Rewriting, a Literary Concept for the Study of Cultural Memory: Towards a Transhistorical Approach to Cultural Remembrance

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Abstract   This article explores rewriting as a concept for cultural memory studies, examining the transformation of the technology of "writing again" in different historical periods. Its aim is to elucidate in what ways rewriting functions as an act of remembrance, and how this function differs in the manuscript age, the age of print and the digital age. The article discusses differences and similarities in the stability or fluidity of texts as a medium for memory, presenting rewriting as a helpful tool to see through presumed distinctions between these periods and their characteristic methods of text transmission. In particular, the article presents findings with respect to its utility to a broad range of historical source evidence, from the early medieval literature on saints' lives to contemporary post-colonial and feminist literature. In this article, rewriting is recognized as a transformative technology of memory, carrying and transmitting memories but not without change and adaptation. Dealing explicitly with the variety and the diversity of the media that transmit cultural memory in the different historical periods, including visual media, the article shows rewriting to be a productive concept for understanding cultural memory as an act of transfer.

Cultural memory studies have recently emerged as a broad interdisciplinary field, encompassing a wide range of perspectives and addressing an extensive list of

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topics, yet with no methodology of its own. Following Radstone's *Memory and Methodology* (2000), scholars have explored how different disciplines engage with memory, describing research methods and laying a conceptual foundation for the new field (Keigthley 2008; Erll and Nünning 2010). This article explores rewriting as a concept for cultural memory studies, seeking to contribute to the transhistorical study of cultural memory. It inquires into the cultural production of memory as it takes place in a broad range of texts and contexts, from pre-modern to postmodern times. How, indeed, can we study cultural memory comparatively? What theories and concepts are needed for transdisciplinary conversations about the cultural performance of memory across historical periods and analyses of it in communities and societies over time? We propose "rewriting" might be such a tool. In *How Societies Remember*, Connerton defines the object of the study of the social formation of memory as "those acts of transfer that make remembering in common possible" (1989, 39). Taking our cue from this definition, we observe that rewriting constitutes such an act of transfer. Rewriting is a process of cultural remembrance— an "act of cultural memory" (Bal 1999), in which texts from the past are re-produced and passed on. Whereas writing and representation have long been key concepts for cultural memory studies, rewriting brings a new perspective to it, inviting reflection on the differences and similarities between the three text cultures of the age of manuscript, print, and digitalization and on the media of memory practices.

In this article, we therefore look at the concept "rewriting" as a tool for the study of cultural memory, examining its place and function in the production and reproduction of cultural memory and probing its applicability to various historical periods. As Erll has recently argued in her *Memory in Culture* (2011), there seems to be increasing convergence among scholars from various disciplines working on the relationship between culture and memory. Yet, how far does this convergence go, especially when it comes to the comparability (or lack thereof) between memory practices in the Middle Ages and those in the (post)modern age? This article grew out of a discussion between representatives of different disciplines and historical periods in which we sought to identify concepts that could be of use to the study of different societies in the past in order to analyse and clarify social and cultural dynamics. One of the potentially most productive concepts that emerged out of this discussion is that of rewriting. This article aims to present our reflections with respect to its utility to a broad range of historical source evidence.[1]

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[1] In October 2008, the Netherlands Graduate School for Literary Studies (Onderzoekschool Literatuurwetenschap) organised, in conjunction with the Research School Medieval Studies (Onderzoekschool Mediëvistiek), a workshop entitled 'Does Memory Have a History?', in which researchers discussed recent research on pre- and postmodern memory practices and the terms used to inquire into them. The present paper grew out of its sequel, a workshop 'Does Memory Have a History? Part Two: Memory, Rewriting, Adaptation', held in May 2010 at Utrecht University. We wish to acknowledge the contributions of our interlocutors and co-organizers on these days, especially Jesseka Batteau, Truus van Bueren, Astrid Erll, and Ann Rigney. We also wish to thank Marit Monteiro and Marco Mostert for their feedback on an earlier version of this article.

