Performing the Past
Memory, History, and Identity in modern Europe

Karin Tilmans
Frank van Vree
Jay Winter
(EDS.)

Amsterdam University Press
Performing the Past
Performing the Past
Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe

Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree and Jay Winter (eds.)

Amsterdam University Press
Cover: Lewes Bonfire Night, procession of the Martyr’s Crosses. Part of the Bonfire Night celebrations on the 5th November in Lewes, Sussex. The burning crosses commemorate the 17 Protestant martyrs who were burnt at the stake in the town during the Marian persecutions of 1555–1557.

Cover illustration: Andrew Dunn, Cambridge, United Kingdom
Cover: Studio Jan de Boer, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
Design: Paul Boyer, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

ISBN  978 90 8964 205 9
e-ISBN  978 90 4851 202 7
NUR  686

© Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree and Jay Winter / Amsterdam University Press, 2010

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the written permission of both the copyright owner and the author of the book.
Every effort had been made to obtain permission to use all copyrighted illustrations reproduced in this book. Nonetheless, whosoever believes to have rights to this material is advised to contact the publisher.
# Table of Contents

Preface 7  
Acknowledgements 9  

1 Introduction.  
The performance of the past: memory, history, identity 11  
   JAY WINTER  

Framework  

2 Re-framing memory. Between individual and collective forms  
of constructing the past 35  
   ALEIDA ASSMANN  

3 Repetitive structures in language and history 51  
   REINHART KOSELLECK  

4 Unstuck in time. Or: the sudden presence of the past 67  
   CHRIS LORENZ  

The Performative Turn  

5 Co-memorations. Performing the past 105  
   PETER BURKE  

6 ‘Indelible memories’. The tattooed body as theatre of memory 119  
   JANE CAPLAN  

7 Incongruous images. ‘Before, during, and after’ the Holocaust 147  
   MARIANNE HIRSCH AND LEO SPITZER
8 Radio Clandestina: from oral history to the theatre
ALESSANDRO PORTELLI

Media and the Arts

9 Music and memory in Mozart’s Zauberkönte
JAN ASSMANN

10 The many afterlives of Ivanhoe
ANN RIGNEY

11 Novels and their readers, memories and their social frameworks
JOEP LEERSSEN

12 Indigestible images. On the ethics and limits of representation
FRANK VAN VREE

Identity, Politics and the Performance of History

13 ‘In these days of convulsive political change’.
Discourse and display in the revolutionary museum, 1793-1815
FRANS GRIJZENHOUT

14 Restitution as a means of remembrance.
Evocations of the recent past in the Czech Republic and
in Poland after 1989
STANISLAW TYSZKA

15 European identity and the politics of remembrance
CHIARA BOTTICI

About the authors
List of illustrations
Preface

Performing the Past explores important trends and patterns in Western thinking about history, memory and identities since the nineteenth century. The key question we examine is this: since roughly 1800, how have Europeans configured their relation to the past through cultural practices, surrounding monuments, novels, plays, rituals, ceremonies, debates, films, academic scholarship, and individual human bodies? This book presents some of the ways scholars in different fields have come to understand this question and the rich array of approaches they have adopted in attempting to contribute to answers it.

In the first part of the book, we examine the framing of memory, history, and language in modern Europe. We then turn to performances of history and memory in popular culture, photography, theatre and body art. Film, fiction, and music form the substance of the third part of the book. Finally we consider narratives about the past in the political domain, moving from museums to court rooms, and finally to the institutions of the European Union, in their presentation of what Charles Maier has termed a ‘usable past’.

The writers who have contributed to this book present many different interpretations of the intersection of history, memory, and identity. What links them together is the way they treat all three as performative, as imbedded in cultural practices that individuals and groups fashion and in which other individuals and groups participate, either directly or over time. In different ways, we all maintain that remembrance is performative. It is an activity, something that happens in time and place, and that on every occasion when we come together to do the work of remembrance, the story we fashion is different from those that have come before. Re-enactment is both affirmation and renewal. It entails addressing the old, but it also engenders something new, something we have never seen before. Herein lies the excitement of performance, as well as its surprises and its distortions.
Performance entails affect. Johann Nepomuk Nestroy, the Viennese writer cited here by the late Reinhart Koselleck, offered this definition of love stories:

There is something peculiar to these love stories: they always seem to revolve around the same thing, but the way they start and end is so infinitely varied that it is anything but uninteresting to watch them!²

What we see in love stories is the essential performative act: to say ‘I love you’ is to perform the emotion and the state of mind it reflects. The act leaves a trace because of the affect it brings, the power of which thereby changes the existing emotional landscape. This is why, paradoxically, performance reiterates and innovates at one and the same time.

Scholars in many disciplines are increasingly exploring this sphere of cultural practices. The domain of the performative is fertile ground for them, and for us. What we have tried to do in this book is to introduce readers to the richness of research in this field. If our efforts have highlighted the conceptual and evidentiary challenges associated today with performativity and with that array of practices which braid together memory, history, and identity, then we have more than realized our hopes.

Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree, and Jay Winter
Amsterdam, November 2009

Notes


2 See below, p. 51.
This book was conceived at the conference *Theatres of Memory. A Conference on Historical Culture*, which was organized by the Huizinga Institute, the Dutch Graduate School for Cultural History, and took place in Amsterdam on 28-30 January, 2004. Thanks to the generosity of the Huizinga Institute, which financed subsequent meetings of the editors and the authors, this book gradually came into being. We therefore would like to express our sincere gratitude to the director and support staff of the Huizinga Institute. We also thank the staff at Amsterdam University Press for their efficient publishing strategy. Finally but foremost, we are grateful to all our authors for their ongoing commitment to the project as well as their patience with the editors who, spread over three different academic institutions in Europe and the US, took a long but interesting journey to bring a happy ending to this book. We sincerely hope we did not test personal and scholarly friendships too much in the course of completing this book.

September 2009
Florence/Amsterdam/Guilford
CHAPTER I

The performance of the past: memory, history, identity

JAY WINTER

The performative moment

Memory performed is at the heart of collective memory. When individuals and groups express or embody or interpret or repeat a script about the past, they galvanize the ties that bind groups together and deposit additional memory traces about the past in their own minds. These renewed and revamped memories frequently vary from and overlay earlier memories, creating a complex palimpsest about the past each of us carries with us.

Thus the performance of memory is both a mnemonic device and a way in which individual memories are relived, revived, and refashioned. Through performance, we move from the individual to the group to the individual, thereby reconfirming the insights of Maurice Halbwachs eighty years ago on the social framework of remembrance.¹

J.L. Austin developed a celebrated theory of performativity in speech acts.² His ideas apply with equal force to remembrance. For our purposes, it is useful to note that the performative act both describes a condition and recreates it. Memories return to past experience but add their traces to the initial story. To say ‘I love you’ is to state an affective fact as well as to breathe renewed life into it by doing so. Initially, Austin’s examination of performative utterances was a challenge to logical positivists as to the existence of a class of meaningful statements which were beyond the reach of tests of their truth content, and are therefore ‘not verifiable, because they do not describe an action but perform it – and a deed cannot be either true or false’.³ There is some dispute among philosophers of language as to
whether the performative is to be distinguished from the constative, that is, that the phrase ‘I love you’ is not a statement in the sense that it cannot be proved to be right or wrong. Performative utterances – like many memories – are beyond simple verification. We need not weigh in on this matter, though, since for our purposes the act of remembering occupies both kinds of utterances, both the constative – ‘I remember the moment I met you’ – and the performative – ‘You swept me off my feet’.

The performance of memory is a set of acts, some embodied in speech, others in movement and gestures, others in art, others still in bodily form. The performative act rehearses and recharges the emotion which gave the initial memory or story imbedded in it its sticking power, its resistance to erasure or oblivion. Hence affect is always inscribed in performative acts in general and in the performance of memory in particular.

**History and memory**

Approaching the rhetoric of remembrance from this angle brings us immediately to the distinction between history and memory. In a nutshell, both are performative and constative. The overlap between history and memory is much greater than purists will have us believe. This shorthand distinction may be useful in introducing and describing the contribution made by the essays in this volume. History is memory seen through and criticized with the aid of documents of many kinds – written, aural, visual. Memory is history seen through affect. And since affect is subjective, it is difficult to examine the claims of memory in the same way as we examine the claims of history. History is a discipline. We learn and teach its rules and its limits. Memory is a faculty. We live with it, and at times are sustained by it. Less fortunate are people overwhelmed by it. But this set of distinctions ought not lead us to conclude, along with a number of French scholars from Halbwachs to Nora, that history and memory are set in isolation, each on its separate peak. Historians bring their own memories to bear both on the choice of subjects they study and on the character judgments they make about human behaviour. Stories about the past that we remember are collages, complex and shifting mixtures of narratives, some of which arise from historical writing and history as visualized in a dizzying variety of films, plays, museums, and websites. Approaching the intersection of history and memory through the performative turn highlights what they have in common and how important it is to avoid a rigid bifurcation between the two.
Twenty-five years ago, while working with a team of historians preparing the design for a new museum of the First World War in northern France, I spoke to a group of veterans of that war, and asked them what they wanted to see in it. Several nodded their approval when one of their number said ‘We want film’. When I asked which one, he replied: ‘Renoir’s LA GRANDE ILLUSION’. This is one of the greatest war films, directed by a veteran himself. It is an elegiac visual poem, universally acclaimed as one of the classics of the cinema. But is it history or memory? My sense is that it is both, and its performative character is what makes it so vivid and moving as a profound portrayal of war that does not show a single battle scene. We shall return in a moment to the way film and other media braid together history and memory.

The performative enhances the overlap between history and memory because it borrows from both. It offers us truth statements rather than true statements, though the two coincide more frequently than not. LA GRANDE ILLUSION tells us truths about the Great War even though the precise events chronicled in it may never have taken place precisely as Renoir and his unforgettable cast of actors presented them. Renoir served in the French air force in the Great War. In his film, released in 1937, he used a castle in Alsace to stand in for a prisoner of war camp further to the east in Germany, and adapted elements of the memoirs of French prisoners of war in the script. His story leaps from documentary truth to a kind of poetic truth combining memory and history in unique ways.

There are those who object strenuously to the overlap between history and memory and find fault with the performative elements in memoirs which tell stories which diverge from the truth. Film is fiction even when it has documentary elements in it. But memoirs frequently are based on a social contract between author and reader that the story told therein is true. What are we to do when we find that that is not always the case? The French critic and soldier of the Great War, Jean Norton Cru, had one answer: denounce and dismiss those memoirs of ex-soldiers who create fiction out of fact, by getting dates wrong, campaigns wrong, uniforms wrong, or the like. To Norton Cru, fiction paves the way for lies, and his duty to the dead precluded his toleration of such sleights of hand. Thus the novelist Henri Barbusse’s treatment of combat in his celebrated war novel, Under Fire, which won the Prix Goncourt in 1917, was a deplorable text, since it moved from fact to fiction, while the author still bore the mantle of the authority of direct experience. To Norton Cru, the author had authority as long as he told the truth and nothing but the truth. 6
The same close scrutiny of the truth-value of survivors’ testimony has taken place in other settings. But what the purists like Norton Cru miss is the power of the performative. The terror of combat, the horror of living in trenches propped up by the bodies of comrades, the surreal landscapes they inhabited may be beyond factual description, but they are not beyond performative statements. War books convey the dreadful character of combat, its disorienting and terrifying moments, precisely by stretching factual statements to their breaking point and beyond. Here are Tim O’Brien’s thoughts on the intersection of history and memory. He served in Vietnam:

In any war story, but especially a true one, it’s difficult to separate what happened from what seemed to happen. What seems to happen becomes its own happening and has to be told that way. The angles of vision are skewed. When a booby trap explodes, you close your eyes and duck and float outside yourself. When a guy dies, like Lemon, you look away and then look back for a moment and then look away again. The pictures get jumbled; you tend to miss a lot. And then afterward, when you go to tell about it, there is always that surreal seemingness, which makes the story seem untrue, but which in fact represents the hard and exact truth as it seemed.

In many cases a true war story cannot be believed. If you believe it, be skeptical. It’s a question of credibility. Often the crazy stuff is true and the normal stuff isn’t because the normal stuff is necessary to make you believe the truly incredible craziness.

In other cases you can’t even tell a true war story. Sometimes it’s just beyond telling.

Positivism is the last way to approach the narratives of direct participants in the violent episodes of the past century, many of which form the subject of the essays in this book. By telling the story, Tim O’Brien is bringing us back to the state of mind of the soldier in combat, and by doing so he is writing in the performative mode. His words recreate the atmosphere, the stench, the horror, as much as they describe them.

Once we abandon a too-easy antinomian approach to the relation between history and memory, we can appreciate more fully the wide field of creative activity in which people perform the past together and in public. In such activities, there are many instances of storytelling which mix memory and history in roughly equal parts. I term this domain the sphere of historical remembrance. The term is distinguished from familial remembrance – the performance of rituals inscribed in the calendar of births, deaths, and marriages of family members – and from liturgical
remembrance – the performance of rituals endowed with sacred meaning. Historical remembrance borrows from both, but uses them to construct a story about a shared past, the shape and content of which tell a group of people who they are and from whence they have come.  

