City memory, from buzzword to a mutating concept

Memória da cidade, de buzzword *a conceito em mutação*

Memoria de la ciudad, de buzzword *a concepto en mutación*

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Abstract

This brief essay discusses the meanings attributed mainly since the end of the 20th century to the expression "city memory" or "urban memory", and presents some elements for one possible theoretical conceptualization of this kind of memory. It points out that the concept of city memory, still under construction, must take into account the effects of the digitization of society on the way individuals interact with each other and with urban space in the construction of collective memory.

Key-Words: collective memory, city, place, sites of memory.

Resumo

Este breve ensaio discute os sentidos que têm sido atribuídos, sobretudo desde fins do século XX, à expressão "memória da cidade", ou "memória urbana", e apresenta alguns elementos para uma possível conceitualização teórica desse tipo de memória. Aponta que o conceito de memória da cidade, ainda em construção, deve levar em conta os efeitos da digitalização da sociedade sobre o modo como os indivíduos interagem entre si e com o espaço urbano na construção de memória coletiva.
Palavras-Chave: memória coletiva, cidade, local, lugares de memória.

Resumen

Este breve ensayo discute los sentidos que se le han atribuido, sobretodo desde fines del siglo XX, a la expresión "memoria de la ciudad", o "memoria urbana", y apunta algunos elementos para una posible conceptualización teórica de ese tipo de memoria. Señala que el concepto de memoria de la ciudad, aún en construcción, debe tener en cuenta los efectos de la digitalización de la sociedad sobre el modo como los individuos interactúan entre sí y con el espacio urbano en la construcción de la memoria colectiva.

Palabras clave: memoria colectiva, ciudad, lugar, sitios de memoria.

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1. Introduction

Buzzword is an English word that is difficult to translate. It is often freely translated into Portuguese as *palavra da moda* (fashionable word), but its meaning goes beyond that. More than just being fashionable, a buzzword is a word or phrase that is new and becomes popular very quickly. It often originates in the technical or academic jargon of some discipline or field of knowledge. But as it is used repeatedly in everyday talk with fuss and excitement, it tends to turn rapidly into meaningless cliché.

"City memory" or "urban memory" is to some extent a buzzword. The idea that cities can "have" memory seems to date back to the 1960s, in architecture theory, when the Italian architect Aldo Rossi, in his now classic book *The Architecture of the City*, when referring to the notion of collective memory posited by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945), proposed that "the city is the locus of collective memory" (ROSSI, 1982, p. 226)[1]. Or perhaps it dates back to the 1910s, in literature, when Marcel Proust, in *Swann's Way*, the first volume of *In Search of Lost Time*, illustrated how certain urban structures are capable of projecting us into the past, triggering often involuntary memories and creating a feeling of permanence of the past (PROUST, 2016; PY, 2016). There are yet several other authors who related memory and city in different ways, some of whom we will mention further on.

But it was mostly in colloquial debate, as noted by the Brazilian geographer Maurício de Almeida Abreu (1998), that the use of the terms "city memory" and "urban memory" gained momentum and spread widely in the late 20th century. This apparently anthropomorphic notion, which grants cities a capacity that, at least at first sight, should belong to the people or groups inhabiting them, has thus gained traits of dull commonplace. Our purpose here is to discuss and problematize what could be considered city memory from a theoretical point of view. The attention and uses the expression has gained in ordinary thought and in some academic texts, and a possible path for building and discussing a concept of city memory, are the object of the following sections.

2. The buzzword in action

Alejandro Baer, a sociologist who studies Holocaust memory, says that "the culture of memory is a term that defines an age, ours, in which the past has gained unprecedented prominence" (BAER, 2010, p. 131). Gilda Waldman-Mitnick (2006) complements this by saying that the emergence of memory as a cultural and political concern is a global-scale trend that spreads across all geographic boundaries.

Indeed, since the 20th century's last quarter, particularly in the Western world, societies have come to worship or celebrate the past with unprecedented zeal: there is ever more talk of disputes and duties of memory, material and immaterial heritages are revered, the vintage culture is cherished, and old traditions are cultivated (or even invented). When describing this phenomenon, Andreas Huyssen (2002) says that memory has become a genuine cultural obsession. Régine Robin (2016) even speaks of a cacophony of memory discourses, of a "saturated memory".