Rewriting as a Technology of Cultural Memory

To rewrite is, quite simply and literally, to write again and "rewriting" is the process and product of the act of writing again. In its most basic sense, then, rewriting encompasses a variety of activities, including the copying of a manuscript, the retelling of a story, the re-narration of an event, and the re-editing of a text. As an act of transfer enabling cultural remembrance, rewriting inscribes time and difference. It is an act of repetition that re-members, re-collects, and re-calls, for it puts the memory together again, gathers it anew, and calls or names it again. The synonymous verbs for the act of memory, to remember, recall, and recollect, are telling, signifying that rewriting literally does "memory-work." Thus, the early medieval Lives of the Saints, transmitting the memory of illustrious members of the religious community, underwent a process of rewriting in the eighth and ninth centuries. The cult of the saints bloomed in the Carolingian era, deployed explicitly to create a communal (religious) identity. When the Carolingian dynasty dethroned their predecessors, the Merovingians, they took over their heroes and role models, but re-narrated the written accounts on life and death of the saints in order to provide these stories with a more distinct "Carolingian" profile (cf. Goullet 2005). The persons that were remembered remained the same, but the way they were remembered changed. More recently, Maryse Condé's rewriting of the Salem Witch trials from the perspective of Tituba in *Moi, Tituba, sorcière … noire de Salem* (1986) illustrates the ways in which rewriting serves to bolster identity (Assmann 1995) as versions of the past get incrusted in collective memory. Indeed, ignoring all evidence that Tituba is an American Indian, Condé reinvents her as a black woman in a novel she composes in response to a request to write "a book about a heroine from my region" (Pfaff 1996, 58), as well as in reaction to the racism she encountered while on a Fulbright fellowship in the United States (Plate 2011, 123). As we shall discuss, rewriting is a particular literary and cultural practice that performs memory. It engages in the labour of remembering and forgetting, involving people in it as an active process of production and repression in relation to institutionalized discourses and cultural and social practices and, as such, it is implicated in power dynamics. The question we wish to answer is: what are the historical and transhistorical characteristics of rewriting as an act of cultural memory?

As process and as product, rewriting is engaged in cultural transmission and inheritance. Like translation, commentary, exegesis—in fact, like all those activities that the literary scholar Marcel Cornis-Pope (1992) puts under the rubric of "critical rewriting"—it adapts culture to preserve it, re-producing it to keep it alive. In this sense, rewriting's teleology is conservative: although it is a transformative process, its re-productive capacity produces tradition, the semblance of things eternally present and unchanged, carried on across time and space. Yet rewriting may also be primarily vested in change. Its interest, then, is not so much in preserving culture as it is in transforming it, directing its look at what might be, rather than to what is or was. Feminist rewriting of the late twentieth century, for instance, can be seen to aim at transformation. Intent on unsettling culture as it is, rewritings of the classics and of canonical works from Sara Maitland's short story "Penelope" (1978) through

Sena Jeter Naslund's novel *Ahab's Wife* (2000) re-collect the past in view of creating what Bal has termed "helpful memories" (1999, xii) and generate a "usable past," to use Van Wyck Brooks's phrase (1918). Like feminist art and scholarship, feminist rewriting is "driven by the desire to redefine culture from the perspective of women" (Hirsch and Smith 2002, 3), seeking to counter the destructive effects of collective repression and forgetting: "to imagine a future that serves women better," as Stimpson puts it in "The Future of Memory" (1987, 263).

Participating in the process of cultural transmission and inheritance, rewriting is a technology of cultural memory. In using the Foucauldian term "technology," we follow memory studies scholars such as Sturken (1997) to stress that while rewriting is an epistemological assumption, the practice of rewriting is a *technè*: a craft and art. In other words, that it is an act, making or doing memory. The terms "act" and "practice" are closely related. We use the term "practice" to refer to the action of "doing memory" and "act" for the specific act people perform, such as reciting, writing, visualizing, re-writing, etc. The technological dimension of rewriting is best to be understood in the terms provided by Goody and Watt in their essay "The Consequences of Literacy" (1968), which discusses the differences between the ways cultural heritage is transmitted in oral and literate cultures. As they explain, orality and literacy work differently as technologies of language, managing knowledge and cultural memory according to different systems and logics. "The transmission of the verbal elements of culture by oral means can be visualized as a long chain of interlocking conversations between members of the group," they write (1968, 29). This means that orality governs a perception of the past in terms of the present. In contrast, writing is a system of storage that inserts absence and historical distance in verbal communication, generating a sense of the past's "pastness." These different systems of cultural transmission are central to the conceptualization of cultural memory. In *How Societies Remember*, Connerton distinguishes between "incorporating" and "inscribing" memory practices, explaining that "[t]he transition from an oral culture to a literate culture is a transition from incorporating practices to inscribing practices" (1989, 75). These incorporating and inscribing memory practices can be identified with what Taylor has termed, in her book subtitled *Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, the repertoire and the archive (2003). To elaborate: orality is performative. It belongs to the order of the repertoire, enacting a memory that is embodied, requires presence, and typically, despite claims to the contrary, does not remain the same. In contrast to this memory that transforms as it keeps, literacy is readily—though not per se adequately (cf. Mostert 2000)—presented as producing "archival memory," which is an inscribing memory that is assumed to be resistant to change and which, "separating the source of 'knowledge' from the knower," "works across distance, over time and space" (Taylor 2003, 19–20).

