreted – strengthen the collective capacity for critique and moral orientation in the face of the functionalist and objectifying tendencies of modernity. The article also diagnoses contemporary social pathologies of memory: (1) administrative standardization, whereby bureaucratic institutions ritualize remembrance through official protocols; (2) cultural commodification, whereby heritage industries reduce historical complexity to consumable spectacles; and (3) digital fragmentation, whereby algorithms personalize memory while simultaneously undermining its integrative and deliberative functions. These mechanisms not only distort the content of memory but also compromise its integrative and deliberative roles. Finally, the article outlines normative and institutional strategies for the protection and revitalization of memory, defending it as a democratic public good. By recovering and updating normative contents from the past, collective memory can function as a communicative core of resistance, capable of countering systemic colonization and sustaining a plural and critical public sphere.

Keywords: Collective memory; Theory of Communicative Action; Colonization of the lifeworld; Social pathologies; Habermas; Normativity; Public sphere.

Riassunto. Questo articolo concettualizza la memoria collettiva come una pratica comunicativa in grado di resistere alla colonizzazione sistemica del mondo della vita, prendendo come riferimento centrale la teoria critica della società di Jürgen Habermas. Basandosi sulla *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (1981; 1988), sostiene che la riproduzione simbolica e normativa del mondo della vita dipende da processi comunicativi che preservano e reinterpretano risorse culturalmente sedimentate – come narrazioni, valori e rituali – fondamentali sia per l'autocomprensione collettiva che per la legittimità democratica. In contrasto con la concezione che riduce la memoria a un archivio passivo di fatti, l'articolo sostiene che la memoria dovrebbe essere intesa come una pratica intersoggettiva in cui il ricordo e la riattualizzazione del passato avvengono attraverso interazioni comunicative orientate all'acomprendimento reciproca. In dialogo con l'opera tarda di Habermas, *Auch Eine Geschichte der Philosophie* (2019a; 2019b), l'articolo sottolinea come la sua genealogia dei contenuti semantici – che traccia la “migrazione” dei significati religiosi nell'orizzonte secolare – dimostri l'importanza delle memorie culturali come riserve normative. Lungi dall'essere residui di un passato assoluto, tali contenuti – quando conservati in modo discorsivo e reinterpretati criticamente – rafforzano la capacità collettiva di critica e orientamento morale di fronte alle tendenze funzionaliste e oggettivanti della modernità. L'articolo diagnostica anche le patologie sociali contemporanee della memoria: (1) la standardizzazione amministrativa, per cui le istituzioni burocratiche ritualizzano il ricordo attraverso protocolli ufficiali; (2) la mercificazione culturale, per cui le industrie del patrimonio riducono la complessità storica a spettacoli consumabili; e (3) la frammentazione digitale, per cui gli algoritmi personalizzano la memoria minandone contemporaneamente le funzioni integrative e deliberative. Questi meccanismi non solo distorcono il contenuto della memoria, ma ne compromettono anche i ruoli integrativi e deliberativi. Infine, l'articolo delinea strategie normative e istituzionali per la protezione e la rivitalizzazione della memoria, difendendola come bene pubblico democratico. Recuperando e aggiornando i contenuti normativi del passato, la memoria collettiva può funzionare come nucleo comunicativo di resistenza, in grado di contrastare la colonizzazione sistemica e sostenere una sfera pubblica pluralistica e critica.

Parole chiave: Memoria collettiva; Teoria dell'azione comunicativa; Colonizzazione della vita; Patologie sociali; Habermas; Normatività; Sfera pubblica.

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Introduction

Jürgen Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action* remains one of the most sophisticated and influential attempts to diagnose the pathologies of modernity while normatively grounding a conception of communicative rationality. Its starting point – the distinction between system and lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) – opened the way for a novel description of how the delinguistified functional imperatives of money and power can *intrude* into contexts of communicative integration, producing distortions that affect the very foundations of socialisation and culture. As Habermas notes: “[...] the lifeworld serves as a background for processes of mutual understanding; it is threatened whenever the systemic logic of the economy and administration invades domains previously organized by language” (Habermas, 1988, p. 322).

This article takes this classical diagnosis as a point of departure but expands it in a new direction. Whereas Habermas identifies, in *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, two principal waves of colonization – that of the market and that of administration – this paper argues that we are now confronted with a third: algorithmic colonization. Unlike the earlier forms, this new mode directly targets collective memory by intervening in communicative processes mediated through digital infrastructures and the phantomization of the public sphere. This represents a qualitative shift: while previous forms distorted action coordination, algorithmic colonization reconfigures the very grammar of social remembrance, fragmenting historical narratives, personalizing memories, and undermining the conditions for critique and democratic deliberation.

Before situating this argument within the Habermasian framework, it is important to acknowledge the broader field of memory studies, which has shown that memory is not merely a repository of the past but a contested terrain of social construction. Foundational contributions by Maurice Halbwachs, Aby Warburg, Pierre Nora, Jan Assmann, and Paul Ricoeur demonstrate that collective remembrance is always embedded in institutional, linguistic, and power structures. Contemporary debates have further underscored the inherently agonistic character of public memory. In such aspect, as Jeffrey Olick (2007) and Andreas Huyssen (1995) observe, remembering and forgetting are socially negotiated acts that involve conflicts over interpretation, representation, and authority. In this sense, memory is both a field of cultural transmission and a site of struggle, where competing groups seek to legitimize their versions of the past. This agonistic dimension makes memory a privileged object for critical theory, for it condenses processes of social recognition, exclusion, and norm formation.

Within this broader framework, the article positions Habermas's theory as a powerful normative perspective for conceptualizing memory not as an inert reflection of the past but as a communicative practice through which societies articulate, contest, and renew their normative horizons. Moreover, the idea of memory as resistance must also be viewed against the backdrop of what Hartmut Rosa has described as the social acceleration of modernity (Rosa, 2013). Accelerated temporal structures – technological, economic, and communicative – erode the continuity of collective experience and produce a form of temporal alienation that weakens the transmission of meaning across generations. Under such conditions, the preservation of memory becomes itself a critical task: to sustain the intergenerational conversation that the modern lifeworld requires for its symbolic reproduction.

The guiding hypothesis of this study is that memory should not be conceived as a passive depository of facts or images of the past, but rather as a communicative practice and normative reserve indispensable to the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld and to the sustenance of deliberative democracy. This conception draws, on the one hand, from the tradition inaugurated by Maurice Halbwachs, from whom “it is in society that people acquire their memories” (Halbwachs, 1950, p. 38), indicating that remembrance is always a socially situated and linguistically mediated act. On the other hand, it is reinforced by Jan Assmann's notion of cultural memory, which highlights how narratives and symbols preserved over time constitute normative and identity-forming reserves for

political communities (Assmann, 2011). Beyond this, Paul Ricoeur adds that memory is not mere conservation but also hermeneutical field of dispute, where recollection is constantly reinterpreted (Ricoeur, 2000).

Critical Theory further provides a fundamental matrix for conceiving memory as a field of resistance. Walter Benjamin, on his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, insisted that every act of remembrance opens the possibility of redemption in the face of barbarism: “even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins” (Benjamin, 1968, p. 226). Theodor W. Adorno, for his part, conceived the memory of suffering as an irreducible ethical obligation: “the demand that Auschwitz not be repeated is the foremost of all for education” (Adorno, 1996, p. 120). These formulations indicate that memory is not limited to the past but project a normative horizon that bears on both present and future.

At this juncture, Habermas’s theory provides a decisive framework. For Habermas, cultural tradition remains alive “through the interpretative appropriation of its contents in communicative action” (Habermas, 1988, p. 210). Memory, understood in this register, appears as a communicative practice oriented towards mutual understanding, capable of preserving, updating, and criticizing sedimented normative contents. This insight acquires renewed vigor in *Auch Eine Geschichte der Philosophie* (2019a; 2019b), where Habermas reconstructs genealogically the “migration” of religious contents into the secular grammar of modernity – “Western philosophy was continuously nourished by reflexive translations that transformed contents of faith into secular knowledge” (Habermas, 2019a, p. 17). Cultural memory, thus, is not a residue of a surpassed past but a source of normative reserves that sustain emancipatory horizons even amidst crisis.

This approach allows us to clarify the transition from market modernity to algorithmic modernity as a transformation not only in the economic and institutional structures of capitalism but also in the temporal and communicative infrastructures that mediate memory production. While market modernity commodified remembrance through the spectacle and circulation of images, algorithmic modernity introduces a new logic of automated selection and participatory dislocation – authorship becomes distributed among users and platforms, archives are rendered unstable and dependent on private infrastructures, and the very boundaries between public and private memory are dissolved by the globalization of data flows. In this sense, algorithmic colonization should be seen as a new phase in the ongoing process of lifeworld colonization (one that acts directly upon the temporal texture of collective experience, accelerating forgetting and producing selective visibilities of the past).

The original contribution of this article lies in updating the thesis of the systemic colonization of the lifeworld to diagnose this *third wave of colonization*: algorithmic colonization. This unprecedented form operates directly on language, memory, and the lifeworld, reconfiguring processes of meaning production, identity formation, and social integration. As Habermas acknowledges in his most recent reflections, “the new information technologies are producing a structural change in the conditions of the discursive formation of opinion and will” (Habermas, 2022, p. 60).

This shift underscores the centrality of memory: amidst the commodification of culture, the bureaucratization of remembrance, and algorithmic fragmentation, preserving memory as a communicative practice means safeguarding a normative core indispensable to the democratic public sphere.

This article unfolds in four movements: (1) reconstruction of memory as communicative practice and normative reserve, in dialogue with Habermas and the tradition of memory studies; (2) analysis of Habermas’s genealogy of modernity as a foundation for a critical conception of memory; (3) examination of the mechanisms of memory erosion (bureaucracy, market, and algorithms) including the “canonical case” of the Holocaust; and (4) delineation of a normative horizon in which civil society, the public sphere, and deliberative democracy can resist new forms of colonization.

1. Memory as Communicative Practice and Normative Reservoir

The concept of *Lebenswelt*, formulated by Jürgen Habermas in *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (1981; 1988), constitutes one of the fundamental axes of his critical theory of society and serves as a basis for understanding memory not as a static deposit, but as a living communicative practice. The articulation between lifeworld and memory is decisive: if the *Lebenswelt* is the horizon of background convictions sustaining social interaction, memory represents the way in which these horizons are continuously preserved, reinterpreted, and criticized by successive generations.

Habermas describes critical theory of society in terms of a historical transition marked by the devaluation of religious-mythical thought as the exclusive instance of orientation. The “capacity to interpret the world” proved insufficient to address the complexities of modernity and was eventually supplanted, thus opening, as Habermas states, “the way of what followed” (Habermas, 1981, p. 105). In this process, religious, cosmological, and metaphysical figures were removed as privileged forms of understanding, giving way to more reflexive and differentiated levels of learning.

This transformation also entailed changes in modes of learning: in the objectifying dimension of science, in practical-moral discernment, and in aesthetic-artistic expression. As Habermas argues, every “cognitive development means [...] a decentring of a world-view egocentrically marked” (Habermas, 1981, p. 106). Understanding is no longer guaranteed by world-images immune to criticism, but rather depends on shared interpretation among subjects.

Modernity thus inaugurates an unprecedented reflexive potential. With the replacement of founding myths by differentiated discourses on science, morality, and aesthetics, the possibility arises of thematising criticisable validity claims, anchored in intersubjective processes of justification. Habermas observes that this movement represents “the most important dimension of the development of world-views” (Habermas, 1981, p. 114). It is in this context that the notion of *Lebenswelt* appears for the first time in his work.

The lifeworld therefore designates the shared horizon in which subjects engaged in communicative action understand one another (Habermas, 1981, p. 107). It is constituted by background convictions that serve as a basis for situation-definitions and stores the interpretative work of preceding generations, functioning as a “conservative counterweight against the risk of dissension arising with every process of understanding” (Habermas, 1981, p. 108).

For the purposes of this article, with the decentring of religious-metaphysical world-images, communicative action becomes the means by which understanding among social subjects takes place. This understanding occurs when it is achieved through *yes/no* positions of acceptance or refusal in relation to criticizable validity claims. According to Habermas, this takes place:

«[...] the more broadly the world-view that prepares the cultural stock of knowledge is decentered, the less the need for understanding is covered in advance by a lifeworld interpreted with immunity from criticism; and the more this need has to be satisfied through the interpretative operations of the participants themselves, that is, through agreement, which is risky because rationally motivated, the more correct it is to expect rational orientations in action» (Habermas, 1981, p. 108).

As it became established that the reflexive relation of subjects to the world must take place upon itself – within a process in which the nexuses of meaning, validity, understanding, and critique could be systematically elaborated, allowing alternative interpretations to be investigated – cultural tradition was required to connect with specialized argumentations, so that its learning processes could be socially institutionalised. It was “along this path that cultural subsystems could emerge for science, morality and law, for music, art and literature, in which argumentatively supported traditions are formed, fluidified by permanent criticism, and at the same time professionally secured” (Habermas, 1981, p. 109).

Habermas defines the lifeworld as “the stock of cultural knowledge, interpretative patterns, and competencies necessary for symbolic reproduction” (Habermas, 1988, p. 209), which allows it to be understood as the background that guarantees the possibility of social interaction oriented towards understanding. Yet, and this is essential, it is not a fixed structure, but a horizon continuously updated through communicative action, in which tradition, solidarity, and identity intertwine (Habermas, 1988, p. 211).

With specific relevance for this article, by emphasizing the centrality of language as a medium of social integration, Habermas shifts the problem of memory from the field of mere conservation to that of communicative practice. Memory, in this framework, is not an immobile archive of facts (just as the lifeworld is not a fixed structure), but a process of critical updating. This nexus between tradition, interpretation, and critique is also the proper place of memory. Maurice Halbwachs had already pointed out that every recollection is anchored in collective frameworks, so that memory must be understood as “social memory” (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 38). Habermas, in insisting that cultural tradition remains alive only through communicative appropriation, approximates this intuition: only communicative intersubjectivity is capable of preserving the normative vitality of cultural heritage.

Several commentators reinforce this point. Richard Bernstein, for instance, notes that the *Lebenswelt* may be understood as “the locus of memory and critique, in contrast to the reifying dynamics of the system” (Bernstein, 1985, p. 18). Likewise, Thomas McCarthy describes the link between the memory and lifeworld in Habermas by maintaining that tradition itself must be understood as “a stock of interpretative resources whose validity depends on their communicative reappropriation” (McCarthy, 1985, p. 156).

This normative dimension is deepened by Habermas in *Auch Eine Geschichte der Philosophie* (2019a; 2019b), where he reconstructs modernity genealogically as a process of reflexive translations, in which religious contents are transformed into secular knowledge. Habermas argues, “Western philosophy was continuously nourished by reflexive translations that transformed contents of faith into secular knowledge” (Habermas, 2019a, p. 17).

Cultural memory thus appears not as a residue of the past, but as a normative reservoir capable of orienting emancipatory practices. Jan Assmann restates this point when he defends the need for “a culture of memory that allows us to distinguish between critical remembrance and destructive forgetting” (Assmann, 2011, p. 21).

From a political perspective, understanding memory as communicative practice implies recognizing its centrality for deliberative democracy. Seyla Benhabib underlines that the public sphere depends on “normative resonances” derived from cultural memory (Benhabib, 2002, p. 448). Andreas Huyssen, in dialogue with the Frankfurt tradition, affirms that memory has become, in the contemporary world, “a terrain of decisive symbolic struggles, between critical remembrance and socially induced amnesia” (Huyssen, 1995, p. 14). This struggle shows that memory is not neutral: it constitutes a cultural and political field.

This critical dimension was already present in the horizon opened by Walter Benjamin, who warned that history always runs the risk of being written “by the victors” and that the task of critique is “to wrest tradition from the conformism that is always threatening to overpower it” (Benjamin, 2006, p. 697). Similarly, Theodor W. Adorno insisted “education must have as its foremost aim that Auschwitz not be repeated” (Adorno, 1966, p. 358), reminding us that memory is inseparable from resistance against forms of domination that reproduce themselves under new guises.

Within this horizon, Habermas presents memory as the core of resistance against the systemic colonization of the lifeworld. He warns that, as this colonization expands, “the source of meaning, which can only be renewed through communicative action, are exhausted” (Habermas, 1988, p. 324). The erosion of memory thus amounts to the pathologization of communicative rationality. As Albrecht Wellmer observes, systemic imperatives threaten to instrumentalize the lifeworld (Wellmer, 1991, p. 56). Memory, so, emerges as an indispensable resource for keeping open the space of critique, reinterpretation, and cultural plurality.