In *History and Memory*, Jacques Le Goff (1994) offers a possible explanation for this strong contemporary tendency towards the cult of the past. For the French historian, the end of the 20th century closed an era of optimism and faith in the future, inaugurated nearly two hundred years earlier by the Enlightenment. In the late 18th century, Enlightenment thought founded a belief in the progress of humanity, which guided Western thought throughout the 19th century and much of the 20th. In this

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[1] T.N.: Except for the quotes of works by Boyer, Crimson, Khoury and Wang, all the other quotes in English were translated from Portuguese, in which case they are either quotes of Brazilian authors, quotes of non-Brazilian authors in Portuguese editions, or quotes of non-Brazilian authors translated into Portuguese by the author of this paper.

world view, the future would always be better, and old equaled outdated. Reverence for the past was therefore a discouraged attitude.

In the 20th century, as Le Goff also notes, a sequence of traumatic events cooled this Enlightenment faith. Two world wars, the Holocaust, the atomic bomb, the Cold War, the discovery of global environmental challenges, humanity's awareness of its capacity for self-destruction, are among the elements that ended up undermining that unlimited faith in the future and belief in progress, suggesting that, contrary to what was thought for two hundred years, humanity is heading towards an uncertain and not necessarily better future. This explains, at least in part, the way in which, culturally, we have turned our gaze to the past: the nostalgic feeling is no longer reactionary.

This pattern, marked by the prevalence of unrestricted faith in the future and a subsequent appreciation of the past, or a desire to restore it, has been reflected in the urban agenda. It was, after all, under full effect of the Enlightenment paradigm that the major western cities developed, and that would explain the historically demonstrated unconcern for heritage in them. "Behind every urban planning and every architectural project was the utopian belief that society was progressing towards a better future", explains, in tune with Le Goff, the urbanist and urban historian M. Christine Boyer (1998, p. 11). This resulted in a development pattern in which many cities grew despising their own material heritage. For Maurício Abreu, cities went through "a long period in which only the new was revered, a period that resulted in a constant, systematic attack on legacies from older times" (ABREU, 1998, p. 5).

Added to this are the effects of tensions from the globalization process. On the one hand, technological advances and economic globalization have furthered a model of society increasingly global, interconnected, tending towards homogenization. On the other, this tendency gives rise to reactions in the field of culture (ROBERTSON, 2000; LOURENÇO, 2014), which include movements to promote local past and identities as an element of singularity (HUYSSEN, 2002; WALDMAN-MITNICK, 2006; BAER, 2010).

Amidst these processes, and as an effect thereof, the fact is that in cities around the world, as Mark Crimson (2005) notes, "never before have there been so many amenity groups, preservation societies, genealogists, museums, historians amateur and professional, conservation areas, and listed buildings" (CRIMSON, 2005, p. xi). A similar process is seen in Brazil, where "day-to-day urban life […] is invaded by discourses and projects that preach restoration, preservation or reinstatement of all types of vestiges of the past" (ABREU, 1998, p. 5).

The justification for such discourses, Abreu emphasizes, is always the need to preserve the urban memory or city memory, two "imprecise" terms (ABREU, 1998, p. 18), which do not find a definition in those day-to-day discourses. Their increasingly frequent use and imprecise meaning give them, one might say, their buzzword quality.

Even in scholarly texts, there are some, like Mark Crimson, who observe that the expression urban or city memory is often "uncritically appropriated and used in an untheorised way" (CRIMSON, 2005, p. xii). If true, this finding can indicate that the buzzword has found its way even into academic debate.

Indeed, while some definitions or attempts at definition can be found, they do not seem convincing in pointing out specific characteristics of this type of memory. Ringas, Christopoulo and Stefanidakis (2011), for example, argue that urban memory can be viewed as an expression of collective memory shaped in a given time within a given space, expressing the relationship between the past and present of that space – something not very different from what Maurice Halbwachs himself, in chapter IV of his classic *On Collective Memory*, established as the relationship between collective memory and space, by saying that "there is no collective memory which does not develop within a spatial framework" (HALBWACHS, 1990: 141). Likewise, for Wang (2016), "urban memory is defined as the collective memory recorded during urban formation, change and development, which, with people as the principal part, dynamically and continuously reconstructs the cognition and memory of the city's

history" (WANG, 2016, p. 3). She goes on to say, in a later passage, that "urban memory is the collective impression of the formation, change, and development of a city" (p. 237). Once again, no attributes are precisely identified that are specific to urban memory or city memory and which can differentiate them from other forms of social or collective memory anchored in spatial relations.

