

# SOCIAL MEMORY STUDIES: From “Collective Memory” to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices

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## ABSTRACT

Despite substantial work in a variety of disciplines, substantive areas, and geographical contexts, social memory studies is a nonparadigmatic, transdisciplinary, centerless enterprise. To remedy this relative disorganization, we (re-)construct out of the diversity of work addressing social memory a useful tradition, range of working definitions, and basis for future work. We trace lineages of the enterprise, review basic definitional disputes, outline a historical approach, and review sociological theories concerning the statics and dynamics of social memory.

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## *Introduction*

... the time is past in which time did not matter. Modern man no longer works at what cannot be abbreviated...

Paul Valéry

Scholars have viewed social memory narrowly as a subfield of the sociology of knowledge (Swidler & Arditi 1994) and broadly as “the connective structure of societies” (Assmann 1992, p. 293). They have seen it as involving particular

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sets of practices like commemoration and monument building and general forms like tradition, myth, or identity. They have approached it from sociology, history, literary criticism, anthropology, psychology, art history, and political science, among other disciplines. They have studied it in simple and complex societies, from above and below, across the geographical spectrum. Social memory studies is nevertheless, or perhaps as a result, a nonparadigmatic, transdisciplinary, centerless enterprise. While this relative disorganization has been productive, it now seems possible to draw together some of these dispersed insights. Our goal in this essay is therefore to (re-)construct out of the diversity of work addressing social memory a useful tradition, range of working definitions, and basis for future work in a field that ironically has little organized memory of its own.

### *Lineages*

Memory, of course, has been a major preoccupation for social thinkers since the Greeks. Yet it was not until the late nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries that a distinctively social perspective on memory became prominent. The first explicit use of the term collective memory we could find was by Hugo von Hofmannsthal in 1902, who referred to “the dammed up force of our mysterious ancestors within us” and “piled up layers of accumulated collective memory” (Schieder 1978, p. 2). Contemporary usages are usually traced to Maurice Halbwachs, who published his landmark *Social Frameworks of Memory* in 1925. Halbwachs’ Strasbourg colleague, historian Marc Bloch (1925), also used the term collective memory in 1925 as well as later in his book on feudal society (Bloch 1974 [1939]). The art historian Aby Warburg used the term social memory to analyze artworks as repositories of history. Walter Benjamin as well, though he never used the terms social or collective memory, analyzed the material world as accumulated history, brilliantly emphasizing not only the manifold traces of the past in the artifacts of commodity culture, but the relations between commodity culture and particular forms of historicity as well (Buck-Morss 1989).

Bartlett (1932) is usually credited as the first modern psychologist to attend to the social dimensions of memory, attributing decisive importance to group dynamics in individual remembering. Anthropologist Evans-Pritchard (1940) developed a notion of “structural amnesia” in his famous study of the Nuer. Interesting but largely forgotten works in other fields include Janet’s (1927) study of the evolution of memory and the concept of time, Vygotsky’s 1929 claim that memory takes narrative form and is wholly shaped by cultural influences (Bakhurst 1990), and Czarnowski’s 1919 Durkheimian analysis of festivals and rituals celebrating Saint Patrick (Schwartz 1996, pp. 275–76).

In about the same period, American sociologists Cooley (1918) and Mead (1959 [1932]) also theorized about the social context of remembering, but their

important ideas—especially Mead’s—have usually been ascribed to extrasociological interests (Maines et al 1983). Among the emerging European classical theorists, Durkheim (1951 [1915]) is insightful about temporality but addresses memory directly only in his brief discussion of commemorative rituals, and there only as a feature of primitive societies. Social reproduction is perhaps *the* central category of Marx’s thought, but the Marxist tradition emphasizes the automatic and unconscious quality of the process; conscious attention to the past is characterized as an irrational residue of earlier social forms: “The tradition of the dead generations,” Marx (1852) writes in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, “weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living.” Simmel (1959) wrote that “All the uncertainties of change in time and the tragedy of loss associated with the past find in the ruin a coherent and unified expression.” This remark is prescient of later theories that see memory traces as evidence of loss, but Simmel did not develop it more than aphoristically. Weber, too, had little to say about memory, despite his interest in traditional legitimation: “by its very ‘progressiveness’ [civilized society]... gives death the imprint of meaninglessness” (1946). Meaningful death is elusive because memory is inadequate to hold together the diversity of our life experiences. But this is an intriguing aside rather than the beginning of a theory of memory.

Shils (1981, p. 9) explains this shared neglect of tradition and memory by demonstrating how Weber and his contemporaries were the victims of their own overdrawn dichotomies. The classical theorists, Shils writes, “oversubscribed to the naive view that modern society was on the road to traditionlessness....” From such a perspective, an interest in how the past works on the present was antiquarian, or at least useful only as a contrast to the ways modern societies work. In his discussion of Tönnies, Terdiman (1993) notes how unusual this lack of interest in memory and tradition was in a *fin de siècle* culture he describes as otherwise obsessed with memory.

Between this early period of scattered work on the social foundations of memory and the present, relatively little attention was paid to the issue. Even major works like Lloyd Warner’s *The Living and the Dead* (1959) were considered exotic. Since about 1980, however, both the public and academia have become saturated with references to social or collective memory. Why has public interest in memory grown so in the last two decades? Kammen (1995) explains it in terms of the rise of multiculturalism, the fall of Communism, and a politics of victimization and regret, among other factors. Schwartz (1997) explains a decline in presidential reputations under the rubric of postmodernity. Nora, Hutton, Le Goff, Matsuda, and Huyssen pursue similar lines of explanation through an enterprise they label “the history of memory,” which we review in greater detail below.

It is a slightly different matter to trace the rise of scholarly interest in the memory problematic and the associated rediscovery of Halbwachs; analytical

paradigms appear to have at least a semiautonomous dynamic. Schwartz (1996) identifies three related aspects of 1960s–1970s intellectual culture that gave rise to interest in the social construction of the past. First, multiculturalists identify historiography as a source of cultural domination and challenge dominant historical narratives in the name of repressed groups. Second, post-modernists attack the conceptual underpinnings of linear historicity, truth, and identity, thereby raising interest in the relations linking history, memory, and power. Finally, hegemony theorists provide a class-based account of the politics of memory, highlighting memory contestation, popular memory, and the instrumentalization of the past.

Hutton (1993) traces the memory problematic to the history of mentalities that has dominated French historiography since the 1960s. Foucault's "archaeological" stance provided general philosophical support for a desacralization of traditions. Historians like Ariès (1974) and Agulhon (1981), Hutton writes, began to study the history of commemorative practices, which they saw as mechanisms of political power, thus shifting historiographical interest from ideology to imagery and from meaning to manipulation. Writers like Hobsbawm—whose much-cited *Invention of Tradition* was a hallmark work in this vein—extended this desacralization, seeing traditions as disingenuous efforts to secure political power. According to Hutton, it was on this foundation that interest in Halbwachs revived; his apparently presentist position was seen as anticipating postmodernism. The recent effort by Nora to document all the "realms of memory" in French society (discussed below), Hutton argues, is the crowning moment in this tradition.

Analogously, sociology has moved from the study of social structures and normative systems to that of "practice" (Bourdieu 1984, Ortner 1984), expanding the functionalist definition of culture as norms, values, and attitudes to culture as the constitutive symbolic dimension of all social processes (Crane 1994). The view that all meaning frameworks have histories and that explicitly past-oriented meaning frameworks are prominent modes of legitimation and explanation leads to increased interest in social memory because it raises questions about the transmission, preservation, and alteration of these frameworks over time. Social memory studies also draw on the Mannheimian tradition in the sociology of knowledge and the Mertonian tradition in the sociology of science as well as on Berger & Luckmann's (1966) social constructionism, for which many sociologists of memory seem to have a special affinity. Social memory studies thus fit squarely within the reorientation of cultural sociology, much like that of recent historiography, from interest in "ideas developed by knowledge specialists... [to] structures of knowledge or consciousness that shape the thinking of laypersons" (Swidler & Arditì 1994) as well as drawing on older sociological interests.