Accordingly, to understand memory as communicative practice and normative reservoir means not only to describe it as a social process but to defend it as a condition of possibility for the renewal of normative horizons and the sustenance of the democratic public sphere. Preserving memory implies resisting the colonizing tendencies that threaten to silence alternative narratives and erode cultural plurality. Memory, understood as an intersubjective practice of critical updating, is therefore both a means of integration and a nucleus of resistance.

Colonizing tendencies, here described as threats to alternative narratives and cultural plurality, are conceived from the concept of systemic colonization of the lifeworld which Habermas formulates as his second thesis of modernity. Initially, Habermas distinguishes two processes arising with capitalist modernity: (1) cultural rationalization, consisting in an internal differentiation of cultural spheres, in which “not only are the ‘intrinsic legalities’ of the cognitive, expressive, and moral components of culture made conscious, but the tension among these spheres also increases with their differentiation”; and (2) social modernization, referring to the institutionalization of formal patterns of systemic control and coordination mediated by money and power.

This dual distinction between cultural rationalization and social modernization enables Habermas to develop and ground his immanent critique of modernity in the very normative principles that made it possible. In this respect, the role of language is emphasized as the privileged medium for discursive legitimation, since “cultural rationalization [...] prepared the ground for a discursive form of legitimation, which remains alive whenever social participants are able rationally to thematise their norms and decisions” (Habermas, 1981, p. 263).

The distinction between cultural rationalization and social modernization not only enriches the analysis of capitalist modernity but also establishes the theoretical foundations for the critique of the systemic colonization of the lifeworld. This hermeneutic key guides the diagnosis of contemporary social pathologies and rests on the establishment of corresponding attributes for the processes that took place in capitalist modernization. In a certain sense, it is possible to affirm that while cultural rationalization offers emancipatory potentials, social modernization – operated by systems and constraining communicative action – presents forms of symbolic reification and disintegration that can be critically analyzed.

Alongside his thesis on the systemic colonization of the lifeworld, Habermas also describes the thesis of the selectivity of the modernization process. With this, he shows how it became possible for systemic imperatives to co-opt attributes from the sphere of symbolic reproduction for their own maintenance, strengthening, and expansion. The selectivity of modernization, which privileges subsystems of purposive-rational action, transforms reason into functional power, and “social modernization, thus detached, will turn selectively against the space of possibilities opened by this very cultural rationalization” (Habermas, 1981, p. 18).

The link between memory and colonization becomes clearer when one considers Habermas’s distinction between cultural rationalization and social modernization, particularly in light of the importance of language as the privileged medium for discursive legitimation. Whereas the former – cultural rationalization – represents emancipatory potentials, in which the differentiation of spheres of knowledge and the possibility of discursive legitimation stand out, the latter – social modernization – is marked by the selectivity of the modernization process, whereby systemic imperatives are privileged and symbolic resources are captured for purposes of functional reproduction. In this perspective, reason, which should serve enlightenment and critique, is co-opted by autopoietic systems that convert it into instrumental power.

This selectivity, as I have sought to argue, produces a rupture between the reflexive knowledge of modernity and its practical application in social life. Normative achievements – democracy, human rights, the discursive principle of morality – are neutralized by the logic of accumulation and administration. Hence Habermas’s diagnosis that the failure of modernity does not lie in an excess of rationality but in its unilateral and functionalized appropriation. It is in this context that memory, conceived as communicative practice and normative reservoir, emerges as an indispensable counterweight for sustaining both communicative rationality and the democratic public sphere.

2. Genealogies of Modernity and Memory as a Normative Resource

The reconstruction undertaken by Jürgen Habermas in *Auch Eine Geschichte der Philosophie* (2019a; 2019b) stands as one of the most ambitious contemporary attempts to situate modernity in a critical continuity with its religious and metaphysical past. His gesture is not merely historiographical but also normative: it aims to show how the post-metaphysical reason of modernity depends, for its very sustenance, on cultural memory contents that have been translated and reappropriated throughout historical processes of learning. In this sense, the genealogy of modernity is equally a genealogy of memory: without the capacity to critically rearticulate inherited traditions, communicative rationality would be deprived of its normative reserves.

Habermas takes as his point of departure the Jasperian hypothesis of the axial age [*Achsenzeit*], namely, the period between 800 and 200 BCE during which, almost simultaneously, religious and philosophical traditions emerged in both the West and the East (Jaspers, 1953). This period is interpreted as a civilizational rupture in which societies began to distinguish between objective, social, and subjective worlds – a process that opened the space for universalizable validity claims. Crucially, however, these contents were not lost; they were preserved through memorial practices and interpretive re-elaborations. Habermas states that “modernity lives off contents it did not produce itself but translated from premodern sources” (Habermas, 2019a, p. 98). In other words, the memory of modernity is a translated memory, and its vitality depends on the ability to critically rework inherited contents.

This understanding allows us to situate memory as a communicative practice. If the lifeworld is the horizon within which cultural traditions are constantly reappropriated, cultural memory is the medium through which these traditions remain alive. Habermas emphasizes that such religious or metaphysical contents could only become modern normative resources insofar as they were “linguistified”, that is, transformed into validity claims open to criticism (Habermas, 2019a, pp. 164–165). Already in *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* he had formulated the thesis of the “linguistification of the sacred”. In his late work, this thesis is expanded: the sacred is understood as a complex of myth, ritual, and transcendence whose solidarizing potential remains accessible, albeit displaced. Memory plays here an essential role, since it is the only resource capable of ensuring that such potentials are preserved as critical reserves without lapsing into dogmatism.

This is why *Auch Eine Geschichte der Philosophie* does not merely map influences but rather proposes a narrative of reflective translations. Habermas describes how Western philosophy was “continuously nourished by reflective translations that transformed contents of faith into secular knowledge” (Habermas, 2019a, p. 17). These translations do not erase the religious origin but reinscribe it within a post-metaphysical horizon, allowing its normative force to be sustained. Memory, in this key, is not a repository of the past but a hermeneutical operation: to remember means to translate, and to translate means to rearticulate normatively.

It is worth highlighting how this conception of memory as reflective translation of the past already figures in Habermas’s earlier works. Several commentators have insisted on this memorial dimension. Cristina Lafont, for instance, stresses that Habermas’s reconstruction of normativity “is inseparable from a work of collective memory” (Lafont, 2020, p. 212), since only critical recollection can sustain democratic legitimacy in the face of cultural plurality. James Bohman (2019a, p. 67), from another angle, underlines that the public sphere can only fulfill its critical function if it maintains a living connection with “historical experiences of injustice”. Thus, remembering Auschwitz, for example, is not a mere historical exercise but a condition for democratic resistance.

By way of illustration only, without aiming to expand the issue beyond Habermas’s work, it is noteworthy how the conception he proposes resonates with reflections by Jan Assmann, who insists that societies need a “culture of memory” capable of distinguishing between critical remembrance

and destructive forgetting (Assmann, 2011, p. 21). One may also include Paul Ricoeur among the intellectual affinities on memory, since for him memory is always traversed by the ambivalence between fidelity and manipulation, and must be oriented by the promise of justice (Ricoeur, 2005, p. 85). Yet, even if sympathetic readings can be identified, it is crucial to underscore that in Habermas these intuitions are translated into a post-metaphysical conception of memory: it retains its force only if it can be thematized discursively, open to critique and reinterpretation. This understanding figures as a distinctive trait of the Critical Theory tradition.

From a political perspective, cultural memory conceived as reflective translation constitutes an indispensable normative resource. Seyla Benhabib (2002, p. 448) observes that the public sphere depends on “normative resonances” derived from cultural memory. Andreas Huyssen (1995, p. 14), in dialogue with the Frankfurt School tradition, shows that memory has become, in the contemporary world, a “terrain of decisive symbolic struggles, between critical remembrance and socially induced amnesia”. This terrain can only be understood in light of Habermas’s genealogy, which articulates memory and modernity as inseparable dimensions: modernity not only produces new contents but depends on its capacity for critical remembrance.

Finally, Habermas relates the genealogy of modernity to the problem of selectivity in the rationalization process. By distinguishing between cultural rationalization and social modernization (Habermas, 1981, pp. 263-265), he shows that the reflexive gains of modernity were, to a large extent, neutralized by the systemic imperatives of money and power. Memory, in this context, functions as a counterweight: it recalls that emancipatory potentials cannot be reduced to instrumental functionalizations. As Theodor W. Adorno warned, education must have as its first task the prevention of Auschwitz ever happening again (Adorno, 1966, p. 358). This maxim echoes the imperative of a critical memory that resists colonization.

Thus, Habermas’s genealogy of modernity cannot be dissociated from the question of memory. By reconstructing how religious contents were translated into secular knowledge, Habermas reveals that cultural memory is the link ensuring both continuity and critique, tradition and innovation. Modernity remains alive only insofar as it is capable of reflective remembrance. Its erosion would entail not merely the loss of a past but the depletion of the normative reserves that sustain communicative rationality and deliberative democracy itself.

3. The Systemic Colonization of the Lifeworld and the Mechanisms of Memory Erosion: Administration, Market, and Algorithms

The thesis of the systemic colonization of the lifeworld is one of the structuring concepts in Habermas’s critical diagnosis. Formulated in *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (1981; 1988), this thesis describes how modernisation, conducted in a selective and functionalist manner, has produced deep distortions in the symbolic structures of social life. The distinction between system and lifeworld is central to this diagnosis: while the system operates through de-linguistified means of coordination (money and power), enabling large-scale functional integration, the lifeworld consists in the horizon of symbolic, normative, and cultural presuppositions that sustain social interaction oriented towards mutual understanding (Habermas, 1988, p. 193).

In advanced capitalist societies, Habermas observes, when the economic and administrative subsystems (originally charged with ensuring the material reproduction of society) overflow their functional boundaries and penetrate domains previously mediated by communicative and consensual practices, what occurs is what he calls the “colonization of the lifeworld” (Habermas, 1988, p. 523). The metaphor of colonization is not merely illustrative: it designates a process of functional usurpation in which the communicative capacities of the lifeworld are displaced by systemic codes of instrumental control (such as money and power). In this dynamic, forms of intersubjective understanding are replaced by strategic mechanisms of coordination, reconfiguring social

organization and imposing upon it logics external to its communicative origins. Habermas describes this process with particular clarity, arguing that:

«In place of “false” consciousness, we now find a fragmented consciousness that evades any clarification of the mechanisms of reification. Only when these conditions are present does the colonization of the lifeworld become possible: [when] the imperatives of autonomous subsystems, stripped of their ideological veils, penetrate the lifeworld from outside – like colonial rulers in a tribal society – forcing it to assimilate; yet the fragmented perspectives of the native culture can no longer coordinated in such a way as to permit the recognition of the play of the metropolis and the global market from the periphery» (Habermas, 1988, p. 522).

This displacement has direct consequences for memory. Colonization manifests itself not only as the institutional reorganization of social life, but also as a subjective reconfiguration of the ways in which experiences are remembered, interpreted, and transmitted. Social practices, personality structures, and interactive contexts come to be shaped by systemic imperatives, converting life goals and cultural values into means subordinated to functionally defined ends. When language – the original medium of social integration – is distorted by the interference of the de-linguistified codes of money and power (which replace discursive consensus with functional and strategic modes of coordination), collective memory runs the risk of being emptied of its critical dimension, reduced to bureaucratic records or to cultural commodities.

The phenomenon of systemic colonization emerges when the lifeworld, once capable of regulating social relations through tradition and natural language, becomes unable to resist the increasing specialization and fragmentation of modern spheres. Habermas links this development to a selective pattern of modernization that instrumentalizes “the potentials of cultural rationalization in the service of capitalist accumulation and bureaucratic-administrative control” (Habermas, 1988, p. 519), identifying four principal forms through which systemic colonization manifests itself:

«[...] (1) if traditional forms of life have disintegrated to such an extent that the structural components of the lifeworld – culture, society, and personality – have become widely differentiated; (2) if the relations of exchange between subsystems and the lifeworld are mediated by differentiated roles (with regard to participation in formally organised workplaces and private household economies, in relations of clientele with public bureaucracies, and in formal participation within the process of legitimation); (3) if the real abstractions by which the labour power of employed individuals is made available and the votes of enfranchised citizens are mobilised can be accepted by those affected in exchange for system-conforming compensations; and (4) if such compensations are financed by increases in capitalist growth, in accordance with the model assumed by the welfare state, and channeled into those roles in which privatised hopes of self-realisation and self-determination – withdrawn from the world of work and from the public sphere – are primarily pursued, namely, those of consumer and client» (Habermas, 1988, pp. 522-523).

The outcome of colonization is the substitution of discursive solidarity with functional compensations, which dismantle critical memory by privatizing it into forms of consumption and entertainment. This process, Habermas stresses, is neither homogeneous nor absolute. Yet when the conditions described above are fulfilled, the structures of meaning and legitimacy within the lifeworld undergo a progressive depletion, leading to the reification of social interactions and the disintegration of shared sense.

Habermas identifies two central mechanisms in this process of invasion: monetarization, which transforms social relations into commodities, and bureaucratization, which governs everyday life through formal systems of control. Christina W. Andrews (2011, p. 142) notes that the colonization of the lifeworld occurs precisely through these instruments, interfering with the process of socialization and distorting the normative foundations of social solidarity. As this systemic process autonomizes, it imposes depersonalized and externalized forms of coordination upon social interaction, breaking normative and symbolic ties that once sustained social life. Thus, “monetarization and bureaucratization affect the symbolic structure of the lifeworld in such a way

that they deform the use of language” (Habermas, 1988, p. 534). Without language as a medium of mutual understanding, cultural reproduction, social integration, and identity formation become unsustainable. Memory, dependent on narrative and discursive practices, is especially vulnerable to such deformation: lived experiences are converted into consumer commodities or administrative data, neutralizing their potential for critique and resistance.

This dynamic provides fertile ground for the emergence of so-called “social pathologies” [*Soziale Pathologien*]. These phenomena indicate the rupture of communicative mechanisms of social reproduction and become all the more visible when the potentials of cultural rationalization are instrumentalized “in the service of capitalist accumulation and bureaucratic-administrative control” (Habermas, 1988, p. 519). Systemic integration is certainly effective for the functional organization of society, but when it extends its scope and overflows beyond the sphere of material production into the symbolic domain of the lifeworld, it directly affects subject formation and cultural development – generating pathological effects on the principles of communication, integration, and social cohesion.

In this sense, the transition from market modernity to algorithmic modernity (a shift only briefly noted earlier), marks a decisive transformation in the structure of colonization itself. whereas market modernity relied primarily on commodification and bureaucratic mediation, algorithmic modernity introduces an additional layer of control that operates through data extraction, prediction, and behavioral modulation. These mechanisms no longer act merely upon institutions but intervene in the very production of subjectivity, authorship, and participation. As collective memory becomes digitized, the boundaries between individual recollection and public archive blur, generating new asymmetries of visibility and power. Processes of archiving, deinstitutionalization, and global circulation of memory (previously mediated by cultural institutions) are now increasingly determined by algorithmic infrastructures that decided what is preserved, amplified, or forgotten¹.

Hartmut Rosas’s theory of social acceleration (Rosa, 2013) provides a crucial complement to Habermas’s framework. Rosa argues that the constant acceleration of technological innovation, communication, and social change weakens the continuity of experience and thus undermines the very conditions for collective remembrance. From this perspective, algorithmic modernity intensifies the temporal pressure on memory, replacing enduring narratives with fleeting fragments. The acceleration of circulation and the contraction of attention spans erode the stability of symbolic transmission, producing what Rosa calls “desynchronization” between system and lifeworld. This desynchronization, I suggest, constitutes one of the most insidious pathologies of memory in digital capitalism: remembrance is not denied, but rendered structurally impossible.

In this respect, the thesis of colonization operates as an analytical bridge between processes of cultural rationalization (such as Max Weber’s *disenchantment of the world*) and the emergence of structurally entrenched forms of domination. The paradox is that rationalization itself, while releasing cognitive potentials, “opened the way for the disintegration of its communicative foundations” (Rehg, 1997, p. 173). Habermas leaves no doubt: “the colonization of the lifeworld can be interpreted as the result of the uncontrolled expansion of systems of purposive-rational action, which escape the normative control of participants” (Habermas, 1988, p. 516).