Still, as observed by Abreu (1998), "despite the imprecisions, the fact is that the terms 'urban memory' and 'city memory' have caught on" (ABREU, 1998, p. 17), which justifies dedicating some effort to conceptualizing them.

3. From buzzword to concept

The fact that urban or city memory has become a buzzword, used in everyday life (and sometimes even in scholarly texts, as said earlier), does not mean that there is not a community of authors, small though it is, who have contributed to discussing the topic conceptually. Prominent such are the earlier-mentioned Rossi (1982), Boyer (1998) and Crimson (2005). In Brazil, the topic was addressed by Sandra Jatahy Pesavento (2007) and Maurício de Almeida Abreu (1998). Based in part on discussions they developed, we will try here to indicate a possible path to advance the conceptualization of "city memory" or "urban memory".

The path we follow involves mobilizing long-established concepts such as collective memory (HALBWACHS, 1990), sites of memory (NORA, 1993), memory conflicts and silencing (POLLAK, 1989). By articulating these, we intend to compose a possible conceptual definition for urban or city memory. To that end, we will proceed in three main steps: understanding memory in its collective dimension, understanding the role of space and of sites of memory, and making a conceptual shift from the concept of sites of memory to that of memory of places.

It should be stressed that there is not, in our intent, the pretension to approach the whole literature on the relationship between memory and city. The intent is more modest: to propose a possible path of conceptualization, with no prejudice to others that may be constructed from other strands of analysis. The path indicated here is certainly not the only one, and there will always be possible counterpoints and alternative views to be offered.

3.1. A Theoretical antecedent: the collective dimension of memory

The word 'memory' has a relatively wide range of meanings. Etymologically, it originates from the Greek *mnemis* and the Latin *memoria*, terms whose meaning is associated with the idea of conservation. Thus, in its more traditional definitions, which usually head entries in language dictionaries, memory is the human ability to file or conserve information acquired in the past (whether referring to facts, ideas, sensations, impressions, knowledge) for future retrieval and use. In this sense, also common in biology and neurosciences, memory is a capacity or faculty that concerns individuals: some have a greater capacity to memorize than others, some lose it over the course of life for a number of reasons, etc.

Contrastingly, the idea of a collective or social memory, which transcends the individual, is more recent: its concept developed in the 20th century, mainly from the work of Maurice Halbwachs. Without denying the existence of that individual dimension, the author proposes that the creation or construction of memories is an eminently collective activity, since every individual memory is conditioned by a social framework. What is remembered, stored in an individual's memory, results from a horizon of sociocultural interpretation, from a collaborative process between the individual and the groups they have affinity and interact with in everyday life. In this sense, for Halbwachs (1990), the individual never acts alone in selecting what will be remembered, which thus configures a process by which every individual memory is socially inscribed. Nor do they act alone insofar as the content of their memories is contingent on an intersubjective process of collaboration through mutual testimony,

to the point that the extinction of an individual or their individual ability to remember does not entail the loss of their memory, which will depend on the weakening or disappearance of the social group. Thus, for Halbwachs, it is not the individual who remembers, but rather the group who does so through individuals, even though the exercise of memory might seem (and had until then been considered) an intimate or individual activity.

Halbwachs was the first to propose the existence of a collective memory (COLACRAI, 2010), though his concept had gaps that were not fully resolved, which sparked a critical discussion that followed through the following decades, with contributions such as those of Paul Ricoeur (2005), Joël Candau (2011), among others.

Candau (2011), in order to advance the distinction between individual and collective forms of memory, proposes a decomposition of the concept of memory into three levels. "Low-level memory", or "protomemory", corresponds to a procedural type of memory, recorded in the body through habit and repetition, which is expressed in everyday practices and automatic gestures. Thanks to protomemory, "we can ride a bicycle without falling or greet someone we meet in the street using an incorporated gesture we are not even aware of" (CANDAU, 2011, p. 23). "High-level memory" (or "memory itself") is, in turn, the ability to maintain and mobilize memories, whether from autobiographical experiences or encyclopedic knowledge. This memory, which can manifest itself voluntarily or involuntarily, is also constituted by forgetting (since not everything can be stored in it) and can benefit from artificial extensions, or memory supports. The third level is "metamemory", which corresponds to the representation that each individual makes of their own recollections, and to what the individual says about them: it is thus an asserted, enunciated memory. For Candau, the first two levels are direct consequences of the individual's ability to memorize, and only metamemory, by its quality of enunciation, is shared on the intersubjective plane, hence its status as collective memory, capable of being produced from collectively shared memories.