Performing identities

The performatve act of remembrance is an essential way in which collective identities are formed and reiterated. Let me offer three instances where this is the case. As David Blight has shown, the winners and losers of the American Civil War shared a cult of the veteran, as a man of virtue, whether he fought for the Union or for the ‘lost cause’ of the Confederacy. Remembering the war in this way occluded its other meaning as an emancipatory struggle. African American narratives were hidden by the way white veterans and their families and supporters came together to ennable their story of derring-do. The true union of the post-Civil War period was performed in acts of remembrance of a very selective and romanticized kind. Blight follows Robert Penn Warren, cited by Peter Burke in his essay in this volume, in affirming that ‘history is the big myth we live, and in our living, constantly remake’. That set of stories Penn Warren calls ‘myths’ are infused with affect. Without it, they would not hold our hearts. In post-Civil War America, and indeed, several generations after the end of that conflict, performing the past – to be sure, a stylized, sanitized past – was an essential pathway to reconciliation within the dominant white community.

There are both parallels and divergences when we consider the very different acts of reconciliation performed more recently by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. There was nothing noble in the savagery of the treatment of anti-apartheid activists by the regime they were trying to overthrow. In this case, the ‘big myth’ – understood as a master narrative and not at all as a set of lies – arising from the work of this commission is a Christian myth, one of cruelty, suffering, but above all, of truth as redemptive. The admission of terrible crimes in public performs the post-Apartheid social contract. In a literal sense, those guilty of these crimes demonstrate in their words and (if honest) in their receiving amnesty, that the truth shall set you free.

A second instance may be taken from a later war. In the late twentieth century and after, an increasing number of Australians have gone on pilgrimage to Gallipoli for the dawn service on 25 April, the anniversary of
the landing of Australian and New Zealand troops south of Istanbul in 1915. Why are they doing so, long after the last of the ‘Diggers’ – as these Australian soldiers were called – has died? Ken Inglis, the historian of Australian commemoration, tells us that in this way these people perform their Australianness, their own sense of national identity.¹⁰

A third instance from an entirely different culture reiterates the central point that remembrance and identity formation are braided together in powerful ways. Until recently, Israeli paratroopers took their oath of military service on the top of the desert mesa known as Masada, the site of a siege and collective suicide after the Romans quelled a revolt in Judea in 70 AD. These young soldiers are told to remember the past so as not to repeat it. Their aim is to prevent another such catastrophe, the nature of which is linked to the Nazi Holocaust of the Second World War. Being Israeli means living under this shadow. Historical remembrance both defines and deepens the shadow.

War is by no means the only domain of historical remembrance. The essays in this volume attest to the richness and range of such cultural practices. Some entail initiation into a cult or a brotherhood. Jan Assmann shows the musical notation associated with the stages of initiation into the mystery cults at the heart of the *Magic Flute*. Jane Caplan’s exploration of body art shows some ingenious ways we put on the clothes of our life, in this case indelibly. Gender identities in this sense are performative rather than biological, as Judith Butler has argued.¹¹

Ethnic identities are performative in much the same way, as in Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer’s discussion of family photographs taken in Czernowitz, Romania, during the Second World War. Here are Jewish people, trying to live normal lives under terrifying uncertainty and danger, and here are their children, the authors of the essay, returning to these haunting images and performing their own ethnic identity through their mediation on images full of affect and sadness. The performative construction of ethnic identities may be observed in a host of cultural practices, from the Feast of San Gennaro in New York to Rigoberta Menchú Tum’s story telling of terrible suffering inflicted by the Guatemalan army on indigenous Indians. It is her identity which is viscerally etched in this form of performativity. Seeing her work in this way helps us to bypass the condemnation of her work by critics who point out that some of her stories are untrue. Once again, her objective is to present truths about her people rather than the demonstrable truth about a particular set of events.¹²

The use of tribunals or courts as sites for the performance of transitional justice shows well how memory and history have come together in public
life. Stanislaw Tyzcka’s essay on legal contests over the restoration of property seized by a sequence of authoritarian regimes in Poland and Czechoslovakia discloses much effort to establish the history of property ownership. But the cases themselves have many subjective elements in them; who gets to make a claim and whose claim is upheld shape the stories people today tell about the crimes committed against ordinary people in the not-too-distant past. The courtroom becomes a place of witnessing, in the sense of being a site for the restoration of dignity and authority to those to whom grave injustices have been done. No one can participate in or watch these kinds of legal struggles without feeling the weight of both history and memory in them. What Chiara Bottici terms ‘institutional memory’ is palpably performative, in that the meaning of texts, policies, and declarations is explicitly framed by reference to a past, usually though not always a violent one, which must be avoided in the future. The Second World War showed what the disintegration of Europe meant; the integration of Europe is a deliberate turn away from such cruelties and sufferings, imbedded in the memories and lives of millions of Europeans. That is why Bottici’s analysis of commemorative gestures built into European community documents reinforces the position this book as a whole adopts that while making history, social and political groups and institutions inject collective memory – understood as the memory of different collectives – into the process.

Peter Burke cites other instances of performativity. Some are built into the calendar: the rise of anniversaries, particularly centenaries, enables us to perform the past. Robert Penn Warren’s celebrated book, The Legacy of the Civil War, from which he took the epigram launching his essay, was written and read as part of the centennial celebrations of that war. Further back, in 1617 was a Luther centennial, and in 1769, the bicentennial of the birth of Shakespeare. Frans Grijzenhout shows some of the ways the makers of the French revolutionary state were dedicated to preserving and performing their achievements in revolutionary museums right from the beginning of their rule. The apotheosis of the nation-state after 1800 produced dozens of such sites and events surrounding them. As the French scholar Pascal Ory put it ‘plus encore qu’une territoire, une langue, une religion ou un régime, une nation, c’est une mémoire’. And we might add, a nation is a set of stories blending together history and memory in chameleon-like ways. We might adapt Heraclitus’s famous dictum to make our central point here. When performing the past, we never dip our toes in the same stream twice. Rituals and commemorations change their meaning even while appearing to retain an older grammar of remembrance.
Re-enactments of historical events are bound to distort the past, and some do so ludicrously. American Civil War battle re-enactors present absurd versions of Shiloh or Gettysburg, but the point is not accuracy but the thrill of contact with a mythic past. The British policeman presenting himself as his counterpart in 1940 in the Imperial War Museum’s ‘Blitz experience’ urging children to behave themselves gives them the same frisson. Affect is the point, and it can be transmitted either in vulgar or in sensitive ways. When visitors to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum enter the permanent exhibition, they are given entry tickets with the name and face of a survivor. They cannot conceivably share the past of these people, but they can perform it, through small gestures and tokens of this kind.

**Social protest and the performative**

Many social movements are performative, in the sense that they use space to link their struggle with earlier ones. The night Barack Obama was elected American President in 2008 was a long one; it took time for the results to trickle in. Awaiting the outcome were thousands of people standing in Grant Park in Chicago, which was both Obama’s home and the site of a violent confrontation between protestors and police 40 years before, during the Democratic party convention in 1968. The drama of the moment was framed there and then. What television captured was the link between Obama’s election and prior anti-war movements. That link brought history and memory together in space. Other images broadcast that night performed the past. There in Chicago civil rights leaders stood silently, etched in memory and through memory, savoring one major moment and many past moments in the long march towards racial equality.

Moments of triumph or transcendence have been marked in the same way in other settings. In December 1948, René Cassin, a French member of the United Nations Commission charged with framing a Universal Declaration of Human Rights, read it out to the UN assembled in Paris. There, at the Palais de Chaillot, he performed the revival of the French Republican tradition, at virtually the same spot at which Hitler had stood in 1940, surveying his latest conquest. Had anyone else from the group which had drafted the document spoken, or had the United Nations met elsewhere that year, there would have been no performance. Place and time made it possible. The memory of the recent past was etched into the moment.14
Moments of failure or of injustice endured have been performed in many places. Consider the case of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires. There, facing the Presidential Palace, Argentine women, wearing white scarves, march in circles. Many of these women hold photographs of the missing – their sons, grandsons, husbands, brothers, friends, who were victims of the Argentine ‘dirty war’ in the late 1970s and 1980s. Thirty years later, the fate of these ‘disappeared’ people is still unknown. The endless circle described by the mothers performs their predicament and the tragedy, the last act of which has yet to be written.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{Traumatic memory and performance}

We have come to term people caught in such circumstances victims of trauma, understood as men and women suffering from a wound which will not heal. In some cases – and by no means in all cases – by performing their predicament, they move towards transcending it. Several instances can serve to show how this is so.

Slave narratives were performative, in that their very existence testified to the humanity of their authors. Their words helped emancipate them.\textsuperscript{16} As we have already noted, the huge wave of war literature produced after the First World War encompassed many different kinds of autobiography, moving repeatedly between history and memory. But some of these works, in poetry and prose, were affirmations that the author was in control of his own story. Traumatic memory in this sense is text out of context, a story that is repeated in the mind of a person who cannot escape from it. Septimus Smith in Virginia Woolf’s \textit{Mrs Dalloway} commits suicide when he cannot escape from his demons. The writing of soldiers’ memoirs enabled some men to assert their authority over their own story, and thereby to get closer to saying ‘goodbye to all that’, in the words of the title of Robert Graves’s war book.

In more recent times, the creation of audio and video archives of the testimony of survivors of the Holocaust provided thousands of people with a chance to tell their life stories. It is unclear to what extent such narration has helped individuals bear the burdens of their past; healing is a mystery. What matters, though, is that there are those who want to tell their stories of dreadful events. They do so at times for the benefit of their children and grandchildren, and at times to add their words to the campaign against denial. By speaking out, they lose some of the passivity of victimhood; by defining themselves, they set aside the story inflicted on them years ago.\textsuperscript{17}
The performative nature of remembrance is particularly marked by the act of listening, of attending to the voices of victims and survivors. Alessandro Portelli’s account of memories of a particular Nazi atrocity in Italy in the Second World War naturally evolved into a play. In the written version, the voices were silent; in the staged version, they came alive. In both cases, the audience performed a moral act – the act of stopping our own speech acts to allow those who have faced what Kant termed radical evil to tell their tale. It is moral to listen, because in doing so, we affirm that moral thinking is not only possible, but that it can survive even the most horrific crimes. Viewing the films Frank van Vree surveys in his essay in this book can take on a similar character. Performances can bring us closer to those who have suffered, though it is unwise to suggest that their wounds are healed thereby.

**Diasporic memory**

The concept of self-fashioning, well developed in literary studies, has its limits when we deal with traumatic memory. Some injuries are beyond the reach of narrative. Other stories restore a sense of place and time to those who have left one home for another far away from their point of origin. These tales capture what we call diasporic memory.

Many of these tales are nostalgic, in that they are marked by a sense of loss, a poignancy which can lead people to idealize the world left behind. Nostalgia can be deployed in ways which depart entirely from reality, in that some elements of the former world are mourned, despite the fact that they were never there in the first place. There is today a revival of Klezmer music in Berlin, a part of the recognition widely accepted in contemporary Germany of how deeply cultural and social life has been diminished by the murder of German Jews. The problem remains, though, that Klezmer music was a Polish, rather than German Jewish, phenomenon; thus today’s revival brings back to life something that was not there in the first place. Some worlds cannot be restored, but even the belief that they can be revived almost always involves some mixture of memory and history which distorts the past.

The melancholy of diasporic or displaced communities can be framed in terms of domestic practices. The old ways are embedded in recipes and cooking, in dress and in dance, as much as in language. The recapitulation of such signifying practices always involves a rehearsal of the traditional ways, transformed in the telling or doing. Given the fact that we are living through a period of massive trans-national migration, it is hardly
surprising that performing old ways in old languages is a way of linking families living in different countries and continents. The key point is that the effort to recapture the past in such trans-national times is almost always framed in an act of memory which takes on the contours of history. Where memory stops and history starts is almost impossible to say. Both entail the kind of repetitive or recursive structure which Reinhard Koselleck elucidates in his essay in this book.

Performing the past: academic controversies and opportunities

As Chris Lorenz notes, the historical profession has had some difficulty in squaring its scientific character with the increasing interest in the phenomenon of memory and its inroads into historical narratives. His claim is that the rigour of history was rooted in its robust sense of territoriality – that of the nation-state. Not only is this regime of spatial organization under siege, so is the notion of linear time, beset by the challenge of traumatic time, or as the French put it, *le passé qui ne passe pas*. As I have argued, the performative turn is built into the shifts in identity attendant upon massive trans-national and trans-Continental migration. It is therefore inevitable that historians and other scholars will pay increasing attention to the ways in which people construct their sense of history by performing the past.