### *Delimiting the Field*

Through this reconstruction of intellectual lineages for social memory studies, it is possible to limn a conceptual core for our contemporary efforts. The place to begin is Durkheim's response to philosophical positions, in contradistinction to which he demanded a social account of temporality. For Halbwachs, Durkheim's student, this meant that studying memory was not a matter of reflecting philosophically on inherent properties of the subjective mind; memory is a matter of how minds work together in society, how their operations are not simply mediated but are structured by social arrangements: "[I]t is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories..." (Halbwachs 1992, p. 38). Nonetheless, because questions of social memory involve issues of temporality, mind, and, as we see shortly, narrative and historicity, social studies of memory have remained close to philosophy.

Halbwachs developed his concept of collective memory not only beyond philosophy but against psychology, though the very idea of a social memory appropriates psychological terminology. Freud had argued that the individual's unconscious acts as a repository for all past experiences. Forgetting, rather than remembering, is what takes work in the form of repression and the substitution of "screen" memories that block access to more disturbing ones. Halbwachs rejects this Freudian and other purely psychological accounts. He argues that it is impossible for individuals to remember in any coherent and persistent fashion outside of their group contexts: "There is [thus] no point," he argues, "in seeking where... [memories] are preserved in my brain or in some nook of my mind to which I alone have access: for they are recalled by me externally, and the groups of which I am a part at any time give me the means to reconstruct them..." (Halbwachs 1992, p. 38).

Writers in other traditions have rejected an individual-psychological approach to memory as well: Gadamer (1979), for instance, has written, "It is time to rescue the phenomenon of memory from being regarded as a psychological faculty and to see it as an essential element of the finite historical being of man" (Hutton 1993). Contemporary psychologists Middleton & Edwards (1990) as well encourage their discipline to recover Bartlett's and Halbwachs' more social insights. Neisser (1982) implicitly calls for a more social perspective on memory when he argues that the standard experimental methods of cognitive psychology have been inadequate due to the artificiality of the experimental setting. Pennebaker, Paez, and Rimé (1997) take an explicitly *social* psychological perspective in their studies of collective memory of political events. Preserving more of the individualist perspective, some authors have suggested possible benefits of linking social, neuropsychological, and

paleoanthropological inquiries into memory (Schachter 1995, Leroi-Gourhan 1993).

The third, and perhaps most contested, boundary for social memory studies is its relation to historiography. Halbwachs was very decisive about his solution: History is dead memory, a way of preserving pasts to which we no longer have an “organic” experiential relation. On the surface, this understanding of the distinction negates the self-image of historiography as the more important or appropriate attitude toward the past: History’s epistemological claim is devalued in favor of memory’s meaningfulness. At a deeper level, however, the distinction is the same that traditional historians would draw between history and memory: Only the former is engaged in a search for truth. In this vein, Yerushalmi (1982, p. 95) draws a sharp contrast between Jewish memory and Jewish historiography, arguing that until the eighteenth century, the former excluded the latter. On the one hand, he laments this condition because, as he writes, “...collective memory... is drastically selective. Certain memories live on; the rest are winnowed out, repressed, or simply discarded by a process of natural selection which the historian, uninvited, disturbs and reverses.” On the other hand, he critiques history for its sterile posture of distance from meaning and relevance: “...Jewish historiography can never substitute for Jewish memory.... A historiography that does not aspire to be memorable is in peril of becoming a rampant growth” (Yerushalmi 1982, p. 101).

Recent approaches within historiography, however, have critiqued this understanding of the relations between history and memory. First, as historiography has broadened its focus from the official to the social and cultural, memory has become central “evidence.” Theorists now recognize, moreover, that memory frequently employs history in its service: Professional historians have often provided political legitimation for nationalism and other more reconstructive identity struggles. This involvement calls into question not only the success of historians in being objective, but the very notion of objectivity itself (Novick 1988). Furthermore, postmodernists have challenged the “truth-claim” of professional historiography by questioning the distinction between knowledge and interpretation, and derivatively between history and memory (White 1973, Veyne 1984). Philosophers have argued forcefully that historiography constructs as much as uncovers the “truths” it pursues (Novick 1988, Iggers 1997). History is written by people in the present for particular purposes, and the selection and interpretation of “sources” are always arbitrary. If “experience,” moreover, is always embedded in and occurs through narrative frames, then there is no primal, unmediated experience that can be recovered. The distinction between history and memory in such accounts is a matter of disciplinary power rather than of epistemological privilege. Burke (1989) therefore refers to history as social memory, using the term as “a convenient piece of shorthand which sums up the rather complex process of selection and

interpretation.” Hutton (1993) titles his book *History as an Art of Memory*. Schwartz argues that “Sharp opposition between history and collective memory has been our Achilles Heel, causing us to assert unwillingly, and often despite ourselves, that what is not historical must be ‘invented’ or ‘constructed’—which transforms collective memory study into a kind of cynical muckraking” (B Schwartz, personal communication).

Before turning to the history of memory and to the substantive results of social memory studies, it is possible, on the basis of the preceding reconstruction, to define some of the basic concepts for such an inquiry. Halbwachs distinguished among autobiographical memory, historical memory, history, and collective memory. Autobiographical memory is memory of those events that we ourselves experience, while historical memory is memory that reaches us only through historical records. History is the remembered past to which we no longer have an “organic” relation—the past that is no longer an important part of our lives—while collective memory is the active past that forms our identities. Memory inevitably gives way to history as we lose touch with our pasts. Historical memory, however, can be either organic or dead: We can celebrate even what we did not directly experience, keeping the given past alive for us, or it can be alive only in historical records, so-called graveyards of knowledge.

Though collective memory does seem to take on a life of its own, Halbwachs reminds that it is only individuals who remember, even if they do much of this remembering together. And Coser (1992) points out that, while Durkheim writes “Society” with a capital S, Halbwachs employs the more cautious “groups.” Halbwachs characterized collective memory as plural; he shows that shared memories can be effective markers of social differentiation (Wood 1994, p. 126). Some authors, nonetheless, detect the collectivist overtones of the Durkheimian tradition in Halbwachs’ work. Fentress & Wickham (1992) worry about “a concept of collective consciousness curiously disconnected from the actual thought processes of any particular person,” which risks rendering “the individual a sort of automaton, passively obeying the interiorized collective will.”

As a result of these problems, some authors prefer other terms to “collective memory.” Sturkin (1997) defines “cultural memory” as “memory that is shared outside the avenues of formal historical discourse yet is entangled with cultural products and imbued with cultural meaning.” Fentress & Wickham (1992) refer to “social memory” rather than to collective memory. Olick & Levy (1997) refer to “images of the past” as parts of “political cultural profiles.” Assmann (1992) distinguishes among four modes of memory in an effort to capture the range of memory problematics: 1. mimetic memory—the transmission of practical knowledge from the past; 2. material memory—the history contained in objects; 3. communicative memory—the residues of the past in language and communication, including the very ability to communi-

cate in language; and 4. cultural memory—the transmission of meanings from the past, that is, explicit historical reference and consciousness.

Critics who charge that “collective memory” over-totalizes prefer a proliferation of more specific terms to capture the ongoing contest over images of the past: official memory, vernacular memory, public memory, popular memory, local memory, family memory, historical memory, cultural memory, etc. Still others argue that a collective memory concept has nothing to add to older formulations like myth, tradition, custom, and historical consciousness. Gedi & Elam (1996) hold that overuse of the term collective memory is “an act of intrusion... forcing itself like a molten rock into an earlier formation... unavoidably obliterating fine distinctions....” If defined too broadly, as the pattern-maintenance function of society or as social reproduction per se, what is not social memory? On the other hand, Burke (1989) argues that “if we refuse to use such terms, we are in danger of failing to notice the different ways in which the ideas of individuals are influenced by the groups to which they belong.” Schwartz uses Herbert Blumer’s classical distinction between operational and sensitizing concepts, and classifies collective memory as of the latter sort. He argues that collective memory “is not an alternative to history (or historical memory) but is rather shaped by it as well as by commemorative symbolism and ritual. To conceive collective memory in this way sensitizes us to reality while encouraging us to recognize the many things we can do to reality interpretively” (personal communication).

In this review, we refer to “social memory studies” as a general rubric for inquiry into the varieties of forms through which we are shaped by the past, conscious and unconscious, public and private, material and communicative, consensual and challenged. We refer to distinct sets of mnemonic practices in various social sites, rather than to collective memory as a thing. This approach, we argue, enables us to identify ways in which past and present are intertwined without reifying a mystical group mind and without including absolutely everything in the enterprise. Methodologically, Olick (n.d.) and Schudson (1992) suggest specifying the different institutional fields that produce memory such as politics and the arts; Olick (n.d.) and Reichel (1995) theorize the varying links between media and memory; Wagner-Pacifci (1996) places special emphasis on memory’s cultural forms.