Ricoeur (2005) in turn expands the discussion on attribution of memory beyond the simple polarity between the individual and collective levels. In keeping with Halbwachs, the author considers that in the act of remembering, the individual has "access to events reconstructed for us by others than us" (RICOEUR, 2005, p. 131). He proposes, however, that this relationship takes place on two different levels: that of "others", i.e., the broader community, and that of "close relations", i.e., the "people who count for us and for whom we count" (RICOEUR, 2005, p. 141). One's family, friends and any other groups of close everyday interaction are examples of what can constitute close relations, situated at an intermediate level between the individual and the collective plane. As D'Alessandris summarizes, between the individual and the group or collectivity, "there is a dimension of shared closeness between subjects, and only by crossing it can we connect singular memories to plural memories" (D'ALESSANDRIS, 2019, p. 58).

Be that as it may, Halbwachs' recognition of group or collective mechanisms in the construction of memory – certainly debated and refined by later authors – also paved the way for another important redefinition: that of the reconstructive and presentist quality of memory. Insofar as memory is enunciated within a social or group context (whether or not the memory concerned is considered metamemory, in Candau's terms, and whether that context is given by close relations or by others, in Ricoeur's terms), it is influenced by the values and reference systems in effect in the present. And as these values and systems change, so too will the past woven by memory.

Or, as Baer expresses:

> The past is actualized from the present, and finds therein its selection, description and interpretation principles. We have therefore moved from a model of memory as archive – in which the past is unalterable – to one of active construction in which the past is being permanently modified by

values, beliefs and constraints of the present (BAER, 2010, p. 132).

3.2. Collective memory, its supports, and space: sites of memory

An important discussion related with collective memory concerns the means, or supports, that ensure its storage and sharing. Aleida Assmann (2006) and Jan Assmann (2016) introduced in the Halbwachian concept of collective memory a distinction between what they called communicative memory and cultural memory. Communicative memory is based solely on the recollections of those involved and on oral testimony, and is transmitted by everyday interaction. It depends on living carriers, and therefore usually has a shorter duration (generally up to three generations, according to the authors). Cultural memory, on the other hand, with a longer duration, is safeguarded in more stable supports, whether immaterial (rituals, traditions, recitations, festivals, etc.) or material (artifacts, objects, archives, museums, monuments, etc.), thus possessing greater durability. Many of the material supports of cultural memory are topographically referenced (as with monuments, for example), which indicates an important role of space as support and base for cultural memory.

Halbwachs himself, though he pays more attention to communicative type transmission and does not further elaborate on memory supports, nevertheless recognizes the role of space in the construction and transmission of memory. For him,

> [...] there is no collective memory which does not develop within a spatial framework. After all, space is an enduring reality: our impressions follow one another, nothing remains in our mind, and it would not be possible for us to understand that we can recover the past, if it were not indeed preserved in our material surroundings. It is to space, to our space [...] that we must turn our attention: it is on space that our thought must rely so that this or that category of memories can reappear (HALBWACHS, 1990, p. 141).

Admitted in these terms by Halbwachs and recognized by Aleida and Jan Assmann as one of the forms of cultural memory, the spatial anchoring of memory will find in Pierre Nora (1993) greater theoretical elaboration. Nora expands the discussion about the relationship between collective memory and places, coining the concept of "site of memory".

For him, modernity brought about the end of the collectivities who "inhabited" their own collective memory, that is, who secured, in their ritualized way of living, contact with the past and transmission or maintenance of their memory, values and traditions. While in those old collectivities the way of life was a repetition, in which the past was carried alive as it was reproduced, the "acceleration of history" brought about by industrial growth, urbanization and modernity broke that continuity between past and present. Relegated to the cold, de-ritualized records of history, the past began to demand unnatural operations to continue functioning as a constituent element of identity. Hence the notion of sites of memory, understood as those sites where memory, once carried alive, now seeks refuge artificially in order to be sought or cultivated.

 "If we still inhabited our memory, we would not need to consecrate places to it. [...] Each gesture, down to the most everyday, would be experienced as a religious repetition of what has always been done", says Nora (1993, p. 8). The de-ritualization of life brought about by modernity represents the disappearance of the "real environments" (*milieux*) of memory that characterized traditional societies, making it necessary to resort to "sites" (*lieux*) of memory to keep the bonds of identity alive. "Sites of memory are born and live from the feeling that there is no spontaneous memory, that it is necessary to create archives, have anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce funeral eulogies, have minutes registered with the notary" (NORA, 1993, p. 13), among other unnatural operations.