The differences in how oral and literate cultures remember, store, and transmit information, as well as those that follow from the shift from print to digitalization, are crucial to understanding rewriting in relation to cultural memory. They raise the question whether it is possible to apply the concept to different periods and societies. Indeed, does not rewriting function differently—and to different effect—in manuscript, print, and digital cultures? As the referent of writing changes with the

advent of new technologies, for instance from handwriting to typewriting, does then not the referent of rewriting also change? Media scholars certainly have been insisting on the constitutive role of the medium for the message, some of them going as far as to say "the medium is the message" (MacLuhan 1994, 7). In addition, the question arises whether we are overstretching the term when we apply it to visual representations as well—a question we shall address later on in this article. To be sure, to think of the phenomenon under scrutiny as re-*writing* is to evoke a whole conceptual apparatus and a particular (and western) conception of language and its relation to memory and experience: "The writing = memory/knowledge equation is central to Western epistemology," Taylor (2003, 24) points out. The choice of term is crucial, then, and has performative force. It suggests that the logic of rewriting is that of writing as inscription and as objectified speech: of language in a material form capable of being "transmitted over space and preserved over time," as Goody points out in the Introduction to *Literacy in Traditional Societies*; of being "rescued from the transitoriness of oral communication" (1968, 1).

Yet, does the distinction really hold? Is writing really the instrument of permanency, of fixity, and of stability, as contrasted to the evanescence of the spoken word? Conversely, is orality really exclusively the domain of performativity or is it possible to identify performative aspects in literary traditions just as well—aspects that give written memories a more dynamic character than the somewhat schematic opposition between repertoire and archive seems to allow for? And are there any differences *within* writing—are there significant differences, that is, between words printed and handwritten, between those that are composed on paper and those that are born digital? The different media of writing constitute different environments for rewriting as an act of memory. They form different cultures of memory. To understand rewriting as a concept for cultural memory and operationalize it for cultural memory studies, we need therefore to examine it across the three media of writing and examine how it functions in the context of manuscript, print, and digital memory culture. Although we will address the question of visual literacy further on, for pragmatic reasons, in this article we do not inquire into ritual, music and re-enactment or embodiment as forms of rewriting, leaving the question of the relevance of the concept of rewriting in these areas open for future inquiry.

Media of (Re-)Writing: Stability and Fluidity in Three Memory Cultures

By characterizing the three memory cultures under scrutiny, we can make a further subdivision in kinds of written transmission and attendant stability of a text: the manuscript age, the period of print, and the digital era. Evidently, a text's mode of transmission has great impact on its stability. The practical method of text transmission characteristic of the Middle Ages, when each single book or document was copied by hand, enhances the fluidity of the text: "Not one copy of any handwritten text is identical to any other single copy" (Mostert 2008, 55). In contrast to the fluid transmission of handwritten texts in the pre-modern era and, as we shall argue, the digital storage and dissemination in the (post-)modern era,

printed reproduction is seen as a form of stable transmission, the mechanical reproduction of the text guaranteeing its sameness across time and space. This presentation is of course misinformed, for as John Bryant points out, "Truth be told, all works—because of the nature of texts and creativity—are fluid texts" (2002, 1).[2] Yet it shapes the *ideology* of print as medium of cultural memory. It is, indeed, no mere coincidence that the institutionalization of intellectual property and authors' rights follows on the invention of print and that copyright legislation takes the copy as its basis (Auslander 2008, 147–148; see also Woodmandsee 1984).