In this field, professional pride must be set aside. The public we serve in our scholarship has as much right to contribute to the debate about history and memory as we do. Through visits to museums, through tourism and pilgrimage, through their choice of films and plays and books, laymen help create the environment in which historical remembrance happens. We in the academy should welcome their interest and their passion. Indeed, there has never been a time when the past is performed as much as it is today. History matters, and so does a recognition that it is an active art, one which entails research and dedicated learning among professionals, but also a willingness to listen and read and see among the public. To be sure, we scholars need to speak out when lies are taken for truth, and we must never accede to the pressure to make the stories we tell honestly more palatable to people who also care about the past, but who reach different conclusions.

We must respect the multiplicity of ways in which the past is performed in our societies, and, in our scholarship, work to make such performances
as honest and accurate as we can. Above all, we must acknowledge that we
too engage in a kind of performance. In all our writing, including this book,
we unfold the past to the public, to our readers, and ask them to go with us
on a voyage of the mind. Recognizing that it is a voyage, and a shared
voyage at that, will not only enhance our scholarship, but also make it more
imbedded in, and more responsible to, the world in which we live.

Notes

4. On this point, see Jay Winter, Remembering war: The Great War between history and memory in the twentieth century, New Haven 2006.
8. Jay Winter, Remembering war, chapter 1.
17. Jay Winter, Remembering war, chapters 1 and 2.
Fig. 4.1. The ‘modern’ regime of historicity: the (sacred) future orients the present and the past.

Fig. 4.2. The Christian model of the Promised Land: Moses looking at the Promised Land.
Fig. 4.3. ‘Beloved Stalin – the people’s happiness!’: Secularized, Communist version of the Promised Land.

Fig. 4.4. ‘Continuous on Revolution road to strive for highest victory’. Secularized, Maoist version of the Promised Land.
Performing the past

Fig. 4.7. The Berlin Wall as a museum of art: graffiti Thierry Noir.

Fig. 4.10. The Course of Empire: Destruction? (1836), Thomas Cole.
Fig. 5.2. Lewes Bonfire Night, Guy Fawkes effigy. Part of the Bonfire Night celebrations on the 5th November 2005 in Lewes, Sussex.
Performing the past

Fig. 5.3. Lewes Bonfire Night. Characters wearing fox-faced masks huddle together to relight their torches. Part of the Bonfire Night celebrations on the 5th November in Lewes, Sussex.
Fig. 10.1. Tilting and the Grand Stand. From J. Aikman and W. Gordon, *An Account of the Tournament at Eglinton*, Edinburgh 1839.
Fig. 10.3. A Confederate Army Encampment, c.1862.
Drawing Léon Joseph Frémaux (1821-1898).
Framework
Over the last decade, memory has been acknowledged as a ‘leading concept’ of cultural studies. The number of books and essays that have appeared on the subject already fill whole libraries. The memory discourse is quickly expanding. There is a growing number of different approaches to cultural memory which exist side by side without taking much notice of one another, let alone engage in a discussion of their various underlying axioms and goals. What the memory discourse still lacks is theoretical rigour, an integral as well as differentiated view of the enterprise, and a self-critical investigation of its central concepts. In my contribution I will examine one of these leading concepts, namely ‘collective memory’ more closely, before, in a second step, introducing some terminological distinctions and, in a third step, testing them by looking at a concrete case.

1. Collective memory – a spurious notion?

There is no need to convince anybody that there is such a thing as an individual memory. Memory attaches to people in the singular, but does it attach to them in the plural? Although, in the meantime, a whole new discourse has been built around the term ‘collective memory’ that fills extended library shelves, there are still inveterate sceptics who tenaciously deny that the word has any meaning. It is easy to create a new term, but can
we be sure that there is anything in reality to correspond to it? Susan Sontag, for instance, belongs to those who deny the meaning of such a term. ‘Photographs that everyone recognizes’, she writes in her new book *Regarding the Pain of Others*, ‘are now a constituent part of what a society chooses to think about, or declares that it has chosen to think about. It calls these ideas “memories”, and that is, over the long run, a fiction. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as collective memory (...).’ And she insists: ‘All memory is individual, unreproducible – it dies with each person. What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating; that this is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds. Ideologies create substantiating archives of images, representative images, which encapsulate common ideas of significance and trigger predictable thoughts, feelings.’

According to Sontag, a society is able to choose, to think and to speak, but not to remember. It can choose without a will, it can think without the capacity of reason, it can speak without a tongue, but it cannot remember without a memory. With the term memory, her license for figurative speech reaches its limit. For her, memory cannot be thought of independently of an organ and organism. Being part of a physical structure, it is tied to individual lives and dies with each person. This common sense argument has its irrefutable evidence. The statement is certainly true, but, I would argue, it is incomplete. To stress the experiential positivism and solipsism of individual memory is to disregard two important dimensions of memory. One concerns the many ways in which memories are linked between individuals. Once verbalized, the individual’s memories are fused with the inter-subjective symbolic system of language and are, strictly speaking, no longer a purely exclusive and unalienable property. By encoding them in the common medium of language, they can be exchanged, shared, corroborated, confirmed, corrected, disputed – and, last but not least, written down, which preserves them and makes them potentially accessible to those who do not live within spatial and temporal reach. This brings me to the other dimension of memory: its externalization. Individual memories are not only inseparably fused with language and texts, but also with material images. Photographs are important props of memory which not only trigger specific individual recollections but also tend to represent them. In these cases, the boundary between individual memory and shared material documents is often not easy to draw.

Sontag would probably concede all of this, were we speaking not of memory but of the mind in general. The mind is that part of the brain in which general concepts are built up, in which external knowledge,
processed from texts and images, is assimilated and reconstructed. ‘There is collective instruction’, Sontag affirms. Psychologists have offered the distinction between ‘semantic’ and ‘episodic’ memory, which can help us to further elucidate the problem. The semantic memory is related to the mind, which also has a memory dimension via learning and memorizing. Semantic memory is indeed acquired by collective instruction, it is the site of continuous learning and acquisition of both general and specialized knowledge which connects us with others and the surrounding world. Episodic memory, on the other hand, enshrines purely personal and autobiographical incidents; though it can be communicated and exchanged, it differs from (general) knowledge in that it remains embodied knowledge that cannot be transferred from one individual to another. It is what distinguishes us from others. A person may be said to share but never to own another person’s memories.

When Maurice Halbwachs (one of the acknowledged patrons of the memory discourse) introduced the term ‘collective memory’ in 1925, he was well aware of potential misunderstandings. He was careful and self-critical enough to couch his sentences in a tentative and hypothetical form and to link the term, from the start, to another one of his own making, which is ‘social frame’. For Halbwachs, one term cannot be explained without the other. Not only collective memory depends on social frames, the memories of individuals are also supported and defined by them. He insists that no memory is possible outside shared social frames and that the shifting or crumbling of these frames induces changes in personal memory and even forgetting.

To define collective memory not in terms of essence and metaphysics (like Herder’s *Volksgeist* or the nineteenth century’s *Zeitgeist* – the ‘spirit of the time’) but in terms of individual participation in social frames is to sever it from the class of ‘spurious notions’ and to transform it into an innovating and groundbreaking term that – as has been proven 60-70 years later – opened up a new field of research. In spite of our sound skepticism of collective mystifications and the political abuse of such notions in racist and nationalist discourse, we must not forget, however, that human beings do not only live in the first person singular, but also in various formats of the first person plural. They become part of different groups whose ‘we’ they adopt together with the respective ‘social frames’ that imply an implicit structure of shared concerns, values, experiences, and narratives. The family, the neighbourhood, the peer group, the generation, the nation, the culture – each of these are larger groups to which individuals refer as ‘we’. Each ‘we’ is constructed through specific discourses that mark certain
boundary lines and define the principles of inclusion and exclusion. To be part of the identity of such a group is to participate in the group’s history which often exceeds the boundaries of one’s individual life span. To participate in the group’s vision of its past, then, means that one has to learn about it. One cannot remember it, one has to memorize it. Though it is acquired as semantic memory, it differs from general knowledge in that it has an identity index – just like episodic memory; it is knowledge that backs up (not an ‘I’ but) a ‘we’.

What is called collective memory, writes Sontag, is not a remembering but a stipulating: groups indeed define themselves by agreeing upon what they hold to be important, to which story they accord eminence, which anxieties and values they share. According to Sontag, the term ‘collective memory’ is just another name for ‘ideology’. The grand historian Reinhart Koselleck shares this opinion. He distinguishes between two forms of truth, one subjective, one objective. Subjective truth can be claimed by the individual who owns his specific distinctive and authentic memories. The truth of these memories arises from the indisputable evidence of unmediated experience. Objective truth, on the other hand, can be claimed by the professional historian who reconstructs past experience in an impartial way. He compares sources, weighs arguments and engages in an open-ended discourse of experts who in continuously correcting each other aspire to come closer and closer to the truth. The wide space between subjective and objective truth is filled by what Koselleck also calls ‘ideologies’.

It is interesting to note that the term ‘ideology’ has dropped from contemporary discourse after a period of heavy usage in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. As the use of this term disappeared, ‘collective memory’ rose and eventually took its place. This was not only a matter of linguistic substitution but also of a decisive shift in theoretical orientation. The term ‘ideology’ is clearly derogatory; it is never used for our own way of thinking but always for how others misunderstand or distort what we hold to be true. It denounces a mental frame as false, fake, manipulated, constructed, insincere, or harmful because it presupposes a truth that is as clear as it is indisputable. ‘Ideology’ is the flip side of the coin of an implicit and self-assured sense of truth. Such assumptions have been eroded since the 1990s under the influence of constructivist thinking. We have come to learn that many of the qualities that we had assigned to ideology in fact also adhere to what we had cherished as subjective or objective truth. It is in particular the insight in the irreducible constructedness of both our memories and the work of the historian that has taught us to discard the
term ideology as a descriptive term and to recognize it as a purely polemical tool. Individual remembering, as psychologists tell us, does not preserve an original stimulus in a pure and fixed form but is a process of continuous re-inscription and reconstruction in an ever-changing present; historiography, as theoreticians tell us, involves a rhetorical use of language and, in spite of all claims to impartiality, a specific vantage point, an unacknowledged agenda, a hidden bias. In addition to this, we have come to accept that we live in a world that is mediated by texts and images, a recognition that has an impact both on individual remembering and the work of the historian. The historian has lost his monopoly over defining and presenting the past. What is called the ‘memory boom’ is the immediate effect of this loss of the historian’s singular and unrivalled authority.

Whether we are in favour of or against these changes in our mental and cultural framework, we cannot disregard them but may have to guard against some of their effects. One problematic effect is the high potential for manipulation by the media which may restage the past according to marketing strategies or the demands of specific groups. Feelings very often are indulged in and exploited in the media market at the expense of cognitive functions. The voice of the professional historian is indispensable when it comes to judging evidence, probing the truth of representations, discovering sources and interpreting them in a new light. But to concede memories, both individual and collective, a legitimate access to the past in the mediated democratic society, is to acknowledge the multiple and diverse impact of the past, and in particular a traumatic past, on its citizens. The memory boom reflects a general desire to reclaim the past as an indispensable part of the present, and to reconsider, to revalue and to reassess it as an important dimension of individual biographies and historical consciousness. It also provides a repository for group affinities, loyalties, and identity formations in a post-individualist age. The fact that the term ‘memory’ has ousted ‘ideology’ cannot mean that the functions of criticism, discrimination, and ethical evaluation have become obsolete. On the contrary, the memory discourse has to develop its own stance of critical vigilance. It has to provide criteria for probing the quality of memory constructions, for distinguishing between uses and abuses of the past, between memories that perpetuate resentment, separatism, and violence on the one hand and those that further inter-group relations and have a therapeutic or ethical value on the other.
2. Four memory formats

In the second part of this chapter, I want to sketch the outlines of some of the ‘wes’ with which the individual identifies and to comment on the different memory formats in which they are packaged. This short sketch of four formats of memory will map various areas of memory research, showing how different disciplines have divided their labour. My working hypothesis is that our personal memories include much more than what we, as individuals, have ourselves experienced. We have our share in the larger and more encompassing memory of the family, the neighbourhood, the generation, the society, the state, and the culture we live in. These dimensions of memory, differing in scope and range, overlap and intersect within the individual who shares and incorporates those memories in various ways. Humans acquire these memories not only via lived experience, but also via interacting, communicating, identifying, learning, and participating. It is true that the borderlines that I am going to discuss are rather fuzzy. It is often not easy to clearly determine where one memory format ends and another begins as they cross over, overlap, interact, and even jar within the individual person. My criteria for distinguishing different frames or dimensions of memory will be threefold: extension in space and time, size of group, and volatility or stability.

Individual memory

The memory of individuals is studied by neurologists and cognitive psychologists, who have a rather poor view of human memory capacity. According to these scientists, human memory is not designed for accurate representations of past experiences but is notoriously distorting and cannot be trusted in any way. The German neuroscientist Wolf Singer has defined memories as ‘data-based inventions’ and Daniel Schacter, the Harvard psychologist, has specified no less than ‘seven sins of memory’. Whatever our memories may be worth from a scientific point of view, as human beings we have to rely on them, because they are what makes human beings human. Without this capacity and at least a sense of its reliability, we could not construct a self nor could we communicate with others. Personal memory is the dynamic medium for processing subjective experience and building up a social identity.