### *The History of Memory*

Instead of trying to fix conceptual distinctions theoretically, many scholars have called for a historical approach to social memory, one that sees such distinctions as emerging in particular times and locations and for particular purposes. As Matsuda (1996, p. 16) puts it, “...memory has too often become another analytical category to impose on the past; the point should be to re-



historicize memory and see how it is so inextricably part of the past.” Yates’ (1966) *The Art of Memory* is the seminal work in this vein, charting the links between memory systems and particular historical orders. Yates traces transformations in *ars memoria*—the rhetorical art of memorizing through spatial images—from Roman times through the Renaissance, where the art of memory persisted in the humanist tradition despite its decline due to the spread of the printing press. Coleman (1992) as well offers a comprehensive history of theories of memory from antiquity through later medieval times, noting the particular sophistication of medieval theories, which address the reconstruction of narratives. Following Yates’ lead, Carruthers (1990) demonstrates the persistence of memory training even with the spread of texts, which resulted in the highly mixed oral-literate nature of medieval cultures. Indeed, the dissemination of written materials, she argues, occurred through memorization and oral transmission.

Yet for Yates, Coleman, and Carruthers, memorization remains central: In earlier centuries, this form of remembering was of greater significance than it is today. But even for those periods, an analysis of *ars memoria* reveals little about popular memory due to its elite focus. In response, Geary (1994, p. 8) focuses on ordinary medieval people who, he argues, were actively engaged in creating their past: “Individuals and communities copied, abridged, and revised archival records, liturgical texts, literary documents, doing so with reference to physical reminders from previous generations and a fluid oral tradition....” Geary (1994) also breaks with Yates et al by expanding the definition of memory to include textual transmission as well as oral memorization.

But while ancient arts of memory do persist in the interstices of later mnemonic forms (Matsuda 1996, Casey 1987, Zonabend 1984), it is virtually impossible to discuss collective memory without highlighting historical developments in the material means of memory transmission. While new technological means of recording the past are often seen as “artificial,” with time they are incorporated into the accepted cultural construct of memory. By extension, contemporary interest in the social bases of memory may be traced at least partly to a historical shift of memory from the mind to external loci; without externalization of memory in “artificial” sites, the social location of memory is not as clear. Even in earlier cultures, however, direct attention to material forms of memory can yield important insights.

Assmann (1992), for instance, argues that while Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek, and Jewish cultures all developed the technical means for preserving the past (word, text, writing, and book), only the Greek and Jewish persisted as living traditions, due to the peculiarities of their historical experiences. In the Jewish case, where the entire weight of cultural continuity rested on fundamental texts, everything depended on keeping them alive. This led to the development of a new form of reading—commentary—and a new kind of his-

torical consciousness. This study thus contradicts technologically determinist claims about the importance of the alphabet for cultural continuity: While the development of an alphabet was important, it was not sufficient, nor were its effects uniform.

Epochal generalizations about the developing relations between memory and technologies of communication have nonetheless described a broad shift from orality to literacy over millennia. Founding this tradition, McLuhan theorized the effects of electronic communications on typographic culture within a history that includes the move from manuscript to print culture two centuries earlier and from orality to literacy a millennium before that (Hutton 1993). Subsequently, Ong traced a long-range pattern from orality to manuscript literacy, to print culture, to media culture, drawing out implications for memory. The invention of writing in antiquity was the seed for the rise of more abstract thinking. Because that capability resided in the hands of a small elite, however, it was not until the vast expansion of literacy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that the profound possibilities of written culture became a dominant cultural form. In the process, memory became a public affair, and a problematic one at that.

On the basis of this kind of macro-historical theory, many contemporary scholars of memory work with an image of oral culture as richly expressive and of literate culture as detached and introspective (Goody 1986). "Memory," as Hutton (1993, p. 16) puts it, "first conceived as a repetition, is eventually re-conceived as a recollection." Where Proust revelled in the "involuntary" memory evoked by the taste of a tea cookie, macro-historical theorists of memory describe modern memory as predominantly "voluntary" or active. Hobsbawm & Ranger (1983), for instance, distinguish sharply between custom and tradition. The former is the unproblematic sense of continuity that undergirds the gradual, living changes of "traditional" societies. Tradition, in contrast, aims at invariance and is the product of explicit ideologies.

In an important synthesis, Le Goff (1992) follows Leroi-Gourhan (1993 [1964–1965]) in identifying five distinct periods in the history of memory.

- First, peoples without writing possessed what Le Goff calls "ethnic memory," in which memory practices are not highly developed arts; Le Goff therefore see societies without writing as free, creative, and vital.
- Second, the move from prehistory to Antiquity involved the development from orality to writing, though writing never fully supplanted oral transmission. This new condition enabled two important new mnemonic practices—commemoration and documentary recording—associated with emerging city structures.
- Third, memory in the Middle Ages involved "the Christianization of memory and of mnemotechnology, the division of collective memory be-

tween a circular liturgical memory and a lay memory little influenced by chronology, the development of the memory of the dead and especially of dead saints..." (p. 68).

- Fourth, memory as it developed from the Renaissance to the present involved the gradual revolution in memory brought about by the printing press, which required the long development of a middle class readership to complete its effect. With a "progressive exteriorization of individual memory," the collective memory grew to such a degree that the individual could no longer assimilate it in toto. In the nineteenth century, Romanticism added to a growing fervor for commemorating, and proliferated multifarious forms for doing so, including coins, medals, postage stamps, statuary, inscriptions, and souvenirs. In the same period, we witness the birth of archives, libraries, and museums, reflecting the interests of different nations seeking to build shared identities within their citizenries.
- Finally, changes in the twentieth century constituted another genuine revolution in memory, the most important element of which was the invention of electronic means of recording and transmitting information, which not only change the way we remember, but provide new ways of conceptualizing memory. Not only computers but image processing and the immune system (Sturkin 1997) now serve as basic models and metaphors for thinking about memory.

A key point in many histories of memory is that a significant transformation in the experience of time occurred at some debatable point between the Middle Ages and the nineteenth century. Many authors describe an existential crisis arising out of the increased possibility for abstract thought discussed above, out of accelerating change resulting from increased industrialization and urbanization, as well as out of the resultant decline of religious worldviews and of traditional forms of political authority. Koselleck (1985), for instance, describes a shift from a "space of experience" to a "horizon of expectation." Through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a wide variety of new experiences and events produced an awareness of the "noncontemporaneity of the contemporaneous," which led, in turn, to a sense of a human future and of the distinctness of history. Ariès's (1974) work on attitudes toward death and dying in Western culture, as well, attributes the rising importance and frequency of commemorative practices in the nineteenth century to an increased sense of change: The past was no longer felt to be immediately present but was something that required preservation and recovery.

Hobsbawm (1972) describes the rise of linear historical consciousness as a necessary solution to the existential problems of rapid transformation: "Para-

doxically, the past remains the most useful analytical tool for coping with constant change.” Thompson (1995) attributes a similar dynamic largely to transformations in media technology, which extended individuals’ experiences beyond the sphere of day-to-day encounters: “The process of self-formation [thus] became more reflexive and open-ended.” Jacoby (1975) and Berman (1982), among others, attribute to late modernity a condition—at least partly related to rampant commodification—that makes it harder and harder to relate to the past, producing what Jacoby calls “social amnesia.” When the past is no longer obviously connected to the present, memory becomes of diagnostic importance, as Terdiman (1993) puts it. Yerushalmi (1982) specifies much of this in his discussion of Jewish memory: “The modern effort to reconstruct the Jewish past begins at a time that witnesses a sharp break in the continuity of Jewish living and hence also an ever-growing decay of Jewish group memory.” In sum, according to Schieder (1978, p. 8), “...historical thought served a compensating function making up for the actual loss of history by exaggerating a consciousness of it.”

The connection between nationalism and social memory appears to have been especially important. Cressy (1989) traces a new kind of memory in England to the seventeenth century, a memory that gave expression to a mythic and patriotic sense of national identity: “The calendar became an important instrument for declaring and disseminating a distinctively Protestant national culture... binding the nation to the ruling dynasty and securing it through an inspiring providential interpretation of English history” (Cressy 1989, p. xi). Calendars map the basic temporal structures of societies, enabling and constraining their abilities to remember different pasts (Zerubavel 1981); many have noted how a new calendar served French Republican leaders as effective symbolic markers for their break from the old regime (Hunt 1984, Ferguson 1994). More generally, Gillis (1994) links the construction of national memories to what he calls a cult of new beginnings.