Matters of authorship, ownership, and authority are closely related to and determined by the character of a specific method of text transmission. In a manuscript culture, the importance of authorship and hence, the authority of a text, is measured with parameters that differ from a literacy of print. Although the concepts of authority and authorship are (also etymologically) closely related (cf. Ziolkowski 2006; Ziolkowski 2009; Mostert 2000; Minnis 2010), the authority of a medieval text does not always depend on whether its author is known by name. In the manuscript age, the material vulnerability and the methodical fluidity of text transmission enlarge the number of writings transmitted anonymously. Moreover, in certain literary domains, anonymity even serves as a deliberate strategy to enhance the authority of a text. In the case of the early medieval royal annals, for example, anonymity is seen as a warranty of authority, for it adds "the semblance of objective authority to their account" (McKitterick 2008, 49). The same phenomenon is illustrated for the later Middle Ages by Plessow (2008, 158), who signals the lack of an "authorial *ego*" in the episcopal chronicles of North-German Bremen and Münster. The bishop's *res gestae* were written down from oral testimonies, which apparently sufficed to "authenticate" them. These examples illustrate that the presence of an author is not indispensable for a medieval audience to put its "trust" in a text (cf. Clanchy 1993 [1979]; Fleischmann 1983; Schulte et al. 2008).

In the context of both medieval literature and religious treatises discussing Christian tradition and doctrine, anonymity is seized in a different way to establish authentication and authority. The attribution of a certain ecclesiastical text or body of texts to a well-known author (e.g. the so-called Church Fathers, founders of a systematic discussion on Christian doctrine) or biblical figure enhances the authority of that text as well as the trust put in it by its readers or audience. In this process, the gravity of the author or biblical figure provides the text with an authority, even when the attribution is not historically "correct." Specific utterances are regularly connected to an author or biblical episode that does not correspond with the actual origin of the text. The dealing with sacred scripture and the authoritative Church Fathers is apparently not as strict as one would expect. This can partly be explained by the methods of writers and copyists in the manuscript age, for whom quoting from memory was common practice—one of many aspects of medieval literacy that make clear the extent to which this culture of writing is dependent on non-literate ways of storing (cf. Carruthers 2008 [1990]). Ziolkowski (2009) notices a similar looseness in referring to authorities in twelfth-century secular literature in the

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[2] Bryant defines the fluid text as "any text that exists in more than one version. It is 'fluid' because the versions flow from one another" (2002, 1).

vernacular, even when the reference is incorrect. Like religious treatises, secular stories were linked to authorities from the past, regardless of whether these authorities were actual historical figures or invented authenticators. As in the case of religious treatises, the fact that a text is linked to a certain authority seems to be more important than the question whether that attribution is historically correct (Ziolkowski 2009, 447; 438–439).

The way differences in text transmission between the manuscript age and the period of print influence the attribution of a text to a named author inevitably results in different manners of assessing intellectual ownership and of debating matters of plagiarism or theft. Although ideas about ownership and plagiarism are as old as literate culture, copyright laws have transformed what constitutes (legally) acceptable forms of reproduction, including rewriting (cf. Plate 2011). Adaptation and appropriation are crucial concepts in this context, for they inscribe different modes of rewriting and different relations to the text being rewritten—adapted or appropriated. As defined by Sanders (2006, 18), adaptation is "a transpositional practice," "a specific version, albeit achieved in alternative temporal and generic modes," whereas appropriation effects "a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain" (26). In other words, adaptation remains within the same ownership domain; appropriation, on the contrary, involves taking possession of something for one's own, especially without permission or authority. Consequently, appropriation holds different meanings and different valuations, depending on the historical period under scrutiny as well as on the perspective held on taking what rightfully belongs to another. When applying rewriting as a concept for the study of cultural memory, it is, therefore, essential to be aware of the different valuation the notion appropriation holds when looked at from different angles. In the age of print, appropriation inevitably raises questions of ownership and theft—questions that are especially fraught with difficulties as the contemporary discourse on literary property that is based on originality is itself entangled in contradictions such as those voiced by Bloom, who points out that "Great writing is always rewriting… The originals are not original, but… the inventor knows *how* to borrow" (1994, 11). Frijhoff (1997) has convincingly demonstrated the emancipatory power of appropriation in the context of cultural history. Ownership plays no role in Frijhoff's account because he discusses praxes, not texts. Yet his approach clearly denotes a positive valuation of appropriation, which contrasts with its denunciation as a form of theft or artistically and/or politically transgressive gestures of appropriation ranging from online Fan Fiction to Kathy Acker's postmodern practice of rewriting as "plagiarism" and the publication of rewritings of novels that are under copyright. Similarly, in a culture where the appeal to authorities is highly valued and where anonymity can be a core characteristic of a (text-) tradition, the act of appropriating another author's intellectual heritage is construed positively, valuing it as a gesture of identification with an authoritative inheritance and of inscription in the tradition.

