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# Beyond Performance: Rhetoric, Collective Memory, and the Motive of Imprinting Identity

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Beyond Performance: Rhetoric, Collective Memory,  
and the Motive of Imprinting Identity

by

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of the requirements for the degree of  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis reconsiders Maurice Halbwachs' theory of collective memory in terms of rhetoric. My purpose is to examine specifically how fading generations conform the present to the past as they fight to maintain and defend their collective identities. Although rhetoric and memory studies have often focused on the complex matters of national collectives, Halbwachs was also concerned with the individual and his or her interaction among those groups that matter in everyday living and memory's role in generational shifts that slowly transform culture. Halbwachs' theory helps determine exactly how attempts at conflict resolution are sometimes guarded defenses against threats to one's personal and collective identity. In contrast to the generally accepted use of memory as selectively adapting the past for present purposes, this protection of identity may require the present to remain faithful to one's past. To examine how memory and rhetoric are complementary, I draw a parallel between Maurice Halbwachs' collective memory theory and Jim Corder's notion of individual identity as historical narrative. Then, in further retracing Kenneth Burke's influence on Corder's work, I also compare Halbwachs' social constructionist view of memory to Burke's theories of symbolicity and identification. Finally, I apply these theories to the recent 2012 debate in Ybor City, Florida over the Spanish spelling of Seventh Avenue in which passing generations struggle to preserve their identity and sense of belonging in the changing social milieu. In demonstrating how people seek a more permanent sense of identity articulated through memory, this debate offers an alternative to the theory of identity as a rhetorical performance negotiated in the present.

## **Introduction**

Human beings generally perceive themselves as forward thinking, with an emphasis on progress. However, humanity just as often looks to the past both willfully and unconsciously; the past can offer wisdom, comfort, or reminders of unshakeable burdens. Memory studies has proven that, for better or worse, the past haunts us, and the decisions and conflicts we encounter necessitate the confrontation of our memory's most persistent ghosts. To understand more completely the power and purpose of memory also requires acknowledging it as the primary source for constructing reality and a sense of self. That is, each of us navigates life carrying our past as a guide. Jim Corder might as well have been referring to collective memory when he wrote, "none of us lives without a history; each of us is a narrative" (16). The past is a cultural marker of individual and collective identity, which guides humanity's orientation toward the largely mysterious world in which it lives.

In rhetoric, identity has often been framed as a constant task for the present, considered as a coming into being or a transformation rather than a question of what is. For example, Bryan Crable describes identity as a constant performance, and Judy Holiday advocates teaching invention in a way that "enables students to perceive themselves as social constructions and thus capable of altering themselves and their habitus at will" (403). Similarly, James L. Kastely notes in his discussion of ethos that, after listening to the rhetor, "The responsibility of the audience is to decide. In their decision, they invent their identity" (235). Maurice Halbwachs' theory of collective memory complements these ideas of identity as a process but also recognizes memory's role in preserving a sense of being in terms of identity that human beings desire for

navigating their everyday lives. Halbwachs' framing of memory as a powerful force that reconciles time and provides a stable, connected sense of being raises questions about the extent to which identity reconstructs itself in a particular situation for conflict resolution to be achieved.

Halbwachs' theory of collective memory presents the problem of identity as the need for emphasizing difference rather than masking or eliminating it. For rhetoric, such a notion builds upon the problem of identification and division later developed by Kenneth Burke. Halbwachs suggests that one's memory narrative is known only to the self, and because identity is socially constructed, it is able to be expressed only partially to various groups in which the individual is a member. In this sense, shared social elements that construct each individual's memory may be considered forms of identification. As an alternative to defining division primarily as a source of conflict, collective memory theory explains how an individual's personal memory narrative represents a desirable division that provides a sense of self or identity.

Burke had recognized difference in his equation of consubstantiality as an "ambiguous" remainder, suggesting identification and division as a kind of hierarchy in which similarities are more important for social harmony (*Rhetoric* 21.) However, understanding identity as constructed only from similarities presents identity as both unstable and beyond the individual's control, as Bryan Crable argues. Although Halbwachs posits memory as a socially constructed and dynamic process, he emphasizes its sense of permanence, which draws human beings toward an idea of being rather than becoming. From this perspective, Halbwachs offers an alternative understanding of identity as the need to affirm a unique, separate existence; to have control over one's expression of identity provides a secure sense of being in the face of change.

Memory further complicates the inherent ambiguity of language as symbols in expressing identity, because individual memory attaches personal meaning to language; as not everyone

shares the same memory, much of the intent behind language use is left to interpretation. Therefore, identity must be carefully articulated within and outside of familiar groups—an idea resurrected and expanded upon by G. Mitchell Reyes. Although rhetoric scholars often promote negotiation or even a transformation of the self as either an ideal solution or the best hope human beings have for achieving any kind of social harmony, the conflict of identity seems to reject these methods of resolution.

This thesis reconsiders Halbwachs' theory of collective memory in terms of rhetoric. Although memory studies has often focused on the complex matters of national collectives, Halbwachs was also concerned with the individual and his or her interaction among those groups that matter in everyday living, and memory's role in generational shifts that slowly transform culture. Investigating how Halbwachs theory complements rhetoric can provide memory studies with another possibility for determining how attempts at conflict resolution are sometimes guarded defenses against threats to one's personal and collective identity. In contrast to the generally accepted use of memory as selectively adapting the past for present purposes, this protection of identity may require the present to remain faithful to one's past.

Although many studies have focused on the importance of how collectives conform the past to the present (Dickson, Blaire, and Ott; Gronbeck), my purpose is to examine how fading generations conform the present to the past as they fight to maintain and defend their collective identities. To examine how memory and rhetoric are complementary, I draw a parallel between Maurice Halbwachs' collective memory theory and Jim Corder's notion of individual identity as historical narrative. Then, in further retracing Kenneth Burke's influence on Corder's work, I also compare Halbwachs' social constructionist view of memory to Burke's theories of symbolicity and identification. Finally, I apply these theories to consider the recent 2012 debate

in Ybor City, Florida over the Spanish spelling of Seventh Avenue in which passing generations fight to preserve their identity and sense of belonging in the changing social milieu.



## Literature Review

Collective memory garnered considerable attention from several disciplines during what is now referred to as the “memory boom” of the late 1970s and has led to the emerging field of memory studies. At present, memory studies seeks to understand how to establish discourse among the variety of memory interests in the sciences and the humanities (Brown, Gutman, Freeman, Sodaro, and Coman; Hirst and Manier; Stony Brook). Over the last few decades, collective memory scholarship in the humanities has involved a brief yet intense period of rapid development and participation, including contributions from anthropology, cultural studies, communications, history, literature, and political science, among others. Olick describes the sudden interest in collective memory as the result of scholars’ need to find a term that would adequately encompass increasing concerns about “collective representations” and “political legitimation” (“Memoire” 20) of the past for present purposes. Of the turn toward collective memory, Blight remarks, “we have experienced a breakdown in agreed-upon institutions, values, languages, or methods of cohesion, then this too may account, in part for a growing social preoccupation with memory and identity” (247). As collective memory came to be considered a fitting concept for the study of how the past shapes social and political issues in the present, terms such as ideology and myth became insufficient and outdated (Assmann; Olick, “Two Cultures”).

French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs is usually credited with coining the term *collective memory*, although more recently scholars have discovered the use of the term predates Halbwachs (Russell; Stony Brook). Interest in memory, especially its ontological status, can be

traced back to the ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle (Yates; Phillips). However, Halbwachs was the first to develop a more comprehensive theory of collective memory, in which “the question of who remembers and how that happens is central” (Russell 796). In his first published and most cited work among memory scholars entitled *On Collective Memory*, Halbwachs answers the debate among his colleagues in psychology and history regarding the origin of individual memory: “No memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections” (43). Halbwachs’ social constructionist perspective posits memory not merely as a social process, but also as the mechanism that sustains society through what Halbwachs calls *social milieus*. In the relationship between memory and history, the past and social milieus in which it once existed die with the generation that lived it. Historical buildings, monuments, factual archives, and museums may remain as either relics or symbols of what once was, but the present generation can reconstruct the past only partially and through the lens of current social frameworks.