Anderson (1991) combines insights into the spread of print literacy, capitalist commerce, and the decline of religious worldviews to explain the rise of historicizing national identities as a pervasive modern principle. In his account, the transformation of temporality and the associated rise of interest in the past made it possible “to think the nation.” Print capitalism, according to Anderson, was the principal agent of this transformation toward what Benjamin (1968) called the “empty, homogeneous time” of the nation-state. Felt communities of fate were secured across wide territories by newspapers and novels, which produced shared culture among people who would never meet. As a result, in Smith’s (1986) words, “ethnic nationalism has become a ‘surrogate’ religion which aims to overcome the sense of futility engendered by the removal of any vision of an existence after death, by linking individuals to per-

sisting communities whose generations form indissoluble links in a chain of memories and identities.”

Others have given similar insights a more critical turn. Boyarin (1994), for instance, points out that statist ideologies “involve a particularly potent manipulation of dimensionalities of space and time, invoking rhetorically fixed national identities to legitimate their monopoly on administrative control.” Renan is remembered from the nineteenth century for having pointed out the ways in which national identities combine remembering and forgetting, with greater emphasis on the latter: They forget that they are not inevitable and that their internal fissures may be as significant as their external boundaries (Anderson 1991). Duara (1995) writes that the relationship between linear historicity and the nation-state is repressive: “National history secures for the contested and contingent nation the false unity of a self-same, national subject evolving through time...” enabling “conquests of Historical awareness over other, ‘nonprogressive’ modes of time.”

Many writers have pointed to the ways in which national states consciously manipulate and exploit professional history. Smith (1986) writes that “One sign of the formation of the nation out of the protonation is the shifting of the center of collective memory from the temple and its priesthood to the university and its scholarly community.” Breisbach (1994) shows that “Historians were called on to mediate between the demands for change and the equally strong desire to see the continuity of past, present, and future preserved.... Presented by careful scholars with great eloquence, these histories became popular possessions rather than scholarly curiosa.” Novick (1988) shows how, despite protestations of disinterest and objectivity, American historical scholarship has always been inextricably tied to contemporary political problematics. More generally, Lévi-Strauss (1979) argues that “In our own societies, history has replaced mythology and fulfills the same function....” Nevertheless, Noiriel (1996) has argued that “the degree to which commemoration of historical origins is essential for building political consensus may be treated as a variable.” Smith (1986) as well warns against either overgeneralizing or overspecifying the urge toward historical commemoration: Nostalgia exists in every society; in the era of the nation-state nostalgia for the “ethnic past” has merely become more acute.

In a major contribution, Hobsbawm (1983) notes the proliferation in the mid to late nineteenth century of state-led efforts to “invent” useful traditions to shore up their fading legitimacy. Particularly after 1870, in conjunction with the emergence of mass politics, political leaders “rediscovered the importance of ‘irrational’ elements in the maintenance of the social fabric and the social order.” Many thinkers thus advocated the construction of a new “civil religion;” successful leaders sought to imbue educational institutions with nationalist content, to expand public ceremony, and to mass produce public monu-

ments. This impulse spread to nonstate groups as well, producing an interest in genealogies of all sorts, including social registers for the upper classes. With more emphasis on local cultures in the nation-building process, Confino (1997) shows how German nation-building in the nineteenth century (and by extension other nation-building projects elsewhere) required assimilating diverse regional memories into one coherent national identity, which was successful only when the national was mediated through local categories.

Not all thinkers of the nineteenth century, however, championed this proliferation of history. Nietzsche (1983) was highly critical of his age's pervasive production of the past in both its scientific and monumental guises. While recognizing that it is the power to bring the past to life that constitutes the humanity of human beings, Nietzsche also claims that an excess of history can destroy our humanity: "The past," he writes, "has to be forgotten if it is not to become the gravedigger of the present." Many contemporary writers on social memory quote Borges's short story about "Funes the Memorious," depicting the agony of a young man who has lost the ability to forget. Nietzsche sees historicism's scientific attitude as producing "dead" knowledge, while monumental history "inspires the courageous to foolhardiness and the inspired to fanaticism." In another well-known essay, Butterfield (1965 [1931]) warns against an overly interested approach to history writing, what he calls "Whig history," which produces "a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present."

Moving to a slightly later period, historians of memory emphasize the importance of the First World War for perceptions of temporality and the status of national memory. Benjamin in particular portrayed the War experience as a decisive moment in a longer-term trend, typified by a decline of storytelling, a process which he sees, however, as "only a concomitant symptom of the secular productive forces of history." The conditions for storytelling, "woven thousands of years ago in the ambience of the oldest forms of craftsmanship" have lost their most basic support "because there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while... [stories] are being listened to." "Boredom," Benjamin (1968) writes, "is the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience. A rustling in the leaves drives him away.... With this, the gift for listening is lost and the community of listeners disappears." For Benjamin, the First World War brought this process into a new phase: "...never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power." This cataclysm left people not only without the conditions for telling stories but without communicable experiences to tell.

With less apocalyptic vision, other writers as well have noted a change in the form of memory after the War. Mosse (1990), in a study of "The Myth of the War Experience," notes that the burial of the dead and commemoration be-

came the tasks of specially formed national commissions during the War. Paradoxically, just as the effect of war was felt more brutally than ever among civilian populations, the tasks of consolation were made more public than ever before. As a result, "The memory of the war was refashioned into a sacred experience which provided the nation with a new depth of religious feeling, putting at its disposal ever-present saints and martyrs, places of worship, and a heritage to emulate." Additionally, Winter (1995) explores the new forms of war memorial that emerged to appropriate the devastation of total war for national purposes, though he emphasizes the proliferation of more introspective forms too. Gillis (1994) notes that World War I marked a massive democratization of the cult of the dead. In a detailed study of war literature that emerged in Great Britain, Fussell (1975) characterizes this corpus as comprising a peculiarly "modern" form of memory.

While the First World War thus created new attitudes toward both the present and the past, the Holocaust is said to have produced an even more decisive crisis of representation. "We are dealing," writes Friedlander (1992, p. 3), "with an event which tests our traditional conceptual and representational categories, an 'event at the limits.'" There is the oft-quoted remark of Adorno that to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. By extension, many have portrayed the Holocaust as challenging the validity of any totalizing view of history (Friedlander 1992, p. 5). In German intellectual circles, this issue has spawned an ongoing debate between those who maintain that the Holocaust was unique and those who call for "historicizing" it. The literature on German debates about the Nazi past is too voluminous to even begin to report. Good starting places are Maier (1988), Evans (1989), and Olick (1993).

Gillis (1994), Mosse (1990), Young (1993), and Koonz (1994) document changes in war memorials after the Second World War, noting that the memory of war is now understood in a new way. Where nationalist leaders exploited a cult of the war dead after the First World War to foment further nationalist sentiment, memory after Auschwitz and Hiroshima has often been more problematic (Bosworth 1993). Where earlier monuments aimed to exacerbate resentment for future campaigns, many later monuments worked to erase a clear burden. Indeed, Young (1992) goes so far as to implicate the very form of monumentalization in the forgetting: "...once we assign monumental form to memory, we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember." Adorno (1967) had many years earlier pointed out the association between the words "museum" and "mausoleum."

While some authors make the Holocaust the decisive turning point, others see in it merely one last and most horrible stage in a development already under way—one which included recognition of horrors of colonialism, two world wars, racism, environmental damage, etc—on the road to postmodernity. In either case, from early intimations of postmodernism in Heidegger,

through the critical theory of Benjamin and Adorno, to the postmodernist theory of the 1980s, the connected problems of time and memory have been central issues for cultural criticism. Postmodern writers have addressed the ruptured sense of continuity and the multiple temporalities that they see as characterizing our highly mediated society. While many of these theorists have made important insights, we focus very briefly on only two here, Huyssen and Nora. For a critique of the postmodernist account of memory as overly unilinear in its critique of unilinearity, see Schwartz (1997).