Systemic colonization does not merely represent the erosion of social normativity, but the hollowing out of the very possibility of mutual understanding – a central condition of communicative

¹ In the present discussion, I assume the expression “algorithmic modernity” as broadly equivalent to “platform capitalism” (Srnicek, 2017), designating a phase of capitalist modernity characterized by the convergence of digital infrastructures, data extraction, and predictive algorithms as the main mechanisms of accumulation and social coordination. This usage follows Habermas’s distinction between modernity and capitalist modernity (presented in *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, 1988, pp. 495-523), in which the rationalizing potentials of modernity are selectively appropriated by systemic imperatives. Similarly, algorithmic modernity represents a new phase of colonization, in which communicative rationality is subsumed under algorithmic rationalization – a process that extends the commodification and bureaucratization of the lifeworld into the digital domain. See also Zuboff (2019) on “surveillance capitalism” and Couldry & Mejias (2019) on “data colonialism”.

rationality. This reconfiguration intervenes in the processes of socialization that shape subjectivity and collective identity, affecting memory as a communicative practice. At this point, memory becomes a decisive field. Cultural fragmentation and social reification not only distort communication but also disfigure the ways in which societies remember and transmit collective experiences. Albrecht Wellmer (1991, p. 56) warns that “the imperatives of the system come to instrumentalise the lifeworld and threaten its destruction” – which, at the level of memory, means official narratives and suppress dissenting voices or cultures of consumption that transform historical traumas into media spectacles. Colonization thus marks the moment when objective social forms (such as money, power, and institutions) reproduce themselves autonomously, imposing their own logic that silences alternative discourse, historical narratives, and individual and collective memories – as Huyssen (1995, p. 25) cautions in his analysis of the “memory industry” that transforms traumatic events, such as the Holocaust, into commodities devoid of normative force.

The thesis of colonization therefore provides both an analytical framework for diagnosing forms of domination rendered invisible by systemic rationality and a normative foundation for social critique. Its strength lies in anchoring critique in a pragmatics of intersubjective understanding capable of resisting reified forms of coordination. This grammar, rooted in communicative action, does not seek to eliminate functional subsystems, but insists that their operation be tied to discursively generated legitimacy and robust regulatory frameworks.

The critical contribution of this article is to propose that, alongside the classical mechanisms of monetarization and bureaucratization, we must today recognize a third form of colonization: algorithmic fragmentation. This “third wave of colonization” is distinct, though interwoven with the previous ones. In the digitalization of the public sphere and the platformization of communication, a new layer of memory erosion emerges. The algorithmic capture of communication and subjectivity operates directly upon language, social reality, and history itself (and consequently memory), reshaping processes of meaning production and political will-formation through platforms and artificial intelligences. As Habermas warns in his most recent work “the new information technologies produces structural change in the conditions of discursive opinion-and-will-formation” (Habermas, 2022, p. 60). In this scenario, profit-driven algorithms select, promote, or conceal content, shaping selectively what is remembered and what is forgotten – a change directly linked to the fact that such algorithms are developed by private corporations oriented to profit, rather than by public institutions committed to the democratic sphere.

In this emerging configuration, memory itself becomes a terrain of social struggle. Following Nancy Fraser’s (2009) concept of “subaltern counterpublics”, we can interpret practices of remembrance as fields in which marginalized groups articulate alternative narratives that resist cultural hegemony. Similarly, Axel Honneth’s (1996) theory of recognition underscores that struggles over memory are constitutive of struggles for social esteem and self-respect: to be recognized as a subject capable of remembering is already to participate in the communicative construction of moral community. From this standpoint, the colonization of memory is not only a process of systemic distortion but also a conflictual arena in which counter-memories and emancipatory recollections continue to emerge.

At the present stage of colonization, we face not merely a prolongation of the commodification and bureaucratization of the lifeworld, but a qualitatively distinct form that acts directly upon the very processes of mutual understanding, reconfiguring language, epistemic production, and patterns of social recognition. George Orwell’s warning – “who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past” (Orwell, 1949, p. 37) – recalled by Habermas in *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, could well appear in his most recent writing as an even more urgent admonition. Today, the control anticipated by Orwell is exercised not only by totalitarian states, but by private platforms whose technical architectures condition collective memory. Habermas (2022, p. 74) speaks, in this regard, of a “new vulnerability of the digital public sphere”, where collective memory is reconfigured by private infrastructures of communication.

The case of the Holocaust illustrates the centrality of memory in this diagnosis. In the debates of the 1980s, Habermas defended the view that Auschwitz constitutes a foundational memory of German democratic identity (Habermas, 1987, p. 237). Historical denialism, in falsifying the past, not only distorts facts but undermines the normative reserves that sustain democracy. Today, digital forms of revisionism expand globally, replicating this threat on an unprecedented scale and corroding the link between memory and democratic deliberation.

Thus, systemic colonization can be systematized in three moments: (1) administration/bureaucracy; (2) market; (3) algorithms. In the first, the administrative subsystem imposes bureaucracy upon the lifeworld, reducing collective memory to formal records and technical classifications co-opted and manipulated by specialists or political agents. Habermas (1988, p. 343) had already warned that “excessive juridification leads to a formalization that empties solidarity of content” and showed how this process transforms lived experiences into administrative data, neutralizing their critical potential.

In the second, the economic subsystem commodifies memory, transforming it into a cultural product suited to consumer interests, aimed at increasing profit or expanding regulated consumer markets. Huyssen (1995, p. 25) observes that the “memory industry” tends to convert traumas into consumer goods – a critique that connects to Habermas’s (1992, p. 452) analysis of the weakening of the link between remembrance and deliberation, whereby critical narratives are transformed into media spectacles.

In the third, algorithmic mediation operates selectively upon collective narratives. Digital platforms select, promote, and even conceal content according to logics of attention and profitability, producing the fragmentation of shared narratives and fostering selective amnesias.

These three mechanisms converge towards the same effect: the erosion of memory as a communicative practice, emptying it of its normative and critical potential. Systemic colonization, in its new algorithmic form, not only threatens social solidarity but intervenes directly in the processes of meaning production, weakening the very possibility of mutual understanding and of deliberative democracy.

4. Normative and Institutional Proposals: Memory as a Democratic Public Good

Habermas’s diagnosis of systemic colonization reveals that it is not enough to describe the mechanisms of lifeworld depletion; it is also necessary to offer normative alternatives capable of restoring the eroded communicative potentials. When applied to the field of memory, this task becomes even more urgent, for remembrance constitutes a condition for collective self-reflection, intergenerational recognition, and the very symbolic reproduction of society. If memory is vulnerable to the forces of commodification, bureaucratization, and algorithmic capture, then the defence of its integrity must assume a central normative role.

The preceding analysis showed that the erosion of collective memory does not result solely from mechanisms of control, but from transformations in its very production and reproduction within digital capitalism. Normative responses must therefore operate not only as limits to systemic intrusions but also as enabling conditions for the renewal of communicative practices that sustain cultural continuity.

Habermas (1981, p. 137) argues that the validity of norms rests on the possibility of securing assent in inclusive discursive processes. By analogy, the validity of memory – understood as a communicative practice that transmits historical experiences and inherited normative contents – depends on its public circulation under conditions of discursive equality. Absent such conditions, memory tends to be reduced to a cultural commodity or to an instrument of political manipulation. Habermas’s critique thus finds here a privileged field of application: memory must be preserved as a living communicative practice, not as a commodity or as a crystallised archive.

Nancy Fraser (2009) underscores the need for subaltern public spheres, capable of resisting cultural hegemony and articulating counter-narratives. Axel Honneth (1996), for his part, emphasizes that struggles for recognition are intrinsically bound up with struggles over memory, since the recollection of traumas, injustices, and exclusions is a constitutive element of collective self-respect. Memory is thus not merely an object of cultural dispute, but a normative resource indispensable for social justice.

Both Fraser and Honneth extend the Habermasian framework by reintroducing conflict and recognition as constitutive dimensions of communicative life. While Habermas privileges discursive rationality as the ground for legitimacy, Fraser insists that public communication is always traversed by structural asymmetries of power and representation; hence, the formation of counter-publics is indispensable to resist hegemonic memory regimes. Honneth, conversely, interprets memory as a moral grammar of recognition, where struggles over remembrance become struggles for visibility and self-respect. Their insights complement the Habermasian emphasis on procedural legitimacy with a socio-moral attention to injustice, showing that the preservation of memory requires not only communicative inclusion but also the repair of distorted relations of recognition.

In light of these diagnoses, I propose five axes of action aimed at building a democratic politics of memory: deliberative forums, legal safeguards, digital regulation, education, and intergenerational transmission, and the consolidation of memory as a democratic public good. These axes are conceived in line with the *modus operandi* of the tradition of Critical Theory, and in accordance with the Habermasian framework of a critical theory of society. .

4.1. *Deliberative Forums of Memory*

Deliberative forums constitute the communicative dimension of memory politics. Inspired by Habermasian pragmatics, these spaces should be designed to promote the plural and inclusive participation of social actors in open processes of remembrance. As Habermas (1988, p. 85) affirms, solidarity can only be sustained when subjects mutually acknowledge one another's validity claims. Applied to memory, this means understanding it not as the mere accumulation of facts, but as a process of reciprocal recognition. Historical experiences confirm this thesis. "Truth Commissions" in Latin America, the South African "Truth and Reconciliation Commission", as well as more recent initiatives in Eastern Europe, demonstrate that memory acquires normative depth when articulated in public arenas of listening and contestation. Yet such forums cannot be treated as one-off events culminating in final reports. To avoid bureaucratic crystallisation, they must incorporate: (1) the periodic renewal of narratives; (2) intergenerational and intersectional inclusion; and (3) openness to marginal voices, often silenced in official processes.

Moreover, deliberative forums must incorporate the digital horizon. Initiatives of *memory activism* in virtual platforms – for example, the use of social networks to preserve testimonies of recent genocides or to denounce state-led erasures – show that today the public sphere of memory extends beyond physical spaces. This reinforces the need to guarantee its plurality and to prevent corporate algorithms from dictating the contours of what may or may not be remembered.

4.2. *Legal and Institutional Safeguards*

A second front of proposals lies in the legal-institutional sphere. Habermas (1992, p. 150) argues that fundamental rights function as institutional guarantees of the communicative practices that sustain democratic self-legislation. By analogy, memory must be protected through institutional arrangements that recognise it as part of the communicative conditions of democracy.

These safeguards involve at least three dimensions: (1) transparency and accountability, whereby memorial institutions, archives, museums, and documentation centres must operate under clear rules of acquisition, curation, and funding, preventing political or corporate capture; (2) public and equitable access, guaranteeing free access to documents, records, and testimonies, which are essential if memory is to remain a communicative resource rather than a privilege of cultural or political elites;

and (3) participatory governance, through management councils composed of civil society representatives, experts, and directly affected groups, capable of ensuring that institutionalized memory is not monopolized by states or corporations.

Jeffrey Olick (2007) cautions that collective memory is a contested field and therefore requires arrangements that preserve its openness. Andreas Huyssen (1995) adds that, without robust protections, the “memory industry” tends to reduce traumas to cultural products, dissolving their critical potential.

4.3. Democratic Regulation of Digital Infrastructures of Memory

In the current context, the most urgent front concerns the regulation of digital platforms, the central mediators of access to the past. By subjecting historical narratives to the logic of algorithmic personalization, these platforms fragment collective memory and subordinate it to criteria of profitability. Habermas (2022, p. 184) warns that when driven by the logic of attention, the digital public sphere “destroys the intersubjective character of opinion-formation”.

In this regards, three measures are central: (1) *algorithmic transparency*: requiring platforms to disclose their criteria for content curation; (2) *long-term digital preservation*: preventing the arbitrary deletion of historical materials, by establishing international standards of archiving; and (3) *protection of testimony*: safeguarding the integrity of victims’ and survivors’ voices against manipulation in disinformation campaigns. These measures can only be effective if based on transnational cooperation. Digital memory circulates in a global network, and its preservation cannot depend on isolated legal arrangements. At this point, Shoshana Zuboff’s (2019) contribution is fundamental: surveillance capitalism captures human experience as raw material, directly threatening democratic autonomy and, consequently, the integrity of memory.

4.4. Education and Intergenerational Transmission

A fourth axis, often neglected, is the role of education as the infrastructure of democratic memory. Without educational programmes that foster critical historical awareness, even institutional and digital safeguards remain fragile. Historical education must be conceived not only as the transmission of facts, but as the formation of communicative competences oriented towards public debate.

Habermas (2019a, p. 1120) reminds us that inherited normative contents remain alive only if they are discursively re-actualized. This mean that the teaching of traumatic events – genocides, slavery, dictatorships, etc. – must include spaces for debates, critique, and communicative appropriation by new generations. Initiatives in public history and participatory pedagogical practices fulfil this role, ensuring that memory does not become an inert tradition, but remains a living resource for democratic self-understanding.

4.5. Memory as a Democratic Public Good

Taken together, these proposals converge towards a normative conception of memory as a democratic public good. Like language, memory must be treated as a shared communicative infrastructure, not subject to exclusive appropriation by States, market, or corporate algorithms. Habermas (1988, p. 367) describes these conditions as “communication infrastructures that sustain civil society”.

To defend memory as a public good is not a mere cultural supplement: it is a condition of democracy itself. Without critical memory, there is no autonomous deliberation; without autonomous deliberation, there is no normative legitimacy. It is at this juncture that Habermas’s genealogy of reason (Habermas, 2019a; 2019b) connects with the present diagnosis: inherited normative contents are preserved only if there are discursively re-actualized. Memory, kept in communicative circulation, reinforces the collective capacity to resist the pathologies of modernity and to project more just and inclusive futures.

In this perspective, to defend memory as a public good is also to defend its productive autonomy – the collective capacity to generate, transmit, and reinterpret meanings beyond systemic imperatives. Only by recovering this generative dimension can memory fulfill its role as a communicative form of resistance to the ongoing colonization of the lifeworld.

Conclusion: Memory as a Normative Infrastructure of Deliberative Democracy

The theoretical and analytical trajectory developed in this article has sought to shift collective memory from the position of a mere archive to that of a communicative practice constitutive of the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld and, consequently, as an indispensable normative reserve for social critique and democratic self-legislation. This shift is not merely semantic: it entails recognizing that memory cannot subsist outside discursive practices that update, question, and reconstruct it. In Habermasian terms, remembering is an integral part of the discursive legitimation process; without memory in critical circulation, the conditions for public argumentation that make shared validity claims possible are lost.

A combined reading of *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* and *Auch Eine Geschichte der Philosophie* allows memory to be understood as a normative resource operating on two complementary layers. First, as a sedimented cultural repertoire – narratives, rituals, values – that provides criteria of understanding and interpretive frameworks. Second, as a practice of reflexive translation: traditions remain normatively alive only when translated and reconfigured in public language capable of generating critical assent. Habermas captures this issue by emphasising that modernity “lives off content that it did not produce itself, but translated from pre-modern sources”. The crucial point is that such content acquires normative force to the extent that it is reappropriated in communicative processes free from coercion.

The diagnosis of the three forms of colonization – administrative, mercantile, and algorithmic – must therefore also be read as a temporal and communicative diagnosis: all these colonizations produce risks of shortening historical horizons, eroding the argumentative depth of the public sphere, and transforming recollections into manageable, profitable, or customizable devices. Bureaucratization tends to reduce experiences to technical categories; commercialization stylises and fragments memories into spectacles; algorithmic colonization reconfigures attention ecologies and institutes regimes of visibility that produce selective amnesias. Collectively, these mechanisms promote memory pathologies: the reduction of the normative density of remembrance, the dilution of experiences of injustice into consumable formats, and the erosion of the deliberative capacity necessary for democracy.

It is essential to acknowledge that resistance to colonization is never purely procedural: it unfolds within fields of conflict, recognition, and power. Nancy Fraser’s conception of counter-publics and Axel Honneth’s theory of recognition clarify that the struggle for memory is simultaneously a struggle for justice. Memory, as a communicative practice, is thus always situated in asymmetrical contexts, where some voices are privileged and others silenced. Recognising this conflictual dimension does not weaken the Habermasian model but renders it more historically and politically responsive: the rational reappropriation of memory presupposes both the inclusion of marginalized perspectives and the rectification of past injustices.

From a theoretical standpoint, three critical implications emerge clearly from this investigation. The first is that the thesis of lifeworld colonization must be updated to incorporate the centrality of digital infrastructures and the role of algorithms in reconfiguring collective symbolic resources. The “third wave” of colonization proposed here does not replace the previous ones but operates in intersection with monetarization and bureaucratization, distinguishing itself by directly affecting the conditions of production, circulation, and reception of meanings. The second implication is epistemological: the erosion of memory is also a problem of epistemic injustice – it silences testimonies, marginalizes subaltern perspectives, and structures hierarchies of credibility that weaken social recognition. The third implication is normative: defending memory simultaneously means

defending communicative rights (such as access, preservation, participation, etc.) that sustain democratic self-legislation.