Although Halbwachs has been almost consistently cited in earlier works of collective memory, his theory has not always been systematically applied (Olick “Memoir”; Wertsch and Roediger III) or even accurately interpreted (Douglass; Confino; Green). One practical challenge for scholars concerns a lack of access to much of Halbwachs’ work as a whole (Olick, “Memoir” 21). Beyond his theory of collective memory, much of Halbwachs’ work has yet to be translated, and *The Collective Memory*, a posthumous collection of Halbwachs’ unfinished essays on memory, has not been reprinted since its first publication in 1980 (Olick, “Memoir” 21). The only known scholarship on Halbwachs’ complete work, a dissertation by Suzanne Vromen written in 1975, remains unpublished (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy 25). A second and significant challenge has been what Olick calls the “metastatic growth” of research on collective

memory once the term began to permeate disciplinary boundaries: “. . . in the early stage of work, many were talking about collective memory issues in other terms, whereas now we often talk about other issues in terms of collective memory, thus risking a loss of conceptual specificity” (“Memoir” 22). Part of the confusion also stems from a multiplicity of terms to identify discipline-specific contributions to memory studies; however, some scholars, and rhetoricians in particular, maintain that the several names given to the study of collective memory are important because they reflect contributions across disciplines (Barnier and Sutton; Blaire; Dickinson, Blaire, and Ott 6).

One of the earlier and most notable works of collective memory is Barry Schwarz’s “The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory,” which compares the commemorations at the U.S. Capitol before and after the U.S. Civil War. To explore how certain events and figures of the past gain or lose significance in the present, Schwartz turns to Claude Lévi-Strauss, Mircea Eliade, and others, to describe how history has been identified as a structured narrative that alters and is altered by the way people perceive and solve current events. Specifically, people’s emphasis on “the celebration of beginnings” sets off a pattern for “imposing discontinuities (Zerubavel) on history and so interpreting the past” (376). However, according to Schwartz, these theories do not explain how this process is constructed and maintained. Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory provides a possible answer to this question in suggesting that the past is inaccessible and can be reconstructed in the present only through the lens of current social frameworks.

Schwartz warns that Halbwachs’ perspective may be extreme, but the theory supports Schwartz’s findings that present values organize historical narratives—in this case, commemorations of American history through paintings displayed in the Capitol Building. For

example, despite the period 1800 – 1860 being the “true golden age of nation building, prosperity, and democracy . . . two major themes—colonization and revolution—almost totally monopolized the commemorative artwork of the pre-Civil War Capitol” (384). Rather than reflect a nation under construction, artwork of the period celebrated the fight for freedom and independence. Only after the outcome of the Civil War had secured the path for national unity did themes shift from national to more local events and icons. Of this change, Schwartz argues, “It was not that the celebration of the nation’s beginnings ceased to be *appropriate*; rather, in a society that had solved the integrative problem and had undergone massive political and economic change, the old paradigm was no longer *sufficient*” (393, emphasis original).

Therefore, Schwartz’s study demonstrates how the arrangement of objects, as historical symbols, is shaped by present social frameworks. Schwartz applies Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory as way to understand how the personal meaning of the past dies with the generations who lived it. Therefore, the present must attach its own meaning to the fragmented history that remains. These objects and arranged narratives also become part of the national identity, boasting those values which support the goals of the collective. Collective memory reinforces identity and ethos, therefore aiding a nation into being and in orienting itself toward what it should become.

### **History and Collective Memory**

Collective memory explores why the past, despite careful research and archiving by historians, continues to be altered in the present. Schwartz and others implicate identity as an important motive, and yet identity in this sense has yet to be fully explored (Gongaware). Rather, scholars have first been preoccupied with the troubling rift between the practice of history between academics and the public. Historians had identified a “history crisis” in the United

States, a disparity between people's learning of historical facts and how these facts were somehow forgotten or reconfigured in a collective sense. Michael Frisch's well known study was designed to investigate the origins of this crisis by exploring how historical knowledge at the individual level contributed to a cultural collective memory. Frisch gathered data of approximately 1000 students over a thirteen-year period from the first day of each American history survey course to ascertain what students already knew about American history by simply asking them to write on paper what came to mind. Frisch found a "dramatic uniformity" in the knowledge dispensed by the students and, furthermore, a common theme:

The most culturally revealing characteristic of the lists is their almost exclusively political and military cast, focused on epochal events. In class discussion, we have frequently noted the kinds of people missing from the survey: religious figures, for instance, or artists, philosophers, or scientists. It is hard to imagine a similar poll in England or Italy or China or Chile being quite so relentlessly political, public, and heroic. (1138)

At the time, Frisch acknowledged the power of cultural memory but suggested to historians that "we need to realize what we are up against" in the context of teaching "the real people and processes of history" (1155). As historians observed a disconnect between what they taught and what the popular mind believed about history, collective memory became a useful approach for studying this peculiar gap in the way information appeared to be chosen and processed collectively, and for what purpose.

As patterns in the relationship between collective memory and national historical narratives were discovered, history and memory were solidified as opposing terms: history, as a task of archiving truth, reveals the true nature of human beings, whereas collective memory is a

meaningful narrative for social and political sustainability. Krinka Vidaković-Petrov refers to memory as the “author of the Book of the Universe,” and she explores how memory serves both practical and social purposes in the oral tradition (94). Repetition, narrative and character templates aid in the retelling and remembering of several stories, while the oral tradition provides cultural “continuity, stability, and identity” and protection of ancestors’ memories (90). In addition to identifying narrative as a tool facilitating remembrance, Vidaković-Petrov suggests here memory as a way of knowing and being in the world, echoing more closely Halbwachs’ original conception of the term collective memory.

Peter Burke further alludes to collective memory’s role in identity construction by analyzing salient archetypes in national historical narratives in which good prevails and evil is either vanquished or conveniently omitted. Memory preserves the collective values that people should aspire to follow, shaping history as a teaching tool for how to live rather than as an archive of facts. In noting the apparent disparity between popular and politicized history versus scholarly research by historians, Peter Burke comments, “I prefer to see historians as guardians of awkward facts, the skeletons in the cupboard of the social memory to remind people of what they would have liked to forget” (110). In other words, in light of collective memory functioning as a kind of motivational narrative for nation (re)building, historians must protect what is considered the unappealing truth of humanity’s past transgressions. Ross Poole summarizes the general findings of collective memory studies and historical atrocities: “achievements from the past will become matters of individual pride; and past disgraces, matters of shame” (276). Affect, then, also navigates the course of collective memory, which Chris Weedon and Glenn Jordan have also pointed out especially in connection to citizens, politics, and national identity (148).

Especially concerning political grievances and human injustice, collective memory has become a mechanism for understanding how nations and governments approach conflict resolution. Blatz and Ross note how, in attempting to resolve past political grievances, “political elites intentionally misrepresent history and ordinary people unintentionally alter it” (234). For example, applying collective memory to the study of the Holocaust’s lasting effects on the German people has been particularly insightful for learning how a nation copes with its painful past. In David Cesarini’s edited collection entitled *After Eichmann: Collective Memory and the Holocaust since 1961*, trauma, political maneuvering, and silencing have been uncovered to explain what may or may not be articulated in public memory. In his introduction, Cesarini describes how collective memory helps to understand how the German nation may seek to rebuild its political reputation, and how the German people wish to dissociate themselves from those who supported Hitler. At the same time, Cesarini acknowledges how Holocaust victims have continued to struggle for grievance rights by seeking others’ complete recognition of the past. Therefore, collective memory and the academic study of history can also be complementary subjects for understanding complex national issues and seeking ways to solve them.

Aleida Assmann describes the progressive stages in understanding the relationship between history and memory: “1) the identity between history and memory, 2) the polarization between history and memory, and 3) the interaction between history and memory” (57). This last stage has led to the recognition of memory as an ongoing activity. Consequently, collective memory has been referred to using alternative terms such as collective remembering to emphasize the subjects and objects involved in constructing memory rather than simply the narrative itself (Reese and Fivush; Wertsch; Wertsch and Roediger.) Scholars have also used the

term *mnemonic practices* to encompass the multiple and complex multidisciplinary processes all classified as memory (Stony Brook).

### **Collective Memory and Rhetoric**

Rhetoric scholars are late participants in the conversation of collective memory, although many of the themes and issues important to collective memory intersect with values in rhetoric (Phillips). Dickinson, Blaire and Ott summarize the common themes of memory study among rhetoric scholars:

In addition to the assumption that remembering takes place in groups, contemporary memory scholars appear to hold to a number of positions, which we will reference as their consensual (or nominally consensual) assumptions. We take them up as follows: (1) memory is activated by present concerns, issues, or anxieties; (2) memory narrates shared identities, constructing senses of communal belonging; (3) memory is animated by affect; (4) memory is partial, partisan, and thus often contested; (5) memory relies on material and/or symbolic supports; (6) memory has a history. (6)

Highlighted here is the largely unchallenged proof among memory scholars that “our understandings of and investments in the past change as our present conditions and needs change” (Dickinson, Blaire, and Ott 7). Although memory is affected by groups, according to Halbwachs memory always takes place in the individual mind; historian Anna Green addresses how collective memory research sometimes “conflates collective and individual memory, or relegates the latter to a position of insignificance” (35). Instead, rhetoric scholars have focused on issues of memory and the public, and in resurrecting the importance of memory in rhetoric.