In *Twilight Memories*, Andreas Huyssen (1995) characterizes the situation of memory in postmodernity as paradoxical. He notes the simultaneous popularity of museums and the resurgence of the monument and the memorial at the same time there is an “undisputed waning of history and historical consciousness.” Novelty, he says, is now associated with new versions of the past rather than with visions of the future. This memory boom, however, is not to be confused with the historical fever to legitimize nation-states that Nietzsche derided. “In comparison, the mnemonic convulsions of our culture seem chaotic, fragmentary, and free-floating.”

His pessimism, however, is not complete, and his analysis is perceptive: “The current obsession with memory,” Huyssen writes, “is not simply a function of the fin de siècle syndrome, another symptom of postmodern pastiche. Instead, it is a sign of the crisis of that structure of temporality that marked the age of modernity with its celebration of the new as utopian, as radically and irreducibly other.” Where Benjamin and Adorno ascribed the contemporary crisis of memory to the forgetting at the center of the commodity, Huyssen relates the further development of media technologies since their time to “the evident crisis of the ideology of progress and modernization and to the fading of a whole tradition of teleological philosophies of history.” As a result, the postmodern condition of memory is not wholly one of loss: “Thus the shift from history to memory represents a welcome critique of compromised teleological notions of history rather than being simply anti-historical, relativistic, or subjective.” The contemporary crisis of memory, Huyssen argues, “represents the attempt to slow down information processing, to resist the dissolution of time in the synchronicity of the archive, to recover a mode of contemplation outside the universe of simulation and fast-speed information and cable networks, to claim some anchoring space in a world of puzzling and often threatening heterogeneity, non-synchronicity, and information overload.” Where postmodern antiepiSTEMOLOGY derides any easy correspondence between experience and memory, Huyssen characterizes that fissure as “a powerful stimulant for cultural and artistic creativity.”

French historian Pierre Nora (1992), leading theoretician and editor of a massive seven-volume project on “places” or “lieux” of French memory, also begins by observing the paradoxes of memory in postmodernity. “We speak so



much of memory," he writes, "because there is so little of it left." Nora can in this way be seen as the true heir to Halbwachs, who noted the passing of memory into history as we lose a living relation to the past, though Nora sees this process as even more dramatic and irreversible, and as more clearly political, than Halbwachs did. Where premodern societies live within the continuous past, contemporary societies have separated memory from the continuity of social reproduction; memory is now a matter of explicit signs, not of implicit meanings. We now compartmentalize memory as a mode of experience; our only recourse is to represent and invent what we can no longer spontaneously experience (Wood 1994). Nora thus contrasts contemporary "lieux" or places of memory to earlier lived "milieux." The former are impoverished versions of the latter: "If we were able to live within memory, we would not have needed to consecrate lieux de mémoire in its name."

Nora's project is to catalogue all of these places of memory in French society. He organizes the analyses around three principles which he sees as layered on top of one another in telling ways: the Republic, the Nation, and "Les Françaises." For Nora, this ordering represents a historical progression from unity, through uncertainty, to multiplicity. The peculiar status of the second, the memory-nation, is the linchpin. In its ascendancy, the memory-nation relied on national historical narratives to provide continuity through identity. In the nineteenth century, change was still slow enough that states could control it through historiography. But, Nora argues, the nation as a foundation of identity has eroded as the state has ceded power to society. The nation itself, earlier shored up by memory, now appears as a mere memory trace. In contrast to theories of the nation discussed above, Nora thus sees the nation-state as declining in salience, the last incarnation of the unification of memory and history, a form in which history could provide the social cohesion memory no longer could. History too has now lost its temporary ability to transmit values with pedagogical authority (Wood 1994). All that is left, as Hutton (1993) characterizes Nora's project, is to autopsy the past, at best to celebrate its celebrations.

Many writers, however, note that older styles of memory persist in the interstices of modern historical consciousness, and they see in this coexistence an indictment of clear dichotomy between memory and history (Zonabend 1984), while others worry that such accounts are inappropriately teleological. Rappaport (1990), moreover, charges that the dichotomy between oral and written modes of memory serves a colonialist mentality that devalues non-Western forms of remembering. These critiques notwithstanding, it is clear that the situation of memory has changed rather dramatically both over the centuries and especially in the last few decades. Nora's approach raises as many questions as it answers: Given the scope of the cataloguing project, what is not a lieu de mémoire? Isn't the attempt to catalogue even what one recognizes as

impoverished memory traces itself a political act of recuperation (Englund 1992)? Nonetheless, Nora's theory remains the most comprehensive empirical effort to confront the contemporary situation of memory. Where Yates suggests a history of memory, Nora takes it to a programmatic level.

### *Processes of Social Memory: Statics and Dynamics*

The history of memory outlined above makes clear that memory is not an unchanging vessel for carrying the past into the present; memory is a process, not a thing, and it works differently at different points in time (Zelizer 1995). Sociologists of memory have thus sought to specify at a more middle level how memory processes operate within specific social institutions. Here the quintessential sociological issues of power, stratification, and contestation are central. One merit of Nora's project is that it reminds us of all the different places historical imagery and practices occur. Sociologists have long studied many of these sites and practices in an attempt to understand the statics and dynamics of social reproduction. Key terms here include identity, contestation, malleability, and persistence.

### *Identity*

Erikson (1959) is usually credited with introducing the identity concept to describe psychological development over the life course: personal identity, despite periodic crises, is self-sameness over time. A recent narrative turn in identity theory, however, has warned against essentializing identities; instead, they are seen as ongoing processes of construction in narrative form (Bruner 1990, Calhoun 1994). As MacIntyre (1984, p. 218) puts it, "...all attempts to elucidate the notion of personal identity [and, by extension, group identity] independently of and in isolation from the notions of narrative... are bound to fail." As Hall writes, "Identities [personal or collective] are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves in, the narratives of the past" (Huyssen 1995, p. 1). Identities are projects and practices, not properties.

Many recent social theorists have extended the concept to the social level, noting, as MacIntyre does, that "The possession of an historical identity and the possession of a social identity coincide." As Hobsbawm (1972) writes, "To be a member of any human community is to situate oneself with regard to one's (its) past, if only by rejecting it." In a much-quoted formulation, Bellah and co-authors (1985, p. 153) write that "Communities... have a history—in an important sense are constituted by their past—and for this reason we can speak of a real community as a 'community of memory,' one that does not forget its past. In order not to forget that past, a community is involved in retelling its story, its constitutive narrative." "The temporal dimension of pastness," Wal-

lerstein (1991, p. 78) adds, "is central and inherent in the concept of peoplehood."

A crucial link between the literatures on identity and memory concerns how we acquire our personal and social identities. Halbwachs paid particular attention to the role of the family in shaping how we construct the past; Zerubavel (1996) generalizes this insight by discussing what he calls "mnemonic socialization" into "mnemonic communities." "All subsequent interpretations of our early 'recollections,'" he writes, "are only reinterpretations of the way they were originally experienced and remembered within the context of our family." Much of what we "remember," moreover, we did not experience as individuals. "Indeed," Zerubavel writes, "being social presupposes the ability to experience events that happened to groups and communities to which we belong long before we joined them as if they were part of our own past...." This "sociobiographical memory" is the mechanism through which we feel pride, pain, or shame with regard to events that happened to our groups before we joined them.

Another central conceptual tool for analyzing this intersection between individual and collective identities as constituted through shared memories is that of generations. Mannheim's (1952 [1928]) seminal work here argues that social and political events shape generations through major shared experience during their formative years. It is not an accident that the notion of generations flowered in Europe after World War I. The war created a felt community of experience especially among the soldiers. Wohl (1979) refers to "the generation of 1914," whose members, following Mannheim's theory, were in the right place (total war) at the right time (when they were young men) to form a particularly clearly demarked generation. Schuman & Scott (1989) develop and test Mannheim's theories about the connections between generations and social memory by asking different age cohorts to rank various historical events in terms of their perceived importance. Striking response differences, they argue, demonstrate that generational differences in memory are strong, that adolescence and early adulthood are indeed the primary periods for "generational imprinting in the sense of political memories," and that later memories can best be understood in terms of earlier experiences. Shils (1981) points out that new generations define themselves against their elders and thus bear a different relation to the past than previous generations. Theorists of nationalism have pointed out (Smith 1986, Anderson 1991) that nationalist movements almost always centrally involve youth movements.