Though tied to subjective experience and an unalterable stance, personal memories already have a social quality in that they are interactively constructed, and, therefore, always connected with the
memories of others. Unless they are integrated into a narrative, which invests them with shape, significance, and meaning, they are fragmented, presenting only isolated scenes without temporal or spatial continuity. Even if they are anecdotalized and regularly rehearsed or stabilized by material objects, writing, or photographs, they remain volatile and subject to change and fading. Some episodic memories become part of a family memory; however, this also sets clear limits to their temporal duration. Even within that cycle of oral interaction they, as a rule, do not transcend the temporal range of three generations, a span amounting to at most a hundred years.

**Social memory**

Although I do not consider ‘collective memory’ a spurious notion, I dislike the term because of its vagueness. To circumvent its vagueness, I prefer to replace it with three different terms: social, political, and cultural memory. The first of these, social memory, refers to the past as experienced and communicated (or repressed) within a given society. It is continuously changing as it disappears with the death of individuals. The memory of a society is by no means homogenous but is instead divided into generational memories, the importance of which is being (re-)discovered by social psychologists. As groups of people who are more or less the same age that have witnessed the same incisive historical events, generations share a common frame of beliefs, values, habits, and attitudes. The members of a generation tend to see themselves as different from preceding and succeeding generations. In the communication between different generations, writes a sociologist, ‘mutual understanding is impeded by an invisible borderline which has to do with the temporality of experience. Age separates in an existential way because one cannot escape one’s time.’

Avowed or un-avowed, this shared generational memory is an important element in the constitution of personal memories, because, as another sociologist has provocatively put it, ‘once formed, generational identity cannot change’.

While familial generations are indistinguishable on the social level, social generations acquire a distinct profile through shared experience of incisive events as well as through an ongoing discourse of self-thematization. The invisible frame of shared experiences, hopes, values, and obsessions becomes more tangible when it shifts. We then feel that stances and habits that were once normative and representative have gradually moved from centre to periphery. Social memory does not change gradually but undergoes a perceptible shift after periods of around 30 years
when a new generation enters into offices and takes over public responsibility. Together with its public presence, the new generation will authorize its own vision of history. The change of generations is paramount for the reconstruction of societal memory and the renewal of cultural creativity.

**Political memory**

The most important difference between individual and social memory on the one hand and political and cultural memory on the other lies in their temporal range. Individual and social memory is embodied; both formats cling to and abide with human beings and their embodied interaction. Political and cultural memory, on the other hand, are mediated and, in order to become a kind of memory, they both need to be re-embodied; both are founded on durable carriers of symbols and material representations. Irrespective of whether they succeed in this goal or not, both political and cultural memory aim at a permanence of memory. While the social format of memory is built on *inter-generational* communication, political and cultural forms of memory are designed for *trans-generational* communication, involving not only libraries, museums, and monuments, but also providing various modes of education and repeated occasions for participation. As we cross the shadow-line from short-term to long-term durability, an embodied, implicit, and fuzzy bottom-up memory is transformed into an institutionalized top-down memory. However overlapping and intertwined social and political memory may be, they have become the objects of different academic disciplines. The bottom-up social memory is studied by social psychologists who are interested in the ways in which historical events are perceived and remembered by individuals and generations within their own life span. The top-down political memory is investigated by political scientists, who discuss the role of memory for the formation of national identities and political action. The first approach focuses on how memories are communicated in private and public space; the second asks how memories are constructed, staged, used, and abused for political action and the formation of group identities.

It must be emphasized that the step from individual or social to political memory does not afford an easy analogy. Institutions and groups do not possess a memory like individuals; there is, of course, no equivalent to the neurological system or the anthropological disposition. Institutions and larger social groups, such as nations, states, the church, or a business firm do not ‘have’ a memory, they ‘make’ one for themselves with the aid of memorial signs such as monuments, museums, commemoration rites, and
ceremonies. Together with such a memory, these groups and institutions ‘construct’ an identity. A memory that is intentionally and symbolically constructed is based on acts of selection and exclusion, neatly separating useful from not useful, relevant from irrelevant memories.

In three aspects, the political constructions of memory differ clearly from personal and social memory. First, they are not connected to other memories and the memories of others but tend towards homogeneous unity and self-contained closure. Second, political memory is not fragmentary and diverse but emplotted in a narrative that is emotionally charged and conveys a clear and invigorating message. And, third, it is not something volatile and transient, but is anchored in material and visual signs such as sites and monuments as well as in performative action such as commemoration rites, which periodically reactivate individual memories and enhance collective participation. In this way, a political memory is stabilized and can be transmitted from generation to generation.

**Cultural memory**
Cultures may be defined as systematic and highly elaborate strategies against the primary experience of ongoing decay and general oblivion. As interventions against the inexorable laws of natural decay and human forgetting, it is their perennial business (to use a phrase formulated by Zygmunt Baumann) to translate the transient into the permanent, that is, to invent techniques of transmitting and storing information deemed vital for the constitution and continuation of a specific group.

Cultures that rely on writing systems for long-term storage of information develop a distinction between what I call a ‘canon’ and an ‘archive’. This division draws a line between what is (or ought to be) remembered by the group (in terms of repeated performances, readings, citations, and references) and what in the long run has been neglected, forgotten, excluded, or discarded but is still deemed worthy and important enough to be preserved in material form. The active memory of the canon perpetuates what a society has consciously selected and maintains as salient and vital for a common orientation and a shared remembering; its institutions are the literary and visual canon, the school curricula, the museum, and the stage, along with with holidays, shared customs, and remembrance days.

Compared to these active forms of recreating and maintaining a cultural memory, the contents of the archive may be said to linger in a state of latency. The archival memory is accessible only to specialists. This part of materially retrievable and professionally interpretable information does
not circulate as common knowledge. It has not passed the filters of social selection nor is it transformed into a living memory supported by public awareness and validation by cultural institutions and the public media. It is important to note, however, that the borderline between the archival and the canon’s active memory is permeable in both directions. Some things may recede into the background and fade out of common interest and awareness while others may be recovered from the periphery and move into the centre of social interest and esteem. Thanks to this double-layered structure and the interaction between the active and the archival dimension, cultural memory has an inbuilt potential for ongoing changes, innovations, transformations, and reconfigurations.

Compared to the symbolic signs of political memory which are homogenizing and charged with a clear message, the symbolic signs of cultural memory have a more complex structure that calls for more individual forms of participation such as reading, writing, learning, scrutinizing, criticizing, and appreciating. The fact that both are designed as long-term memory does not mean that their structure is permanently fixed. Both are permanently challenged and contested, and it is, to a large part, this very contestation that keeps this memory alive.

3. Reframing memory – German memories of suffering

In order to illustrate and thereby to test the heuristic value of these four formats of memory I will now turn to an empirical case. A remarkable shift happened in German post-war memory in the new millennium. During a lecture on individual and collective forms of memory in October 2000 in Vilnius, Günter Grass reflected on the lack of attention that has been paid to the suffering of Germans during the Second World War. He called it strange and disquieting how late and reluctantly these memories were surfacing in German consciousness: ‘The expulsion, the plight of 12 million East German fugitives, was a topic only in the background. One iniquity displaced the other.’ Three years later, the situation in Germany had dramatically changed. The country was suddenly flooded by memories of German suffering during and shortly after the war that returned with an unprecedented emotional impact. New themes suddenly attracted public attention such as the forced migration of the German population from Eastern European countries, the carpet bombing of German cities, and the organized mass rape of German women as carried out by soldiers of the
Re-framing memory. Between individual and collective forms of constructing the past

Red Army. These events were presented in the mass media via images and films, books and interviews, talk shows, and memoirs, and were discussed on the internet by members of all generations with high emotional intensity. How were these individual memories transformed into a social memory? This transformation occurred in terms of various social and political reframings.

1. **Individual memories of flight and bombings that had been contained for more than half a century in the ‘social private’ frame now entered the ‘social public’ frame.**

The experience of expulsion and of burning cities lent itself better to intergenerational family communication than the shameful experience of rape which was covered up by social and familial taboos. The social frame of the memories of expulsion and firestorm had been that of the family; it was a shared memory, but one that remained on a purely private level. Counting by numbers of book editions, by frequency of articles in major journals and newspapers and by numbers of spectators of television documentaries and prime-time shows, we may infer that these individual memories were transferred after 2001 from the private and unofficial frame of the family to that of the society at large. In this shift, they underwent a considerable metamorphosis: they became mediated and mediatized. Books, films, and videos create representations that become generally accessible. In a newspaper article in 2003, Ulrich Raulff complained that that these memories, which resurfaced 58 years after the war, did not have the ‘decency’ to wait for another two years for their formal commemoration date in 2005.\(^{10}\) The fact that the arousal of memories happened in an informal bottom-up way and rather than being triggered from the top down may be a sign that they were still to some extent embodied memories of experiences charged with strong personal emotions.

2. **Materialized individual memories that had been part of archival memory were reclaimed as part of public social memory.**

Individual memories persevere not only by oral communication and continuous rehearsal in the social frame, but also by their material fixation in texts and images, first of all in diaries and letters, written in the wake of the events described, but also later on, in forms of memoirs and novels, creating a more permanent shape for individual memories and making
them available to others. Written documents, however, have to be published and to find an interested audience before they can aspire to contribute to a social memory. If they do not (or no longer) meet with general interest, they are relegated to the archive, that is, the inert or virtual memory of historical material traces. In 1990, the German filmmaker Helke Sander wanted to recover the tabooed memory of the mass rape of 1945 by making a film which was based on her research on the textual and visual archives and an extensive oral history project. Her work won considerable attention but remained contained within a particular segment of society, mainly that of scholars and feminists. Another example of a work of art that did not immediately strike a chord with the public social memory is the trilogy by Dieter Forte, also published at the beginning of the 1990s, who described his own traumatizing childhood memory of the bombing of Düsseldorf within an extended family saga. Not only did it not meet with public interest, it even escaped the attention of W.G. Sebald who searched German literature for texts on the subject only a few years later. A third example: the sinking of the ship Wilhelm Gustloff, carrying thousands of German fugitives who drowned in the incident at the end of the war, was recalled to public memory by a short novel by Günter Grass, published in 2002. This incident had already been described in numerous publications, and even a film without meeting with general interest and resonance. These presentations had spoken only to a small segment of the society, namely the particular generation whose own experience related to the event, and they had been quickly passed over and stowed away in the archival memory. After 2000, when the incident was being reclaimed by the society as a whole, we could witness a transfer from particular experience to general interest, from expert knowledge to public response, from an archival to a social memory.

3. In the 1950s and 1960s, what had been claimed as a political memory was reclaimed as a social public memory

The memory of expulsion had already been claimed as a public political memory in the 1950s. After the war, the League of the Expellees (Bund der Vertriebenen) acted as a custodian of these personal memories, representing and instrumentalizing them in a political context. The memory was shaped by this lobby so as to fit a common narrative and to serve a revisionist political agenda. As the members of this league represented a sizeable portion of voters in West Germany, it also received considerable governmental support. In the 1950s, the ministry for the expelled had
endowed the league with generous funds for museums and other educational institutions. It even commissioned a large oral history project which documented the experience of expulsion and was carried out by the most renowned historians of the time. Over the decades, however, this memory lost much of its social impact. Their museums were visited less and less by members of the younger generation, and their ritualized folkloristic events were marginalized more and more. Fifty years later, this particular and waning political memory returned and rocked the whole society. In its new frame, it is no longer necessarily politicized but mainly is being reconstructed in its humane and social dimension and invested with emotional significance by the society as a whole.

4. **A particular political memory was reclaimed as a national political memory**

Although there is such a thing as a human right to one’s individual memory, there is not necessarily a right to the expression of any kind of a collective memory within the public sphere. While heterogeneous private memories coexist quietly side by side in a society, they easily can become conflictual and incompatible if they are invested with political claims which clash in the public arena. If we ask why public acclaim had been withheld from these memories for so long, we may find an answer in Grass’ statement. When he wrote: ‘One iniquity displaced the other’, he condensed a problematic ‘psycho-logic’ of German postwar memory into a palpable formula. Indeed: immediately after the war it was the pathetic self-image of the Germans as a suffering nation that blocked their perception of guilt and an awareness of the suffering of others, in particular of the Jewish victims. After the establishing of a worldwide memory of the Holocaust, it was in turn Jewish suffering that displaced the suffering of non-Jewish Germans, and with the shift after 2000 it was feared that the memory of German suffering would once again displace the Holocaust and blunt the consciousness of German guilt.