In the digital age, the transmission of texts is characterized by a new fluidity. Digitality enhances the independence of texts from any one particular form or presentation. The cut-and-paste function in computing facilitates appropriation and practices of "uncreative writing" (Goldsmith 2011), proving copyright increasingly

inadequate as a means of regulating (re)production in the digital age. Not surprisingly, copyright proves increasingly inadequate as a means of regulating the production and reproduction in the digital age and scholars and activists of a wide variety of plumage have called for its rethinking and reconceptualization in the context of the Internet (e.g. Lessig 2005; the Creative Commons and Copyleft licensing initiatives). With its particular approach to matters of authorship and intellectual ownership, contemporary digital literacy is not without analogies with the medieval situation. Mostert argues for "a new sensitivity to the openness of textual traditions" (2008, 55). More interesting for our purposes, Walter Ong introduces the notion of a secondary orality—an orality that is dependent on literacy and the existence of writing, "a more deliberate and self-conscious orality," as he puts it, "based permanently on the use of writing and print" (2004 [1982], 136).

Ong's notion of "secondary orality" is useful in thinking about orality and literacy today, in a time when writing and print exist alongside oral and digital transmission. The contemporary situation, indeed, is a lot more complex than the simple opposition between orality and literacy set up by Goody and Watt (1968) in their essay. In fact, the advent of new technologies of information and communication has brought about a reordering of the entire system, as anthropologists of writing have reported (e.g. Barton and Papen 2010). Writing, today, is not just the opposite of speech in a binary that has been proven untenable; it is a kind of speech, and functions as such in the context of the new communication technologies that substitute new forms of writing for face-to-face oral communication (Plate 2011). To be fair, Goody and Watt acknowledge this complexity at the close of their essay, when they state that "in Western cultures the relation between the written and the oral traditions must be regarded as a major problem" (1968, 68). Yet they do not go further: they do not tease out the ways in which the different modes of transmission work together, influence and/or interfere with one another in the process of transmission that is the field of cultural memory. As media of memory, however, these different technologies of inscription, storage, and transmission differ significantly, affecting both what is remembered and how. They need, therefore, to be examined in their distinctiveness and specificity, as well as in how they interact to produce cultural memory.

Can We Speak of "Visual Rewriting"? The Case of Medieval Images

Before inquiring further into the position of rewriting between orality and literacy, the question needs to be answered whether or to what extent rewriting is a useful concept for discussing images in relation to cultural memory. Can images be conceived as "rewritings" of the past? Obviously, literacy extends beyond the written word. There are many other media through which the language of culture is expressed, such as music and all forms of ritual and, more generally, embodiment or enactment. For pragmatic reasons—to limit the scope of the present inquiry—we excluded most of these media of cultural memory from this article, electing to focus on writing across its manifestations in manuscript, print, and digital cultures. For the sake of our argument, however, seeking to establish the relevance of rewriting as a

concept of cultural memory studies, it is important to sound its possibilities beyond the mere verbal and consider it in relation to another domain that is important to how cultures remember: that of images.

It is common nowadays to approach the visual images of the medieval period as "texts." This is not only a corollary of the so-called linguistic turn, which tends to read the past in its entirety as text, but also follows from a predominantly educational interpretation of medieval visual culture. In consequence, images are viewed as a medium for the writing and rewriting of history. A case in point are the famous thirteenth-century stained glass windows of Chartres Cathedral, which Manhes-Deremble (1993) discusses as a rewriting (*réécriture*) of earlier hagiographical texts with an educational purpose. With this approach, Manhes-Deremble continues the modern characterization of the Gothic cathedral as a book in stone and glass [Mâle 1958; cf. also Proust's preface to *The Bible of Amiens* by Ruskin 1989 (1910) and Calinescu's discussion of it (1993, 24–25)]. In this late nineteenth-century perception, the raison-d'être of the cathedral-book is rather straightforwardly understood as of educational character. In recent scholarship, the more complex nature of medieval visual literacy is acknowledged, and the adage of medieval art as the book of the illiterate is questioned (Duggan 2005).