In the previous section, we saw that the nation-state, despite internal divisions along generational, regional, religious, and other lines, has often claimed to be the primary form of organizing social identity. But in the history of memory, this remains a broad epochal generalization. Sociologists have studied at a closer level how this aim to dominate identity manifests itself through collec-

tive mnemonic processes. Collective memory does not merely reflect past experiences (accurately or not); it has an orientational function (Schwartz 1996a). As Schwartz puts it, “collective memory is both a mirror and a lamp—a model of and a model for society” (personal communication).

National and other identities are established and maintained through a variety of mnemonic sites, practices, and forms. Spillman (1997), for instance, compares the role of centennial and bicentennial celebrations in Australia and the United States, demonstrating the different ways each of these countries used commemorations to address diverse issues. Hunt (1984) explores clothing, medals, language, and other symbolic forms as well, as markers of memory and identity. Cerulo (1995) examines national anthems, though she does not make the connection to social memory explicit. Schwartz (1990, 1991) and Goode (1978), not to mention the classical work of Thomas Carlyle (1901), examine the role of heroes in national identity. Coontz (1992) documents nostalgia for earlier “golden ages,” as does Smith (1986), who notes the importance of origin myths in creating and maintaining identities. Zerubavel (1995) discusses national mythologies, and associated physical places, as ordering principles for articulations of national memory. Ferguson (1994), Boyer (1994), and Haydon (1995) examine the ways urban form embodies a vision of identity by inscribing the past. Muensterberger (1994) explores collecting as a mnemonic practice, while Bennett (1995) undertakes a history of the museum and of the world's fair as sites for articulating national identities. Rochberg-Halton (1986) studies the role of household objects in establishing the relations between memory and identity. Olick (1993, 1997) examines political speech as mnemonic practice. Dayan & Katz (1992) see the mass media as producing electronic monuments that compete with history writing to frame social memory; Lang & Lang (1989) examine the role of the news in forging collective memory. The literature on film and national memory is enormous.

There are many important case studies of the connections between memory and particular national identities, emphasizing both positive and negative aspects of those historical formations. Rousso (1991) and Maier (1988) study how France and Germany respectively confront their difficult legacies of World War II. Roniger (1997) and Nino (1996) look at how various countries in the Southern Cone, including Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina, confront the memory of human rights violations. Aguilar (1997) discusses the problematic legacy of the Spanish Civil War for subsequent regimes. Trouillot (1995) analyzes the complex memories of colonialism and contemporary struggles over historical identity in Haiti. Sturkin (1997) examines memories of Vietnam and of the AIDS epidemic in the United States as sites for working out national identity. Buruma (1994) compares Japanese and German memories of the Second World War. Gluck (1993) examines different epochs in Japanese memory. A special issue of the journal *Representations* edited by Greenblatt, Rev, and

Starn (1995) studies struggles in Eastern Europe with memory of pre-1989 events; a volume edited by Watson (1994) examines memory under state socialism; Tumarkin (1994) has written on the cult of World War II in Russia. Borneman (1997) analyzes how various central and eastern European countries have settled accounts after 1989 with their Communist pasts, as does Rosenberg (1995).

Herzfeld (1991) uses ethnography to analyze the complex negotiations between local and national memories in a Greek town, as does Confino (1997) for Wilhelmine Germany. Kammen (1991, 1978) is the preeminent analyst of American memory, documenting the changing forms of historical consciousness in American history; Thelen (1989) has edited an important volume on American memory. Mudimbe & Jewsiewicki (1993) explore history making in Africa, while Fabre & O'Meally (1994) explore the role of memory in African-American identity. Segev (1993) and Zerubavel (1995) present rich studies of memory in Israeli collective identity. Darian-Smith & Hamilton (1994) have edited a volume on Australian memory. A massive tome sponsored by the Holocaust Memorial Center (Wyman 1996) contains monographs on how 24 different nations reacted to the Holocaust, exploring how that event shaped national identities and vice versa. Rapaport (1997) and Irwin-Zarecka (1989) research how Jews in contemporary Germany and Poland, respectively, live in the lands of their former oppressors.

One particularly vibrant area of debate concerning the connection between memory and identity has been scholarship concerning heritage. The classic work in this field is Lowenthal's (1985) monumental *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, which documents the ways in which national pasts, particularly their built and geographical remains, are reshaped according to present interests. Heritage sites appear to be especially useful for dramatizing the historicity of the nation, particularly in Great Britain. Indeed, the heritage debate has been most heated in Britain, which possesses an elaborate physical legacy and which has a substantial history of propagating it. Barthel (1996) compares such debates in Great Britain and the United States, finding more democratic and inclusive versions in the United States and more elitist programs in the United Kingdom; Koshar (1994) studies such processes in West Germany. Wright (1985) has provided a detailed account of British debates and, along with Hewison (1987), criticizes the nostalgia "industry" for producing mindless, pacifying, and politically conservative commodifications of the national past. Samuel (1994), on the other hand, sees a redemptive potential in the heritage industry; to argue otherwise is to denigrate popular consciousness in the name of the people. Many others have documented the commercialization of nostalgia, particularly in the form of reconstructed villages, Disneyland versions of the American past, and souvenirs (Davis 1979). For an informative review of the literature on nostalgia, see Vromen (1993).

National identities, of course, are not the only ones available, but hegemonic forces within the nation-state have worked hard to appropriate and silence other identity discourses. As Alonso (1988) explains, "Historical chronologies solder a multiplicity of personal, local, and regional historicities and transform them into a unitary, national time." Almost all of the studies just mentioned, however, highlight not the simplicity or unity of national narratives, but the fact that they are essentially contested: Memory sites and memory practices are central loci for ongoing struggles over identity. As Sturkin (1997) puts it, "Cultural memory is a field of cultural negotiation through which different stories vie for a place in history." This sounds almost too benign and passive; people and groups fight hard for their stories. Contestation is clearly at the center of both memory and identity.

### *Contestation*

Memory contestation takes place from above and below, from both center and periphery. The critical theorists of nationalism discussed above noticed that nation-states not only use history for their purposes, but make historiography into a nationalist enterprise. Indeed, Wilson et al (1996) document how national governments seek to control the very "sources" of professional historiography by limiting access to state archives. "The hegemony of modern nation-states," Alonso writes (1988), "and the legitimacy which accrues to the groups and classes that control their apparatuses, are critically constituted by representations of a national past." This is accomplished through the related strategies of naturalization, departicularization, and idealization. This means that history as a tool has until recently not been easily available to competing identities; as a result, other claimants often have not been very good competitors. As Foucault (1977) put it, "Since memory is actually a very important factor in struggle... if one controls people's memory, one controls their dynamism."

In order to resist the disciplinary power of nationalist historiography, Foucault articulated a notion of "counter-memory," referring to memories that differ from, and often challenge, dominant discourses. In a similar vein, many scholars in the past several decades have sought to redirect historical inquiry away from the nation-state as a unit of analysis in favor of groups and perspectives excluded from traditional accounts. Feminist historians, for instance, have sought to recover the repressed history of women that has been left out of "official" histories. Oral historians (Thompson 1988) see their enterprise as a way of giving "history back to the people in their own words." It claims to be more democratic than other historiographical methodologies because it provides an alternative viewpoint from below, a viewpoint that conventional methodology disenfranchises. Feminists and oral historians, in fact, have often

combined their efforts to recover the lost voices of ordinary women's experience (Leydesdorff et al 1996).

The dominance of national memory over other memories thus not only excludes other contestants for control over the national identity but maintains the primacy of national over other kinds of identity for primary allegiance. On the other hand, counter-memory approaches often employ a rather essentialist notion of authenticity: Counter-memory is sometimes seen as protected and separate from hegemonic forms. To resist this, the *Popular Memory Group* (Johnson et al 1982) and others employing the concept of popular memory (Lipsitz 1990, Wallace 1996) have sought to understand popular memory in terms of ongoing processes of contestation and resistance, a relatively free space of reading and reaction in which official and unofficial, public and private, interpenetrate. Dominant memory is not monolithic, nor is popular memory purely authentic. Some historians of gender argue that "focusing exclusively on the dominated makes a full understanding even of the origins and maintenance of their subordination impossible" (Leydesdorff et al 1996). "The intertwining of power and memory," these authors write, "is very subtle... when we as oral historians try to rescue and interpret these memories... we also inevitably transform their standing and character as memories."