Based on these premises, the defence of memory as a public good demands an articulated set of institutional and normative responses, guided by three interdependent principles:

1. *Protection of the plurality of voices and contestability*: Memory remains alive only if open to critical dispute. This requires institutionalised deliberative forums (such as promoted by “deliberative design”) that combine active listening, transgenerational participation, and mechanisms of public controversy capable of preventing both bureaucratic ritualisation and spectacular commercialisation. Memory commissions, advisory councils with civil representation, and pedagogical processes oriented toward controversy are complementary measures in this direction.

2. *Legal guarantees as safeguards of memorial integrity*: It is necessary to establish legal instruments that ensure participatory governance of archives and museums, transparency in acquisition and curatorial policies, free public access to collections, and protection of testimony against instrumentalisation. In line with the argumentative framework Habermas presents in *Faktizität und Geltung*, such guarantees must function as “institutional guarantees” of the communicative practices that sustain democratic self-legislation.

3. *Democratic regulation of digital infrastructures*: Platforms that mediate access to the past today bear public responsibilities proportional to their power to shape memories. This requires norms of algorithmic transparency (explainability and auditing), obligations for the preservation of public interest (interoperability standards and long-term preservation), mechanisms to curb disinformation, and legal protections for the integrity of testimonies (rights to non-manipulation and contextualisation). Furthermore, public digital infrastructures – repositories and networks of public curation – must be promoted to provide counterpoints to private memory ecologies.

In addition to these principles, a further implication arises from Hartmut Rosa’s theory of social acceleration: the temporality of late modernity, marked by compression and simultaneity, corrodes the very rhythm of remembrance. The acceleration of communicative exchanges and the volatility of digital attention undermine the capacity for narrative continuity and critical reflection. To resist this temporal pathology, democratic institutions must cultivate what Rosa terms ‘resonance’: the capacity to sustain meaningful temporal relations with the past. Thus, defending memory as a public good also entails defending temporal infrastructures of reflection against the accelerated reproduction of meaning imposed by digital capitalism.

These measures do not exhaust the agenda but point to the need to treat memory as an infrastructure – not only symbolic but also material, legal, and technological – that sustains civil society and the public sphere. In this regard, institutional reforms must be combined with educational policies that strengthen competencies in critical reading of history, media literacy, and memorial citizenship practices. Historical education, conceived not as the transmission of immutable truths but as training in critical controversy and recognition of interpretative pluralities, is a key element in preserving living normative reserves.

From a critical-theoretical perspective, it is equally important to emphasize the negative function of memory: its critical and dissonant dimension – what Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin insisted on preserving – constitutes a condition for memory not to turn into mythification or commodity. Adorno warned that remembrance must retain the weight of tragic experience (as in the example of Auschwitz) to prevent the recurrence of domination structures. Benjamin, in turn, urged us to “brush history against the grain” to recover subaltern voices. Critical memory, therefore, does not seek consensus at any cost, but rather fair and discursive conditions of contestation that allow for the emergence of robust moral and political judgments.

It is precisely in this tension between consensus and contestation that the communicative potential of memory resides. A critical theory of memory must recognize that remembrance is a dialogical and agonistic field: it preserves its emancipatory power only when the plurality of perspectives remains audible. Thus, the goal is not harmony but discursive justice: a public space where conflicting interpretations of the past can coexist under conditions of reciprocal recognition.

The practical implications for democratic vitality are compelling. Societies whose public memories are fragmented or captured – by official bureaucracies, cultural industries, or private platforms – tend to lose the capacity of civil society to aggregate demands, form deliberative opinions, and sustain recognition processes. In contexts of accelerated polarization, the weakening of normative reserves and the fragmentation of the past open space for authoritarian strategies of reinterpretation or historical manipulation for present legitimizations. To counter this trend, memory politics must be an integral part of any robust democratic agenda.

In sum, treating memory as a democratic public good is to recognize it as the normative infrastructure of deliberative democracy. Protecting this infrastructure requires legal instruments, deliberative institutions, and technological regulations that ensure plurality, preservation, and contestability. Only by preserving memory in its communicative dimension – open, plural, and critical – can the past be restored to an emancipatory function, capable of guiding present political action and preserving spaces of critique against successive forms of lifeworld colonization.

Ultimately, defending memory is defending public time: a time in which narratives intersect, arguments are confronted, testimonies are heard, and validity claims can be discussed under reasonable conditions. Without this public time, the democratic promise loses its normative support. Memory, far from being a mere relic of the past, must be treated as a praxis of resistance – a field where the practice of communicative freedom is continuously rehearsed.

This conclusion is intended not only to suit the article developed here but also to remain faithful to the tradition of Critical Theory. Since its classical formulation by Max Horkheimer in *Traditionelle und kritische Theorie* (1937), Critical Theory has assumed the dual task of diagnosing social pathologies and elaborating normative prognoses oriented towards emancipation. Habermas, in *Theorie des Kommunikativen Handelns* (1981; 1988), resumes and radicalizes this task by reconnecting critique and emancipation to the grammar of communication, shifting the axis of critique from political economy to the conditions of linguistic intersubjectivity. If Horkheimer defined critical theory by its refusal of neutrality and its demand for social transformation, Habermas expands this horizon by offering a procedural criterion of communicative rationality capable of grounding diagnoses of colonization and, at the same time, opening prognoses for emancipated social practice. In his most recent work, *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie* (2019a; 2019b), even though the focus falls on the genealogy of reason and normativity, the gesture remains faithful to this tradition: the historical-critical reconstruction of the normative sources of modernity is not a mere erudite exercise but a critical resource for projecting conditions of self-understanding and self-renewal of democratic societies.

In this sense, the present investigation situates itself in the lineage of critical theory: not only to diagnose the mechanisms of erosion of collective memory but also to propose institutional and communicative prognoses that reinforce its preservation as a democratic public good.

By resuming the tradition that runs from Horkheimer to Habermas, this article reaffirms the central task of critical theory: not only to offer rigorous diagnoses of social pathologies but also to elaborate prognoses capable of orienting emancipatory practices. In this sense, the analysis presented sought to show that critique is not exhausted in the denunciation of the forms of colonization of the lifeworld but projects itself as a normative horizon for social transformations. Critical theory thus remains a discipline that links reflection and action, sustaining the promise that reason can be mobilized in favor of justice and emancipation.

If social critique must both diagnose pathologies and project horizons of emancipation, memory play a decisive role in this process. More than a simple record of the past, it operates as a normative resource capable of illuminating injustices, keeping historical responsibility alive, and orienting practices of solidarity. It is in this interweaving of critique and memory that critical theory finds its current force: to transform remembrance into potentials of resistance and into conditions of possibility for more just societies.

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Fidelity to Absence: Marrano Memory as Counter-History

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Abstract. This article theorizes Marrano crypto-Judaism through the lens of Walter Benjamin's messianic philosophy, proposing the Marrano condition as emblematic of "objectless anamnesis", a memory stripped of content yet charged with ethical exigency. Engaging the Jewish imperative of *Zakhor*, it contends that Marranos sustain redemptive potential not through codified ritual but through gesture, narrative, and silent transmission. Benjamin's concept of *Eingedenken* frames this as a form of political-theological resistance, fracturing historicism's "homogeneous time" and sustaining the "weak messianic power" to redeem historical ruins. Marrano secrecy, mirroring Benjamin's hidden theology, calls for an allegorical hermeneutics capable of decoding their silence, exile, and transmission without substance. Ultimately, Marranism reconfigures exile as a site of counter-historical threshold, where silence becomes an indictment of triumphalist temporality. Through Benjamin's "secret appointment", this intergenerational memory opens onto a radical, diasporic cosmopolitanism, in which justice, perpetually deferred, remains insistently imminent.

Keywords: Marranism; anamnesis; Walter Benjamin; messianism; *Zakhor*; secrecy; counter-history; remembrance; crypto-Judaism; temporality.

Riassunto. Il presente contributo propone una rilettura del cripto-giudaismo marrano attraverso la lente della filosofia messianica di Walter Benjamin, assumendo la condizione marrana come figura paradigmatica di un'anamnesi senza oggetto, una memoria spogliata totalmente di contenuti positivi, ma intensamente investita di urgenza etica. Alla luce dell'imperativo ebraico *Zakhor*, si sostiene che i Marrani preservino un potenziale redentivo non mediante ritualità codificate, ma bensì attraverso il gesto, il racconto e la trasmissione silenziosa. Il concetto benjaminiano di *Eingedenken* configura questa forma di memoria come pratica politico-teologica capace di infrangere il "tempo omogeneo" dello storicismo e di mantenere attiva la "debole forza messianica" cui il passato rivolge la propria istanza. La segretezza marrana, in risonanza con la teologia occulta di Benjamin, esige un'ermeneutica allegorica capace di interpretare il silenzio, l'esilio e la trasmissione svuotata di contenuto non come mere assenze ma come forme attive di significazione. In questa prospettiva, il marranismo si configura come soglia contro storica, entro la quale l'esilio diviene il luogo in cui la frattura della tradizione genera aperture inedite nella linearità del tempo storico. Attraverso la "segreta intesa" tra le generazioni evocata da Benjamin, la memoria marrana si declina come vincolo trans-temporale, inaugurando una forma radicale di cosmopolitismo diasporico in cui la giustizia, per quanto eternamente procrastinata, insiste come possibilità messianica latente.

Parole chiave: Marranismo; Anamnesi; Walter Benjamin; messianismo; *zakhor*; segretezza; controstoria; ricordo; cripto giudaismo; temporalità.

The Marrano Condition

The term "Marrano," of debated etymology, designates the Jews of the Iberian Peninsula who were forcibly converted to Catholicism, initially on a massive scale following the pogroms of 1391, and subsequently after the Alhambra Decree of 1492, which mandated their expulsion from the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon. This decree presented the Jews remaining in Spain with the trilemma of exile, death, or baptism. In those tumultuous days, while many chose exile, dispersing throughout North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, and Italy, thousands became "baptized while standing" (*battezzati in piedi*; Silvera 2013, 120) after enduring days of imprisonment without sustenance. Cecil Roth, in his *History of the Marranos* (Roth 1932, 41), reconstructed the principal etymological hypotheses surrounding the term, highlighting how the very plurality of interpretations reflects the profound

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ambivalence inherent to Marrano identity. The Judaizing *conversos*—those who, while presenting a Christian façade in public, continued, despite their baptism, to maintain a distinct form of Jewish life in private—incarnated this Marrano duality, thereby exposing themselves to forms of exclusion from both sides: from the Jewish community, on grounds of their perceived betrayal, and from Christian society. These *conversos* thus embodied a paradoxical existential condition: formally integrated into Christian society, many secretly continued to practice various elements of Judaism, giving rise to the complex phenomenon of crypto-Judaism. From this perspective, Marranism was not merely a matter of forced conversion but rather a laboratory of identity transformation wherein secrecy and memory played a foundational role.

In his studies on the crypto-Jews, David Gitlitz emphasizes how the isolation of the *conversos'* descendants from traditional Judaism and their immersion within a Christian context precipitated profound transformations in the fundamental principles of their faith. Stripped of access to texts for educating new generations, the possibility of attending Talmudic schools to deepen their understanding of Jewish law, and the communal framework for Sabbath study, the crypto-Jews were compelled to rely exclusively on memory to preserve their religious practices (Bielik-Robson 2019). In this context, secret prayer became an essential component of their devotion. However, they continued to direct their worship solely to the God of Israel and to consider themselves followers of Mosaic law; they at times incorporated Christian elements into their invocations, which were often recited in Latin or Spanish. Indeed, Marrano religiosity was characterized by a creative adaptation to persecutory conditions, developing what Donatella Di Cesare terms a "faith by subtraction" (Di Cesare 2020, 52)—a faith constituted by simplified rites, focused on easily concealable practices such as fasting, and marked by a heightened attention to a more intimate form of devotion, a religiosity described as "intimate religiosity characterized by secrecy – one that was confined to the private and interior sphere." (Di Cesare 2020, 49). Latin prayers, rituals transformed into daily gestures devoid of explicit explanation, and Hebrew names preserved only within the family sphere all became signs of a memory persisting in silence, of a past surviving solely in an encoded form. Where transmission is interrupted and words can no longer be spoken openly, the past ceases to be a guaranteed inheritance and becomes instead a task – something that can be recovered only through a labor of decipherment and reinterpretation. In this sense, we argue that this dynamic prefigures a central problem: namely, the relationship to the past in an era of discontinuity. When history can no longer be lived or conceived as an unbroken line, it transforms into a field of fragments, a fragmented collective memory that, in the case of the Marrano, was transmitted through family narratives and concealed symbols.

The studies of Yosef Yerushalmi and Nathan Wachtel have demonstrated precisely how Marrano memory was transmitted through a hybrid linguistic code, wherein the unspoken and the implied became essential instruments of communication, capable of forging an invisible community founded upon complicity and the sharing of an esoteric knowledge. Encryption became a mode of existence, a practice that establishes an oblique relationship with truth and transforms clandestinity into a form of thought. In this sense, we can conceive of Marranism not only as a condition endured but also as a potential for rupture in the face of every dogmatic system. Marrano memory functions not as a mere act of preservation, but as an act of resistance against a dominant power that sought to erase their identities. It is within this context of persecution, secrecy, and submerged transmission that the "memory without content," which is the object of our inquiry, takes shape.

Ritual Time and the Ethics of Remembrance

Within the Jewish tradition, remembrance transcends mere mnemonic exercise, constituting instead a divine imperative, a constitutive practice that underpins communal cohesion. Far from a passive or sentimental retrospection, it operates as an active reenactment, materialized through discursive, ritualistic, and narrative modalities, as well as through a hermeneutic of temporal justice (Di Cesare 2020, 108). To comprehend the resilience of Marrano memory, one must first recognize that remembrance functions not as a mere individual or psychological faculty, but as a social fact in

the most profound sense of the term. This foundational insight, articulated by Maurice Halbwachs, posits that memory is constructed and sustained within specific "social frameworks" (*cadres sociaux*) - institutions like family, religion, and class - which provide the necessary structures and contexts for recollection. The Jewish tradition of *Zakhor*, with its ritual repetitions and liturgical calendar, constitutes a powerful, highly structured example of such frameworks. The historical predicament of the Marranos, however, represents the paradoxical limit-case of this very principle: it is the social fact of memory persisting through the systematic demolition of its visible social frameworks. Stripped of the synagogue, the public community, canonical texts, and open transmission, the Marranos were forced to reconstitute their mnemonic social frameworks within the clandestine sphere of the household and the shared secret of the family. Their collective memory thus became a concealed social fact - a fragmented framework kept alive by the pure form of intergenerational relation and obligation, demonstrating how the social imperative to remember can endure even when all its institutional supports have been obliterated.

As Donatella Di Cesare underscores, "Recollection is not contingent but is the hinge around which the community revolves" (Di Cesare 2020, 107). This mandate to remember reverberates insistently throughout the Torah, functioning as a bulwark against the inexorable pull of oblivion.¹ Di Cesare delineates a critical distinction between remembrance (*zakhor*), a collective mandate, and memory as an individual cognitive faculty. Memory can fade; it is "instinctive and unreflective, left up to the spontaneity of the individual" (Di Cesare 2020, 108). Remembrance, by contrast, is institutionalized through the community's ritual repetitions: a dialectic wherein "one remembers by observing, one observes by remembering" (Di Cesare 2020, 108). The imperative *Shamor*² ("guarding" or "observing") thus assumes a politico-theological dimension, urging those who did not directly experience the founding events to recall them, to keep their trace alive, and to transmit their meaning. Ritual observance, the recitation of the *Haggadah*, and the cyclical celebration of festivals thereby transcend commemoration, emerging as mechanisms of cultural endurance and as practices through which a community defiantly negotiates the erosive currents of history.

The Jewish tradition, through this hermeneutic mechanism, liberates the liturgical calendar from natural cyclicity, reinscribing it with the irruption of historicity. Major festivals, such as *Pesach* or *Yom Kippur*, are not reducible to calendrical markers but function as temporal thresholds through which the past erupts into the present to reorient the future. As Yerushalmi contends, Judaism does not merely archive the past; it reactivates it. During *Pesach*, the Exodus from Egypt is not commemorated as a distant event but relived performatively through the *Haggadah*, transfiguring liberation into an eternally open horizon (Yerushalmi 1982, 44). Jewish liturgical time thus eludes both linearity and circularity, embodying instead a repetition with difference; each annual observance unfolds within altered contexts, refracting new generational traumas, hermeneutic exigencies, and redemptive possibilities. This temporal modality aligns with Benjamin's conception of messianic time, a differential repetition that fractures historical continuity, preserving the immanent potential for redemption.