The sites of memory, according to Nora's definition, are constituted by the combination of three dimensions: a material dimension, since they offer themselves to sensory experience (they can be apprehended through the senses); a functional dimension, because they perform the function (exclusive or not) of supporting collective memory; and a symbolic dimension, since they are the object of a ritual through which collective memory is expressed and kept alive, making the past present. The three dimensions always coexist, even if to different degrees. The notion is flexible enough to include not only places understood in the physical or topographical sense, such as buildings, monuments, museums, public spaces, commemorative plaques, but also a variety of other items that also offer themselves to sensory experience and which lend themselves functionally and symbolically to remembrance: objects, celebrations, parties, emblems, national anthems and symbols, toponymy, etc.

Sites of memory are therefore places, corporeal or not, where the memory of a collectivity crystallizes and takes refuge; that lend themselves, through their "symbolic aura" (NORA, 1993, p. 21), to a ritualized relationship with the past, in order to keep collective memory and identity alive, and to block forgetting. Far from being natural, they are a historical construction with a compensatory quality to them: they are created as a result of a "will to remember", prostheses of a memory no longer spontaneously experienced in everyday life.

Through sites of memory, social groups identify with and recognize each other, fostering a sense of identity. Nora's interest when developing this concept was specifically directed at discussing the role of those places in the collective representation of French national identity, but the concept had wide repercussion and was quickly "assimilated by other academic and geographical latitudes" (NEVES, 2004, p. 17). As described by Huyssen (1994), in a rapidly changing world, marked by media saturation and information overload leading to a "culture of amnesia", humans have been increasingly concerned with building or instituting places that can afford them some sense of temporal anchorage. The concept coined by Nora was timely and well-suited for understanding such movement.

And in the midst of same phenomenon, the idea has been developing of urban territory as a system or collection of sites of memory, which is the object of the next section.

3.3. From sites of memory to the memory of places: at last, a concept of city memory

While Halbwachs, as we have seen, recognizes the importance of space as a support for collective memories, Aldo Rossi (1982), as said earlier, refers specifically to urban space: "Expanding Halbwachs' thesis, I would say that the city itself is the collective memory of the people; and because memory is linked to facts and places, the city is the locus of collective memory" (ROSSI, 1982, p. 226). In the post-war historical context, in which many European cities altered their landscapes by investing in modernist-influenced urban renewal projects, Rossi argued for the importance of preserving old buildings. Insofar as they provide a spatial framework for memory, conserving the buildings and other old physical structures of a city corresponds to conserving the collective memories that find in them shelter, or support.

In line with Rossi, also for Crimson, "modernism in architecture often seemed to erase memory from the city" (CRIMSON, 2005, p. i). And Boyer (1998) develops the discussion: "Architecture and city places [...] give particular form to our memories; they are the mnemonic codes that awaken recall" (BOYER, 1998, p. 322). Although neither Boyer, Rossi, nor Crimson explicitly refers to the concept of site of memory, it is not difficult to see that something close to Nora's idea underlies their statements. Certain buildings or monuments of a city, by functioning as "mnemonic codes", operate the three dimensions Nora talks about: they are material sites (since they offer themselves to sensory experience and, in this case, also because they are places in the topographical sense); functional, since they have among their functions supporting memories; and symbolic, insofar as through them we are able to make the past allegorically present. It is in this way, ultimately, that, as Boyer says elsewhere, "the memory of a city develops out of its monuments and artifacts" (BOYER, 1998, p. 174).

The Brazilian historian Sandra Pesavento (2007) is yet another author who alludes to the idea by referring to the multiple "memory anchor points" in a urban landscape. This time, the association with Nora's concept is explicit:

> All of us who live in cities have in them memory anchor points: places where we recognize ourselves, where we have experienced ordinary or exceptional situations, territories often traversed and familiar or, on the contrary, spaces existing in another time, which only have meaning in our spirit because they are narrated by those who lived before us and have walked through them in the past. […]. More than spaces, or extensions of surface, they are territories, since they are appropriated by the social. But, most importantly, they are places endowed with a symbolic charge that differentiates and identifies them. And if such meanings are past referenced, evoking actions, characters and stories from a bygone time, they are sites of memory, as Pierre Nora points out, or spaces that contain a time, as Paul Ricoeur indicates (PESAVENTO, 2007, n.p.).