At this point we have to add that the political differs from the social frame in that it introduces norms into the frame of memory. Conflict and clashes do not evolve from mere stories but from arguments, values, aims, projects, intentions, claims, and decisions, all of which imply a normative dimension. While stories may be compatible, normative orientations may not be. The normative orientation of the politicized memory of the expelled had been contained within the larger political frame of German Holocaust memory as established on the national and state levels. After 2000, this particular memory of German suffering strove to be elevated to the
national level. Some felt that a pompous memory of German suffering could even serve as a convenient master narrative that would bind together East and West German experience, forging an emotional link of national unity after so many experiences of inner German dissent, estrangement and rupture.

It is remarkable that this reframing of a particular memory as a national memory coincides with a generational shift. Memory dies with each person, writes Susan Sontag. This case, however, is slightly more complicated. At a time when many of the members of the first generation have passed away, a succeeding generation is stepping into their shoes. We are witnessing the shift from a ‘generation of experience’ to a ‘generation of confession’ who identifies with the experience of their parents and grandparents and tries to transform it into a lasting and respected memory. The present spokeswoman for the league of the expellees, Erika Steinbach (born 1940), was clearly trying to elevate the memory of her family to a national symbolic level during the years after 2000. After the harsh confrontation of the generation of ’68 with the guilt of their parents, we are witnessing a new willingness to identify with them and to inherit their suffering. Steinbach’s aim was to establish a Centre against Expulsion in Berlin, which would be designed as an institutional stronghold of a German national memory of suffering. The Jewish community feared that as a symbolic site, it would become a rival to and challenge the Holocaust Monument; it has already deeply irritated Germany’s Polish neighbours. The political reframing of German memory of suffering by the league of the expellees was not confined to the dimension of space. The Bundesrat proposed 5 August, the day of the signing of the charter of the expelled in 1950, as a new date for national commemoration. This proposal, however, has not found the support of the government.

The considerable turmoil caused by Steinbach is an unmistakable sign that her intentions are challenging the normative frame of German national memory. It also shows that the composition of national memories is a highly politicized issue that, in a democracy, is open to negotiations. So far, German national memory remains defined by the frame of German guilt of the Holocaust, even if other memories of German suffering are admitted by its side. This normative frame allows for heterogeneous memories on the social level, provided that they do not challenge this hierarchy of norms. ‘One iniquity displaced the other’, wrote Grass. He obviously overlooked this hierarchy of frames and the normative power of the national memory. We have therefore reason to hope that this mutual eclipse of German guilt and suffering will not go on forever. It is no longer one iniquity displacing
the other, but the acknowledgement of German guilt and responsibility that also makes place for the acknowledgment of German suffering.

Conclusion

Let me conclude with a few observations.

The first point concerns the externalization of personal memories. Individual memories, Sontag insisted, are irreproducible, while ideologies are supported by archives of texts and images. The distinction, I fear, cannot be made quite as neatly. As individuals live in societies which produce texts, images, and films relating to what they themselves remember, their individual memories necessarily always interact to some extent with externalized representations. What individuals remember are repeated representations which are rarely preserved over the years in a state of fixed stability and uncontaminated purity.

The second point concerns the discontinuity and continuity of individual memories. Individual memories die with the person, Sontag wrote. While this statement can hardly be contested in its literal sense, it disregards the ways in which parts of these memories may be reconstructed and represented on a social level by those who succeed them in time. The family, the political unit, the nation, can create ties, loyalties, and obligations which call for a continuation of memories.

The third point concerns the transformation from individual to public memory. This transformation has a double effect: it creates public visibility and audibility on the one hand, and it homogenizes and reduces experience by creating representations on the other; these latter are always in danger of becoming standard references, icons, stereotypes, or even screen memories.

The fourth point concerns the normative character of political memory. Not all collective memories exist on the same level; some are part of a hierarchical structure. While in both the private and public dimensions of social memory we meet with a multiplicity of voices and opinions, on the political level memories acquire the quality of normative symbols. While there is much room for variation and heterogeneity on the social level, there is very little to no space on the level of national memory construction that provides the framework to personal and social memories.

Halbwachs’ brilliant observation that memories depend on social frames is an important clue to the complex problems of current memory issues. His concept of ‘frame’ has drawn our attention to the subtle ways in which individual memories partake of social memories and are
transformed into collective memories. These frames determine the validity and relevance of individual memories and shape their forms of articulation. Halbwachs’ hints, however, need further elaboration and differentiation. In my contribution I wanted to show that ‘collective memory’ is not necessarily a spurious notion but one that needs to be theoretically differentiated and elaborated as social, political, and cultural memory. If we multiply the respective memory frames, Halbwachs’ concept of framing and re-framing can become an important tool to analyse complex cases of memory formation and transformation in the past, present, and future.

Notes

1. In order to provide some minimal terminological consistency, I shall try to use the distinction between the terms ‘memory’ and ‘memories’ very much in the way the linguists distinguish between langue and parole. Memory will generally refer to the level of langue and hint at the organizational frame, while memories will refer to the level of parole, pointing at discrete and realized entities.
CHAPTER 3

Repetitive structures in language and history

REINHART KOSELLECK †

‘There is something peculiar to these love stories: they always seem to revolve around the same thing, but the way they start and end is so infinitely varied that it is anything but uninteresting to watch them!’ Anyone unable to read this quotation in the original language will miss the Viennese lilt, but they will still be able to guess the author: Johann Nepomuk Nestroy.2

The beginning and end of all love stories – or the alpha and omega of every love – are as infinitely different as the number of times lovers find one another and part or are parted. And yet it is always a matter of the same thing: that love which, inspired by the sexual urge, constantly and continuously repeats itself. However variously the sexual urge may be channelled according to ethnic background, however differently it may be organized and shaped by cultural mechanisms, with every new beginning the difference and tension between the sexes invite a repetition without which neither our human race nor its histories and stories would exist.

This brings us straight to the core of our problem. Everyone, as persons finding one another through love, is just as unique as they believe themselves to be: believing that precisely their love is exempt from the burden of history, unmistakable, amazing, unique, or whatever the mutual incantations may be. Behind this lies an anthropological discovery that has gradually mutated during the course of European history. ‘Persona’ once referred, as in the Greek Prosopon, to a predefined typology, a mask that a man must don in order to assume a stage identity. An exchange of roles was conceivable: not, however, a development of character or of the modern
It was only the individualized concept of the persona that opened the way for an enlightened yet romantic conception of marriage that was no longer geared primarily to the objective reproduction and maintenance of a domestically defined family, but to the subjective and autonomous self-development and mutual attachment of two individuals through their love. Rites in various cultures draw on the zoological preconditions of sex in very different ways. Yet on this level of a formal general description, both the fulfilment of sexually determined preconditions, as repeated for millions of years, and the concrete consummation of ever-unique encounters and interactions between at least two people (possibly more) remain essentially the same. This ‘again and again’ repeats itself in each individual case, and yet the individual case is not subsumed in the inherent sexual repeatability that governs and drives it. Actions and behaviours may be infinitely diverse, but the underlying sexuality remains essentially the same.

Our premise as derived from Nestroy’s observation can be generalized. On the timeline of events, people (not actually mentioned by Nestroy at all) and their events, incidents, and conflicts (and the solutions of these, i.e. catastrophes or compromises), are and remain unique and unrepeatable. The thesis that I should now like to develop is that they are nevertheless built into or contained in self-repeating preconditions without ever being identical with those givens. Permit me first a thought experiment that may help us to understand Nestroy’s interest in the love story that he says is always the same and yet always new.

If everything were to repeat itself in the same way, there would be no change and no surprise – whether in love or in politics or in the economy or anywhere else. The result would be yawning boredom all round.

If, on the other hand, everything were always new or innovative, humanity would find itself falling into a black hole, utterly helpless and lacking all orientation.

These logically cogent arguments suffice to demonstrate that neither stasis, characterized by the repetition of the same, nor the category of diachronically successive unique events, whether seen progressively or historically, is inherently suited to the understanding of human histories. The historical nature of man, or, in epistemological terms, historical anthropology, has inserted itself between the two poles of our thought experiment: continuous repeatability and continual innovation. The question that we are thus forced to consider is how the ratio of one to the other can be analysed and represented layer by layer.

Our theoretical model, which obliges us to combine repetition and innovation in different ways, allows us to enter retardations and accelerations
depending on how often repetition and uniqueness permit themselves to be assigned to each other. Acceleration occurs when, in any sequence being studied, less and less is repeated as time goes by and more and more innovations occur to depart from the old preconditions. Retardations happen when successive repetitions begin to dig in or become so bogged down that all change is slowed or even rendered impossible.

Our thought experiment is thus designed to bring about the theoretical isolation of all conceivable individual events of possible histories so that with the help of the categories mentioned earlier they can be temporally broken down, and to identify the more enduring preconditions – that is, the repetitive structures – without which no events would occur. All actual changes – faster, slower, or long term (to summarize Braudel’s categories) thus remain linked back to the variable interplay of repetition and uniqueness.

It would then be possible to demonstrate what is really new in our so-called modern age, that is, what repeats nothing of what used to be – or what was already there and now merely returns in a new form. Finally, it also would be possible to identify the enduring structures that are present in or distinguish all human histories, regardless of the age or cultural environment to which we assign them. In even more general terms: we are looking for what is peculiar to all men, what is peculiar only to some men, or what is peculiar to only one man. Diachrony then stacks itself layer by layer with overlaps which, crossing the conventional ages, allow multiple assignments. It would then be possible, depending on the mix of repetition and uniqueness, to pluralize the ages without resorting to more or less meaningless ways of defining periods such as saying that they are ‘old’, ‘middle’, or ‘new’.

The fact is that it is impossible to deduce what is old, middle, or new from these terms. On the other hand, the formally predicted mix of repeatability and uniqueness offers substantive definitions that can be used to jettison the three traditional ages into which our Eurocentric textbooks are divided and by which our professorial chairs are constrained. What would be gained would be ethnological perspectives extending from before the time of written history into our so-called advanced civilizations; what would be required would be intercontinental and intracontinental comparisons that testified equally of ethnogeneses and of migrations, interbreedings and fusions of the respective cultures and action units – all the way to the economic, ecological, and religious challenges that now face the entire globe: the cracks and fault lines which collectively call for alternative forms of political action. In short, it would be necessary for all
special histories to make their contribution to the history of the world we all share. Historical anthropology is at least equipped to drive paths in this direction.

Before I turn to empirically enriched repetitive structures it will be pertinent to insert two warnings by way of clarification. First: a repetitive structure has little or nothing to do with the old theory of cycles. A cycle reduces repetitions (which remain possible) to a linear, irreversible decline à la Spengler or Toynbee, which is essentially teleologically programmed. In terms of the theory of time it differs very little from a linear progress model, except that – in a quasi-decadent sense – it is steered back into itself. This is valid for cosmological theories of recurrence, e.g. that of Plato, or for Leibniz with his *anakyklosis panton*, without thereby completely covering their theories. It also applies to the theory of *anacyclosis* put forward by Polybius, who – ideal-typically – saw all the hitherto conceivable and humanly possible forms of constitution being driven out and scattered within the space of thrice three generations.

In contrast to this comparatively simple and hence easily understood theory of recurrence, ‘repetitive structures’ refers here to constantly possible, variably realizable but only situationally determined recurrent conditions of individual events and their consequences. A stochastic probability theory is allowed to avail itself of such ever-present possibilities, but their realization depends on an unknown series of accidents. In this way it may be possible for any given uniqueness to be explained – or indeed made probable.

My second observation is intended to warn against assigning causes. For any event any historian will be able to produce grounds, as many as he likes, or such as openly promise him agreement. Our theoretical model refers to a gaping aporia between the recurrent conditions of possible events on the one hand and the events themselves and their acting and directing persons on the other. No event can be adequately derived from synchronic conditions or diachronic premises, whether they be termed economic, religious, political, mental, cultural, or anything else. It follows that there are innumerable (synchronic) conditions and (diachronic) premises that are impossible to identify by any law but which justify, trigger, release, and constrain the concrete actions of actors who contradict, compete against, or are engaged in conflict with each other. The very numerosity of the free room for action of those involved precludes the invention of unilinear or determining causal chains (apart from heuristic justifications). It is the repetitive structures that at all times and at the same time contain more or less than is apparent in the events.
Repetitive structures, then, do not indicate a simple return of the same, and although they predicate the uniqueness of events they do not adequately explain them.

In a second visit to the subject I should like to take a broad view of variously deeply stacked repetitive structures. They have to do with (a) non-anthropogenic conditions of our experiences, (b) such biological premises for our lives as we share with animals, and (c) repetitive structures peculiar to humans, that is, institutions. To end with we shall look at (d) those repeatabilities that are contained even in unique sequences of events, and finally we shall examine (e) linguistic repetitive structures, within which all the repetitions or repeatabilities mentioned thus far have been and still are being generated and discovered.