At a more theoretical level, Carruthers (2008) underlines the performative function of visual images as carriers of memory. Due to their mnemonic function, she argues, images do not merely imitate reality, but re-present reality in the sense that they make the depicted reality present in the here and now. Images function "recollectively," then, in the sense that they recall a reality to mind, just as letters "make present the voices (*voces*) and ideas (*res*) of those who are not in fact present" (Carruthers 2008, 275; cf. Duggan 2005, 69). With this description of the function of images in medieval culture in mind, we may now have another look at the concept of the cathedral as a book, seeing it as the script of a performance (cf. Cothren 2006) rather than as an educational programme, as has long been maintained. In a performative sense, stained glass windows can be seen as a visual expression of memory culture, for instance the cultic commemoration of the saints.

Carruther's performative approach, however, does not answer the question of who could participate in this performance through visual images. Duggan (2005) counters the adage of images as the book of the illiterate by claiming that pictures can only call to mind what is already known and thus re-membered.[3] In this perspective, medieval visual literacy, like modern visual literacy, is a complex and difficult process comparable to the reading of texts (Hageman and Mostert 2005, 2). It requires the ability to gain access to the stories or themes depicted, or, at the least, instruction leading to familiarity with the represented traditions. Pointing out that contemporary visual literacy, in fact, makes significant demands on today's public, Pauwels (2008a, b) calls for the development of an interdisciplinary approach to visual literacy. His analysis of the close relation between literary and visual culture shows strong analogies with the medieval situation. Thus, he contests the popular statement that images, as opposed to words, are "universally understandable" (Pauwels 2008a, 79) and advocates an approach to visual culture where the verbal

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[3] See Duggan (2005, 109–19) for the criticism this statement aroused.

and the visual are not played off against one another, but are mobilized in conjunction. Both present-day and medieval visual culture require an approach where the visual object is studied not in isolation, but in "its context of production" (Pauwels 2008b, 159).

The inclusion of visual literacy in the discussion of rewriting is indicative of a "textual" approach to images. The point is not that images are to be approached as texts in the semiotic and "linguistic-turn" senses of the term, but that images are media for telling stories about the past and retelling existing traditions in accordance with the needs of the present. Also, like the written word, images are inscribing practices and, as such, constitute a medium for the transfer of memory akin to yet different from writing, since they can be stored, transmitted, and transformed, albeit in distinct material forms. Yet, the question needs to be posed whether the term rewriting is really an adequate one to discuss images. Indeed, because of rewriting's entanglement with writing as a specific technology of the word, for the purpose of our discussion, we might want to briefly consider the relative merits of competing terms. There are, indeed, many related terms. For instance, refracting, recycling, remediating, reframing, reformulating, reiterating, retrofitting, retrojecting, revisioning, …—with each of these terms having its own connotations, which imply different views on the subject and carry different sets of instructions. Thus, "recycling" emphasizes re-use and the relationship to waste while "remediation" implies a change of medium[4]; "adaptation," in contrast, stresses its affinity with life: in the realm of biology, adaptation designates the capacity of organisms to adapt to their changing environment or circumstances and thus to survive. This feature of adaptation makes it particularly interesting for a discussion of rewriting as a concept for cultural memory studies: it puts change at the heart of the procedure, as well as interaction with the environment, making context a significant component of its analysis. Media neutral, the concept of adaptation means not some after-life: adaptation is life itself. As such, it raises the question of agency, asking who does the adaptation, as well as the question of performativity; asking, in the words of art historian W. J. T. Mitchell (2005), "what do pictures want?" Indeed, a crucial issue for cultural memory and the role of rewriting in cultural remembrance is the question of agency, querying, on the one hand, what role do individuals play in it, and on the other hand, how and to what extent is memory determined by its technologies, as well as by what may be called the persistence of the past—a possibly inherent determination to persist?