Pesavento's mention of Ricoeur and of "spaces that contain a time" can be understood from the earlier-mentioned role attributed by the latter to "close relations" in the attribution of collective memory. The experience of the world that is shared with one's close relations "rests in the community of both time and space", says Ricoeur (2005, p. 140), and "collective memory can thus be described as the ability to recognize, through reciprocal attribution, the recollections that are inscribed in the *temporal spaces* shared with our close relations and, through these, with others" (D'ALESSANDRIS, 2019, p. 59, emphasis added). In other words, the collective memory that is built together with one's close relations is linked to the spaces where that closeness takes (or took) place – after all, in Ricoeur's terms, "every life story unfolds in a space of life" (RICOEUR, 2021, p. 155).

Pesavento shows, in addition, how the relationship between urban space and collective memory takes place at different scales. Among the memory anchor points that exist in the urban space, there are those that echo particular experiences, closer to the individual scale: every inhabitant of a city has places of memory that are significant to them for evoking their memories – the house and the street of their childhood, for example – in a process similar to that by which the protagonist of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* relives the past as he sees the paving stones he trod as a young man. But there are, above all, those of a more comprehensive nature, charged with memories that are common to the whole community, usually as a result of public policies and induction mechanisms: "we may have been induced, educated and taught to identify places in a city, sharing the same references of meaning, in a process of experiencing the collective urban imagination" (PESAVENTO, 2007, n.p.). These last, among which are monuments, museums and official urban toponymy, for example, carry an institutionalized narrative about the past, charged with officialism, which works as a reference standard for the collectivity that inhabits a urban territory. "Thus, a city is holder of history and memory, as well as of this symbolic community of meaning which is called identity" (PESAVENTO, 2007, n.p.).

The same author, in another text (PESAVENTO, 2004), when drawing attention to cities' anchor points or sites of memory, uses the palimpsest as a metaphor for urban territory. A term of Greek origin, the palimpsest is a parchment from which a first writing has been scraped in order to make way for a new one. However, the erasure is never perfect, so the new text is written over traces of the old one. Cities can be read as palimpsests, since they also result from the superposition of successive "texts", never completely erased[2]. In a city "there is a time that has flowed away, but which has left traces that can

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[2]   The palimpsest metaphor is also used by the architect Benedito Lima de Toledo, in a well-known passage of his analysis on the transformation of the city of São Paulo: "The city of São Paulo is a palimpsest – a huge parchment whose writing is scraped off from time to time in order to receive another, new one, generally of inferior literary quality" (TOLEDO, 1983, p. 67).

be recovered" (PESAVENTO, 2004, p. 26), and that recovery requires from the observer of the city "a sharp eye to discern what is not imposing to view" (p. 25) – at least to a superficial, hurried view.

The "sharp eye" Pesavento refers to may well be that of the historian, as she points out, but it also belongs to the many inhabitants who, though entangled in everyday life, are still attentive to the urban space and the symbols established in it. Here, it is worth remembering the *flâneur*, a figure originally set in 19th century Paris which appeared in the work of the French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867). Endowed with theoretical interest by Walter Benjamin (2007), the *flâneur* is presented by this author as a model of the modern urban spectator: the city is a text to be deciphered, and the *flâneur*, in his wandering and observing everyday life, is its sharp reader. Like the "walker" described by Michel de Certeau (1998), the *flâneur* experiences the urban territory from the ground and from within the crowd, that is, from the angle of view of the common people of the city (in this the *flâneur* differs from the voyeur, also described by Certeau, whose view of the city is from above, panoramic and totalizing). Yet, although surrounded by the urban crowd, the *flâneur* is somehow able to stand out from it, capturing aspects of the city beyond the limited view of the common walker. The *flâneur* looks with a clinical eye at the urban space. Genuinely "botanizing on the asphalt" (BENJAMIN, 2007, p. 417), he discovers the life and symbols present there. This includes the ability to see the marks of the past, the places that evoke it or which, in a Proustian sense, help to keep the past present.

However, it is yet another Brazilian author, Maurício de Almeida Abreu, who thinks more explicitly about the relationship between these anchor points or sites of memory found in a given place (or city) and the idea of memory of that place. For Abreu, the terms urban memory and city memory "do not concern the ability of individuals or groups to remember, but the stock of recollections eternalized in the landscape or in the records of a particular place, recollections which are now the object of reappropriation. by society" (ABREU, 1998, p. 17-18).