Achieving mnemonic consensus is thus rarely easy, charged as it is with transcending the infinity of differences that constitute and are constituted by it. As Thelen (1989) puts it, "The struggle for possession and interpretation of memory is rooted in the conflict and interplay among social, political, and cultural interests..." "It is a product," Irwin-Zarecka (1994) writes, "of a great deal of work by large numbers of people." Many empirical studies have focused on these struggles, especially over the most public representations of the past to be found in monuments and museums. Wagner-Pacifici & Schwartz (1991), for instance, introduce a notion of cultural entrepreneurship in their study of the struggle for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The essays in Linenthal & Engelhardt (1996) document so-called history wars over a proposed Smithsonian exhibit on the bombing of Hiroshima. Savage (1994) characterizes American Civil War memorials as involving "systematic cultural repression, carried out in the guise of reconciliation and harmony." But as much as monumental form strives for permanence, Savage argues, "the cultural contest that monuments seem to settle need not end once they are built and dedicated": Even the most concrete presentations of the past are polysemic. Along these lines, Sandage (1993) showed how African-American civil rights groups appropriated the Lincoln Memorial as a site for articulating their claims.

Groups can also use images of the past and struggles over history as vehicles for establishing their power or, perversely, lack of power. Baker (1985) demonstrates how revolutionaries in eighteenth-century France used memory to achieve their movement aims. Bodnar (1992) shows how various ethnic

groups in the 1920s used national holidays to articulate their versions of American identity and to claim a unique place in the cultural landscape. Takezawa (1995) documents the Japanese-American movement for redressing internment during World War II. De Oliver (1996) analyzes the struggle over containing alternative voices at the Alamo historic site. There are numerous other such studies of contestation and social movements demanding an inversion of some past or a new monumental interpretation.

### *Malleability and Persistence*

Noticing the ways in which images of the past are the products of contestation has led varieties of both constructionists and deconstructionists to emphasize that the past is produced in the present and is thus malleable. A powerful line of so-called “presentism” runs through much of the sociological work on memory, work which documents the ways in which images of the past change over time, how groups use the past for present purposes, and that the past is a particularly useful resource for expressing interests. Within presentism, however, it is possible to emphasize either instrumental or meaning dimensions of memory: The former see memory entrepreneurship as a manipulation of the past for particular purposes where the latter see selective memory as an inevitable consequence of the fact that we interpret the world—including the past—on the basis of our own experience and within cultural frameworks. Hobsbawm & Ranger (1983) are paradigmatic examples of instrumental presentism, while Mead (1959 [1932]) and Mannheim (1956) manifest the latter variety; Halbwachs (1992) combines elements of both.

In response to the perceived ascendancy of presentism in social memory studies, a number of authors highlight limits on the malleability of the past. Schudson (1989, 1992), for instance, argues that “The past is in some respects, and under some conditions, highly resistant to efforts to make it over.” Three factors, according to Schudson, limit our abilities to change the past: The structure of available pasts presents only some pasts and poses limits to the degree to which they can be changed, while placing other pasts beyond our perceptual reach; the structure of individual choice makes some pasts unavoidable and others impossible to face; and the structure of social conflict over the past means that we are not always the ones deciding which pasts to remember and which to forget. In his important study of Watergate in American memory as well, Schudson (1992) responds to the instrumentalist claim of infinite malleability by taking the limits on such manipulability into account.

In contrast, Schwartz (1991, 1996) responds to the cultural claim of malleability: Certain pasts, while somewhat malleable, are remarkably persistent over time. Schuman & Scott (1989) and Middleton & Edwards (1990) emphasize individual-level processes like generational experience and personal iden-



titles, while Schwartz and others look at institutional factors. Schwartz documents how certain meanings remain relevant over long periods of time despite superficial changes in the reading of those meanings as well as in their institutional contexts; certain pasts are constitutive elements of political cultures, and these endure as long as the political culture is not completely superseded. Even when radically new pasts emerge, they often superimpose themselves over older versions without eliminating them. As Shils (1981) sums up a more extreme version of this argument, “traditional patterns of belief and conduct... are very insistent; they will not wholly release their grip on those who would suspend or abolish them.” Shils also emphasizes that the persistence of the past can be an explicit goal, as in self-conscious orthodoxies, thus mixing instrumentalist and culturalist positions.

A third aspect of memory persistence and malleability could be termed “inertial.” Halbwachs discusses how memories become generalized over time into an “*imago*,” a generalized memory trace. Conservatives see this kind of change in memory as decay and seek ways to recuperate the lost past. Shils (1981) and Assmann (1992), among others, discuss pasts that remain the same simply out of the force of habit. Connerton’s (1989) focus on memory “incorporated” in bodily practices (as opposed to that “inscribed” in print, encyclopedias, indexes, etc) suggests this sort of inertia. Drawing on Elias’s civilizing process and Bourdieu’s work on consumption, he argues for a “mnemonics of the body.”

Table 1 summarizes this discussion by identifying six ideal types of mnemonic malleability or persistence: 1. instrumental persistence—actors intentionally seek to maintain a particular version of the past, as in orthodoxy or movements to maintain or recover a past; 2. cultural persistence—a particular past perseveres because it remains relevant for later cultural formations (more general images are more likely to adapt to new contexts than more specific ones); 3. inertial persistence—a particular past occurs when we reproduce a version of the past by sheer force of habit; 4. instrumental change—we intentionally change an image of the past for particular reasons in the present (though we cannot always predict the results of our efforts); 5. cultural

**Table 1**

	Instrumental	Cultural	Inertial
Persistence	Self-conscious orthodoxy, conservatism, heritage movements	Continued relevance, canon	Habit, routine, repetition, custom
Change	Revisionism, memory entrepreneurship, redress movements, legitimization, invented tradition	Irrelevance, paradigm change, discovery of new facts	Decay, atrophy, saturation, accidental loss, death

change—a particular past no longer fits with present understandings or otherwise loses relevance for the present; and 6. inertial change—the carriers of particular images die, our mnemonic capabilities decay, or we simply forget.

One problem with instrumentalist and inertial accounts of change or persistence is that they locate the statics and dynamics of memory outside of the memories themselves. Even cultural approaches, while emphasizing meanings, seem to locate the source of change in political cultures, not in the textual dynamics of memory itself. To remedy this exogenous bias, Olick & Levy (1997) argue that whether a particular past persists or not depends partly on how it is constituted: Mythic logics produce taboos and duties while rational logics produce prohibitions and requirements; the former require bold acts of transgression to change them while the latter can be changed through argument and refutation. Olick (1997) also refines culturalist theories of mnemonic dynamics by pointing out that cultural persistence or change is not merely a matter of fit or lack of fit with context, nor of whether a particular memory is defensible as accurate or authentic: Memories form genres that unfold over time by referring not only to their contexts and to the “original” event, but to their own histories and memories as texts.

### *Reputations and Knowledge*

Two empirical areas that have seen a great deal of work on the statics and dynamics of memory are reputation studies and the sociology of knowledge. While the sociology of reputation is not an entirely new field—biographies have always dealt with image—it concentrates in an unprecedented way on how individuals are remembered rather than how they lived. Often these studies begin by recognizing that reputations are only loosely correlated with lifetime achievements; not only talent, but social factors play a role in securing and maintaining the outstanding reputations of individuals.

Various authors, including especially Lang & Lang (1988) and Taylor (1996), appear to have converged on explanations in terms of four basic factors in reputational dynamics. First, personal strategizing and political maneuvering by the figure or his or her representatives can control the figure’s image. Strategies include seclusion, autobiography, flamboyance, forging relations with patrons, etc. Lang & Lang (1988) note that in order to catch the eyes of dealers, collectors, curators, and art historians, artists have to produce a critical mass of work, keep adequate records to guarantee proper attribution, and make arrangements for custodianship. Institutional practices like record-keeping also favor some kinds of reputation for preservation over others.

Second, image is influenced by those with a stake in a particular reputation. Latour (1988), for instance, argues that Pasteur’s reputation spread as doctors and hygienists aligned themselves with the scientist’s cause to promote their own professional interests. De Nora (1995) shows how Beethoven benefited

from admiration by an aristocratic musical public that was pivotal in shaping the narrative of his genius. Schudson (1990) reveals how Ronald Reagan's popularity was constructed by an oral political culture in Washington, DC. Donoghue (1996) argues that in the eighteenth-century literary market, it was reviewers, and not the authors themselves, who were chiefly responsible for creating narratives of literary careers.