For some rhetoric scholars, collective memory has presented an opportunity and an arguable need for re-envisioning the fifth canon of memory, which has appeared to have lost



some of its relevance and identity since what has been generally agreed upon as “the western world’s shift from orality to literacy” (Stormer; Reynolds 245). For example, whereas historically the fifth canon of memory concerns orality and the memorization of speeches, Nathan Stormer contends that memory can be reconfigured as a “genealogy of recursivity [that] would study the descent of modes of performative interaction with the past, looking for moments when those modes emerge within struggles over *how* to discourse” (29). Seeking to expand the more common goals of rhetoric to focus on the present in times of conflict, Stormer demonstrates how one’s memory, although changing and evolving, should not be ignored because the present often conjures some part of one’s past in any particular situation, while the present can also affect one’s understanding of the past. Bruce E. Gronbeck acknowledges the significance of identity and community values in citing Michael Kammen’s important work, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*, about the changing of tradition in American culture: “Public memory, which contains a slowly shifting configuration of traditions, is ideologically important because it shapes a nation’s ethos and sense of identity. That explains, at least in part, why memory is always selective and is so often contested” (Kammen qtd. in Gronbeck 7).

Generally, as compared to other disciplinary arguments concerning memory and history, research in rhetoric and memory also expresses little concern for viewing these terms in an opposition of truth (memory) against Truth (history.) Instead, rhetoric scholars have focused on how these terms represent forces of the rhetorical situation that construct the past to suit present purposes. In a dissertation examining collective memory and the U.S. Civil War, Michael Janas suggests that history and rhetoric have been artificially separated as academic study versus public practice. Janas draws upon collective memory as a rhetorical practice through which the

public reconfigures the past to reflect present views towards social and political issues. Therefore, the past should, instead be viewed “for what it is most—a highly personal and relevant source of collective meaning” (Janas 279). Similarly, Marouf Hasian, Jr. and Robert E. Frank designate history and memory respectively as official and vernacular rhetorics, each engaged in “dialectical tension” (109).

Much of the collective memory research in rhetoric has been presented by scholars from the field of communications, often with a focus on memory representation in texts, media, and place. Wulf Kansteiner makes a case for using methods from cultural studies and communications to address the impact of media, which “neither reflect nor determine collective memory but are inextricably involved in its construction and evolution” (195). Barbie Zelizer argues that the photos which journalists take of tragic events helps construct a narrative of public memory and an affective dialogue with spectators. Specifically, Zelizer builds on the premise that “Images function in memory precisely through contingency, when meaning settles not at the image’s original point of display but over time in new contexts that are always altered” (161). Zelizer uses the term *subjunctive voice* to name the process by which individuals and collectives construct and interpret narratives for the picture they view. This voice “allows them to move through what might be called the ‘as if’ of visual representation and memory,” either softening or heightening the impact of the picture’s message (163). Zelizer’s work furthers the humanities’ interest in objects that function as symbols with a variety of possibilities for memory production.

As media and technologies continue to permeate society at an increasing pace, rhetoric scholars have shifted their focus towards understanding memory as a kind of system or practice. Rather than considering memory as content, Jeff Pruchnic and Kim Lacey situate memory as a “program” of “broad systems in which past experiences and associations are captured and/or

strategically leveraged for persuasive effects” (475). Pruchnic and Lacey argue that “the future of rhetorical memory will be inextricably bound to our ability to “forget” the content of experiential memory as it becomes stored in information networks and our bodies’ affective responses” (475). That is, Pruchnic and Lacey find that technology has driven persuasion toward the individual in many ways, creating an exchange more primarily between internalized, affective biological memory and externalized memory. With social media platforms, the internet, and even the latest move toward Big Data, externalized or “prosthetic” forms of memory, as originally described by Alison Landsberg, must be considered in ways that account for the changing social landscape. Pruchnic and Lacey analyze an older experiment called the “Pepsi Challenge,” in which participants were tested on whether they preferred Pepsi or Coca-Cola. About half of the participants in the blind taste test preferred Pepsi; however, when the individuals knew the contents of the drink, a majority preferred Coca-Cola. The first test resulted in brain activity that triggered “feelings of reward,” whereas the second test engaged “the prefrontal cortex and the hippocampus, both associated with the impact of affect on behavior and the latter associated with memory” (488).

Addressing present issues of bridging the sciences and humanities in the pursuit of memory studies, Grant David Bollmer contends that one of the most significant barriers for productive dialogue across disciplines is the battle over the ontological status of memory. Rather than continue to debate over whether memory has essentially collective or individual origins, Bollmer suggests assuming neither. Instead, borrowing Bergson’s definition of virtual and actual history, Bollmer argues, “the collective cannot be thought to precede the individual (and vice versa)” (460). Bollmer then references Bruno Latour’s work to theorize memory as assembled systems, “made up of all the objects, people, and places—the various actors, living and non-

living—that are involved with the various rituals that constitute the maintenance and differentiation of an individual-collective in time and space” (462).

Collective memory has also been connected to some of Kenneth Burke’s major concepts. In a chapter dedicated to public memory, David Blakesley argues that memory and forgetting can be viewed in terms of identification and division, wherein memories that would conflict with a group’s unity are conveniently forgotten for the sake of harmony among members. Blakesley then demonstrates how the film *Toy Story* implicitly asks the audience to identify with particular childhood values and toy products that promote these values. From a different perspective, Jordan Jack suggests that Halbwachs’ notion of social frameworks function as Burkean terministic screens, which “filter out certain kinds of experiences or ideas as appropriate and rendering others inappropriate for collective memories” (233). Although both scholars provide useful comparisons between Burke and collective memory, there is room for further study. In some situations, division may not always correspond to forgetting, and Jack’s working of terministic screens offers scholars new opportunities to discover how collective memory may render one’s memories as appropriate or not depending on the individual’s particular group affiliation in space and time.

Shane Borrowman and Marcia Kmetz have also argued that division, in a Burkean sense, must be articulated to defend threats that attempt to silence the dissenters. The authors provide the example of Jeannette Rankin, who might have been remembered as one of the few women to serve in congress or as someone who voted for women’s right to vote in 1914. Borrowman and Kmetz, who both grew up in Montana, describe how Rankin is instead a shameful figure in history for many Montanans because she had been one of the few members of congress to vote against the U.S. entering World War II. According to Borrowman and Kmetz, in the present

there have been many instances in which Democratic or Republican candidates have attempted to silence the public on important issues rather than promote “debate—and division—among people of good will” (289). Borrowman and Kmetz conclude that considering identification and division as “seemingly simultaneously natural processes and rhetorical choices makes discussion of them . . . dauntingly problematic” (290). Instead, identification and division should be considered of equal importance and as necessarily contending processes. Borrowman and Kmetz do not incorporate collective memory theory, but their study suggests the need to study division and its lasting effect on memory and identity.

G. Mitchell Reyes has recently called for an “analytic of difference,” a theoretical lens that acknowledges difference as a fundamental part of identity performance. On traditional modes of conceiving identity, Reyes observes, “The presumption here is that human agency and identification are the conditions for the possibility of collective identity and solidarity. Here mnemonic practice is an effect of an agent’s will” (241). In critically reassessing the terms identification and difference, however, Reyes suggests that alterity is the first necessary encounter for any individual in the process of identification and identity performance. For Reyes, thinking only in terms of identification limits the implications that can be drawn from analysis, and in some cases it may even unjustly minimize issues.

To demonstrate his point, Reyes analyzes the *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Alex Haley and other popular portrayals. A traditional view of identity stresses only Malcolm X’s triumphs; an analytic of difference, on the other hand, demonstrates his life as “equally about the play of identity and alterity, assimilation and oppression, as it is about transcendence and enlightenment” (243). The necessary repetition of identity performance, as aligned with more

recent conceptions of memory and identity as part of an assembling network or system, creates the illusion of stability while allowing for alterations of identity performance. Reyes concludes,

Resistance does not emerge from the fissures and cracks in an otherwise coherent subject position; it materializes by way of the principles of repetition and difference identities depend on. Thus, resistance and difference are not markers of an “error” (à la intersubjectivity). They are part and parcel of any identity’s performative presence. (243)

Memory is a knowledge base for recalling past performances, and assessing the present in order to sort through identification and difference and “reinscribe” (243) identity for a particular time.