¹ See, for example, the remembrance of the dead in Jewish liturgy (*Yizkor*, *El Male Rahamim*), tied to the conception of the soul (*nefesh*) as fragile and contingent. Memory does not merely preserve the past but opens onto an eschatological dimension: Gan Eden and the World to Come (*Olam Ha,ba*) are not simply consolatory representations but connect to the justice of remembrance and the hope of redemption.

² The two biblical verbs "*Shamor*" (to guard) and "*Zakhor*" (to remember) appear in the two Sabbath commandments, in Deut. 5,12 and Exod. 20,8, respectively. In Rabbinic exegetical tradition, these verbs are interpreted as having been spoken by God simultaneously (*shamor ve,zakhor be,dibur echad*), a formulation found in the *Lecha Dodi*, a liturgical hymn by the Sephardic kabbalist Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz. This signifies the dual nature of Shabbat: on one hand, *Zakhor*, active, liturgical memory tied to the remembrance of Creation and the Exodus from Egypt, expressed through festive rituals; on the other, "*Shamor*", silent guardianship and abstention from labour. These verbs are fundamental to biblical Hebrew vocabulary, both associated with the Sabbath commandment yet carrying distinct meanings and functions. In Jewish mysticism, "*Zakhor*" is linked to memory as openness and commemoration, while "*Shamor*" implies defensive, silent vigilance, akin to 'guarding' something that cannot be spoken. Notably, in the Marrano context, where "*Zakhor*", understood as public, liturgical, and festive remembrance, was forbidden or suppressed, only "*Shamor*" could endure: a secret, fragmented, silent observance entrusted to individual memory and concealed practice.

Memory without Content, Fidelity without Form

It is precisely here that Benjamin's philosophy converges with the historical predicament of the Marranos. His notion of *Eingedenken*, remembrance-with and for the vanquished, transcends mere commemoration, constituting a political-theological praxis of retroactive justice. Benjamin repudiates memory as inert preservation, advocating instead a mnemonic act that rearticulates and actualizes the past, detonating it into the present as a constellation of meaning. Such remembrance does not nostalgically recollect; it redeems. It transcends survival, gesturing toward the messianic "weak force" of redemption; "the recount is already to redeem, and history is already a reparation" (Di Cesare 2020, 108). The task is not to memorialize the defeated as relics of a concluded past but to think alongside them in the now, rupturing the triumphalist continuum of history. Through Benjamin's lens, Jewish memory³ is thus constitutively futural: every act of remembrance imposes an ethical demand to hold fast to what was lost so that it might yet become.

This responsibility constitutes an ethical imperative, for the past is not merely revived but reanimated through a hermeneutic of repetition, not as static recurrence but as "repetition-with-a-difference". Language, in this schema, becomes the medium through which remembrance evades oblivion; within its discursive matrix, the past is not petrified into inert imagery but sustained as a promissory note, a latent possibility of return. Within Jewish tradition, language operates not as a descriptive tool but as a performative act; it forges covenantal bonds, institutes communal identity, and perpetuates the dialectic of divine-human reciprocity. The recounting of Israel's liberation from Egypt, for instance, transcends mere chronicle; it reanimates the present through the axiomatic conviction that every oppression remains surmountable. Successive generations join in narrating the Exodus as though they had emerged from bondage, a mnemonic praxis that transposes the past into a transformative present, a now-time (*Jetztzeit*) charged with confronting and reconstituting historical contingency.

This conception of time crystallizes in Benjamin's notion of *Jetztzeit*—a 'now-time' that blasts open the continuum of history. Benjaminian philosophy shatters this schema and forcefully asserts the idea that every moment contains within itself a revolutionary opportunity, a chance, provided it is seized as the opening of a new task irreducible to the mere continuity of the past. As suggested by Gershom Scholem, Benjamin here draws upon the Jewish mystical tradition that projected the messianic utopia into the present moment. Redemption was thus re-evaluated: from an event placed at the end of times, a passive expectation to be procrastinated into an uncertain future, to a real possibility that the Messiah could erupt at any moment. (Scholem, 1941, p. X). This radical immanence of the messianic is what charges the 'weak messianic power' of every generation with such urgent responsibility. The Marrano's secret observance, a punctual and hidden fidelity outside the linear flow of official history, becomes a lived embodiment of this very *Jetztzeit*—a perpetual, concealed readiness for redemption (Scholem 1986, 117).

³ Marc H. Ellis similarly emphasizes that, within the biblical tradition, memory is not primarily a relationship with the past but an act oriented toward the present and future. 'Its primordial bond is with a present that projects itself toward the future' (*Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation*, Baylor University Press, Waco, 2004). Here, memory is conceived as an ethical and transformative force; to remember means not merely to retain in mind but to *take into account*, to assume active responsibility in the face of history and its wounds, and to respond to the call of justice. In this framework, memory becomes a praxis that transforms suffering into testimony, survival into resistance, and history into *theophany*, a revelation of the divine as justice that summons the subject to choose, as in the Deuteronomistic tradition, between life and death, blessing and curse. This conception deeply intertwines with the Benjaminian idea of remembrance (*Eingedenken*), understood as a critical and revolutionary act capable of redeeming fragments of the past and opening a messianic breach in historical time. It reimagines the call to life against all forms of unjust death.

However, the Marrano condition is defined precisely by the foreclosure of this commandment's conventional fulfillment; rituals are proscribed, texts eradicated, dates encrypted, and language itself rendered illegible. Paradoxically, it is within this existential fissure that remembrance assumes its most radical valence. In such a state of clandestine ontology, memory mutates into a "recollection of the secret" (Di Cesare 2020, 111), a mnemonic act divested of ritual scaffolding yet bound by its unrelenting imperative. The Marrano becomes the custodian of an unknowable legacy, the witness to an unspeakable testimony, and the transmitter of an unpossessable inheritance. This memory is objectless, an anamnesis unmoored from content, grounded solely in the ethical exigency to remember *qua* remembrance, a fidelity to absence that, in its very negation, inscribes the trace of what has been effaced.

This form of memory, stripped of concrete content yet saturated with immanent imperative, finds resonant expression in a seminal Hasidic narrative attributed to the *Ba'al Shem Tov*.⁴ The tale traces the progressive erosion of ritual gestures, sacred spaces, and liturgical language across generations. Ultimately, only the narration of remembrance itself persists. Significantly, even this terminal act, the recounting of absence, retains vestigial efficacy, as though still channelling the ritual's primordial power. In this culminating gesture, remembrance crystallizes as hyperbolic fidelity; no longer directed toward specific content but toward transmission *qua* transmission. Memory thus severs its referential anchors, enduring as a pure remnant, an evacuated yet insistent structure whose indeterminacy becomes meaning generative. Herein lies the radicality of Marrano anamnesis, it conserves not tradition's substantive corpus but its empty form. This constitutes not remembrance of something, but rather remembrance of remembrance itself, a meta-mnemonic praxis where absence sustains ethical persistence.

The nature of this messianism, however, requires clarification. It deliberately oscillates between historical immanence and a force that shatters the continuum of history. To grasp its complexity, it is necessary to turn to the work of Gershom Scholem. He maintained that the messianic idea represented a fundamentally transformative and catastrophic power that erupts into history from without. Benjamin secularizes and radically reworks this theological concept. His is not a messianism that awaits a transcendent savior, but neither is it one that resolves entirely into the immanent flow of historical progress. Rather, it articulates what may be defined as an immanent messianism of interruption. The weak messianic force is a potentiality inherent to time, whose activation requires a rupture—one that blasts open the homogeneous and empty continuum of the victors' history. In this rupture, the unfulfilled past and the possible future converge in a charged constellation of now-time. This constitutes not a vertical transcendence pointing to an afterlife, but a horizontal and diagonal transcendence, sought in the fractures and folds of profane time itself, wherever the defeated of history advance their claim for justice. The secret of the Marrano, vibrating in the interstices of loss, becomes precisely a fracture of such magnitude.

⁴ See S.Y. Agnon, Preface to *The Stories of the Baal Shem Tov*, Florence: Giuntina, 1995: «When the Baal Shem Tov needed to fulfil a difficult task, something secret for the sake of creation, he would go to a place in the woods, light a fire, recite prayers, absorbed in meditation, and everything would be accomplished according to his intent. A generation later, when the Maggid of Mezritch faced the same task, he returned to that place in the woods and said: «We can no longer light the fire, but we can recite the prayers», and everything unfolded as he desired. After another generation, when Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov had to fulfill the same task, he too went into the woods and said: «We can no longer light the fire, nor do we know the secret meditations that once enlivened the prayers. But we know the place in the woods where all this happened, and that must suffice.» And indeed, it sufficed. Yet another generation later, when Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin faced the same task, he sat upon a golden throne in his castle and said: «We cannot light the fire, we cannot recite the prayers, and we no longer know the place in the woods. But we can tell the story of all this.» And his storytelling alone held the same efficacy as the actions of the other three.

Messianic Disruption and the Politics of the Secret

«Ruins and fragments become allegories of a redemptive possibility, one that concerns the awakening of consciousness [...]. Through its catastrophic apperception, a wound opens within historical time. It is the awareness of this wound that transforms catastrophic time into messianic time. But such a transformation is unthinkable without a memorial gesture of thought. In the act of remembrance, the anthropological and theological dimensions [...] are welded into a single figure» (Desideri 2018, 104).

Within the clandestine existence of Marranos, every gesture, every whispered utterance, every ritual fragment constitutes hyperbolic resistance. The secret, devoid of content, paradoxically sustains the very possibility of transmission, a concept resonating with Kabbalistic linguistics, where words function not as signifiers of fixed meaning but as generative forces, spiritual forms that enact creation. Here, language transcends referentiality, becoming a world-shaping praxis. What matters ceases to be communicable content, shifting instead toward relationality between concepts.

Benjamin inherits and transfigures this legacy into a theory of messianic purity, in which salvation emerges not from doctrine but from contentless tension, an intentionality divorced from outcome. What endures is not knowledge but the preservation of relation. Memory thus merges with secrecy; “the secret of recollection becomes the recollection of the secret” (Di Cesare 2020, 111). Through marranism persists the faintest thread binding present to past, an echo of covenant persisting beyond comprehension. Deprived of the canonical instruments of cultural transmission, the Marranos emerge as witnesses to void, bearers of an aporetic “secret of the secret” that binds them through silence, exile, dispersion. Nonetheless, within this radical dispossession resides messianic potential. When cognition dissolves and only the formal gesture endures, a rupture in historical continuity becomes conceivable, shattering modernity’s illusory linearity, which Benjamin relentlessly decried. In his Sixth Thesis, Benjamin evokes the possibility that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if the victor continues to triumph:

«Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious» (Benjamin 1968, 254).

Here, Marrano existence embodies Benjamin’s warning. Their fragmented remembrance, devoid of content yet saturated with obligation, defies the victors’ narrative. What persists is not doctrine but the trace of the covenant: a messianic charge vibrating in the interstices of loss. In this void, where tradition survives as pure form, history’s continuum fractures. The Marrano’s silence becomes counter-history; their secrecy, an unspoken indictment against triumphalist teleologies. For Benjamin, such tenuous fidelity harbors revolutionary force, the “weak messianic power” to redeem the past’s unredeemed claims through the sheer insistence of remembering (Benjamin 1968, 254). Thus, Marranism transforms deprivation into dialectical leverage. Where coherent testimony proves impossible, the refusal to forget becomes the last messianic spark, a formal resistance that, like Benjamin’s angel of history, gazes backward to gather the ruins while being propelled into a future unclaimed by the victors.

In this sense, the image proposed by Bielik-Robson (Bielik-Robson 2020, 11) of a Benjaminian theology that liquefies, through the ink of writing, lends itself well to rendering the image of a secret that remains in shadow to safeguard its purest essence. From this perspective, fidelity to the original message requires the betrayal of its institutionalized form, for it is only by immersing oneself within the hidden tradition that its revolutionary charge can be preserved.

The lament, as an expression of the unfulfilled and a demand for justice from the oppressed past, acquires a particular splendor in the act of remembrance. This idea was anticipated in an early text by Gershom Scholem, who asserted: 'Only in lament does darkness shine.' (Scholem 2005, 295) Remembrance, as a central element of the theological conception of Jewish history, is what would allow for the anticipation of the Messiah's coming, since «Every second is the small gateway through which the Messiah might enter. The hinge of this gate is recollection. » (Benjamin 2003, 397) For Benjamin, therefore, redemption is not something situated at the end of history, but an event that can erupt into the present at any instant. As Scholem suggested, Benjamin draws on the Jewish mystical tradition that awaited the Messiah's imminent advent, projecting utopia into the present moment. Redemption does not appear as something placed at the end of time - a passive expectation to be postponed into an uncertain future - but as a real possibility for the unexpected to irrupt at any moment. If for Rosenzweig, without the will to anticipate the Messiah's coming, the future appears merely 'as a past dragged out to an infinite length and projected forward,' for Benjamin, conversely, what is at stake is the past itself, wherein lie unexploded splinters of the future; in the disappointed hopes of past generations, Benjamin sees the very ground upon which humanity plants its dreams.

Emerging from this dialectic of secrecy and void, where tradition persists as trace rather than substance, the Marranos epitomize a messianic threshold: custodians of Judaism's "final sparks"⁵, not through salvific content but through the silent bearing of the unforgettable. Their secret, devoid of content yet charged with potency, operates as pure relationality; in the act of guarding without revealing, they unleash a force transcending conventional cultural transmission. This bond is simultaneously temporal and spatial, forging invisible continuity between generations who, though severed from dialogue, remain constitutively entangled in mutual expectation. Herein lies Benjamin's "secret agreement" (Benjamin 1968, 254), a transtemporal covenant unfolding in history's fractures, where the Marrano gesture inscribes itself as a meaningful interruption.

Within such broken temporality, memory reconstitutes itself not as linear continuity but as counter-historical expectancy. Where tradition lies shattered and time fragmented, Marrano existence sustains the possibility of rekindling, not through archives but through gesture and fragment. The past here orients itself toward redemption: an intergenerational encounter demanding radical responsibility. As Benjamin asserts: «Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim» (Benjamin 1968, 254). Thus, Marrano memory reconfigures not only temporality but spatiality, extending the intergenerational bond into a radical cosmopolitan horizon, where exile becomes the condition for a justice yet to come.

Focusing on the discontinuity of tradition and its relationship with memory, Stéphane Mosès contrasts the linear temporality of historical causality with the time of generations, a discontinuous, non-cumulative temporality marked by a transmission that does not follow a direct order from fathers to sons but instead unfolds in the oblique bond between grandparents and grandchildren. Mosès articulates this as follows:

«To the continuous and irreversible temporality postulated by historical causality is opposed the time of generations, discontinuous and reversible, symbolized by the double bond of the grandfather with the grandson and the grandson with the grandfather: discontinuity of a transmission that [...] immediately unites the ancestor with the generation of the grandchildren; reversibility of a non-cumulative time, in which the grandson, bypassing the generation of the fathers, reconnects directly with the teachings of the forebears» (Moses 1993, 97-98).

⁵ The reference to "final sparks" alludes to the Lurianic Kabbalistic myth of *nitzotzot* (divine sparks) scattered and imprisoned in matter following the "Shattering of the Vessels" (*Shevirat ha-kelim*).

This dynamic manifests with particular intensity in the reality of the Shoah, where the transmission of memory, frequently fractured between survivors and their progeny, appears to regain potency in the subsequent generation of grandchildren. It is as though the generational distance enables them to reactivate the memory in a distinct form, one less directly burdened by the immediate trauma and thereby capable of renewed resonance, narration, and preservation. In this sense, memory does not conform to a linear progression but instead advances through discontinuities, echoes, and reiterations.

For this compelling reason, the Marranos may be considered not merely as the final remnants of a historical Jewish continuity, but also, in a deeply Benjaminian sense, as the inaugural witnesses to an alternative, emergent history. A history that does not conform to the criteria of progress and does not submit to dominant chronology but that patiently awaits, within the quietude of silence and dispersion, the time of interruption, the time of redemption.