Third, the impact of cultural factors on reputation is theorized in two distinct ways. For those who view cultural patterns as distinct from talent, culture works to boost some reputations at the expense of others as a matter of happenstance. Lang & Lang (1990), for instance, discuss the influence of ideology on reputation, noting that artists' achievements are refracted "through their availability as a symbolic form for a variety of sentiments that may have nothing to do directly with art." In a different approach, cultural theorists (Bourdieu 1984) who focus on the constructed nature of taste show how reputations depend on struggles for prestige and position that employ culture as a tool and as markers. De Nora (1995, p. 180), for instance, details how Beethoven's promotion of a sturdier piano helped create new aesthetic categories within which his music "could make sense and be positively evaluated." Reviews of Beethoven's work became more favorable as personal idiosyncrasies and creativity came to be valued in the music-critical discourse as a "higher" form of music. Similarly, Tuchman & Fortin (1984) show how women were "edged out" of the literary field: As men entered the field, the novel rose to high-culture status while the themes and styles of women's writing were demoted to popular culture. Zelizer (1992) shows how professional journalists used the Kennedy assassination and their eulogies of him to advance their own authoritative status.

A fourth line of work on reputation shows how reputations respond to broader narrative and cultural forms. We have a tendency, theorists of reputation argue, to exaggerate both greatness and evil. One of the earliest reputation studies (Connelly 1977), for instance, demonstrates how the figure of Robert E. Lee was invested with extraordinary import because, across many years, his image acted as a palimpsest on which contemporary concerns could be written and rewritten. Schwartz (1990) documents how Lincoln's image changed from one of simple accessibility to that of a "remote and dignified personage." Schwartz (1991) also shows how Washington's reputational malleability is tied up with the changing needs of different periods in American history, while maintaining a common core of continuity. In his now classic study, Pelikan (1985) shows how the varying representation of Jesus reflected particular pre-occupations of different societies in different periods.

From the other side, Ducharme & Fine (1995) show how villains—in their case, Benedict Arnold—are remembered in much worse light than their deeds might warrant; Johnson (1995) discusses the rehabilitation of Richard Nixon. Additionally, Taylor (1996, p. 261) notes that "we are particularly prone to re-

member stimuli associated with major changes in a niche.” It helps one’s reputation, Latour (1988) argues, to be associated with the dawn of a new era in a particular field. Others have carried this line of argument even further, arguing that the very possibility of distinctive reputations is tied up with the career of the genius notion in the culture at large. Heinich (1996), for instance, inquires into the history of the category of talent in her study of *The Glory of Van Gogh*, as does Gamson (1994) in his study of the category of celebrity in American culture.

Another empirical field where sociologists have studied the dynamics of memory is the sociology of science and knowledge. Research on scientific knowledge is concerned largely with the problem of forgetting, while investigations of canon formation ask why particular kinds of knowledge are remembered. Kuhn (1962) argues that knowledge depends on paradigmatic conventions: Normal science within paradigms cumulates, but knowledge in different (later) paradigms is incommensurable. Gans (1992) argues, however, that even within paradigms knowledge does not cumulate: Younger researchers repeat findings already reported by earlier practitioners. Gans labels this process “sociological amnesia” and attributes it to institutional factors including academia’s reward structure, myths of scientific progress, and the lack of mechanisms for punishing unintentional borrowers. Gans is aware that Sorokin (1956) had already made the same point. Merton (1973) also documented how scientists tend to forget the origins of their ideas: Scientists are committed to an ideology of original discovery, “which is embedded in all the forms of institutional life, along with prizes and naming of plants, animals, measurements, and even diseases after scientists.” Good ideas, moreover, are the products of climates of opinion; it is thus often pointless to ask who said something first, as Merton demonstrates in his study of the expression, “on the shoulders of giants” (1985 [1965]).

Some works, figures, and ideas, however, tend to be singled out and preserved as particularly important. Just as for reputation, one important factor is how closely associated with a major rupture a work or idea is, in Kuhn’s terms, how close to a paradigm shift. As Levine (1995) notes, moreover, disciplines have collective memories that establish and maintain their identities. Douglas (1986) argues that a theory is more likely to be remembered if it shares basic formulae, equations, and rules of thumb with theories in other fields: “On the principle of cognitive coherence, a theory that is going to gain a permanent place in the public repertoire of what is known will need to interlock with other kinds of theories.” Tuchman & Fortin (1984), as already noted, show that these processes can be political: Ideas propagated by powerful groups and for powerful purposes are more likely to be remembered than others. Taylor (1996), among many others, documents the underlying political function of canons as well.

Efforts to revise established knowledge orthodoxies can be tied up with overt political constellations and purposes as well. In the past decade, there has been a proliferation of “historians’ disputes,” public debates about both the content and meaning of history in several nations, including Germany (Maier 1988), France (Kaplan 1995), and Israel (Ram 1995). The rise of interest in memory, the challenges to the distinction between history and memory, and the status of memory in postmodern society reviewed in this essay are part of the explanation for these debates. It is interesting to note that the term “revisionism” is of relatively recent vintage (Novick 1988); revisionism now is taken to refer to those who deny taken-for-granted truths—like the occurrence of a German genocide of Jews in the 1940s—though it originally meant any attempt to challenge commonly held beliefs about the past, including the “normal” growth of scientific knowledge. Studies of more extreme revisionisms (Lipstadt 1993, Vidal-Naquet 1992) document both that history can serve as a surrogate in more general political struggles as well as that particular images of the past have symbolic import that extends beyond questions of their truth.

### *Future Directions*

The field of social memory studies is clearly vast, the forms of memory work diverse. It should be clear, however, that similar themes occur in different disciplinary, substantive, and geographic areas. Given the epochal character of memory demonstrated by the history of memory, this should not be surprising. As Valéry put it in our epigraph, the time is past in which time did not matter; we experience this condition as a problem of memory. In recent times, the solution has been to designate sites to stand in for lost authenticity, to proliferate new narratives when the old ones no longer satisfy, and to abbreviate—as here—in face of insurmountable accumulation. Social memory studies are therefore part of the phenomenon they seek to explain. But the explanation, we have tried to show, need not be relentlessly particular: The enterprise does have clear lineages just as the phenomenon has general contours, and explanations of the various processes are transposable across cases (e.g. Germany and the United States) and across issues (e.g. reputation, monuments, and knowledge).

We conclude by pointing to four areas that emerge in social memory studies as possible future directions. First, social memory studies clearly fit with the widespread interest in identity in recent social and sociological discourse. Memory is a central, if not the central, medium through which identities are constituted. Inquiries into identity and memory are being related; these research programs, we hope, will illuminate further how, when, and why individuals and groups turn toward their pasts.

Interestingly, both fields have attacked the tendency to reify their foundational concepts; both identity and memory, we now recognize, are ongoing

processes, not possessions or properties. This leads directly to our second point: Many sociologists (McDonald 1996) have recently argued that the basic categories of sociological analysis reify temporality. These critiques call for a “processual” or “narrative” approach to social processes, arguing that sociological strategies for approaching the past have heretofore been ahistorical. Appreciating the changing history of mnemonic practices as well as the ways in which these changing practices are the media of temporal experience can and should play a role in this search for a more genuinely historical sociology.

A third point is more practical. As the belief that history and memory are epistemologically and ontologically distinct has eroded and as competing pasts and historical legitimacy claims have proliferated, the ability to settle conflicts over how to represent the past has also diminished. We have certainly gotten better at deconstructing identitarian mythology, but this has left us with a not-always-productive cacophony of claims vying for dominance. While the recent period of inquiry into the history and dynamics of social memory seems to have fed this deconstructive mood (and vice versa), we hope that further research will help us resolve some of the conflicts or at least manage them better.

Our fourth point is connected to this: Until now, it seems that macrosociological theories of modernity and postmodernity have done well at explaining memory as a dependent variable. But social memory is largely absent from our grandest theories. The diverse memory practices reviewed here are not merely symptoms of modernity and postmodernity—they are modernity and postmodernity. Sociological theorists, we argue, thus have a great deal to learn from theorists like Nora, Huyssen, and Koselleck. Recent work by Giddens (1990, 1994) has moved in this direction. More studies of the way memory practices are central features of modern and postmodern life and more theories of these epochal forms with memory at their heart should follow. In sum, all four of these points demonstrate that social memory studies is not a narrow subfield; it provides powerful lessons for sociology as a whole, is consonant with the reformation of historical sociology now occurring, and provides important insights for theory at the broadest level. Sociology, we argue, cannot afford to forget memory.

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