(a) Having started from the human sexual urge, let us now broaden our view to look at those natural preconditions which, independently of man, make human life possible. The first of these is that cosmos within which, with their regular recurrence, the revolution of the rotating earth around the sun and the revolution of the moon around the earth give structure to our daily life. The repeated alternation of day and night and the succession of the seasons determine, hemispherically displaced north and south of the equator, not only our rhythm of sleeping and waking but also, despite all our technology, our working lives. Varying according to climate, sowing, harvest, and crop rotation all depend on our planet’s regular orbit. Both the ebb and flow of the tides and changes in climate, including ice ages so recent as to have been experienced by our ancestors, remain embedded in the recurrent orbits of the solar system. In this respect the primary experiences of all known historical civilizations have been the same or similar. And one of the first achievements of civilizations all over the globe was to calculate the orbits of the planets in order to create calendars – a prerequisite for the ritualized or rationalized repetitive rules that help to give order to our everyday lives.

Until the eighteenth century this cosmos, whether it was believed to be created or eternal, was regarded as stable, so that it was possible to derive from or read into it laws that were independent of time. With the historicization of the old natural history (*historia naturalis*) to natural science – since Buffon and Kant – it is of course true that the temporal status of all the natural sciences derived its form. Even natural laws are put into service between the beginning and the postulated end of natural history. Cosmology, physics, chemistry, biology – and indeed anthropology – all need their own theories of time in order, in their different ways, to create
order between their individual unique hypothetical courses and the
associated repetitive structures. Herder’s metacritique of Kant and his
formulaic representation of time as an empiria-free prerequisite for all
experience has meanwhile encompassed all the sciences: ‘In fact every
changeable thing has within it the measure of its own time; this would exist
even if nothing else were there; no two things in the world have the same
measure of time. My heartbeat, or the pace or flight of my thoughts, is not
a measure of time for others; the flow of a single river or the growth of a
single tree cannot be used to time all rivers, trees and plants ... At any one
time, therefore (it may be stated truly and categorically), there are in the
universe countless times ...’ The relativity of time in the spectrum of
multiple times, as Herder conceived of it after Leibniz and before Einstein,
and as Friedrich Cramer illustrated it epistemologically, requires for every
area of knowledge and experience its own new mixture of repeatability and
uniqueness in order to be able to analyse the processes that are always
different even if they are interdependent.

(b) The further palaeontology penetrates into the depths of billions of years
to approach a cosmogenesis, and the more closely interwoven become the
microprocesses of physical and biological chemistry, including gene
technology, the greater becomes the overlap between biological, animal, and
human natural history, however distinct from one another they may remain.

In the biological conditions of human nature there are numerous
repetitions which, in various measure, we share with many animals. Not
only the differences between the sexes, reproduction, birth, and death, but
also the killing not only of prey but also of our own kind, every manner of
satisfaction of needs, principally in order to avoid hunger (which is what
drives longer-term forward planning) – all this we share with many sorts of
animal, even if we humans encapsulate and impose form on these
fundamental actions and processes in and through our culture.

To these we may add three formal fundamental definitions: Over/Under,
Inside/Outside and Sooner/Later, which drive all human histories and
hence the bringing about of events. These too are equally naturally
preprogrammed.

Inside/Outside demarcations constitute all animal territories but also
fulfil the most elementary form of the human need for imposing limits in
order to be, and remain, capable of action. In the course of history,
demarcations multiply and overlap all the way down to so-called
globalization, which in turn brings about new internal distinctions on the
planet we all share.
Hierarchical Over/Under definitions – that is, in animal terms, the pecking order – recur in a different form in all human constitutions and organizations, even those whose object it is to secure the equality and freedom of those involved in them. Only direct democracy as the rule of all over all has yet to be achieved.

The tension between Sooner and Later is by nature embedded in sexuality and the generations that derive from it. Just as the natural, social, and political generational cohorts differ from each other, so too they remain set in the natural difference, sooner or later to enter the relevant entities of experience and action that trigger sequences of events. Animals and humans certainly employ the arc of tension from childhood and youth to old age in different ways, but it still contains that minimal natural commonality that in the case of human history carries within it all conflicts and the opportunities for their resolution. Inside/Outside, Over/Under, and Sooner/Later are therefore definitions of difference that for both animals and man can escalate into radical opposition; in their formality they represent structures of self-organization and capacity to act that constantly repeat themselves even as they help drive unique sequences of events. To that extent, they point to the biologically determined basis of all historical anthropology.

If, meanwhile, advances in science, technology, and industry should bring about ever-increasing numbers of innovations that were once at best the stuff of dreams, the ratio of innovation to repetition may indeed – in modern times, as it were – shift. This would also place what used to be the accepted insight of Rahel Varnhagen in a new perspective: ‘We do not have new experiences: it is always new people who have old experiences.’

But even if more recent inventions should cause us to have genuinely new experiences, the tension between innovation and repeatability would never be eliminated: it is only the balance between them that changes through history. This is demonstrated by

(c), human institutions. They are founded on purely anthropogenic repetitive structures. Let us look briefly at some of them:

– all labour, which the young Karl Marx said underlies the whole of history, is based on learnable and teachable repeatabilities. Learning how to do things feeds on example, which can be imitated and hence repeated, rehearsed and practised. For centuries, working on the land remained embedded in comparatively static geographical and climatic conditions to which hunters and farmers had to adapt themselves in their various ways in order to survive. The shift away from agriculture and
manual labour towards mechanical, industrialized, and capitalized production produces, as it were artificially, new repetitive structures that precede the individual product. Ever since that shift began, actual production has been preceded by production plans and plans to increase productivity. Production-line working and the automated and electronic manufacturing of individual products depend on the stored repeatabilities of the plant being used – and, of course, on the probability of success in the marketplace as forecast on the basis of past experience: a probability that is accordingly based on a minimum of repeatability. Thus the expansion from oikos to oikonomia in the territorial, national, or global framework reproduces ever-renewed conditions for the repeatable stability without which any economy would collapse.

– like all institutions, the law depends first and foremost on its repeatable application. Justice and the principle of legal certainty can only be brought about if the law, having been applied once, is applied again. Otherwise we should have nothing but arbitrary rule, by whomever it were exercised. The minimum necessary degree of trust in the law depends on its repeated and hence expectable reapplication. It is true, of course, that the whole of past history teaches us that time and again, from case to case, new jurisprudence and legislation have been challenged. And with our rising new age we are seeing a shift that endows ad hoc rulings with the force of law and grants sovereignly declared laws a growing inherent weight vis-à-vis long-established or recently acquired rules of law or customs that may have been in force for decades if not centuries. The accelerating pace of modern life elicits promptly imposed but shorter-lived statutory orders whose increasing numbers secure less and less justice. Nevertheless it is true for the law as for other fields that it can remain secure and can guarantee justice only when a substantial degree of reapplication of existing laws makes it possible to cover whatever new individual cases may present themselves.

– an analogous situation applies to all other institutions in our society that shape or regulate our everyday lives. To retain their credibility, religious dogmas have to remain at least relatively stable. Once their repeatable promulgation lapses, to the extent that its faith is rooted in dogma the congregation or church will itself collapse. The same applies to all rites and cultic practices, which, to remain effective, have to be regularly repeated.

It is possible to show a similar interdependence, mutatis mutandis, between the permanently obligatory programmes of a political party or other
ideology-based organization and their concretely unique actions. Without repetitive reaffirmation of their goals, such bodies would necessarily lose their effectiveness and credibility and hence their electability.

Themselves established in law are those permanent stipulations of repetition which, by forcing their repeated application, protect individual laws in constitutional law from change. In our [German] constitution this includes respect for human dignity and the guarantee of the federal separation of powers.

Established rules of procedure in parliaments, parties, companies, and other places of work are also among the permanent temporal conditions by which unique decision-making processes are initiated and made possible in the first place.

A similar interdependence has become established – with increasing definition over several centuries – throughout the transport and media industries. In transport, fixed budgets and concomitantly fixed timetables ensure, by and large, the regular recurrence of services throughout the year. All transport routes, whether by land, water, or air, are operated and whenever possible coordinated so that they can be used on a continuous basis. The death notice brought by the postman in the morning only comes once, but we owe the fact that he can bring it at a more or less fixed time of day to the regularly repeated process of conveyance and delivery.

It is true to say, of course, that, thanks to the telegraph, the telephone, and now the computer, the forces that drive these processes are increasingly passing into the ownership of private individuals, but it is the electronic network as a whole that continues to ensure the constant renewal of call and availability. Communicative repeatability is now merging into the sum of individual performances. It is not in the transport industry but in communication between individuals that synchronic prerequisites are increasingly converging with unique arrangements. The multimedia message of image and text sent by mobile phone is for both sender and recipient identical to the simultaneous event that can only be created by the message itself and the technology used to send it.

(d) Diachronic prerequisites for sequences of events. Whereas in the past it was the synchronic conditions for possible events that used to be picked out as the most important, whether they were non-anthropogenic conditions, regarded as applying, in biological terms, equally to animals and humans, or considered to have been generated purely by man through the agency of his institutions – it is now possible to add some diachronic prerequisites for the courses of individual events. What may come as a
surprise is that even events which by definition require or bring about their own singularity or even uniqueness have repeatable regularities. In his comparative anatomy of the English, French, and Russian revolutions, Crane Brinton provided clearly ordered models for their courses that demonstrate the diachronic repeatability of similar events.

Let us look at three examples. They have to do with prophecy, forecasting, and planning. Each has to do with extrapolations into the future whose cogency is founded in the repeatability of earlier sequences of courses.

– Prophecies may be based on astrological calculations of recurrent constellations of returning planetary orbits whose astral effects are then incorporated and used in personal or political diagnosis. Alternatively they may be based on a revealed biblical text, from which – conveying the Old and New Testaments – an ingenious system of apocalyptic or shorter-term predictions spanning centuries was developed that could always be called upon and was therefore repeatable. The law of the repeatability of biblical predictions was based on the belief that every prophecy that was not fulfilled increased the probability that it would all the more certainly be fulfilled at some time in the future. In other words, past failure to be fulfilled brought growing probability of fulfilment. In this way even failed prophecies retained a growing right to future fulfilment. Historically this theological manifestatio Dei led via Bengel and Otinger to Hegel’s Phänomenologie des Geistes and finally, in Marx, Engels, and the Communist Party Manifesto, to the casting in concrete of an error-resistant permanent certainty of ultimate victory in the class struggle – though it has to be conceded that, after a century and a half of rationalized alternative and supplementary predictions, that certainty has melted away.

– Analytically speaking, forecasts, even if they empirically proceed from or remain intertwined with prophecies, differ in certain essential respects from long-term prophetic predictions. A forecast is concerned with unique political, social or economic events in the future. Forecasts may prove accurate, they may not. They have to do with future events that are determined by deeds, and being imminent factuality they can only be proved right once. All alternative variants lapse with the arrival of the events themselves. To use Leibniz’s term, we then have a unique truth of fact (vérité de fait) as opposed to truths of reason (vérités de la raison), which are repeatable and hence remain permanently true. The extraordinary thing is that forecasts of unique events still need to draw on repeatable conditions that refer to a possible future and do not
ultimately become exhausted by the occurrence of particular events occasioned by individuals. What we then have, alongside numerous other types, is a repeatable condition forecast. Let us look at an example. After his bloody defeat at Kunersdorf in 1759, Frederick the Great wrote a short essay on the subject of Charles XII of Sweden, who exactly half a century earlier had suffered a crushing defeat at Poltava at the hands of Peter the Great. Frederick distilled from this an everlasting forecast: that anyone who ventured to push east from western Europe without taking due account of the geographical and climatic conditions would be cut off from his supplies and lose any chance of victory. Had Napoleon or Hitler read this text and understood what ominous sequences of events it foresaw, they would never – given the same logistic premises – have embarked upon their Russian campaigns. Instead, at Moscow and Stalingrad respectively they met their Poltava.

It was only the potential destruction of the Soviet Union by atom bombs within thirty minutes from Leningrad to Vladivostok that caught up – albeit not entirely – with Frederick’s forecast. His warning to European powers not to overextend their sphere of control stands undiminished today.

- My third example has to do with the planning of coming events that the planner’s own actions are designed to bring about. Such events are necessarily grounded in prior events which must contain repeatable preconditions for a possible future. In September 1939, Hitler was looking not to unleash a second world war but to avoid one. He wanted a war, but not the war he got. The pact with Stalin was concluded in order to avoid the repetition of the war of 1914. In this, he was successful – particularly in so far as, on the western front, the planned reversal of the First World War was swiftly achieved. When he subsequently changed course and ignited the flames of the war against the Soviet Union he failed to appreciate the lessons of 1709 and 1812, instead contriving to perceive relevance to his plans in three more recent events – history may teach us everything, but that includes the opposite. First, he recalled the years between 1914 and 1917, which, as a result of the two Russian revolutions, brought about a clear defeat for the Tsar and his empire. Second, he could point to the murder of almost the entire Politburo and military leadership, robbing the Soviet Union of its ruling elite. Third, the extent to which this had rendered Russia’s military power impotent appeared to be demonstrated by the humiliating result achieved by Stalin in the campaign he had unleashed against little Finland. And the initial successes on the eastern front
seemed to confirm the relevance of Hitler’s three key facts of recent history.