Research in collective memory and its intersection with rhetoric also resonates with Dale Sullivan’s definition of epideictic rhetoric as a combination of the speaker’s timely response in tune with an audience’s personal experiences as “they are being caught up in a celebration of their vision of reality” (128). Two notable differences from epideictic rhetoric concerning collective memory as Halbwachs specifically theorized the term, however, may be considered. First, Halbwachs used the term collective memory to describe and explore individual memory rather than shared memories of a group. Second, a Halbwachsan view of collective memory focuses on how the past has a more significant everyday function in people’s lives. These major differences offer an alternative understanding about how a perspective of identity as purely performance can overlook the crucial role memory plays not only in the construction but also the persistence of identity.

The past is not conjured only for the purpose of establishing moments of consubstantiality, as Sullivan also notes (127), or for celebrating a community’s vision of reality. Epideictic rhetoric also still frames identity primarily as a performance, which suggests a more radically fragile, constructed identity. However, people depend on and preserve the past because

of a need to affirm their identity and a place in their present reality in a way that provides both a more permanent and cohesive sense of existence; this goal is necessary for everyday survival, whether or not in the face of the kinds of major social and political conflict that often concern rhetoricians. More simply put, Halbwachs' theory attempts to answer why and how people can wake up the next day and still know who they are and where they have been, which often gives people the comfort and guidance to tackle their future.

## **Maurice Halbwachs and Collective Memory**

F.C. Bartlett, a psychologist and Halbwachs' contemporary, had misinterpreted Halbwachs' theory as "memory of the group," to which he offered the correction of "memory in the group" (Bartlett qtd. in Douglass 17; Bartlett qtd. in Wertsch 294). However, Halbwachs never suggests a kind of Jungian collective unconscious state, as he claims explicitly, "there is no universal memory" (*The Collective* 84). For his colleagues from other disciplines who had questions about the extent to which Halbwachs' believed memory was a social phenomenon, Halbwachs also later clarified, "it is individuals who remember" (*The Collective* 46). Halbwachs' original conception of the term was to explain how individual memory worked: collective memory is collective in the sense that many forces, such as social interactions, familial bonds, personal reflection, time, local cultural traditions and social structures co-construct individual remembrances. Even for shared experiences, each individual will process them differently because of his or her attitude, personal past, and unique position at the time and place of the event. Remembrances influence individual thought and behavior, which in turn affects social interaction; in light of this reciprocal affective relationship, Halbwachs distinguishes between memory processes and its social consequences.

The essence of Halbwachs' theory is to understand individual memory from the perspective of his or her everyday life experiences. Collective memory, as Halbwachs' originally defined it, reveals an already complex network of performance that embodies individual and collective identity, and which is also strongly influenced by affect through close bonds among group members. To understand the components of his theory, particular reconsideration must be



given to the way Halbwachs' strongly emphasizes the individual's role, distinguishes memory from history, defines how groups are formed and sustained, and establishes a wide scope of meaning for the term *social frameworks*.

### **Memory as an Individualized Process**

Halbwachs' theory of collective memory is based on the necessity of social frameworks for organizing and assigning meaning to images stored in the individual mind; it is through this process that collective memory forms, bonds, and divides groups and group members in society. Halbwachs argues directly against psychological notions about the origin of memory, claiming that the individual mind is ultimately incapable of producing memory by itself; rather, the individual mind succeeds only in storing memory *images* (*On Collective* 41). These images, when isolated from society's influence, "have no consistence, depth, coherence, or stability" (*On Collective* 44). These stored images cannot be recalled or constructed as memories without a number of social frameworks and influence from the different groups to which an individual belongs. Halbwachs uses dreams to exhibit the limited workings of the human brain in isolation, as he argues that people are truly apart from society only during sleep (*On Collective* 41). Dreams often lack coherence, proving for Halbwachs that social interaction and social frameworks are what provide stability and meaning to memory images. Halbwachs effectively illustrates this point through metaphor:

Yet between the dream's row of successive images and a series of recollections there is as much difference as that between a pile of rough-hewn materials with superimposed parts heaped one upon the other, only accidentally achieving an equilibrium, and the walls of an edifice maintained by a whole armature, supported and reinforced by neighboring edifices. (*On Collective* 42)

These individual memory images, then, provide only the basic materials with which memory itself is built. Specifically in “The Social Frameworks of Memory” from *On Collective Memory*, Halbwachs argues that social interaction and social structures constitute recognizable thought. Human beings must look to society to assemble and assign meaning to the images and information stored in the individual mind.

In a posthumous collection of essays published in 1980 and entitled *The Collective Memory*, Halbwachs began clarifying and even reshaping his theory. Halbwachs answers some criticisms of his work and concedes that the process of memory may be possible in the human mind alone: “The whole point is to know if such a remembrance could exist, if it is conceivable. The fact that it occurs, even if only once, suffices to prove that nothing opposes its operation in every case” (34). Halbwachs may have had yet to be fully convinced of psychological theories about memory, but his comment here proves he may not have been the stubborn “imperialist” Olick has claimed (Stony Brook). The tragic circumstances of Halbwachs’ untimely death as a prisoner at Buchenwald prevent the world from ever knowing what further contributions he would have made to the evolving multidisciplinary study of memory (Coser).

Collective memory is less about shared memories among a group, although the term can encompass this notion in accordance with Halbwachs’ implications of memory as an integral part of a group’s identity and survival. Rather, collective memory, as Halbwachs essentially defines it, is the process by which individual memory is made: “The succession of our remembrances, or even our most personal ones, is always explained by changes occurring in our relationships to various collective milieus—in short, by the transformations these milieus undergo separately and as a whole” (*The Collective* 49). Whether the memory is a shared experience or a moment of solitude, we draw upon the social realm in the act of remembering. The phenomena that result

from what people do with memories are distinct from the process that describes how memories manifest in the individual mind.

### **Social Frameworks**

Halbwachs refers to external influences on memory as social frameworks, which have an almost limitless scope, ranging from local influences such as family, friends, work life, and tradition, to what he identified as the more distant forces of national politics and culture. For example, “modes of thinking” or shared interests and values among members of a certain group are also considered frameworks, created and modified by group members and their interactions over time (*On Collective* 81). Halbwachs considers family the most unique group, whose “common spirit” cannot be replicated (*On Collective* 68), and whose primary framework kinship is able to overcome other influential frameworks (*On Collective* 63, 68). According to Halbwachs, the family group is “. . . least dominated and guided, in our judgment of those close to us, by the rules and beliefs of society . . . . What counts in the family above all are almost exclusively personal qualities, instead of what individuals are or could be for those other groups that surround the family without pervading it” (*On Collective* 70).

This description of family and its relationship to social frameworks and the individual suggest that any glimpse of individual identity is seen only in the closest groups, on the grounds that such groups are accepting of individual expression because they can overcome—even if for a short period of time—the influence of more distant social frameworks. Rhetoric scholars may find this passage problematic because of its suggestion that family can be immune to ideologies. Halbwachs’ description also does not reflect current understandings of diverse or lack of family structures. However, if kinship and family can be understood as a close bond not necessarily tied

to biological factors, then Halbwachs draws attention to the important aspect of affect within communities.

More distant frameworks have far less impact on the group. To illustrate his point, Halbwachs describes how the time period of a novel is not always necessary for understanding the “psychological contents” of the story’s characters (*The Collective* 77). Halbwachs identifies history as a distant social framework, further clarifying that his interest was in everyday lived experience rather than national conflicts: “the nation is too remote from the individual for him to consider the history of his country as anything else than a very large framework with which his own history makes contact at only a few points” (*The Collective* 77). Here, history refers to both events that occurred before the birth of a generation and during its lifetime; although Halbwachs acknowledges history’s influence on other frameworks such as traditions, politics, and social class, history is decidedly nothing more than “conceptions, symbols” that may influence memory indirectly (*The Collective* 52 – 53). Halbwachs asserts, “Our memory truly rests not to learned history but on lived history” (*The Collective* 57), reaffirming collective memory as based on lived experience and following social traditions or rules governing everyday work or family life. Because group influence begins with the individual and extends outwardly toward the group, frameworks that affect fewer individuals will have, in turn, less overall effect on the group. The distant past does not strongly define a group or render nations as unified collectives.

