

# TRAUMA & MEMORY

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## Call for Papers: Memory and Critical Theory

Memory studies have been relaunching memory's key role for twenty years now, developing it in an interdisciplinary way. As a theme, memory and its multiple inflections have crossed historical and cultural borders, thus becoming a core element of contemporary research. Both systematically and across other disciplines, the relation of memory to time can hardly be ignored. From such a perspective, memory's relation to Critical Theory comes out as one of the most relevant research pathways of contemporary memory studies.

The Frankfurt School and its most notable members have always played a key role in the tradition of memory studies, particularly with respect to their contribution to the study of critical memory. Authors like Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, Erich Fromm, and more recently Jürgen Habermas have all conceived memory as a critical tool through which to question the past in order to provide a deeper understanding of modernity and its contradictions. What all these perspectives have in common is a focus on memory not only as "a repository of past events", but also as a device for the critique and transformation of the present.

If, on the one hand, a critical take on memory stems from (1) the seminal works of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, in which memory is related to the inhumanity of Auschwitz, and (2) from Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, in which historical memory becomes a transformative-creative act *towards* the future and *against* the homogenizing continuity of history, then on the other hand (3) Habermas' contribution to the theme (through such works as *Auch Eine Geschichte der Philosophie*) offers innovative reflections on how collective memory can counter our time's tendency to reduce human experiences to functional categories. In particular, Habermas's most recent work crucially provides a way of looking back at western cultural-religious memory *from a normative point of view* – a perspective from which our past becomes an inextinguishable source of moral intuitions, in contrast to the increasingly functionalistic-objectivizing angle increasingly typical of contemporary societies' self-comprehension. Thus, far from being a historiographical work, the analysis underlying *Auch Eine Geschichte der Philosophie* interrogates its readers about the status of contemporary western-philosophical thought and its relation to its mythical/religious roots.

In times of postmodernity and globalization, critical memory becomes a crucial issue for social and political theory. How can we balance past and present, memory and change? What is memory's role in societies that confront collective traumas and contemporary challenges? How can Critical Theory contribute to create a critical and transformative relation to the past, rather than fostering a merely conservative and commemorative memory? In light of these questions, this call invites theoretical and sociological contributions that investigate the nexus of **memory** and **critique** and offer reflections on how historical-cultural memory can be put to use as a creative tool for critical transformation. In particular, we encourage contributions that focus on one (or more) of the following themes:

- **Memory and contemporary thought:** papers that explore the idea of memory undergirding Habermas' work, particularly with respect to his take on collective memory as a counterweight to functionalistic and objectivizing tendencies.
- **Adorno's legacy:** contributions on Adorno's conception of memory, its critical-transformative power, and especially his recourse to negative-dialectical methodology in order to grasp memory as a phenomenon open to critique and renewal.
- **Walter Benjamin and critical memory:** papers about Benjamin's interpretation of memory, particularly with respect to his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, in which memory takes on a revolutionary and critical function, opposing history's linearity and countering oblivion.
- **Freud and memory inside Critical Theory:** contributions that investigate the influence of Sigmund Freud on the Frankfurt School's thought, especially for what concerns the role of memory inside trauma, sublimation and social dynamics.
- **Memory and Utopia:** how can memory work as a booster for the utopian imagination; and enable it to offer an alternative to the utilitarian and functional rationality typical of contemporary societies? What is the role of memory in thinking about new forms of community and social justice?
- **Memory, trauma and collective identities:** reflections about how historical traumas (the Shoah, colonization, world wars) and collective memory can define cultural, political and social identities. The relation among media, memory and trauma.
- **Critical Theory and the digitalization of memory:** explorations concerning the impact of new technologies on the conservation, management and interpretation of historical memory. Digital platforms and collective memory.

Submissions should be prepared according to the journal's guidelines and submitted via email to one (or more) of the following addresses: [massimo.caon@uniroma2.it](mailto:massimo.caon@uniroma2.it); [luca.corchia@gmail.com](mailto:luca.corchia@gmail.com) ;.

**The deadline for the submission of contributions is April 1<sup>st</sup>.** The papers accepted will be published in the next issue of *Trauma & Memory*.