For Abreu, a city contains in its territory a collection of sites of memory (in the sense of Nora, 1993), or memory anchor points (if we want to use a more general expression), in the form of buildings, monuments, institutions and other structures and records inherited from other times, which make the past present when appropriated by the individuals and groups who identify with them. City memory can thus be defined as the aggregate, or sum, of the different collective memories which are evoked or kept alive through this collection of places[3].

Such places are part of the space where everyday life unfolds, and at the same time the material support in which collective memories are referenced or supported. In Dieterle's (2003) words, there is "a set of memorial processes that take place in cities, which are triggered by that which beckons us in cities" (DIETERLE, 2003, p. 10). "That which beckons us" are sites of memory situated in a territory, whose loss or destruction – whether as a result of the devastation caused by 20th-century wars in different cities around the world, as described by Khoury (1995), or due to patterns of disfiguring urban growth, as in São Paulo and other large Brazilian cities (ABREU, 1998; TOLEDO, 1983) – "has not only burned holes in its citizens' memories, it has also erected a barrier between the individual and its physical environment" (KHOURY, 1995, p. 142).

In sum, from the foregoing, we may conceptualize city memory as the stock of collective memories or remembrances, of different groups, which are supported by the collection of memory anchor points (or sites of memory) situated in an urban landscape.

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[3]   Abreu (1998) makes a distinction, which we do not stress here, between the idea of urban memory (of the urban or of cities in general) and that of a memory of the city (of a particular city). Though aware of this distinction, for the purposes of this work, we treat the two expressions as equivalent. The definition presented here seeks consistency with what Abreu calls "memory of the city", Crimson (2005), "urban memory", Pesavento (2007), "memory of the urban", Khoury (1995), "memory of the city", and Dieterle (2003), "*mémoire des villes*".

4. Problematizing the concept: the conflictive and silencing nature of city memory

With a possible conceptual definition for city memory thus achieved, it is necessary to problematize it. As it is common with all collective memory, city memory thus defined can be biased or influenced by power relations, and have an oppressive nature.

Michael Pollak (1989) is one of the main authors who question conceptualizations according to which collective memory is elaborated on the basis of social cohesion, in communities of belonging and affinity-based groups. Without denying this mechanism, Pollak draws attention to settings marked by the presence of conflicts and disputes in the elaboration of the past, and emphasizes the uniformization and silencing often involved in the process of building collective memory. He refers in particular to national memory, "an organized collective memory which summarizes the image that a majority society or the state wishes to convey and impose" (POLLAK 1989, p. 8), which ends up overriding the memory of subaltern classes or minority groups. The latter end up constituting what Pollak calls "subterranean memories". As these do not fit the image of the past constructed by the majority society and the state, they are transmitted in restricted networks of affective and/or political sociability, being denied expression in the public space.

The memory of the city is not free of such homogenization and silencing mechanisms. Abreu (1998) alludes to this when saying that a city is not a community of homogeneous experiences; on the contrary, it is the stage of countless experiences of the various groups that coexist in it, with different capacities to inscribe stable records in the form of sites of memory or memory anchor points. "The dominant classes not only built more durable objects, but were also the creators of the memory institutions themselves, often established precisely to keep the memory which those who instituted them considered important", says Abreu (1998, p. 15). Thus, insofar as the memory of the city is anchored in a collection of sites of memory and other anchor structures that in turn result from power relations, it is fatally a selective or elitist memory. "It is impossible to recover the memory of a city, if that means the totality of collective memories which had that city as setting" (ABREU, 1998, p. 15).

Thus, studying a city's memory involves not only identifying the points or sites of memory in which it expresses itself. It is necessary to problematize the way in which these spatial supports were instituted, and the power relations from which they resulted. It is also necessary to identify dissonant voices, anonymous or less visible recollections – in short, the memories that Pollak (1989) calls subterranean – mostly absent from institutionalized city memory, in its biased collection of sites of memory. We return here to communicative memory, which gains importance for recovering part of these memories that escape the memory of the city, a memory inscribed in the collection of sites of instituted memory within the urban space.

We are met, however, with difficulties such as those pointed out by Ecléa Bosi, for whom orality, although important for transmitting and keeping these non-hegemonic and less institutionalized memories, on the other hand faces ever greater obstacles to its subsistence precisely in the urban environment. Finally, the memory of the city has a conflicting and silencing nature that is difficult to overcome:

> The urban environment keeps people apart, they no longer visit each other, companions are no longer around who used to keep memories now dispersed. Hence the importance of the collectivity for supporting memory. When the voices of witnesses disperse, fade away, we are left with no guide to help us tread the paths of our recent history. Who will lead us through their forks and shortcuts? We are left with official history (BOSI, 2003, p. 70).