### **Collectives and Identity Performance**

Halbwachs further addresses the nature of collective memory as he describes the web of dynamic collectives in which each individual operates: “Each man is immersed successively or simultaneously in several groups. Moreover, each group is confined in space and time. Each has

its own original collective memory, keeping alive for a time important remembrances; the smaller the group, the greater the interest members have in these events” (*The Collective* 78). Because individuals occupy several groups, then understanding the complexity of memory production requires acknowledging the individual’s negotiation of multiple social roles. Halbwachs also alludes to shifting identity performance influenced by various collectives by suggesting that “We change memories along with our points of views, our principles, and our judgments, when we pass from one group to the other” (*On Collective* 81). For example, facts can be reinterpreted depending on its position among particular systems of groups and frameworks: “just as people are members of many different groups at the same time, so the memory of the same fact can be placed within many different frameworks which result from distinct collective memories” (*On Collective* 52). Therefore, as individuals naturally maintain multiple memberships with different values and perspectives and adjust their personal memories accordingly, Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory predates Reyes’ notion of disidentification for identity performance. Moreover, Bollmer’s overall criticism of Halbwachs’ theory as too stable may perhaps be partly reconsidered in light of how Halbwachs’ describes individual mobility and the malleability of memory through multiple, simultaneous group memberships.

In a later essay distinguishing history from memory, Halbwachs explains the individual’s general relationship with groups in another way: “I belong to a group with a part of my personality” (*The Collective* 53). Here, Halbwachs suggests that collective identity is an extended network of individual identity. If closer connections to individuals enables personal characteristics and identity expression to overcome other powerful social frameworks as indicated in his discussion of family, individual identity is more strongly linked to groups whose members share a closer bond. In identifying memory a reflection of the individual’s personality,

Halbwachs' theory indicates memory as a necessary subject of study for identity and its role in negotiating collective memory production.

Halbwachs' acknowledges the inaccuracy of memory recall, but his discussion suggests that such limitation is the result of facts being less important than memory's role in preserving personal values and the impressions of people that make life meaningful. In an example from *The Collective Memory* (1980), Halbwachs explains how memories alter the framework of school life as a child to clarify the limitations of social frameworks as incapable of "a precise and picturesque remembrance. . . . the framework has been buoyed up with personal reflection and family remembrances: the remembrance is an image entangled among other images, a generic image taken back into the past" (71). Two implications can be noted from this passage: 1) memory is imprecise and provides a relatively cumulative picture of the past, and 2) frameworks are unstable, slowly altered through reflection and personal experience.

In another example of memory's imprecision, Halbwachs discusses Chateaubriand's account of how his family spent the evenings during his childhood. Halbwachs notes that Chateaubriand can provide only "the idea of a type of life" (*On Collective* 60) through a collection of various images that surface from the different moments of his past; in this sense, through Chateaubriand's description of his family, readers learn of their "habitual style" (*On Collective* 60). As the group changes, "its experience in regard to this same kinsman acquires many new impressions even as it loses some of its content," therefore resulting in recollections of individuals not being able to conjure the "same totality of personal characteristics" each time (*On Collective* 73). Memory, therefore, is bound up in identity construction, common group values, and emotions through the bonding of group members. Memory may be imperfect but any of its inaccuracies, generalities, and omissions can reveal how individuals translate their reality

and trace their journey of becoming into a sense of being that is strongly connected to the world around them.

### **Living in the Past**

Towards the conclusion of “The Social Frameworks of Memory,” Halbwachs argues that people cling to tradition because they doubt their abilities to create an “equivalent” functional structure in its place (*On Collective* 120). Halbwachs explains this need for tradition partly through the concept of nostalgia: “there is a kind of retrospective mirage by which a great number of us persuade ourselves that the world of today has less color and is less interesting than it was in the past, in particular regarding our childhood and youth” (*On Collective* 48). Later, in *The Collective Memory*, Halbwachs further explains the power of nostalgia by describing the impact of childhood, a period of innocence and discovery that greatly influences the cumulative memory process: “many of our remembrances date back to times when immaturity, inexperience, and inattention obscured the meaning of various facts or hide the nature of different persons or objects” (73).

As Halbwachs’ theory demonstrates, memories build upon one another and serve as a lens for arriving at an understanding of the self and its place in the world; because of the feelings attached to it, some of this knowledge becomes part of a solidified identity as human beings mature over time. Halbwachs takes what appears to be a commonsense approach toward memory through nostalgia, which implies a kind of mourning for the past. This intuitive understanding of memory as a cognitive process that evolves through time, maturity, and experience, coupled with nostalgic feeling, suggests a longing for simplicity and even blissful ignorance. In some cases, then, memory offers clues about whether or not human beings undergo great change or if the illusion of change is instead a better understanding of one’s self and reality through memory.

## **Maurice Halbwachs and Kenneth Burke: Memory and Language**

Halbwachs and Kenneth Burke reflect social constructionist views but seem to hold opposing views about what sustains society: memory versus language. Collective memory and symbolicity, however, work interdependently to inform human attitudes, behavior, and identity construction. Although Burke grapples with the consequences that result from the paradoxical characteristics of language, which plays into what Burke calls the *logomachy*, Halbwachs' theory of collective memory further helps to locate the multiple contending meaning of language. Moreover, as Burke's theory establishes language as the façade of social instability, Halbwachs' theory explains how this feat is achieved and provides the comforting sense of permanence human beings seek from the "symbolic veil."

According to Stephen Hassett, Kenneth Burke held neosophistic notions of rhetoric in theorizing symbolicity as human beings' ultimate mode of survival: language comprises reality, and without it there is no society or lucidity of experience. As Burke asserts, "Man, qua man, is a symbol user. In this respect, every aspect of his 'reality' is likely to be seen through a fog of symbols. And not even the hard reality of basic economic facts is sufficient to pierce this symbolic veil" (*Rhetoric* 136). As mere representations of the things they name, symbols fail to accurately articulate reality. Human beings rely on the "symbolic veil," despite its shortcomings, to alleviate a persistent anxiety in acknowledging that reality "is but a construct of our symbol systems" (K. Burke, "Definition" 493). Burke explains further:

To meditate on this fact until one sees its full implications is much like peering over the edge of things into an ultimate abyss. And doubtless that's one reason why, though man



is typically the symbol-using animal, he clings to a kind of naïve verbal realism that refuses to realize the full extent of the role played by symbolicity in his notions of reality.

(“Definition” 493)

Language masks social instability, and people assume control over the self and their environment by confronting language as a transparent code. Yet Burke also implies that humanity yearns to make life meaningful, the opposite of the cold, indifferent “abyss.”

Burke’s account of symbolicity can be seen as a negative modification of Protagoras’ theme from “The Great Speech” found in Plato’s *Protagoras* (320c – 328d). A celebratory “history of human origins,” Protagoras’ speech relies on myth to explain how “political virtue, or citizenship, cannot be taught” (McNeal 299). Protagoras elevates politics as a right granted by the gods to ensure human survival, whereas Burke offers its negative as “the Human Barnyard . . . the state of Babel after the fall” (*Rhetoric* 23). Protagoras’ speech reflects the typical way human beings refer to their own history and nature as embodying a unique gift or greatness that distinguishes them from all other living things in the world. Rather than face the limitations and chaos of the human condition, human beings often chase an unattainable perfection and order, a point reflected in Burke’s essay, “The Definition of Man:”

Man is the symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-misusing) animal; inventor of the negative (or moralized by the negative); separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making; goaded by the spirit of hierarchy (or moved by the sense of order); and rotten with perfection. (507)

Burke depicts mankind as blind to its own habits as it seeks affirmation of their existence, which requires a sense of permanence. Natural chaos must be organized and meanings must be assigned or discarded. Yet in doing so, human beings further limit their options for communication and

understanding. Burke asks, “Do we simply use words, or do they not use us?” (“Definition” 495).

In contrast to Burke, Halbwachs argues that memory is ultimately responsible for maintaining and transforming society. Halbwachs makes the practical argument that when people are born they have no choice but to adapt to the current social structure in place (*On Collective* 55). Only after processing and understanding the roles they have been given under the current social structure can people begin to slowly alter it; through memory, human beings then modify and transform their surroundings in ways that guarantee the present generations’ survival (*On Collective* 83). As Burke does with the symbolic veil, Halbwachs also applies a metaphor of being unable to see the instability of social structures. The clashing of values and traditions among generations can cause “a revolution” which “tears off the mask” of society (*On Collective* 121). Halbwachs’ remark here is quite literal: war and revolution are large-scale disruptions of a social structure otherwise perceived as relatively stable and self-sustaining.