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[4] Remediation has come to mean specific things in the wake of Bolter and Grusin's book (Bolter and Grusin 1999). In his book on *Rewriting* Moraru avoids the term recycling because, he writes, "recycling is a concept without glory": "It smacks… of impotent rumination, routine, superficiality, worthlessness, refuse—and dealing in the waste of our 'excremental culture' (Kroker and Cook) is scarcely glamorous. Nor does it hold great promise of creativity" (2001, 7). There is much to take issue with in Moraru's rejection of the term "recycling." In the light of current ecological efforts, its lack of creative potential is debatable. In fact, in the context of the Global North's excessive production of waste, might the term not prove especially productive, inviting rethinking cultural production in terms of re-use and in relationship to waste?

Rewriting: Between Orality and Literacy

Matters of authorship, authority, and a stable or more fluid text transmission have a fundamental impact on the trustworthiness of a written text. Writing in the late 1960s, Goody and Watt express an optimistic, even positivistic trust in writing. As they state, a member of an oral society has "little perception of the past except in terms of the present," while a member of a literate society has access to more objective sources: "The annals of a literate society cannot but enforce a more objective recognition of the distinction between what was and what is" (1968, 34). A similar trust in writing is expressed in the authors' opinion that "literate society merely [has] no system of elimination, no 'structural amnesia'" (57). Goody and Watt conclude that the perception of the past is determined by the way knowledge about this past is stored and transmitted. In an oral culture, the memory and conceptualization of the past are influenced by concerns of the present: there is no body of control in the form of written records (34). Of course, printed writing is subject to destruction and deterioration like any material culture. Also, printed transmission itself is characterized by fluidity. As Bryant has argued, while "nothing is more material, more visible, more closely watched, and more fixed than a printed text as it marks space across and down a page," "fictive works as wide ranging as *Piers Plowman*, *King Lear*, *Frankenstein*, … the Declaration of Independence, and … *Moby-Dick* are 'fluid texts'; they exist in multiple, significant material versions" (2010, 1,043; see also Bryant 2002). In addition, Goody and Watt seem to overlook some important instruments producing oblivion in a literate age. Ways of recording the past on paper are not especially trustworthy, as selection is integral to writing at every level, from that of the word to that of the text as a whole (cf. Jakobson 1960). Moreover, as many have pointed out, the archive is an instrument of power. In colonial contexts, one will recall, it served to recognize the history and humanity of some people while obliterating that of others, remembering and forgetting in powerful and troubling ways (e.g. Stoler 2009).

Rewriting, in this perspective, can be an instrument serving to delegitimize and to undo the (false and illegitimate) trust in the archival document as the provider of "objective sources"—an instrument, in other words, to adjust the conceptualization of the past to the needs of the present. Of this, Maryse Condé's above-mentioned account of the Salem Witch trials from the perspective of Tituba in *Moi, Tituba, sorcière … noire de Salem* (1986) is exemplary, inviting the rethinking of the events and how they have been recorded and their meaning passed on. As Angela Davis writes in her foreword to the novel's English translation, "in the final analysis, Tituba's revenge consists in reminding us all that the doors to our suppressed cultural histories are still ajar" (1992, xi). Whereas writing evokes stability and trust, rewriting implies—indeed *embodies*—change. The act of repetition, of writing again, inscribes time and difference in the text, making change and transformation its central characteristics. It brings a bit of play within the text, loosens it up and highlights the text's fundamentally fluid character. As such, rewriting partakes of the repertoire, to evoke Taylor's term for non-archival cultural transmission again—a mode of cultural transfer that transforms as it keeps and transmits, and so, preserves while enabling change. In this sense, rewriting is integral to a culture of memory that is fundamentally at odds with the

ideology of writing-as-stability and constitutes a technology of memory more typical of oral culture than of a literate one. Whereas the commitment of memories to writing is a solid strategy that objectifies them by arresting their movement in time and across space, rewriting re-mobilizes them, bringing them back into circulation while mobilizing them for specific intents and purposes. Not surprisingly, the fluidity characteristic of the text that is continually reproduced, travelling by word of mouth or migrating across media platforms such as handwritten books or personal computers, stands at the heart of the contemporary moment of "secondary orality," which sociologist Bauman (2000) dubbed "liquid modernity."[5]

In this light, it is interesting to note that Goody and Watt entirely neglect the medieval period in their discussion of orality and literacy. Is this because of their uneasiness over the period's mix of tenaciously oral and highly literate characteristics? A schematic distinction between oral and literate societies is also visible in their idea that in an oral society each individual takes part in the group's cultural tradition, whereas reading and writing are "normally solitary activities," which implies that the dominant culture (a literate one) is easy to avoid. Knowledge is, paradoxically, easily accessible, but also easily avoided. The medieval situation deviates from this schematic opposition, particularly since reading—and, by extension, writing, as indicated by the writing of a letter, which was generally read aloud in company—is in this period a highly collective activity, taking part in a community (see also Rehberg Sedo 2011).