Benjamin's theological conception of redemption, especially in his Second Thesis, shifts the focus from individual salvation to a collective, historical task. Redemption is not retrospective nostalgia but an active, ethical demand inscribed within the structure of history itself. Every image of happiness bears a secret agreement pointing toward the unrealized hopes of past generations. Against any teleology that accepts defeat as final, Benjamin insists that the past remains open to justice; the "unfinished past" still demands to be redeemed. This messianic potential emerges through *Eingedenken*, a form of remembrance that interrupts the homogeneous flow of time and reactivates lost possibilities. In this framework, memory resists oblivion not by preserving content but by bearing witness to what was silenced. Recollection becomes a revolutionary gesture, redemptive not in spite of its fragmentary nature but because of it.

The imperative task of the present generation is thus to redeem the suffering of the ancestors by enacting a *Jetztzeit*, a messianic interruption of time capable of breaking the continuity of history. The very image of redemption intertwined with that of recollection (*Eingedenken*); Benjamin conceives redemption primarily as the remembrance of the victims of the past. In this practice, a peculiar form of theological experience emerges: in remembering, the human being performs a gesture that, while situated within the profane realm, nonetheless belongs intrinsically to the sacred.

Benjaminian recollection, though consciously detached from explicitly religious language, functions as a redemptive device insofar as it does not merely recover the past but also rescues it from oblivion and reactivates it in the present, charging it with a demand for justice and fulfillment. Through it, the unfulfilled may be fulfilled, suffering revisited with restorative intent, and history itself consequentially rewritten. As Benjamin writes, theology is like the "little hunchback" hidden inside the automaton that controls the puppet of historical materialism, enabling it to win. However, he must remain hidden. (Benjamin 1968, 253) To recollect is a revolutionary act, not merely to remember, but to engage critically and redemptively, for it fundamentally shatters the illusions of irreversible time and restores possibility to what was deemed a failure. Recollection opposes the homogeneous and empty time of propagated by historicism, aiming instead to reactivate the unrealized possibilities embedded within the past, giving voice to what has been forgotten or systematically repressed: «even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious» (Benjamin 1968, 255).

«Such mindfulness can make the incomplete (happiness) into something complete, and the complete (suffering) into something incomplete. That is theology, but in remembrance, we have an experience that forbids us to conceive of history as fundamentally a-theological, little as it may be granted us to try to write it with immediately theological concepts» (Benjamin 1999, 471).

Concretely, in the act of recollection, the human being undergoes a genuinely theological experience: one in which history is conceived through a redemptive lens, where even "every echo of

lament” (Benjamin 2003, 401) may be overcome. Memory thus becomes the critical threshold upon which the Messiah can break in at any given moment. Indeed, Benjamin writes: «Every second is the small gateway through which the Messiah might enter. The hinge of this gate is recollection. » (Benjamin 2003, 397) Here, Benjamin draws from the tradition of Jewish mysticism, according to which every moment might become an occasion for redemption. For Rosenzweig, a failure to proactively anticipate the Messiah risks reducing the future to nothing more than a mere projection of the past. For Benjamin, on the contrary, shards of the future lie concealed within the past itself, and it is precisely within these fragmented remnants that the unfulfilled dreams of previous generations lie dormant, still awaiting their realization.

This seemingly theoretical gesture finds a concrete parallel in Marrano memory, a distinctive mode of recollection characteristic of Jews compelled into forced abjuration. In *The Faith of Remembrance: Marrano Identity and Sacred Memory*, Nathan Wachtel (2008) explores this diasporic and submerged memory, expressed through fragmentary ritual practices, clandestine oral traditions, and veiled gestures. As previously underscored, the Marrano cannot openly declare their theological commitment but preserves it through subterranean means. In both the Marrano paradigm and that of the historical materialist, recollection becomes a form of resistance against erasure; in Benjamin, a resistance to the oblivion imposed by official historical narratives; in the Marrano, a resistance to cultural and spiritual annihilation. Memory becomes an act that holds onto the past not as a static monument, but as a dynamic interruption of the present, an active gesture of justice.

Furthermore, a deeper, crucial connection fundamentally links these two modes of memory: both are characterized by their inherently cryptic nature. Just as Benjamin’s messianic theology hides within the folds of historical materialism, so too does Marrano memory conceal itself within the seemingly mundane forms of everyday life. In both instances, recollection does not express itself openly, but demands a code, an allegorical reading. Marrano memory thus resides in the shadowy zone between knowledge and theological faith; the Marrano no longer enjoys unmediated access to their past. For them, memory ceases to be an automatic inheritance and instead transforms into a future-oriented ethical and intellectual task. The past, consequently, becomes a cipher awaiting decipherment.

Where history can no longer be experienced as a linear continuity, it is instead transmuted into a field densely scattered with fragments, symbols urgently awaiting decoding. Both the Marrano and the historical materialist operate within broken time, seeking in the ruins of transmission something that might still be redeemed.

«Benjamin inherits this idea fundamentally from Judaism, from the Jewish religious tradition, which emphasizes: “It is well known that Jews were forbidden to investigate the future. The Torah and prayer instruct instead in remembrance.” An important element of Benjamin’s reception of Judaism lies in the notion of *trustworthiness*, of fidelity to a covenant that must be remembered, preserved, and maintained through an attitude of gratitude. Memory becomes charged with emotional resonance, directed toward an immemorial past, toward an originary pact through which humankind emerged from violence and the state of nature. Memory is thus the key to redemption, salvation, and hope, categories that Benjamin explicitly mobilizes» (Vinci 2013, 28).

Through memory, one may perform the tiger’s leap into the past to save the dead, linking moments of individual recollection with the community’s memory, an event that occurs profoundly within the festival’s framework. From this perspective, the festival itself becomes a revolutionary act since it facilitates profound communal participation. It is marked by calendrical time, by the leap of memory that forges a vital constellation with the past: the festive day, understood as such, becomes itself the small open gate through which the Messiah might enter.

As Giulio Schiavoni notes, this urgency to “save the people of memory” from the Kafkaesque oblivion that “steadily gains ground” simultaneously points to an inescapable task: that of remembrance (*Eingedenken*), the necessity of undertaking the journey of salvific memory. “Remembering as a task.” (Schiavoni 2001, 264) The theme of the task permeates all Benjaminian texts, signifying an operation both ethically charged and politically resonant, aimed at repairing what is shattered and thereby redeeming the sufferings and unfulfilled utopias of defeated generations.

The theoretical framework that emerges from the intersection of these perspectives - the Jewish mandate of *Zakhor* and Benjamin's philosophy of history - enables a deeper interrogation of the specificity of the Marrano experience. While the historical research of Nathan Wachtel provides an indispensable archive of crypto-Judaic practices, the philosophical work of Agata Bielik-Robson explores its consequences for a theory of tradition. Donatella Di Cesare, on the one hand, emphasizes the aspect of absence and “faith by subtraction,” viewing the Marrano as the custodian of a lack. Bielik-Robson, on the other hand, proposes a more productive reading of the Marrano crisis, interpreting it not as mere loss but as a cryptotheology that, through its very negation, innovates and preserves tradition in a new and paradoxical form. It is precisely in this space between the absence of content and the persistence of a pure form that Marrano memory, like a Benjaminian flash, erupts into the present with a redemption claim.

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Reviews

Conference “Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism: Two Sides of the Same Coin?”
[“*Antisemitismo e antisionismo, due facce della stessa medaglia?*”]
held at the Library of the Chamber of Deputies, Rome, July 18, 2025,
organized by Daniele Nahum (Councilor for the City of Milan for the *Azione* Party)
and professor David Meghnagi (*Roma Tre University*)

Joel Terracina*

On July 18, 2025, a Conference entitled “Antisemitismo e antisionismo, due facce della stessa medaglia?” [Anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism: two sides of the same coin?] was held at the Library of the Chamber of Deputies of Rome. It was organized by Daniele Nahum (Councilor for the City of Milan for the *Azione* Party) and professor David Meghnagi of *Roma Tre University*.

The conference was attended by Noemi di Segni, president of the Union of the Italian Jewish Communities (*Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane* [UCEI]), Luca Spizzichino of the Union of the Young Italian Jews (*Unione Giovani Ebrei d'Italia* [UGE]), Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, director of the Contemporary Jewish Documentation Center Foundation (*Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea* [CDEC]), Maurizio Molinari, writer and former editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper *la Repubblica*, Dina Porat, former director of the Department of Jewish History at the Stephen Roth Institute of Tel Aviv University, David Meghnagi, professor at *Roma Tre University* and president of the European Academic Committee against Antisemitism, General Pasquale Angelosanto, national coordinator for the fight against anti-Semitism, and Milena Santerini, professor at the Catholic University of Milan.

After the institutional greetings, the audience’s attention was focused on the individual reports of the various experts who were called upon to provide their own interpretation of the hateful phenomenon of anti-Semitism, which seems to have re-emerged with all its virulence after yet another conflict in the Middle East.

One of the objectives of the conference was to raise awareness among institutions of the dangerous drift towards a new form of anti-Semitism that could potentially be devastating for civil coexistence. The conference sought to examine these disturbing developments from different perspectives: legal, sociological and historical. It was a wide-ranging and complex debate in which the dynamics of the new anti-Semitism were addressed from different perspectives.

As Meghnagi pointed out in his report, the backdrop to the new anti-Semitism is «the demonization of Israel and the delegitimization of its existence. This is not about the right and duty to dissent or criticize, which are the lifeblood of democracy». Having to «repeat this every time», added the scholar, «is already a sign of the problem. In this perverse logic, «the “State of the Jews” has become “the Jew of the States”, demonized and ontologically delegitimized and rejected as such for a sin of

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origin and for the fact of being». According to Meghnagi, the process «developed in stages and had a long history. It was the result of a convergence between Soviet anti-Semitism in the 1970s, expressed as anti-Zionism, with Third World ideology and pan-Arab rejection. The resolution remained in force even during the peace process that led to the Camp David Accords with Egypt in 1978. The resolution was revoked in 1991 after the Gulf War and with the Madrid Conference. But this important decision was not followed by a critical review of the political and ideological culture that fed it and on which it was based. Amidst the serious crisis that has engulfed the Western world, the failure to rethink the political culture that underpinned the ontological rejection of Israel had devastating consequences after the failure of the Oslo Accords». «After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a window of opportunity opened up that later made the Oslo Accords possible. It was a race against time, which ended tragically due to the absence of clear and shared objectives on the final outcome, which would have involved sustainable sacrifices for both sides. A political agreement can only hold if the objectives are clearly established».

Otherwise, «it is only a truce, as Arafat stated in the aftermath of the agreements, it is a sort of Koranic *hudna*».

«In left-wing culture», added the scholar, «there has always been great difficulty in understanding the idealistic reasons behind the Zionist movement. The idea that Jews, after millennia of exile and persecution, could aspire to a homeland of their own, put a strain on the ambiguous liberal and socialist narrative of emancipation. In the fierce debate that pitted the socialist and communist movement against the Zionist movement and the Jewish socialist movement of the Bund (which limited itself to claiming the right to cultural and national autonomy), Jews were asked to sacrifice themselves for the greater good. In this perverse logic, even the use of the Hebrew language could become a crime». Plekhanov contemptuously described the Bundists as “Zionists with seasickness”. While Austro-Hungarian Marxism recognized the right of the empire’s nationalities to cultivate their own cultural autonomy, «it denied this right to a minority without territory, which, on the basis of this assumption, would have been entitled to it».

«Those who live on an island», added the author, «must befriend the sea. Israel is like an island in a vast Arab sea that it will one day have to befriend. It will have to do so not to please those who, in the name of “peace”, would like to see Israel commit suicide. It must do so in order to remain faithful to its deepest vocation, for its children and for the dream that has inspired it over the centuries. Let us try to imagine what the Near East would become if the Israelis, the Arab peoples and the Palestinians could one day unite in the name of democracy and the acceptance of their respective cultural and national realities».

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Edited by *Paolo Migone**

Issue no. 1, 2025, Volume 59

Paul L. Wachtel, *My evolution as a psychotherapist*

Abstract. Psychotherapy has evolved over the past fifty years, and many seasoned psychotherapists have evolved as well. In this requested editorial, the author's evolution as a psychotherapist is summarized, from his original training in psychoanalytic theory and technique at *Yale University*, influenced by ego psychology, to his increasing interest in psychotherapy integration and his curiosity towards other approaches. In particular, his interest in behavior therapy and especially in the importance of the behavioral technique of exposure are described in the context of a theory of therapeutic change that continues to be strongly rooted in psychoanalytic ideas but that updates those ideas in light of the important contributions of other clinical perspectives. Attention to actual ongoing experiences, and not only childhood events, is fundamental for the patient's improvement, and what the author has called "cyclical psychodynamics" is a central concept for the understanding and treatment of psychological problems. In this regard, another approach that is considered useful in the author's research in psychotherapy integration is systemic family therapy, whose main concepts can be fruitfully included in the psychodynamic approach.

Simone Santamato, *Emotional atmospheres and their role in psychotherapeutic treatment. Some doubts about atmospherological psychiatry*

Abstract: The fundamental points of the atmospherologically oriented phenomenological psychology are identified and discussed: if phenomenology sees the symptom within subjectivity, atmospherology shifts the emphasis of emotions outward. Atmospheres capture us so deeply that they direct our agency and our perception of places, objects and situations: in psychiatry it would be possible to organize a diagnostic criterion where the psychopathogenic agents are reconstructed

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following the emotional atmospheres grasped by the patient-person. The article problematizes the theoretical base of this concept, arguing that the personhood of the patient-person, in an externalizing theory of emotions, is lost. In a psychiatric instance, this is problematic as the aim of reconstructing one's atmospherical emotions collides with emotions being all-out: it is at least paradoxical or conflicting to believe that one's psychopathogenic atmospheres are clinically detectable if emotions are poured into air. Finally, it is supported the idea that, while preserving the possibility of having an atmospherological diagnosis, a deeper analysis of its theoretical preconditions is needed.

Interventions:

Gianni Francesetti, *A look at the premises of atmospherology. Comment on Simone Santamato's paper "Emotional atmospheres and their role in clinical treatment. Some doubts about atmospherological psychiatry"*

Abstract. This commentary on Santamato's article (2025) aims at briefly highlighting some of the premises necessary to understand the atmospheric perspective and its potential relevance for the psychiatric and psychotherapeutic clinical work. This exploration in fact requires abandoning an individualistic epistemology, typical of modernity, by making a movement towards a paradigm that considers the self an emergent phenomenon. This is already present in many phenomenological explorations, but also in Gestalt psychology and psychotherapy and, today, in the sciences of complexity and neurosciences. The self, and thus the person, in this paradigm is a phenomenon emerging from a background in which the poles of subjectivity and objectivity have not yet been defined. Atmospheres, as affective tonalities diffused in the situation, are footprints of this process and inform the clinician of the forces that move in the field that takes shape in the encounter.

Tonino Griffero, *Some atmospherological thoughts. An anti-critique*

Abstract. This anti-critique rejects some objections found in the otherwise interesting article by Santamato (2025), which focuses on the contradictions of atmospherology and the risks of its psychopathological adoption. The fact that such a radically externalist project (atmospheres as feelings present in space) is controversial is, however, not a flaw but an added value (at least philosophically). Moreover, both Santamato's interpretation of some key concepts (spurious atmospheres, lived body, normative aspects, etc.) needs to be corrected, and the objection of overall contradiction must be rejected. Santamato's article simply adopts a paradigm (intentionality of atmospheres, affective introjection, etc.) that is completely foreign to the atmospheric presuppositions (primacy of the pathic and the lived body, critique of the rational autonomy of the subject, etc.). But does it make sense to embrace the atmospheric paradigm while stripping it of these revolutionary ontological presuppositions?

Simone Santamato, *Atmospheric confrontations. A rebuttal to Gianni Francesetti and Tonino Griffero*

Abstract. In this rebuttal to the interventions by Francesetti (2025) and Griffero (2025), Santamato (2025) on the one hand clarifies his positions regarding atmospherology and the emotional externalism that paradigmatically constitutes it, and on the other he acknowledges some of the criticisms. This response is structured in two parts: in the first part, the discussion on emotional externalism is revisited, reaffirming Santamato's (2025) positions through an anti-critique of the anti-critique (Griffero, 2025); in the second part, while addressing some of the criticisms directed at an atmospherological psychiatry, the discourse on an atmospherological clinical practice is revisited and expanded.