In “The Social Frameworks of Memory,” Halbwachs concludes that language is “the most elementary and the stable framework” because it is how human beings process, translate, and articulate memory (*On Collective* 45). Halbwachs uses the example of a person suffering with amnesia to show how, at the same time, language is meaningless without memory, arguing that in being able to recognize images through memory, human beings “feel empowered to name them” (*On Collective* 44). Halbwachs also describes how the reciprocal relationship between language and memory forms a more complex, personal knowledge base over time. Language triggers recall, and people use language to identify and make sense of what they see in both stored and present images. For example, memory gives words meaning, while names conjure particular meanings developed from previous social interaction and experiences; therefore,

“words” and “relations with others” give us the ability to remember (*On Collective* 45). This understanding suggests that the meaning of language changes because of the dynamic memory process.

Language receives little attention in his overall theory; however, Halbwachs acknowledges the limits of language as “it fails to encompass all memories that are even slightly complex and since it retains only isolated details and discontinuous elements of our representations” (*On Collective* 45). Writing long before poststructuralist theories of language developed, Halbwachs was still clearly aware of language’s imperfections, although he reflects his time in classifying language as the most stable framework because its role changes little as the main form of communication. Still, Halbwachs’ perspective here should not be dismissed as outdated, because an important consideration is that human beings still often treat language as a more stable framework. This belief in language’s stability arises in part because of the strong attachment memory creates with language over time. Therefore, a dialogue about collective memory can help uncover and understand the possible meanings and the emotional picture that can arise from a particular word or idea. As Halbwachs suggests, emotions as they are tied to memory represent not simply feelings but “the idea of a type of life” (*On Collective* 60), therefore pointing to people’s personal perspectives and values. Taking the time to share collective memories can establish empathy by revealing the personal, emotional perspectives of different groups.

Burke’s discussion of the term *casuistic stretching* presents possibilities for understanding the relationship between memory and language. In *Attitudes toward History*, Burke defines casuistic stretching as “introducing new principles while theoretically remaining faithful to old principles” (229). This definition as applied to language complements the study of

collective memory concerning generational shifts that shape the social structure. As older generations begin to pass while newer generations mature over time, community values and social frameworks also change, including language. Burke continues by claiming that casuistic stretching is inherent in phonetic language, which forms words according to their sound rather than their representation of meaning. In this respect, language masks the positive and negative aspects of a word. For example, Burke compares hieroglyphs to phonetic language to express the word *law* (231). A hieroglyph, in Burke's view, may represent positive and negative by pairing images of the gallows and a halo; this paired image may serve as an explicit reminder of what the word *law* encompasses.

Phonetic language, on the other hand, masks these opposing meanings. Language inherently comprises both positive and negative aspects, since to use words appropriately, "we must know that they are *not* the things they stand for" ("Definition" 501). Yet Burke notes that "we believe so thoroughly in its pristine unity that we don't even seek for the antithesis subsumed in it" (*Attitudes* 231). This belief is alluded to in the haunting poem found at the end of Burke's essay, "The Definition of Man," in which greatness, a term associated with progress, reveals throughout the course of the poem its devastating negative, reflected in large scale destruction (513 – 514).

From the perspective of memory, the passing of time and the shifting perspectives of collectives may also uncover these alternative meanings. The problem, as Burke explains, is that very often collectives acknowledge only those meanings that subscribe to their own values. Any decision over language use within a particular collective or across collectives forces a suppression of alternative meanings and beliefs. The implicitly understood meaning of the symbol must consistently be renegotiated or reclaimed. These limiting actions still must

discriminate to a lesser or more severe degree, respectively, among differently held beliefs, and are thus, as Jim Corder has claimed, a potential threat to identity.

## **Rhetoric, Memory, and Identity**

Bryan Crable proposes an interactional rhetoric to describe how individual identity is inextricably tied to collectively formed structures: “In interactionist terms, ‘private’ self is dialectically bound to ‘public self’, because we cannot separate individual character from the materials provided by a particular symbolic framework” (9). Crable refers to Burke’s well cited justification of human beings’ anxiety toward realizing the socially constructed nature of the symbolic veil to argue that human beings link together their notion of reality and identity. In agreement with the process of identification, Crable claims that “the dispelling of anxiety” is achieved “through correct (and applauded) identity performance” (17). These characters must be accepted and validated by the audience because identity formation requires the cooperation of both the rhetor and the audience: “If my identity is primarily derived from external sources . . . my identity is never under my control—my efforts to master my own character can never be complete . . . it must continually be performed for others” (10). In Crable’s view, individual agency over identity construction is completely surrendered to the social realm and therefore lacks any stability. While Crable makes a valid case, Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory explains why human beings cling to identity and resist change in time of conflict.

In his introduction to “Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love” Corder argues for an understanding of the human condition in a way that echoes Halbwachs’ collective memory. Corder claims, “none of us lives without a history; each of us is a narrative” (16). He continues, “Whether consciously or not, we always station ourselves somewhere in our narratives when we use language” (17). Arguing that individuals embody their own identity through narratives,

Corder suggests, “each of us is an argument, evidenced by our narrative” (18). We construct rather than perform our narratives, suggesting a greater individual agency over our identity. Similarly, Halbwachs implicates an individual narrative by noting how each person “has a capacity for memory [*memoire*] that is unlike that of anyone else, given the variety of temperaments and life circumstances” (*On Collective* 53). Individual memories do not “resemble” each other, but rather are connected by shared social frameworks (*On Collective* 52).

Corder acknowledges a personal history or memory narrative that must be defended by language and social action, yet is perceived as an individual source of stability because it “is not something *to present* or *to display*. It is something *to be*. It is what we *are*” (Corder 26).

Halbwachs also acknowledges a sense of being when he states, “I belong to a group with a part of my personality” (*The Collective* 53). The individual draws upon social frameworks as a resource for shaping personality, but in remaining consistent with Halbwachs’ view of collective memory as an individual process, so too is personality maintained by the individual. On the contrary, collective memory recognizes the interdependent relationship between individuals and the social milieu that influences change.

Memory is active, a “living history” that exists in the present and passes away with its generation. In discussing the difference between memory and history, Halbwachs notes that gradual, unobtrusive changes underpin the function of collective memory, whereas history’s emphasis on major, large scale events categorized by time periods gives only the false impression of long-term social stability (*The Collective* 106). For this reason, the transformation of memory over time often remains unnoticed:

The group is undoubtedly under the influence of an illusion when it believes the similarities more important than the differences, but it clearly cannot account for the

differences, because the images it has previously made of itself are only slowly transformed . . . . What is essential is that the features distinguishing it from other groups survive and be imprinted on all its content (*The Collective* 87).

Individual memories seem to bear similarities because they are shaped by the same social milieu, but a person's unique experiences, time, and place he or she occupies leads to inevitable differences among the group. As social beings, however, individuals still require a sense of belonging and identity. Rather than a strictly performative identity as proposed by Crable, which "must continually be performed for others" (10), Halbwachs suggests that people yearn for a more permanent articulation: an "imprint" on memory. Therefore, although similarities seem the most essential in creating belonging within a group, collective identity actually requires an emphasis on the differences from one group to another to establish itself in memory.

Halbwachs' ideas here align with Burke's theory of identification and division. The term identification expands upon rhetoric's traditional definition of persuasion, which Burke finds inadequate in describing how human beings form attitudes and communicate with one another (*Rhetoric* xiv; 46). According to Burke, identification cannot function without its "counterpart" division (*Rhetoric* 23). The uniqueness of human individuality forces each human being to face the conflict of division in every social encounter. Burke notes, "to begin with 'identification' is, by the same token, though roundabout, to confront the implications of *division*" (*Rhetoric* 22). Successful interaction takes place under circumstances of identification, in which human beings can base their communication upon shared interests and similarities. Burke describes the process of identification as "A is not identical with his colleague B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B. Or he may *identify himself* with B even when their interests are not



joined, if he assumes they are, or is persuaded to believe so” (*Rhetoric* 20). Burke suggests here that identification need not be authentic; it can also be an illusion, or the willed belief.

Because each human being is distinctive and comes from a different set of experiences, he or she must practice rhetoric to seek out those interests and similarities in order to momentarily trump division in a given situation. However, human beings still value division because it distinguishes themselves from others, which Burke suggests in his description of consubstantiality:

Here are ambiguities of substance. In being identified with B, A is “substantially one” with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time he remains unique, an individual locus of motives. Thus is both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with the other. (*Rhetoric* 21)

Collective memory clarifies the ambiguous notion of being “both joined and separate” by stressing people’s desire for others to remember their identity. Even while Halbwachs acknowledges social instability and personal transformation, memory provides people with a sense of being and an affirmation of existence. Although shared social frameworks promote identification within an already established group, creating the “illusion” of similarities, division realizes the group’s longing to manifest and sustain a unique collective identity (*The Collective* 87).