The tense relation between orality and literacy and its impacts on medieval society is recognized by Stock, who describes it as one of the period's most intriguing, though puzzling, characteristics:

> The central problem of the Middle Ages is the relation of orality to a world making ever-increasing use of texts, not only, as obvious, in its real social interchange, but more importantly, in the ontological sphere, that is, as a set of purely abstract or intellectualized models out of which any experience may potentially be interpreted. (1984–85, 16)

Although Stock's linear approach of an "ever-increasing use of texts" is contradicted by others (Mostert 2010, 8; McKitterick 1989),[6] his presentation of the manuscript age as a literacy very different from the age of printing—more confined, more expensive, more vulnerable; also, more fluid and liable to change and adjustment—is still valid and useful for the present attempt to understand rewriting as a technology of cultural memory. Both the manuscript transmission and the commonality of anonymity offer numerous possibilities to adjust texts, almost as if they were orally transmitted, either through changes in the copying process— changes which may be intentional as well as accidental—or through the application

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[5] Although the terms "fluid" and "liquid" belong to the same semantic field, in this article, following Bryant (2002), we have opted to discuss texts in terms of fluidity, reserving the term "liquidity" for the sociological (cf. Bauman 2000). Similarly, we have chosen to use the term "stability" rather than its cognate "solidity" to indicate a text's (perceived) un-changeability and steadiness.

[6] Mostert (2010) describes McKitterick (1989) as a first synthesis paying attention to the literary character of ninth-century Francia, against the general bias depicting the early Middle Ages as a predominantly illiterate society.

of deliberate tools of adjusting such as palimpsesting. The medieval situation, with its mix of orality and literacy, seems to offer evidence for the assumption that rewriting is a technology astride the two cultures, partaking of both orality (adapting transmitted beliefs and concepts of the past to present needs) and literacy. This implies that rewriting is, in fact, not to be viewed in terms of writing—as writing again, re-writing—but on its own terms and as something altogether different.

As an act of cultural memory, rewriting asks scholars to account for agency and intentionality. For if, as we argued above, to re-write is to re-collect and to re-call, then its analysis requires we consider rewriting both in its technological and in its intentional dimension. Proust (1913) famously coined the term of *mémoire involontaire*—involuntary memory—to designate an act of memory triggered by the senses and occurring without conscious effort or desire to remember, simply through the taste of a *madeleine* dipped in linden tea, or the somatic effect of missing a step of the stairs. Although this involuntary memory differs from the conscious effort to remember, it is clear that rewriting may serve the purposes of both voluntary and involuntary memory. In other words, it may be happening perchance, the outcome of certain procedures or practices. Yet it may also be performed willfully and purposely (cf. Goullet 2005, 24), for instance, in deliberate attempts to generate "usable pasts" and "helpful memories." In this case, rewriting is an intervention in cultural memory that is intentional, serving particular ideological purposes, connecting the present to the past and to a future as they are (re)inscribed in the past.

Conclusion

In this article, we have asked whether rewriting might be a useful concept for the study of cultural memory, inquiring how it can contribute to cultural memory studies through our exploration of it across historical periods and memory cultures. As we have argued, rewriting is a productive concept for understanding cultural memory as an act of transfer, for it invites recognition of its technological dimensions as well as of its intentional ones, acknowledging the role of agency and that of the social and media frameworks in which cultural remembrance takes place. Rewriting is intimately connected to writing as a technology of the word, yet differs fundamentally from it in terms of ideology, with writing inviting trust on the basis of its supposed stability, and rewriting functioning as an instrument of continuity through movement and change—through de-stability and the fluidity of circulation and reproduction. As such, rewriting reveals writing in general and historiography in particular to be instruments of fluid transmission across historical periods and not the stable objectified language stored for posterity that inscription—from the carved stone to printed writing to visual images—was long taken to be.

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