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## **Collective Memory and Cultural Heritage (based on the two essays of Thomas Thiemeyer and Gabi Alex)**

Civis stream 3 19. 4.24

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- "Collective memory" ("kollektives Gedächtnis") was popularized in the 1990s by
- Egyptologist Jan Assmann (2011 [German original 1992]). He states: "It is fundamental to the thesis that the past only comes into being insofar as we refer to it." (p.17)
- The past is constructed in memory
- Collective Memory is always
- culturally shaped and learned

*The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas) in Berlin.*

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# Jan Assmann - Theories on Collective memory

- **"Collective memory"**
- "communicative memory" connected to generations. It is based on shared "biographical memories" (Assmann 2011, p. 34f.) of contemporary witnesses and is tied to their lifetime because it is passed on orally. It occurs in many different forms because it tolerates numerous, sometimes contradictory stories about the past side by side.
- "cultural memory" - is artificially created. It is supported by institutions of remembrance such as museums,
- memorials or archives and is given a fixed place in people's everyday lives through monuments, rituals, festivals or holidays so that they can remember certain people or events
- permanently (Nora 1984).



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## Communicative memory

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## Cultural Memory

- "cultural memory" does not spread by itself (like the "communicative memory"), but it must be specifically organized. It is subject to controlling bodies (institutions, researchers) that regulate access authoritatively. The transition from private "communicative" to publicly negotiated "cultural memory" is the moment in which history is made. It marks the transition "from the memory struggle [Erinnerungskampf] to the culture of memory [Erinnerungskultur]" (Frei 2005, 26).
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## The Osebergship



- The Osebergship was hidden under a burial mound in Norway for more than 1000 years. After it was excavated by archaeologists in 1904/1905, an additional museum hall had to be built next to the Natural History Museum in Oslo in 1926 to store it permanently. From this first building arose the Museum of the Viking-Age, where three large, preserved ships from the Viking-age and numerous other finds from this period are on display



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## Cultural Heritage

- The Oseberg ship is exemplary for an object that was elevated to the status of cultural heritage: From being a functional object, a ship, it became a ritual object for a burial, then an object of archaeological curiosity and it is now an object of cultural heritage. Its ‘authenticity’ enhances the effectiveness and value, and the emphasis on the originality of the material creates uniqueness.





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## Cultural Heritage

- Material objects are also intangible resources of knowledge – they can contain technical, chemical, craft or artistic knowledge that was necessary for their production. Authenticity of cultural heritage is also gained by providing objects with a story, which makes them special and extraordinary.
- The two women buried in the Osebergship opened up for speculations about why women were given such a high-status burial (Holck 2006).



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## Cultural Heritage

- Creates objects - possibilities – imaginations - of identification - with e.g. a group, a past, a tradition, a landscape, a belief system/religion, activities.  
The example: The enthusiasm about the Viking-age has grown since the 1970s, not only in Scandinavia but also in Europe and is expressed actively in a participative memory culture through activities such as festivals, concerts, craft workshops, fairs or touristic pilgrimages to Viking-age sites and museums (Staecker 2005a, 2005b)



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## **Destruction Of Cultural heritage**

- Cultural heritage can provide identity, belonging, collective memory, groups formation etc.
- But it can also be the other way round: The destruction or modification of cultural heritage is a way of influencing the memory culture of a group or even a nation and put forward ideological ideas.
- EX: In 2001, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan passed a resolution to destroy all statues of non-Islamic origin (Manhardt 2001).



## “Destruction” or demolition of Cultural Heritage



- *By states to indicate change*
- The Lenin statue being demolished
- Streets /Places, Cities etc. being re-named
- Museums renamed and re-ordered
- *By forces to take away memory/war*
- Cultural Heritage, collective memory, things known standing for a collectivity and past destroyed : sites songs, books, ideas, names languages, etc. material/immaterial





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