As Corder argues, because memory narratives are “the only evidence of our identity,” any threat to their existence can lead to conflict (19). According to Corder, any threat to identity can also escalate conflict and thwart attempts toward resolution. Corder originally had suggested that “we need to rescue time”; since “the world wants speed, efficiency, and economy of motion,” Corder advises that we must “teach the world to want otherwise” (31). Collective

memory should be considered as a way of implementing Corder's suggestions. People enmeshed in conflict can take time to establish empathy by considering memory narratives among opposing groups and therefore discover how identity is at stake.

### **Memory, Identity, and the Debate over “La Sétima”**

During the day, the streets of Ybor City are quiet and populated by tourists interested in the city’s historic district, shops, and restaurants. In the evening, particularly during the weekends, Ybor City’s second identity emerges as a lively, local nightlife attraction. Residents of Ybor City, especially those whose families have resided in Ybor for generations, hold yet another view of their city much more deeply rooted in personal and collective identity. For these residents, Ybor City is much like a living album of memories, and this strong connection between place and identity can be traced back to the city’s founding. Ybor City was settled largely by marginalized populations, such as Cuban, Spanish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants, as well as Cuban African-Americans (“7th Avenue”). Although certainly not a utopian community, Ybor was a gathering place for those who could not find acceptance elsewhere. Hispanics have had a great influence on Ybor’s development, and during the last Industrial Revolution in the late nineteenth century and into the Progressive Era, Ybor City became a successful cigar factory town (Lastra). Later in the 1950s and 1960s, the federal government had threatened to tear down 93% of the city in the name of progress and “renewal efforts” to clear the “slums” and make space for freeways (“7th Avenue”). Tony Pizzo and other residents reacted by forming The Barrio Latino Commission (“7th Avenue”). At this time, several key figures of the city, including Pizzo, emerged to preserve what remained of Ybor City’s history.

#### **Origin of “La Sétima”**

A number of residents have made great efforts to sustain the spirit of Ybor’s past generations. One influential figure is Frank Trébin Lastra. Born to Spanish and Sicilian

immigrants, Lastra grew up in Ybor City (George, “Ybor City’s Seventh”). Although he majored in engineering, Lastra returned to Ybor and became president of the Ybor City Chamber of Commerce in 1974, and wrote several history articles for its newsletter *La Sétima* (George, “Ybor City’s Seventh”; “Frank T. Lastra”). Lastra also spent ten years documenting Ybor’s history; the result is a nearly 300-page book published by the University of Tampa Press in 2006. Based on his firsthand experience and lasting community relationships as a resident of Ybor, Lastra claimed that Ybor’s 7th Avenue (also known to many residents as Broadway,) was commonly referred to as “La Sétima,” and he later explained in his book *Ybor City: The Making of a Landmark Town* that this particular pronunciation and spelling derived from the early immigrants who settled there and comprised the “*tabeberos*” who worked in the factories (Lastra 5). In 1996, Lastra successfully brought to the Ybor City Council the idea of adding “La Sétima” to the street signs on 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue (George, “Ybor City’s Seventh”). Not all residents agreed with Lastra’s argument. In 2009, an attempt supported by Fran Costantino was made to change the signs to “La Séptima” (Wade, “Ybor Street”), but the Ybor City Council voted to maintain “La Sétima” (Wade, “Ybor Will Keep”). Costantino, a Tampa resident, also has cultural roots in Ybor City and West Tampa, and is founder and president of the East Ybor Historic and Civic Association (“Costantino and Company”).

For anyone unfamiliar with the history of Ybor, the naming of a street may seem almost inconsequential. For Ybor’s residents, however, the street speaks to a particular identity and sense of belonging. Many accounts from the Ybor City Oral History Project recall 7th Avenue as a city center where people went to socialize and even find their future spouses (*Ybor City Oral Histories*). The Avenue is also home to well-known establishments such as the first Columbian

Restaurant. For these reasons, 7th Avenue was and is considered the “main spine” of the city, granting greater importance to its name and remembrance (Lastra 357).

### **“La Sétima” in 2012**

When the Republican National Convention chose Tampa as its host, many residents of Ybor realized an opportunity to readdress the spelling of Ybor’s main avenue (George, “Tampa City”; Moreno). Costantino once again became the representative speaker for those in the community who felt “Tampa would be the laughingstock of Hispanic tourists, delegates and politicians” (George, “Tampa City”). Because of the national attention and potential revenue the Republican National Convention was anticipated to bring to Tampa, this second battle over Ybor City’s main avenue intensified and attracted local media coverage. Of the tension surrounding the debate, Tampa Bay Times columnist Sue Carlton remarked, “Yes, Tampa has officially lost its mind over a sign” (Carlton). Residents debated the issue before The Tampa Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), comprised of Tampa City Council members (Byrne, “Ybor’s Debate”).

Many residents feared that “La Sétima” symbolized ignorance and a lack of education. Again, Costantino took a stand on the issue as president of the East Ybor Neighborhood Association: “It just makes us look like we’re all stupid and illiterate” (Moreno). Supporters of “La Séptima” gathered many substantiated sources to prove their case. For example, USF Special Collections Librarian and Floridiana specialist Andy Huse had never come across records using “La Sétima,” and he noted, “Just because some people can’t pronounce certain things or have an accent . . . doesn’t mean it changes the spelling” (George, “La Setima”). Others complained that visitors from Spanish-speaking countries have often questioned the spelling of La Sétima (Wade, “Ybor Street”). Still, some residents of the Tampa area did not find the debate

worthy of Ybor City's—or the media's—time and money, with one resident asking, “When will this foolishness stop?” (Carlton).

Those who supported “La Sétima” cited the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language, which acknowledges “sétima” as an accepted variation of *seventh* (George, “La Setima”). Specifically, “sétima” is pronounced this way when “el grupo *pt* situado en interior de palabra, pero solo es corriente su pérdida en séptimo y septiembre, que se pronuncian a menudo en el habla espontánea, al menos en España” (“La Setima”).<sup>1</sup> Additionally, “sétima” may appear in writing but “séptima” is the preferred spoken and written form (“La Setima,”). In considering the Spanish and Italian heritage of Ybor City, another possible theory not mentioned in the debate may be the influence of “settima,” which is Italian for “seventh.”

In seeking out official sources to validate their argument, supporters of “La Sétima” demonstrate Kenneth Burke’s theories of symbolicity and identification. What appears to be a minor issue over spelling instead exposes the vulnerability and ambiguity of language and the symbolic veil it creates. An authority such as the Royal Academy of the English Language also serves as an attempt to identify with the opposition’s need to be represented as educated about the Spanish language. Yet the goal of such identification is ultimately to persuade and gain acceptance of the memories and sense of identity that divides “La Sétima” supporters and makes them “unique” (K. Burke, *Rhetoric* 21).

To add to the tension of the issue, news anchors who reported the story on television did not pronounce La Sétima or La Séptima correctly for either spelling (“Ybor Debate” 2012). The newscasters’ unintentional yet obvious failure to learn the correct pronunciation before speaking on television further suggests how outsiders of Ybor placed little or no value on the street sign

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<sup>1</sup> ... when “*pt* is situated in the interior of the word, but the loss is only common in *séptimo* and *septiembre*, which is pronounced frequently when spoken, at least in Spain.”

debate. The indifference may not necessarily mean insensitivity, but the error points to the delineation of groups. Each of these varied responses represents different groups in a way that reflects Halbwachs' collective memory theory. Halbwachs' understanding of groups upholds specific collective memories as the result of personal, small-scale, daily interactions in which all group members participate; what is meaningful to one group may not be so for another group.

After sorting through multiple arguments, the CRA made the decision to change the signs (George, 2012b). The decision was then taken to the Ybor City Council, which had voted to include both spellings and the English version of the name: La Sétima, La Séptima, and 7<sup>th</sup> Ave (Byrne, "Ybor City"; Poltilive). In this case, the council made the choice to ensure that the identities of all residents who had voiced their concerns were represented. Although this decision reflects the kind of negotiation rhetoricians often advocate, most residents of Ybor were disappointed and the media even reported the Council's move as a loss for those who cared about Ybor's history (Tillman). The public upset caused by the Council's decision might be explained by Kenneth Burke's theory of symbolicity; ordering to have all spellings displayed together on the same sign makes clear how the significance of language depends on the meaning people attach to it and consequently choose to express their reality. The Council's ultimate ruling appeared to the community as an indecision by failing to establish a clearly defined sense of order. However, the council's ruling also reflects a possible indifference to the issue. Each spelled version of the street sign had at stake the individual memories that give each person a persistent identity. The debate over "La Setima" is more so about validating and affirming a place for one's identity in the world. Residents perhaps feel that they must redefine themselves in order to accept negotiation. The dissatisfaction with the ruling may have emerged from a sense

of loss over identity; the Council had ensured with its ruling that Seventh Street truly belonged to no one.