This example may suffice for the repetitive structures of rational planning, even if Hitler’s war against the Soviet Union (not to mention Britain and the United States) cannot be adequately explained on this rational basis. The blindness of utopian thinking and the fanatical use of terror – against the mentally ill, against Jews, Gypsies, Slavs, and other ‘subhumans’ as defined on eugenic or racial grounds – are beyond the rational criteria advanced here for a planning model.

Our thoughts concerning repetitive structures in history started from two extreme positions: that neither constant repetition nor continual innovation suffices to explain historical change. Both of these mechanisms are required to bring about the pertinent ratios in the mix. Two apparently mutually contradictory conclusions can be drawn from this. Precisely when a situation has to be kept stable it is necessary, so far as possible, to change the conditions under which it originally came about. Conversely we find that a situation will be more likely to change if the conditions that brought it about remain stable over time.

Why this should be may perhaps be arrived at by reference to our sets of examples. Because of the differing pace of change in what are, in the chronological sense, synchronic sequences of events – whether political, military, social, mental, religious, or economic – there are also analytically distinct repetitive structures, which in turn have an effect on the sequences of events. To stay with geological metaphors, which is perhaps not without some deeper relevance given our dependence on the history of the earth, this is bound to lead to shifts, fractures, cracks and eruptions as well as revolutions.

(e) Be that as it may, the metaphor brings us to our final question, namely the question of repetitive structures in language. All metaphors, taking the term in its widest sense, demonstrate that the potential for a comparison in a turn of phrase must be known in advance not only to the speaker but to the listener too if it is to be understood and conveyed at all. The superficially nonsensical sentence ‘Alexander was a lion’ can be understood only by one who can complete the analogy, i.e. one who knows that Alexander fought like a lion: courageously, bravely, or victoriously. Regardless of the polyinterpretable origins of such a metaphor in terms of ethnology and the psychology of language, it depends on linguistic knowledge and its repeated application to be effective. This is a universal rule. No sentence, whether spoken or written, can be understood if it is not
founded in prior linguistic knowledge, that is, pre-understanding or prejudice in the Gadamerian sense. Even something that is merely new, that which has been newly recognized or discovered, that which was not previously known, can only be turned into knowledge if the language handed down to us allows us to express it.

Of course, there may be a need for purely linguistic innovations to allow completely new phenomena to be understood. This is the kind of thing we see daily in, for example, the formulaic language of atomic physics, genetic engineering, or electronics. But even expressions that are generated purely linguistically, or linguistically immanently, so to speak, i.e. expressions which in turn shift the meanings of neighbouring concepts or which may have a converse effect on syntax or even the entire linguistic system: even such linguistically immanent innovations will only succeed and be understandable if, embedded in the linguistic heritage, they are formed analogously to earlier formations.

The tension between repetition and singular innovation that we have so far seen in the multiplicity of histories also forms the language in the multiplicity of its linguistic, dialectic, geographical, social, historical, or other articulations. Here it may be noted first that the ratio of the pace of change in histories to the pace of change in languages is never $1:1$. This is prohibited from the outset by the duality of all language: on the one hand it refers to the state of things, to objects experienced or not experienced or to thoughts outside itself, on the other hand it is subordinate to its own linguistic rules or innovations. Both aspects refer to each other and in places condition each other, but they never quite converge. The world-constructing referential nature of language on the one hand and its own inherent formative power on the other may have a mutually stimulating effect, but within the extralinguistic histories of the world there is always more, or less, than can be expressed in language – just as, conversely, in every speech before, during, or after a history either more or less is said than is or was actually the case.

After this methodically cogent reservation we may nevertheless essay some statements to shed light on the relationship between repetition and uniqueness in the bilateral interaction between language and history.

It will probably be helpful to distinguish between syntax, pragmatics (or rhetoric), and semantics, since each of these has its own, different, pace of change. Syntax and grammar remain comparatively stable over long periods of time, whereas semantics, by the very nature of the external challenges to which it is exposed, is often called upon to adapt rapidly. However, even a cursory look at political or military history, which proceeds
in what is often a series of punctuated bursts, can tell us something about the recurrently gaping hiatus between the history of events and the history of language. Political change, always to some extent linguistically induced (ex ante) and linguistically recorded (ex post), has a habit of proceeding more swiftly than the linguistic change that may be contained within it but which cannot keep pace with it. Only semantics can be politically coloured, and when semantics has to adapt itself to the language of propaganda, it by no means follows from this that syntax and pragmatics change too. One has only to recall the triumphal semantics of wartime National Socialism, which also intoned the pacifistic style of ‘re-education’, or the crisp staccato speech of the weekly newsreels, a style that lived on long after Germany’s defeat before the newsreel found its new, gentler, and more convincing voice. For quite a while the speech patterns and semantics of the German language survived the country’s political, military, and social collapse, before gradually dying the death of the Nazi regime. Yet despite the spat-out bellicose slogans of wartime Nazi propaganda, the German language per se changed barely at all in the twelve years between 1933 and 1945. It is not words that are responsible for their shades of meaning and the way they are used, but those who use them.

Underlying such time shifts between short-term statements and more enduring linguistic history there is, of course, a general problem that affects any rhetoric that builds on repeatable arguments in order to have a one-time effect. It was pointed out by Heinrich Lausberg: where rhetorical topoi fail to be correctly identified as recurrent but are instead misunderstood as unique or new, they are overvalued; if, on the other hand, they are perceived as repeatable commonplaces, they are undervalued and equally misunderstood. What applies to rhetoric applies all the more to the whole of pragmatics: it is a matter of distinguishing between innovation and repetitive structures, of weighing them up against each other in order to arrive at the correct judgement. It is precisely the unrepeatability of a successful speech or the uniqueness of a new proof that is founded in the art of selecting repeatable and familiar linguistic elements and combining them so that we hear something unique or novel. At the same time it is always important to remember the difference between linguistic form on the one hand and fact on the other. The order to kill, or the approval of a killing, or the news of a death, is not the same as death itself.

What, anthropologically speaking, is a recurrent statement of the truth, viz. that we are all mortal, can be elaborated both linguistically and in reality – how, why, where someone dies – without the language ever being able to catch up with a particular death. This is why, compared with syntax,
semantics more easily and more quickly finds itself involved in matters of proof or crises of credibility. The difference between language and history is ineradicably inherent within semantics. To illustrate this, finally, we may cite an interesting example from German semantic history.

In his translation of the Bible, Luther translated the term berith, meaning the Old Testament alliance between God and his people, by the German word Bund. This was a happy re-invention of a term of what was then recent constitutional history, and denoted, as a collective singular, the institutionalized embodiment of intra-class or inter-class arrangements within the Schmalkaldic League. Though in the late Middle Ages it was of growing importance for the language of law, Luther disambiguated Bund with a theological meaning. A Bund could never be created by men: it could only be established by God. This new theological message completely swamped the word’s legal sense. As a result, in the language of Lutheranism Bund lost its constitutional status; and der Schmalkaldische Bund, as the League is known in our [German] textbooks, never referred to itself by that name. It was a pragmatic secular alliance for the protection of the Protestant faith but it was not a Bund established by God. The explosive, revolutionary mix of politics and theology, as had been embodied in the English covenant, remained, in Germany, suppressed. The extent to which the semantics of the League continued to be permeated with theology – in spite of all the constitutional political and social usages that proliferated in the Enlightenment – is demonstrated by the task that Marx and Engels were given in 1847: they were to write a ‘creed of the League of Communists’. Declining such a theologically tinted commandment to repeat what had been done before, they formulated instead a new, more future-oriented text that was to shake up and overshadow the next century and a half: the Communist Party Manifesto. The creed was replaced by a historical-philosophical ‘manifestation’, and in the place of the divine alliance came an aggressively and deliberately one-sided party that was henceforth in league with history as interpreted by historical philosophy.

So it was that a centuries-old semantic force with its origins in theology was now cut off by an innovative linguistic decree and – for the price of a simple repetition – guided into a new direction. Of course, the old German theological interfacing continued to show through the new Marxian usage. The foreknown passage of God through history, a manifestatio Dei, lent even the new party programme a superficially surprising credibility.

So, too, our last example shows that no innovation, whether linguistic or material, can be so revolutionary that it will not continue to depend on pregiven repetitive structures.
Notes


CHAPTER 4

Unstuck in time. Or: the sudden presence of the past

CHRIS LORENZ

If you could lick my heart, it would poison you.
Yitzhak (Ante) Zuckermann,
second in command during the Warsaw Ghetto uprising (1944) in the film Shoah (1985)

From history to memory

Since 1989, the past is no longer what it used to be, and neither is the academic study of the past – that is the Geschichtswissenschaft. No historian had predicted the total collapse of the Soviet bloc and the sudden end of the Cold War, the ensuing German unification and the radical reshuffling of global power relations. A similar story goes for the other two ‘epochal’ and ‘rupturing’ events of the past two decades: ‘9/11’ and the economic meltdown of 2008. Therefore, academic historians can claim very little credit for their traditional role as the privileged interpreters of the present in its relationship to the past and the future (and it is only a small consolation to know that the social scientists and the economists performed only slightly better on this score).

Maybe even more surprising – or disappointing – is the observation that no historian had imagined the eruptions of the past into the present which started in Eastern-Central Europe directly after 1989 – especially in the form of genocidal war and of ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia.
Suddenly it seemed like the Croats and the Serbs had slipped back into the Second World War.

Through these events both the ‘pastness of the past’ (which had been the constitutive presupposition of academic history since the French revolution) and the capacity of academic history to explain how the past is connected to the present, suddenly lost their ‘evidential’ quality. If burying the dead is equal to creating the past, as Michel de Certeau and Eelco Runia both have argued, their funeral was suddenly interrupted, confronting historians since 1989 with a ‘haunting’ past instead of with a – distant – ‘historical’ past.\(^2\) This change can undoubtedly be connected to an experience of crisis, as Jan-Werner Müller has recently suggested: ‘According to John Keane, “crisis periods …. prompt awareness of the crucial importance of the past for the present. As a rule, crises are times during which the living do battle for the hearts, minds and souls of the dead”. But the dead also seem to be doing battle for the hearts, minds and souls of the living, as the latter often resort during times of crisis to a kind of mythical re-enactment of the past’.\(^3\)

Another constitutive presupposition of academic history since the early nineteenth century – that the nation and the nation-state were the fundamental subjects of history – also lost its plausibility around the same time – as if there was a sudden consciousness that the mass killings of the twentieth century had been caused by nationalisms run wild. Since then, ‘methodological nationalism’ is ‘out’ and debates concerning the question which spatial units should replace the nation in history writing have been rampant. Both sub-national units (cities or city-networks, regions, borderlands, etc.) and supra-national units (like empires, cultures, civilizations, networks, diasporas, or the entire world) have been advertised as such. Therefore, not only the temporal dimension of history has turned into a new object of discussion in academic history after 1989, but also history’s spatial construction, spiraling into discussions about ‘transnational’, ‘global’, and even ‘big’ history.

Last but not least, the relationships between history and politics, history and ethics, and history and justice have resurfaced in unprecedented ways – all problems academic history claimed to have ‘left behind’ by splitting off the ‘historical’ past from the ‘practical’ past when history turned into an ‘autonomous profession’. The attempts to confine academic history to the issues of epistemology and of methodology and to fence it off from the domain of politics and ethics seem to have lost whatever plausibility they had in the second half of the catastrophic twentieth century.
Of course each individual issue had been raised at some point before 1989 and of course national history never had been the only show in university town – most certainly not – but at no time had these questions collectively unsettled academic history to a similar degree. Fundamental questions as regards the ‘the founding myth’ of professional, academic history – its ‘objectivity’ – had started destabilizing academic history from the 1970s onwards in the slipstream of multiculturalism, the ‘cultural wars’, and the ‘politics of identity’ – often referred to collectively under the name of ‘postmodernism’. Class, gender, ethnicity, and race were mobilized successively and successfully in order to undermine the academic historians’ claim to ‘objectivity’. These collective identities fragmented the profession along different fracture lines and opposed history’s ‘objectivity’ to the notion of (class, gender, etc.) ‘experience’ and – increasingly and most fundamentally – to the notion of ‘memory’. Illustrative for these developments was the fact Peter Novick’s debunking book on the American historical professions claim to ‘objectivity’ was rewarded with the AHA Prize in 1988.4

The notion of memory became the common denominator for anchoring the past in collective experiences of specific groups. Especially traumatic or catastrophic memories became the privileged window on the past since the 1980s. Wulf Kansteiner formulates the present predicament of ‘memory studies’ as follows: The predominance of traumatic memory and its impact on history is [...] exemplified by the increasing importance since the 1970s of the Holocaust in the ‘catastrophic’ history of the twentieth century. Despite an impressive range of subject matter, memory studies thrive on catastrophes and trauma and the Holocaust is still the primary, archetypal topic in memory studies. [...] Due to its exceptional breadth and depth Holocaust studies illustrate the full range of methods and perspectives in event-oriented studies of collective memory, but we find similar works analyzing the memory of other exceptionally destructive, criminal and catastrophic events, for instance World War II and fascism, slavery, and recent genocides and human rights abuses. Especially with regard to the last topic attempts to establish the historical record of the events in question and the desire to facilitate collective remembrance and mourning often overlap. In comparison, the legacy of relatively benign events is only rarely considered in contemporary studies of collective memory.5

In the following contribution I will analyse some of the implications of the rise of memory for history as an academic discipline in the beginning of the twenty-first century. Basically I will argue that the rise of memory necessitates reflection both on the frames of representation of academic
history – especially on its temporal and spatial frames – and on its political and ethical entanglements.