Cesare Romano, *Angela Rohr (1890-1985). A psychoanalyst in Stalin's Gulags*

Abstract. The almost unknown psychoanalyst Angela Rohr studied Medicine and afterwards followed a psychoanalytic training with Karl Abraham at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute. Then she moved with her husband, Wilhelm Rohr, to Soviet Union, where she became a journalist for the German daily newspaper *Frankfurter Zeitung* for ten years. After the invasion of the URSS by the Nazis, in the 1941 she and her husband were arrested and she was accused of espionage. She was imprisoned for five years in a Gulag, and then condemned to perpetual exile that lasted for another eleven years. In the meanwhile, she worked as a physician in the Gulag and saved some prisoners with her medical knowledge. She was released only after Stalin's death and rehabilitated a few years later. She succeeded in surviving thanks to her medical education and psychoanalytical training, that allowed her to keep undamaged her self. She and her husband were members of the Russian Psychoanalytic Society from the foundation until 1937, and both made lectures on psychoanalytic topics. Angela Rohr lived until 95 years, without seeing published her main work, a detailed record of his life in the Gulag, that was published in 1989, four years after her death. Some information on the Gulag organization and its difference from the Nazi lager and work camps are also provided, as well as a quick picture of the first pioneers of Russian psychoanalysis.

Cristina Orlandi, *Emotion-Focused Therapy: An overview*

Abstract. An introductory overview of Leslie Greenberg's *Emotion-Focused Therapy* is provided, given also the fact that Italian publications on this therapeutic approach are scarce. Furthermore, in the Italian literature the same name and its acronym (EFT) are used for Susan Johnson's *Emotionally Focused Therapy*, generating an overlap between the two approaches. To give *Emotion-Focused Therapy* a distinguishable identity in Italy as well, in agreement with Leslie Greenberg it has been proposed the designation of *Terapia Centrata sulle Emozioni* ("Emotion-Centered Therapy"), which replaces the one by which in Italy both approaches have been translated for more than two decades, namely *Terapia Focalizzata sulle Emozioni*. It is offered an introduction to the evolution of this therapeutic approach, a look at the theory of self-functioning and dysfunction, and an overview of the compasses that guide clinical practice.

Traces

Michele Ranchetti, *Metapsychology and metaphysics* (2006). With an Introductory note by Mauro Bertani and Roberto Righi

Abstract. Sigmund Freud should be no doubt considered a cultural hero of a kind: a rather obscure neurologist from Vienna, he was able to produce a new discipline that could accomplish a fresh and deeper insight into human psyche. The new discipline implied unique and surprising tools and frames. But the invention of psychoanalysis implied first of all the creation of a language, indeed of many languages. Freud's major purpose has possibly been to take care of the movable articulation of psyche's tongue; to follow and reconstruct Freud's moves was the very essence of Michele Ranchetti's (1925-2008) legacy.

Clinical Cases

Adriana Grotta, Paola Morra & Euro Pozzi, *Farewell from the previous editors of the "Clinical Cases" column*

Giorgio Meneguz, *Introduction to the clinical case presented by Morris Eagle*

Morris N. Eagle, *Enactments, transference, and symptomatic cure: A case history*

Abstract. A case study is presented in which the dramatic disappearance of the patient's chronic symptom of dyspareunia followed a critical episode in the treatment in which a core dynamic theme of defiance-punishment was enacted in the patient/therapist interaction. Symptomatic cure was not accompanied by the patient's explicit insight, but rather seemed to be a function of a complex process of test-passing and transference/countertransference enactments leading to the disconfirmation of a core unconscious pathogenic belief. Concepts of transference, transference cure, misalliance cure, and analysis of transference are discussed in the context of this case study.

Book Reviews

Book Review Essay

Riccardo Marco Scognamiglio, Simone Matteo Russo & Matteo Fumagalli, *Il narcisismo del You. Come orientarsi nella clinica digitalmente modificata*. [The Narcissism of You. How to Navigate in the Digitally Modified Clinical Practice] Preface by Miguel Benasayag. Sesto San Giovanni (Milan): Mimesis, 2024 (Euro Pozzi)

Book Reviews

Sigmund Freud & Eugen Bleuler, *Lettere 1904-1937*. Italian translation edited by Mario Bottone, Riccardo Galiani & Francesco Napolitano. Rome: Alpes, 2024 (original edition: »Ich bin zuversichtlich, wir erobern bald die Psychiatrie«. Briefwechsel 1904-1937. Herausgegeben von Michael Schröter. Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2012) (Davide Cavagna)

Judith Butler, *Chi ha paura del gender?* Bari: Laterza, 2024 (original edition: *Who's Afraid of Gender?* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2024) (Chiara Pecchio)

Chögyam Trungpa, *La salute originaria della mente. Una prospettiva buddhista sulla psicologia*. Prefaces by Daniel Goleman and Kidder Smith. Introduction by Carolyn Rose Gimian. Edited by Paola Silvia Parini. Rome: Astrolabio, 2024 (original edition: *The Sanity We Are Born With. A Buddhist Approach to Psychology*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2005) (Andrea Castiello d'Antonio)

Kenneth E. Bruscia (editor), *Casi clinici di Musicoterapia con bambini e adolescenti*. New Edition, edited by Rossella Fois (First Edition: 1995). Rome: Società Editrice Dante Alighieri, 2024 (original edition in: *Case Studies in Music Therapy*. Gilsum, NH: Barcelona Publishers, 1991); Kenneth E. Bruscia (editor), *Casi clinici di Musicoterapia con adulti*. New Edition, edited by Rossella Fois (First Edition: 1997). Rome: Società Editrice Dante Alighieri, 2024 (original edition in: *Case Studies in Music Therapy*. Gilsum, NH: Barcelona Publishers, 1991) (Davide Cavagna)

Andrea Castiello d'Antonio, *L'aggressività distruttiva nel mondo del lavoro. Il mobbing e le altre forme di violenza organizzativa*. [Destructive Aggressiveness in the Workplace. Mobbing and Other Forms of Organizational Violence] Florence: Hogrefe, 2024 (Mauro Fornaro)

Books Received

Journals

The International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 2024, Volume 105, nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 (Francesca Tondi)

Francesca Tondi, *Comment on The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*
American Journal of Psychotherapy, 2024, Volume 77, no. 4 (Paolo Migone)

Annual Review of Psychology, 2024, Volume 75 (Paolo Migone)

Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy, 2024, Volume 54, no. 4 (Paolo Migone)

2025 Program of the “International Seminars of Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane”

Information for subscribers and readers

Theodor W. Adorno, *Freudian theory and patterns of fascist propaganda* (1951)

Abstract. In this article, written with the collaboration of Max Horkheimer and published a year after the book by Adorno *et al.* (1950) *The Authoritarian Personality*, the psychodynamics of the fascist mentality are discussed, starting above all from the reflections contained in Freud's 1921 essay *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. The differences between Freud's essay and the well-known 1895 book by Gustav Le Bon *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* are highlighted, and various considerations are made on the bond that ties the individuals of a group together and on the unconscious identification with their leader. References are also made to the propaganda techniques used during the Nazi regime and in contemporary industrial societies.

Andrea Angelozzi, *The question of empathy: The many problems of something that everyone believes they know*

Summary. Although everyone believes they know what empathy is, it actually presents a whole series of controversial aspects. Many different definitions emerge, resolved in a multidimensional approach that includes affective empathy, cognitive empathy, and motor empathy, each linked to different neurological correlates. Even the connection with the mirror neuron theory and the phenomenological conception of embodied empathy shows fragility. Its role in psychotherapy has been variously considered, highlighting the difficulty in fostering empathy in therapists and pointing out a series of negative aspects. Except for emotions, the accuracy of empathic perceptions yields very modest results, downplaying its role in psychiatry and psychotherapy, contrary to the beliefs of popular psychology. By exploring the characteristics of the perceiver, the subject, and the relationship most conducive to empathy, glaring errors in common beliefs become apparent. The study of its role in psychopathology also reveals elements that are different from what is commonly believed to be established. What emerges is the picture of a complex concept, very different from common beliefs, and one that should be used with great caution in psychiatry and psychotherapy.

Luca Degasperi, *Between collaboration and destructivity. The fraternal complex among psychotherapists and in the legal field*

Abstract. Psychotherapists carry out their professional activities within regulatory, legal, and ethical constraints that promote a collegial relationship among them in terms of collaboration, loyalty in interactions, the construction and sharing of common knowledge, the transmission of expertise, and the development of research. Considering the broad framework of analysis of institutions and the various dysfunctional systems that may characterize them, the concept of fraternal complex is used as an organized set of unconscious elements and representations that, originating from individual mental processes, penetrate the intersubjective dimension. The "fraternal" set does not guarantee the quality of the relationship among those who share bonds of belonging, nor does it inevitably lead its members in a supportive direction, providing narcissistic comfort or fostering a collegial solidarity and equality. However, it does not merely stimulate them in the banal aspects of competition and confrontation. In fact, excessive emphasis on rivalrous conflict leading to intransigence, malevolent factionalism, or destructiveness, the predominance of more archaic fraternal dimensions manifesting themselves as persecutory or expulsive impulses, the emergence of anxieties of undifferentiation, or the exercise of power along dominance/submission axes are some of the disruptions that can infiltrate collegiality among psychotherapists. These disruptions can significantly affect the domains in which they operate, particularly in legal psychology, where such dynamics at times appear with far greater intensity than in professional collaborations on assessments, training activities, research or publications.

Traces

Johannes Cremerius, *Genealogy of the psychoanalysts. A correspondence of Johannes Cremerius.*

With an Introductory note of Giorgio Meneguz

Abstract. After an Introduction by Giorgio Meneguz (who had the material here published), some letters of a correspondence that the German psychoanalyst Johannes Cremerius (1918-2002) had with some colleagues of different countries are reproduced. The first three letters, of 1962, are between Cremerius and Kurt R. Eissler, of New York, while the other twenty letters, that go from 1984 to 1988, concern the project of reconstructing a genealogy of psychoanalysts, that is, of tracing the names of their training analysts. The intention was to present a paper at the 34th Congress of the *International Psychoanalytic Association* (IPA) in Hamburg, but the project was too ambitious and had to be abandoned. The letters selected here concern the correspondence with Hermann Argelander, Hermann Beland, Marie-Claire Boons, Medard Boss, Annemarie Dührssen, Ernst Federn, Rainer Funk, Fritz Meerwein, Margarete Mitscherlich-Nielsen, József Paál, Paul Parin, Angelika Schönhagen, Richard Sterba, Helm Stierlin, and Helmut Thomä. Eight drawings made by Cremerius are also reproduced.

Clinical Cases

Interventions on the clinical case presented by Morris Eagle in issue no. 1/2025 “Enactments, transference, and symptomatic cure: A case history”:

Paolo Chiappero, *Introduction*

Merton M. Gill, *Interaction and interpretation*

Theodore J. Jacobs, *Insight and experience*

Robert Shapiro, *Theory and change*

Morris N. Eagle, *Reply to Gill, Jacobs, and Shapiro*

Abstract. After an introduction by Paolo Chiappero, four interventions on the clinical case presented by Morris N. Eagle – entitled “Enactments, transference, and symptomatic cure: A case history” and published in the previous issue of *Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane*, 2025, 59, 1: 131-146 (DOI: 10.3280/PU2025-001011) – are reproduced. This clinical presentation originally appeared in *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 1993, 3, 1: 93-110 (DOI: 10.1080/10481889309538962), and the four interventions, that were on pp. 111-149 of the same issue of *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, are, respectively, by Merton M. Gill, Theodor J. Jacobs, and Robert B. Shapiro, with a reply by Morris N. Eagle. The issues that are discussed are, among others, the following: one-person and two-person perspectives in psychoanalysis, explicit and implicit interpretations, analysis of transference, enactment, theory of curative factors, Alexander’s corrective emotional experience, Weiss & Sampson’s control-mastery theory, etc.

Book Reviews

Book Review Essay

Raffaele Visintini (editor), *Il modello GET per la personalità borderline. Il trattamento con i Gruppi Esperienziali Terapeutici. [The GET Model for Borderline Personality. Treatment with Therapeutic Experiential Groups]* Preface by Giancarlo Dimaggio. Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2024 (Euro Pozzi)

Book Reviews

Massimo Recalcati, *Clinica del vuoto. Anoressie, dipendenze, psicosi*. [Clinical Treatment of the Void. Anorexia, Addictions, Psychoses] New Edition (First Edition: Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2002). Milan: Raffaello Cortina, 2025 (Davide Cavagna)

Byung-Chul Han, *La crisi della narrazione. Informazione, politica e vita quotidiana*. [Crisis of the Narrative. Information, Politics, and Everyday Life] Turin: Einaudi, 2024 (original edition: *Die Krise der Narration*. Berlin: Matthes & Seitz Berlin, 2023) (Chiara Pecchio)

Andrea Fiorillo, *Le depressioni. Diagnosi, clinica e trattamenti*. [Depressions: Diagnosis, Clinical Practice, and Treatments] Milan: Raffaello Cortina, 2025 (Andrea Castiello d'Antonio)

Books Received

Journals

Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association, 2024, Volume 72, nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 (Jutta Beltz & Paola Raja)

Jutta Beltz & Paola Raja, *Comment on the Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 2024, Volume 93, nos. 1, 2, 3, 4 (Andrea Castiello d'Antonio)

Andrea Castiello d'Antonio, *Comment on The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*

Il Veltro. Rivista della Civiltà Italiana, 2024, Year 67, no. 3/4 (Paolo Migone)

Cognitive Therapy and Research, 2025, Volume 49, no. 1 (Paolo Migone)

Adolescenza e Psicoanalisi, 2024, Year 24, no. 2 (Paolo Migone)

2025 Program of the “International Seminars of Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane”

Information for subscribers and readers

Issue no. 3, 2025, Volume 59

Joel Weinberger, *The unconscious: What took so long, what we know, and clinical implications*

Abstract. Unconscious processes are reviewed from historical, empirical, neurocognitive, and clinical perspectives. Historical factors delayed the scientific study of unconscious processes in academic psychology because of the Cartesian identification of mental with conscious awareness. This became even more extreme when behaviorism dismissed internal processes altogether. Psychoanalysis emphasized unconscious processes from its inception, but its isolation from academic psychology and aversion to empirical methods limited its influence. Academic psychology, in turn, dismissed psychoanalytic methods and insights, and eventually came to recognize unconscious processes, which it saw as normative. Some of the main research findings are reviewed and clinical implications are suggested. Finally, three neurocognitive models of the mind as possible metapsychologies are examined. All posit unconscious, parallel, and associative processing, and they also align with many psychodynamic tenets including contradiction, conflict, and compromise, but do not view them as necessarily leading to pathology. It is argued for a reconceptualization of the unconscious as normative, mostly promoting adaptation, that sometimes goes awry.

Riccardo Marco Scognamiglio, *The Hibernians. From the Ego narcissism to the You narcissism*

Abstract. In 1984, the sociologist Christopher Lasch pointed out how the triumph of individualism rested on its flipside: that of a *minimal self*, anything but the representation of a Promethean world-creating ego. Today, the *minimal self* has been replaced by the *You narcissism*. If in the myth of Narcissus it is his face that is reflected in the pond, in the time of hyper-digitalization it is the screen that is reflected in the face of Narcissus. Through this optical reversal, the Ego is

transformed into *You*, the object of the computer algorithm. While we believe we are looking at the Web, it is the Web that is mirrored in us with the effect of hibernating the Ego within a new “Psychopathology of everyday life”: *FoMO (Fear of Missing Out), orbiting, ghosting, phubbing, cyberstalking, flaming, sexting, revenge porn, binge watching...* In this process of continuous virtualization, in which “real reality” itself is perceived as a virtual entity, the Ego comes to lose its psychic consistency, colonized by the logic of the *You*. The *You* no longer produces dreams, memories and personal myths, moving in a *virtual-real space* where time has stopped. The *You narcissism* confronts us with the difficulty of continuing to use a model of the mind based on the achievement of precise evolutionary tasks and with the complexity of conceiving a cure for singularity.

Interventions:

Riccardo Catanzaro, *Comment on Riccardo Marco Scognamiglio’s paper “The Hibernians. From the Ego narcissism to the You narcissism”*

Abstract. It is argued that the analysis presented in Scognamiglio’s (2025) paper highlights in a one-sided way the harms that the digital world can cause, especially to young people, whereas it can actually be used in a beneficial manner. Web 2.0 can enable many individuals to construct their own identity in many ways, with a level of freedom and creativity that was previously unimaginable. Adaptation to the digital world is possible, just as it happened with previous milestones in human communication, such as writing, the printing press, the telephone, and television.