The reactions of the public and the media suggest that although people demand acknowledgment of their individual and collective identities, few may be comfortable with ambiguity of the new street sign and view it as a failure to affirm any identity. Instead, Ybor City residents seemed to equate elimination with the legitimation of one term over another, an action that reflects the need for order and perfection as described by Burke. Symbols are both “signs for helping us find our way about,” and “sheer emptiness, as compared with the substance of things they name” (K. Burke, “Definition” 495). Perhaps for some residents, then, displaying all name versions on the street signs also exposed the nature of the symbolic veil. In terms of memory, the negotiation of the street signs is also partly a loss for older generations because it proved that their memory imprint is fading and less relevant to the present.

### **Generational Shift**

In 2012, Lastra had long since retired from public service and had suffered a stroke in 2010 (George, “Ybor City’s Seventh”). Lastra’s son claimed to have been uninformed of the debate over “La Sétima” until after a decision had already been made (George, “Ybor City’s Seventh”). Some of Lastra’s former supporters had also reconsidered their position. Former Mayor Greco, who had adamantly supported Lastra in 1998, changed his opinion to accommodate public dissent in 2012. Greco explained, “I think it might be best to spell it the right way, but it’s fulfilling the same purpose . . . La Setima [sic] or Septima [sic], either way they want to spell it is fine as long as it begs the answer: What does it mean?” (George, “Ybor City’s Seventh”). Greco’s comment suggests an investment in political appeasement over any cultural value, as “La Sétima” would not draw visitors’ curiosity but instead conform to a mainstream understanding of the



Spanish language. The last debate over the street sign, then, lacked the strong support and presence of those for whom “La Sétima” is most meaningful.

Curiously, the debate over the street signs did not concern the omission of the accent over the “e” in some of the signs along the street—which is part of the spellings for both “La Sétima” and “La Séptima.” (“Ybor City”). The issue with these two different versions of “Seventh Street” is less about spelling accuracy than it is about each word’s symbolic meaning as an accepted marker of identity. Each variation of the name represents a different identity, which is bound up in the memories and values of the individuals and then symbolized through language. Identity also claims a physical space. As one resident commented, “La Setima [sic] is not just about a number; it represents a place” (Carlton).

Halbwachs’ definition of group membership and collective memory is also evident in the comparison of the many factions who voiced their opinions about the street sign controversy. First, the two most prominent sides of the debate exposed the kind of generational rifts that Halbwachs describes. Those who embrace the spelling “La Sétima” remember directly (through their own experience or of their families) the struggles that led a diverse population of immigrants to Ybor City; their perspective rests on family, tradition, and community—the basic but arguably most prevalent elements of the Halbwachsian social milieu in which people carry out their daily lives. In contrast, the spelling “La Séptima” reflects both the fragmentation within generations and a newer, emerging generation attempting to create a space for itself in the present.

Even for residents who did not have ancestral ties to Ybor, their support of “La Sétima” reflects similar values of preserving the past as also preserving identity. Although Columbia

Restaurant President Richard Gonzmart and his family did not refer to Seventh Avenue as “La Sétima,” Gonzmart ultimately valued the idea of representing a sense of belonging:

When I first saw [La Sétima,] it bothered me that the spelling was wrong . . . but then I started thinking about the roots of Ybor City—the Italians, the Cubans, and the Spanish. And the Spanish that was spoken in Ybor City was different than it was spoken in Spain or Cuba or anywhere else. This is what makes Tampa unique. My vote is: This is what my ancestors called it. (George, “La Setima”)

As the great-grandson of Columbia Restaurant founder Casimiro Hernandez, Sr., Gonzmart also has deeply rooted ties to Ybor City (“Media Room”). Gonzmart’s experience and recollection of family may indicate to him that “La Sétima” is “wrong” but his response to the debate suggests the ability to acknowledge the spelling as both an articulation of division and yet accept its place as part of the larger collective’s past. On the surface, Gonzmart’s reasoning may appear to reflect Burke’s idea of consubstantiality. However, Gonzmart emphasizes not simply a connection to his ancestors but rather the “unique” identity of Tampa that “La Sétima” represents. Therefore, to be distinguished, rather than the same, is a preference for establishing identity.

Anthony Sullivan, who has no ancestral connection to Ybor City and has lived in the Tampa Bay area only since 1993, bought one of the old “La Sétima” signs that had been auctioned to pay for the new signs (Gauntt). Sullivan stated, “to own a little piece of history and put it in my office is something that’s really unique and rare” (Gauntt). For some, the preservation of history is also a cultural value that should be practiced to honor the identity of past generations.

The importance of articulating and imprinting identity is much more than physical space; it is more so about claiming a dimension of time, which is the lens through which existence is

realized, and as a result must be protected to ensure one's survival. Returning to Halbwachs' theory, memories are stored in the individual mind, but they are shaped by the everyday experiences and interactions with one's family, friends, and community. These memories can encapsulate shared community, family, and personal values, and provide a picture of the kind of life a person lived. Using this framework, "La Sétima" is seen not only as the language used but part of the everyday memories of those who supported this spelling of the Seventh Street in the street sign debate. Memories of a life become the mosaic of one's identity.

The "La Sétima" debate demonstrates each person's need to claim a space in time for their individual identities to exist within and yet distinct from the social milieu of their generation as opposed to being subsumed or erased. According to Lastra, Jr., his father Lastra, Sr. and those who supported his initial motion to change the street signs to "La Sétima" saw the spelling as "an opportunity to teach [visitors] about Ybor's culture, history and characters" (George, "Ybor City's Seventh"). Jim Corder suggests "we need to rescue time," since "the world wants speed, efficiency, and economy of motion" (31). Corder's words here reflect not only time to solve conflict, but also for revisiting the past to learn about people. Lastra's efforts to change the street sign and preserve Ybor's history, which would encourage conversations about collective memory, may be seen as aiding Corder in his quest to "teach the world to want otherwise" (31).

## **Conclusion**

“La Sétima” is a representation of tradition and language codes unique to a particular group, time and place. Collective memory helps explore how the rift in generations changes the social milieu and threatens identity; since the group has been altered by newcomers and the distance between generations, the street has gained a different meaning and therefore must be renamed. As reflected in the case of “La Sétima,” The question may not always be finding a way to identify, but rather allowing the self to be divisive in the expression of identity and respecting that difference. Jim Corder argues,

Since we do not have time, we must rescue time by putting it into our discourses and holding it there, learning to speak . . . anecdotal, persona, and cultural reflections that will make us plan to all others, thoughtful histories and narratives that reveal us as we’re reaching for the others” (31).

Time here may also be represented as memory, which locates the personal values, attachments, and identity narratives that provide people with not only a meaningful life but an affirmation of existence. Although the final ruling over the street signs disappointed many on both sides of the argument, the city council allowed for both identities to be represented. However, the problem with identity is apparent: while being unarticulated can feel like being forgotten or denied existence, negotiation is also less satisfactory. Instead, identity requires a distinct ownership of time and space, protected by the collective memory process.

Philosophers and scholars will continue to debate over whether asking the question of who we are is a valid pastime, yet collective memory theory and the debate over “La Sétima”

demonstrate that who we are as we live in the everyday world—in the “wrangle of the marketplace”—does matter. Even as individuals perform various roles in response to their particular interactions, these performances in part emerge from dynamic and deeply rooted contents of individual memory. Memory is so integral to people’s everyday functioning that it is perhaps taken for granted. Since Plato, memory has had complaints against it for being unreliable, but serious and tragic illnesses such as Alzheimer’s disease show how memory, in all its proven shortcomings, provides an incredible sense of stability, belonging, and cohesion. Halbwachs’ theory posits memory as a map for navigating life, but his theory is also a reminder that memory gives humanity perhaps the closest sense of permanence possible in an impermanent world.

In light of rhetoric and the social sciences’ more recent move toward Bruno Latour’s material network theory, it appears that the past and questions of existence matter less. Research in memory studies, especially as it moves toward interdisciplinary work that bridges the sciences and humanities, provides rhetoric scholars with the opportunity to understand how the past and questions of existence will continue to matter. Even when we close our eyes and cut ourselves off from the world around us, our memories still persist, and they tell a story about the experiences, relationships, values, ethics, and feelings that make our lives meaningful and full of purpose. Humanity will continue to embrace a life supported by the idea of progress, but in many ways it can benefit from being responsible for the memories it creates along the way.

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