5. City Memory in digital society: a mutating concept? (Final considerations)

In the previous sections, we sought to weave and then problematize a possible concept of urban or city memory. With the concept thus articulated, it is worth noting that the main authors we drew on for this purpose – Halbwachs, Nora, Ricoeur, Pollak, Abreu, Pesavento, Bosi – are men and women of the 20th century whose work was produced fundamentally in the pre-digital era. Although several of them got to witness the current process of digitization of society (Maurício Abreu lived and worked until 2011, Sandra Pesavento, until 2009, Ecléa Bosi, until 2017, Paul Ricoeur, until 2005, Pierre Nora still lives), this is not necessarily reflected in the way they thought about the relationships between places, closeness, city and memory. As a consequence, the concept of city memory as we have constructed it based on these authors primarily refers to modalities of remembrance anchored in conventional space, not in virtual space.

This is not to say that these authors ignored the potential offered by the new communication and information technologies for the conditions of collective remembrance. Maurício Abreu, for example, recognized that "the spectacular advances achieved recently in information storage techniques […] ensure the storage of much information in a minimum space" (ABREU, 1998, p. 24), and thus, that "computers are new and important 'sites of memory'" (p. 24, emphasis in original). But the author did not get to explore the concrete practices of collective remembrance about the city anchored in these new sites of memory, or, if we will, in informational spaces of interaction provided by the virtual environment.

The effects of the computational age on human interaction and thought have been debated for some time. For Pierre Lévy (1993), the new "intelligence technologies" expand the intellectual potential of humanity by enabling new spaces for the production of knowledge based on network communication and collaboration. Inevitably, these new ways of thinking and building knowledge bring novelties to remembrance practices. For Huyssen (2002), for example, digitization has affected the way we apprehend the past, making it less ephemeral and more musealized. According to the author, the new technological means have the property of producing "present pasts": the past, though having passed, remains easily accessible to visitation. This scenario justifies thinking of "new sites of memory": the cyberspace[4] preserves mediatized elements and offers to sensory experience innumerable objects from the past which can play this role.

If these considerations are valid for the construction and transmission of collective or social memory in general, there seems to be no reason why they should not apply to city memory as well. The collection of sites of memory that anchors the memory of a city can expand into the informational space. A set of examples appears in Jayo and Vargas (2019), who list as "cybersites" of urban memory: (i) the immersive environments that allow visiting and moving around the city in its past configurations (such as the Google Street View tool), making previous writings in the urban palimpsest readable in great detail; ii) applications of georeferencing technologies which facilitate interactive navigation through a city's historic plans and old images (such as those available today, in the case of the city of São Paulo, in the GeoSampa public portal, among others); and, most notably, (iii) the remembrance spaces that have emerged on the web 2.0, including blogs, websites and "memorialist" initiatives in social media, dedicated to the sharing and exchange of images, documents, personal testimonies and other material concerning the past of cities. All this could even provide a new way of sustaining memories by those whom, as seen in Bosi (2003, p. 70), the physical environment keeps apart and "no longer visit each other" in the physical space of the city.

On the other hand, this new relationship with temporality can also entail new forms of risks to memory,

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[4]   Cyberspace: a term which was first used by the American writer William Gibson, in his science-fiction novel *Neuromancer* (1984). It refers to the virtual space of human interaction constituted in communications by computer networks.

such as those derived from the superabundance of information. Candau (2011, p. 111) speaks of a "contemporary iconorrhea", which can cause confusion and forgetting precisely due to excess of information. Much is discussed in recent academic debate on collective memory – it is analogous to what Paul Connerton (2008) calls "forgetting as annulment", and consistent with the "omission-forgetting" mentioned by Johann Michel (2010) –, this limitation still deserves examination regarding specifically what we conceptualize here as city memory. How can we expect the new cybersites of urban memory to perform their function of providing anchorage, if they themselves can be objects of media saturation?

This, in conclusion, is the state of the art in which, we might say, the discussion of urban or city memory stands. If this type of memory, as we were able to conceptualize it in the previous sections, concerns a set of collective memories which are produced anchored in a collection of sites or spaces of memory situated in an urban territory, it is still worth discussing more specifically how the production of such memory is strengthened, on the one hand, and hampered, on the other, when the collection expands towards mediatization and virtuality. Here is path of expansion, or mutation, for a concept that, as seen, is young and still under construction.

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