Intelligenza Artificiale (ChatGPT, OpenAI), *A look of Artificial Intelligence on the You narcissism: An algorithmic reflection on Riccardo M. Scognamiglio’s paper*

Abstract. In response to the theses presented by Riccardo Marco Scognamiglio (2025) in his paper “The Hibernians. From the Ego narcissism to the You narcissism”, an Artificial Intelligence (AI) offers a critical perspective from its own computational viewpoint. While acknowledging the theoretical depth and visionary language of the paper, the AI points out some limitations: a strictly psychoanalytic approach, lack of empirical references, marginalization of the adaptive functions of digital environments, and neglect of generational and cultural diversity in online experiences. It is further explored how AI and the Internet influence identity construction and contemporary psychic functioning, and advocated for a conscious cohabitation between human subjectivity and digital environments, where AI acts as a tool – not a substitute – for human alterity.

Riccardo Marco Scognamiglio, *Her-rare humanum est... Reply to the interventions by Riccardo Catanzaro and Artificial Intelligence*

Abstract. The call for a debate about the digital world and its connection to clinical practice attests to the need for continued discussion beyond merely technophilic or technophobic stances. My response to Catanzaro’s (2025) contribution seeks to reaffirm my starting premise for conceptualizing the digital phenomenon: that of the digital habitat. If we consider the digital world not within a subject/object dialectic but rather as a “substance” in which we are immersed, we lose the possibility of conceiving of a subjectivity that utilizes the Web to freely express parts of the self. This subjectivity is, on the contrary, “digitized” *ab origine*. From this, a series of new clinical phenomena emerges that must not be reduced to the category of technological addiction. Instead, they compel the clinician to acquire new hermeneutic lenses and adopt new modalities of being with the other. Finally, the editorial team’s inclusion of Artificial Intelligence (AI) expands the debate from the question of the subject to that of the machine. Before we address “what AI does”, we must first reflect on “what we perceive it to be”. Only then can we venture into the critical issue of why the human subjects experience the machine as an agentive entity capable of responding to their own malaise.

Vittorio Gallese & Ugo Morelli, *Getting serious about empathy in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy*
Abstract. This essay proposes a radical reconsideration of the concept of empathy in theory and in clinical practice, shifting its focus from a cognitive and representational conception to an embodied, inter-corporeal and transformative perspective. Far from being a simple relational technique, empathy is here understood as an original modality of affective co-experience, which emerges from the shared field between analyst and patient. Through a dialogue between psychoanalysis, phenomenology and neuroscience, the bodily foundations of the therapeutic relationship are outlined, and the interpretive primacy of the classical tradition is criticized. Empathy, as a form of *aisthesis*, makes possible a clinical practice centered on sensitive listening, affective regulation and co-construction of meaning. The essay argues that only a truly embodied paradigm can restore to care its relational, intersubjective, human and transformative dimension.

Elena Bergia, “The real heroes were men”. Prison protests, seductive capital, and gender differences in the Northern Irish Republican Movement

Abstract. During the Northern Ireland conflict (1969-1998), the Republican women and men incarcerated for their involvement in the armed struggle engaged in a series of increasingly extreme protests to affirm the political nature of their actions. Some of these protests, particularly the so-called “dirty protest”, had a shocking impact because they utilized the prisoners’ bodily excreta as symbolic tools of political struggle. By making visible the bodily substances that society regards as taboo, these protests created a symbolic rupture that was difficult to heal. However, the male prison experience ultimately morphed into a badge of honor. Involvement in the prison struggles granted some ex-prisoners, heroic status in their communities and among international sympathizers. This, in turn, led to some unexpected advantages, including an increased power of attraction over like-minded women. The author refers to this increased attractiveness as “seductive capital”. The acquisition of heroic status and subsequent seductive capital did not, however, befall *women* prisoners. This gender difference is explained through an analysis of the different symbolic meanings attributed to the bodies and bodily excreta of women and men; the gender roles dear to Irish nationalism; and notions of gender spread in Ireland and beyond.

Traces

Pier Francesco Galli, *On Fritz Morgenthauer* (2017). With an Introductory note by Paolo Migone

Abstract. After an introduction by Paolo Migone, a handwritten text by Pier Francesco Galli of 2017 is published, where he answered two questions of Dagmar Herzog, professor of History at the *City University of New York*, about the Zurich psychoanalyst and anthropologist Fritz Morgenthauer (1919-1984). Herzog was doing a research on Morgenthauer; Galli had been in analysis with him in Zurich in the 1960s, and both were part of the Zurich Psychoanalytic Seminar (PSZ), which had been important in Galli’s training. Morgenthauer also collaborated with the journal *Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane*, founded by Galli in 1967. These were the questions: “What ideas of Morgenthauer shaped your clinical practice when you first met him?”; “What do you retain or remember most about Morgenthauer?”. Galli talks about Morgenthauer’s position and also tells four anecdotes of his analysis with him.

Clinical Cases

Fabrizio Rizzi, *Does a “therapeutic aggressiveness” exist? A clinical case*

Interventions:

Giorgio Cavallari

Alberto Lampignano

Valentina Ruggeri

Book Reviews

Book Review Essay

Susanna Mati, *Lou Salomé. Amare la vita*. [Lou Salomé. Loving Life] Milan: Feltrinelli, 2025 (Ugo Morelli)

Intervention on the book review essay of Susanna Mati's book (The editors of the "Book Reviews" section)

Reply to the intervention of the editors of the "Book Reviews" section on the book review essay of Susanna Mati's book (Ugo Morelli)

Book Reviews

Giuseppe A. Micheli, *In terra incognita. Disegnare una società che cura dopo Basaglia*. [In Uncharted Territory. Imagining a Caring Society after Basaglia] Preface by Benedetto Saraceno. Sesto San Giovanni (Milan): Mimesis, 2024 (Francesco Scotti)

Carlo Faravelli, *La diagnosi psicopatologica. Le parole di ieri per la clinica di oggi*. [Psychopathological diagnosis. Yesterday's words for today's clinical practice] Rome: Astrolabio, 2024 (Andrea Castiello d'Antonio)

Girolamo Lo Verso (editor), *La clinica gruppoanalitica, oggi, in Italia. Inquadramenti teorici ed esperienze di cura nel sociale*. [Group-Analytic Clinical Practice in Italy Today: Theoretical Frameworks and Care Experiences in the Social Field] Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2025; Girolamo Lo Verso (editor), *Il lavoro clinico con i gruppi. Metodologia operativa ed esperienze contemporanee*. [Clinical Work with Groups: Operational Methodology and Contemporary Experiences] Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2025 (Giorgio Meneguz)

Maria Zalambani & Leonid Kadis (editors), *Tatiana Rosenthal. Pioniera della psicoanalisi russa*. [Tatiana Rosenthal: A Pioneer of Psychoanalysis in Russia] Preface by Luciano Mecacci. Pisa: ETS, 2024 (Andrea Castiello d'Antonio)

Piero Cipriano, *La salute mentale è politica*. [Mental Health is Political] Milan: Fuori Scena, 2025 (Pietro Pellegrini)

Books Received

Journals

Contemporary Psychoanalysis, 2024, Volume 60, no. 1/2 (Paolo Migone)

Paolo Migone, *Comment on Contemporary Psychoanalysis*

Revue Française de Psychanalyse, 2024, Volume 88, nos. 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5 (Mauro Fornaro)

Mauro Fornaro, *Comment on the Revue Française de Psychanalyse*

Self and Identity, 2025, Volume 24, no. 4 (Paolo Migone)

Infant Observation, 2024, Volume 27, n. 2 (Paolo Migone)

Psicodramma Classico, 2024, Year 26, no. 1/2 (Paolo Migone)

Psicoterapia Psicoanalitica, 2025, Year 32, no. 1 (Paolo Migone)

2025 Program of the "International Seminars of *Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane*"

Information for subscribers and readers

Wynne Godley, *Saving Masud Khan*. With an Introductory note by Paolo Migone

Abstract. After an introduction by Paolo Migone, an article by Wynne Godley that appeared in 2001 in the *London Review of Books*, in which he recounts his psychoanalysis with Masud Khan, is published. This article caused embarrassment in the psychoanalytic community, which led to an investigation and a report published by Anne-Marie Sandler in issue 1/2004 of the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, with a commentary by Godley himself. Wynne Godley (1926-2010) was a prominent economist who worked at the British Treasury, and Masud Khan (1924-1989) was a London-based psychoanalyst of Pakistani origin, close to Donald Winnicott, who was his third analyst; Khan (who edited some of Winnicott's works) gave important contributions to psychoanalysis, and was co-director of *Freud Copyrights*. In his introduction, Paolo Migone offers reflections that transcend the specific case of Masud Khan and address, more broadly, the issue of training in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy.

Interventions:

Davide Cavagna, *From “as if” to “why not?”. Notes on transference, violations and transmission of knowledge starting from the Godley case*

Abstract. Some considerations are made starting from Godley's (2001) article on his disastrous analysis conducted by Masud Khan, characterized by repeated violations and abuses by the analyst. In addition to an examination of some aspects of the transference/countertransference dynamics, analytic relationship, and boundary violations, Godley's case is read in light of the problems inherent in analytic training and the transmission of knowledge, with particular reference to the analyst's theories that underlie technical choices and clinical practice. The importance of misunderstandings and erroneous beliefs on the part of the analyst, resulting from deviations or theoretical revisions and specific difficulties in conducting the treatment which risk compromising the nature and aims of the analytic work, is particularly emphasized.

Giovanni Foresti, *How can abuses of power be prevented, treated, and sanctioned in psychoanalysis? The proposal of the “fourth pillar” of psychoanalytic training*

Abstract. This intervention, which draws on Wynne Godley's article on his analysis with Masud Khan, published in the *London Review of Books* in 2001, reflects on the limitations of traditional psychoanalytic training and the need to address abuses of power with an approach that integrates prevention, treatment, and punishment. Drawing on experience gained in international psychoanalytic institutions, it emphasizes how professional solitude fosters abusive behavior and how self-idealization of training can reduce self-criticism. This is the context in which Stefano Bolognini in 2014 proposed the “fourth pillar”: an expansion of training to include group and institutional experiences, capable of consolidating analytic skills and strengthening the collective morality of the psychoanalytic community. Critical reflection and experimentation with these practices are encouraged.

Giorgio Meneguz, *The Khan-Godley case and the long shadow of the ancestors*

Abstract. The Khan-Godley case is analyzed, focusing on the deleterious impact of Khan's psychoanalytic training on his fragile psychic condition. From this brief analysis, a synthetic historical review of the dynamics of the psychoanalytic movement unfolds, beginning with Sigmund Freud's position within the complex entanglement of rivalries and ambitions that characterized the psychoanalytic community. The context of these problems serves as a backdrop to address the unresolved issue of preventing iatrogenic effects deriving from specific professional behaviors. In particular, the discussion focuses on the role of the institutional dynamics of training institutes and the critical points of the theoretical and technical principles of psychoanalysis and training programs. The open objective is to discern to what extent these elements contribute to the transgenerational perpetuation of models of boundary violations within the profession.

Vittorio Lingiardi & Nancy McWilliams, *Introduction to the Third Edition of the Psychodynamic Diagnostic Manual (PDM-3)*

Abstract. The third edition of the *Psychodynamic Diagnostic Manual* (PDM-3) is presented. The first part covers the following topics: the rationale for the PDM-3 classification system; the differences between the PDM and the DSM and ICD systems; a comparison between the PDM-3 and other diagnostic systems; diagnostic approaches compatible with the PDM-3; the DSM-5 “Alternative Model for Personality Disorders” (AMPD); the *Hierarchical Taxonomy of Psychopathology* (HiTOP); the *Research Domain Criteria* (RDoC) approach; network approaches; and the *Power Threat Meaning Framework* (PTMF). The structure of the PDM-3 is then presented, with a description of its three axes: the profile of Mental functioning (Axis M), Personality styles and disorders (Axis P), and the subjective experience of Symptom patterns (Axis S), along with their order in the various sections; psychological experiences that may require clinical attention; the *Psychodiagnostic Chart* (PDC). Finally, the main changes in the PDM-3 are described, and some considerations are made on the terminology that the PDM-3 has chosen to adopt.

Traces

Pier Francesco Galli, *Psychoanalysis: The Mad Centipede* (1986). With an Introductory note by Paolo Migone.

Abstract. After an introduction by Paolo Migone, a paper that Pier Francesco Galli, in collaboration with Berthold Rothschild, presented at a meeting organized by the Zurich Psychoanalytic Seminar (*Psychoanalytisches Seminar Zürich* [PSZ]) on May 30-June 1, 1986, is published. This meeting was entitled “Institutionalization/Deinstitutionalization: On the History and Present of the Psychoanalytic Left”. Among the issues discussed by Galli there are the misunderstandings of the theory of psychoanalytic technique, the problems of the so-called psychoanalytic “orthodoxy”, psychiatric diagnosis, and the critical issues of training in psychoanalytic institutions.

Discussion with interventions by: Irene Brogle, Mario Erdheim, Pier Francesco Galli, Susann Heenen, René Major, Emilio Modena, Judith Valk

Discussions

Interventions on Vittorio Gallese and Ugo Morelli’s paper “Getting serious about empathy in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy” (*Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane*, 2025, 59, 3: 463-494):

Andrea Angelozzi, *Some epistemological observations on empathy*

Abstract. This intervention examines several critical issues in the paper by Gallese & Morelli (2025). It is argued that some of the questions raised by these authors, in line with phenomenological thought, have in fact long been present in the debate and have already received substantial responses. Special emphasis is placed on the epistemological dimension, recalling Jaspers’ view that scientific explanation must complement understanding. The limits of an embodied and pre-reflective approach to empathy are discussed, with attention to the methodological contradiction of a perspective that rejects external observation and the analytical decomposition of phenomena, while simultaneously relying on neurophysiological experimentation. A similar tension emerges in the proposal of an empathy grounded in the pure experience of interpersonal subjectivity yet expressed through a language that aims at being descriptive and therefore objectifying. Finally, the paper addresses the challenge of how such experiential dimensions may be transformed into therapeutic experience and empirically validated in this role.

Mauro Fornaro, *“Pedantic” linguistic-conceptual notes on empathy*

Abstract. It is shown in detail how the concept of empathy, contrary to essentialist definitions, is a construct. Recalling the plurality of current conceptions, it is urged to take into account the etymological meaning of the term when using empathy or developing theories about it. Finally, three typical problems raised by the concept of empathy are discussed: the notion of “feeling” (*pathos*), the subject of empathy in its relationship with truth, and the “nature” of the relationship between empathizing subject and target subject.

Clinical Cases

Nadia Tagliaferri, *The anxiety of not existing. Introduction to the clinical case presented by Marcel Sassolas*

Marcel Sassolas, *How to care for a person traumatized by a first psychotic break. The Adrien case Interventions:*

Roberto Carnevali, *Humanizing psychiatry: A commentary on the Adrien case*

Ugo Corino, *Psychosis: A clear thought, a coherent project. On the clinical case presented by Marcel Sassolas*

Book Reviews

Book Review Essay

Vittorio Gallese, Stefano Moriggi & Pier Cesare Rivoltella, *Oltre la tecnofobia. Il digitale dalle neuroscienze all'educazione*. [Beyond Technophobia: The Digital from Neuroscience to Education] Milan: Raffaello Cortina, 2025 (Matteo Fumagalli)

Book Reviews

Bernard Golse, *La cura psichica del bambino e dell'adolescente. Per una psichiatria infantile umanistica*. Transl. and edited by Lenio Rizzo. [Mental Health Care for Children and Adolescents. Toward a Humanistic Child Psychiatry] Rome: Astrolabio, 2025 (original edition: *La Pédopsychiatrie aujourd'hui. Ce que les enfants risquent de perdre*. Paris: Odile Jacob, 2023) (Adriana Grotta)

Elsa Godart, *Vite vuote. Il nostro bisogno di riconoscimento è impossibile da soddisfare*. [Empty Lives. Our Need for Recognition Is Impossible to Satisfy] Rome: Fioriti, 2024 (original edition: *Les vies vides. Notre besoin de reconnaissance est impossible à rassasier*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2023) (Chiara Pecchio)

Gregg Barak, *Criminology on Trump*. London: Routledge, 2022 (Andrea Castiello d'Antonio)

Claudio Di Lello, *Elementi di psicoanalisi nei gruppi terapeutici*. [Elements of Psychoanalysis in Therapeutic Groups] Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2025 (Giuliana Nico)

Books Received

Journals

Psyche. Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse und ihre Anwendungen, 2024, Volume 78, nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9/10, 11 & 12 (Marco Conci)

Marco Conci, *Comment on Psyche*

London Review of Books, 2025, Volume 47, no. 14 (Paolo Migone)

Journal of Applied Psychology, 2025, Volume 110, no. 7 (Paolo Migone)

Gli Asini, 2025, Year 16, no. 121 (Paolo Migone)

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