My analysis starts with going back to the origins of academic history in the early nineteenth century and its connection to the nation/state. In the first section I argue that academic history presupposed a specific conception of space – that of the nation-state – and that it identified history with the process of nation formation. I also argue that the specific claim of academic history to ‘objectivity’ was directly based on and thus dependent on this spatial unit.

In the second section I argue that academic history was based on a specific conception of time – that of linear, irreversible and teleological time. Following Koselleck and Hartog I interpret this time conception in terms of the ‘modern regime of historicity’ and with Agamben I locate the origins of this ‘modern’ time conception in a mixture of the Greek and the Christian ideas of time. I also argue that the academic conception of history as the process of nation formation is based on this ‘modern’ time conception. Last but not least I argue that the storyline of national history is derived from the narrative structure of the Christian bible and that both imperial histories and class histories can be regarded as sub-genres of national histories in this respect.

In the third section I argue with Nora and Hartog that the rise of memory studies in the 1980s is related to the fall of national history and that this development can best be explained in terms of a change of the ‘modern’ to the ‘presentist’ regime of historicity. Because their analysis of presentism does not confront the catastrophic or traumatic character of the present past explicitly, however, their diagnosis of ‘presentism’ is missing important characteristics. With Spiegel, Langer, Bevernage, and Chakrabarty I argue that the recognition of ‘historical wounds’ is an essential ingredient of ‘presentism’ and that this presupposes a time conception which is not ‘erasive’ and which can explain duration.

In the fourth section I go into some of the implications of my amended version of ‘presentism’ (which could be called ‘catastrophic presentism’) for academic history. Two implications are emphasized. First, given the fact that the claim of academic history to be ‘objective’ is damaged beyond repair, the ideal of ‘resurrecting the past’ must be abandoned for a systematic reflection on the representational forms of history. The recent debates about the spatial alternatives to national history in transnational, imperial and global history can be interpreted as examples of this type of reflection. Second, however, given the fact that the catastrophes in twentieth-century history are present in such a manner that they have
undermined the claim that academic history can keep ‘distance’ from them, academic history needs to reflect on its own political and ethical investments. In Holocaust historiography, these issues have already made it to the agenda. A reflexive academic history in the twenty-first century can no longer afford to be only academic. Therefore I argue that a reflexive kind of history writing does not only need to problematize its (epistemological) choices of representation, but also its political and ethical investments.

I. The rise of academic history and the rise of the nation-state

Traditionally, history’s identity as an academic discipline has been explicated in epistemological and in methodological terms, that is, in terms of its truth claim, based on its source critical methods and its archival foundation. The origin of this idea was usually ascribed to the founders of what is known as the ‘Historical School’ in Germany: Barthold Georg Niebuhr, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and, last but not least, to Leopold von Ranke. Therefore it was not surprising that the spread of academic history over the rest of the globe was usually attributed to the spread of Rankean ideas and of Ranke’s pupils – a diffusionist and Europe-centric picture for sure (with the United States and Japan as the extra-European model cases). During the last decades, however, this diffusionist picture of ‘scientific’ history, originating in Berlin, has been seriously questioned. Not only the Antiquarians and the Enlightenment thinkers have increasingly been recognized as important origins of academic history – by Momigliano, Iggers, and Grafton, among others – but recently also history’s exclusive European origins have been questioned. Edward Wang, for instance, has argued that, fully independent of Europe, methods and traditions of ‘evidential learning’, similar to those of the Antiquarians, have been developed in the Japanese, Chinese, and Islamic cultures. Thus although for instance Japan and China actually did ‘import’ Rankean ideas about ‘scientific’ history in the nineteenth and twentieth century, this does not imply that Rankean ideas about history were the only ones around and the only ones effective. Transnational transfers of ideas rarely produce only ‘copies’ of the original, instead usually producing ‘local’ adaptations.

However this may be, the spectacular rise of academic history as an institution is usually explained by the direct connection between the professionalization of history at the one side and the nation-state at the other.
Therefore academic history was basically conceived of as national history, although in practice other varieties of history – like ecclesial, legal and local history – continued to exist by its side. Moreover, quite a few nations defined themselves as imperial nations, so the differences between national and imperial histories were rather a matter of degree than of a kind.\(^9\)

This case for the ‘special connection’ between academic history and the nation-state been emphasized again recently by prominent experts in historiography. ‘The rise of professional scholarship and of new “scientific” history it generated were closely related to the strong currents of nationalism’, Georg Iggers recently observed (although this of course does not mean that Ranke was a German nationalist).\(^10\) Similar observations have been made by Daniel Woolf who signals a broad consensus among both the national historians and their (subaltern) critics about the crucial importance of the nation for academic history: ‘History is the principal mode whereby non-nations were converted into nations’ (declaims Prasenjit Duara). ‘Nations emerge as the subjects of History just as History emerges as the ground, the mode of being, of the nation’. Others concur: ‘There is no way’, one scholar has asserted (without apparent awareness of his silent extrapolation beyond the West), ‘to write a non-national history. The national framework is always present in the historiography of modern European societies’ – and Woolf adds, ‘The qualifier “European” may be unnecessary’, quoting historians from outside Europe. Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gérard Bouchard, and Stefan Berger can be named as further support for Woolf’s conclusion concerning the omnipresence of the national framework in history writing outside Europe.\(^11\)

For most academic historians of the nineteenth century, identification with their state and nation (or ‘people’, ‘race’, and ‘tribes’, all of which were used as synonyms of ‘nation’) only seemed natural, because they identified the historical process itself with the genesis and development of nations and ‘their’ states.\(^12\) Through this (Herderian) identification, national history appeared as the adequate representation of the historical process – as its ‘natural mode of being’, in Woolf’s words. As far as world or ‘universal’ history was concerned, it was primarily conceived as a ‘sum’ of national histories and therefore typically as a project for the future. It was no accident that Ranke only turned to world history – characteristically meaning the history of Europe for him – at the very end of his long career – in the 1880s. The attempts at ‘world history’ originating in the Enlightenment were rejected as ‘philosophical’ – as not based on archival research and thus basically as premature syntheses without a foundation in ‘scientific’ analyses.\(^13\)
Through this identification of the process of nation formation with history itself (that is the fusion of romantic ethnic nationalism and historism) national historians could also see their histories as ‘truthful’ and/or as ‘objective’. The discourse of ‘objective’ history and the discourse of the nation/state were intimately connected from the second half of the nineteenth century: striving after ‘objectivity’ was conceived as leaving ‘partisanship’ behind in terms of religious and political affiliations within the national arena. This connection explains why most historians regarded ‘the’ point of view of ‘the nation’ as the ‘objective’ point of view and why they did not experience a tension between their striving after ‘objectivity’ and their role as ‘half-priests and half-soldiers’ of their nation.14

Similar presuppositions would later support the Marxist identification of history with the process of ‘class formation’ and of ‘class struggle’. Marxist historians, too, would see themselves as ‘half priests and half soldiers’ of their (socialist) ‘nation’ – that is: of the proletarian class. And they, too, would conceive of history as an ‘objective’, teleological process – in their case, of the ‘classless society’ in the making. Eric Hobsbawm’s early publications such as Primitive Rebels (1959, 1971) and Bandits (1969) furnish good examples of how this class view structures historical narratives. It therefore makes good sense to view the Marxist concept of class on the model of the nation and to view the ‘classless society’ as ‘the nation of workers’ in the making. Therefore, for social historians too, there was no way to write ‘non-national’ history – and this holds both for the ‘blends’ of national and of class history produced by the social-democratic tradition in Europe as for the ‘pure’ class histories by the later communist traditions.15

The ‘objectification’ of the nation-state by academic history was codified in the ‘founding myth’ of Rankean history, that is, in its epistemological claim to describe the past ‘as it really was’ (‘wie es eigentlich gewesen’) and in its methodological claim to be beyond any form of partisanship, that is to be ‘objective’. This combination of a truth claim (in contrast to all fictional genres) and a claim to ‘objectivity’ (in contrast to all non-academic, ‘partisan’ genres of history) has been the characteristic of most academic history ever since.16 Max Weber’s defence of the Wertfreiheitspostulat and of the ‘objectivity’ of the social sciences had the very same double foundation. Critics of academic history and of the Wertfreiheitspostulat therefore have usually questioned one of these two claims, or both.

On closer analysis, the claim to objectivity represents the ‘hidden bridge’ between academic history and politics, because according to Rankean theory, history’s ‘objectivity’ is institutionally safeguarded by the impartial nation-state against all ‘partisan’ interests. The nation-state does
so by financing and thus by professionalizing its historians. By doing this the nation-state releases them – at least in theory – from both ‘amateurism’ and frees them from economic dependence on ‘partisan’ interests, as had been the case in earlier ecclesial and court histories, thus installing its historians with the ‘objective’ authority to speak about the past. So the methodological identification of academic history with ‘objectivity’ was implicitly connected to the political theory of the ‘supra-partisan’ nation-state, including the assumption that state archives were the primary storehouses of ‘realistic’ information for historians.\(^{17}\) So, remarkably, Foucault’s theory that epistemology and politics (‘power/knowledge’) are always ‘blended’ in ‘truth regimes’ appears to have some foundation in the case of academic history.\(^{18}\)

It is thus not accidental that academic history and the institution of centralized state archives have developed hand in hand during the post-Napoleonic period: the archive came to be seen as the historian’s only true workshop.\(^{19}\) Accordingly, those historians who would later explicitly reject the theory of the impartial state, ranging from the Prussian School in the later nineteenth century and all other proponents of explicit nationalism (e.g. in the Volksgeschichte) to most proponents of Marxism in the twentieth century, have usually rejected the idea of history’s ‘objectivity’ and opted for some explicit form of ‘objective’ partisanship. Many nationalist historians simply regarded furthering ‘the cause of the nation’ as legitimated by the ‘objective’ course of history. Likewise, Marxists who thought that their partisanship could be founded in history’s ‘objective’ teleology characteristically claimed to subscribe to an ‘objective’ partisanship or an ‘objective’ class perspective (‘objektiver Klassenstandpunkt’).\(^{20}\)

The same logic explains why historians critical of the idea of the impartial state have recently deconstructed the theory of impartial state archives containing impartial documents as the raw material of academic history. For post-dictatorial and post-colonial states this theory held little credibility anyhow.\(^{21}\) As Marlene Manoff has recently summarized: ‘The methods for transmitting information shape the nature of the knowledge that can be produced. Library and archival technology determine what can be archived and therefore what can be studied. Thus Derrida claims ‘archivization produces as much as it records the event’.\(^{22}\) Criticizing the theory of state impartiality as an ideological concealment of power relations, subaltern historians subscribe to Foucault’s theory that knowledge and power are inextricably interrelated. This clearly held for the colonial setting, and it can and has been argued that similar mechanisms are at work in the national setting.
2. The modern regime of historicity and the nation-state

As the nation became the almost ‘natural’ spatial framework of academic history – replacing the older frameworks of the dynastical state and of religious history – history’s temporal framework also changed fundamentally. In order to characterize specific constellations between the dimensions of the past, the present, and the future in history, Francois Hartog has coined the concept ‘regime of historicity’ in this context: ‘The regime of historicity […] could be understood in two ways. In a restricted sense, as the way in which a society considers its past and deals with it. In a broader sense, the “regime of historicity” designates the “method” of self-awareness in a human community’ [-]. More precisely, the concept provides an instrument for comparing different types of history.23

Following Koselleck, Hartog signalizes a transition from the ‘classical regime of historicity’ – captured by Cicero’s formula historia magistra vitae, with the past being exemplary for the present and the future – to the ‘modern’ regime of historicity around 1800. Instead of the past being authoritative for the present in the form of practical exempla, after the French Revolution, the future became the point of orientation – in the form of a telos in the making, especially ‘the nation-state’ in the making – and therefore national history is intrinsically connected with the idea of a ‘special mission’ of each nation resulting in its ‘special path’ in history. This way of viewing history became possible only after history was no longer seen as a collection of stories about the past and after history had been ‘objectified ‘ into a real process with an origin and a telos of its own.24 Later on in the nineteenth century we observe the same development in class history, when Marx and Marxists designated ‘the classless society’ in the making as history’s telos and class struggle and the special ‘mission of the proletariat’ as the ‘motor’ of the historical process, originating in the birth of class society.25

This change in regimes of historicity implied a fundamental change in the relationship between the three dimensions of time. As far as the ‘lessons of history’ under the ‘modern’ regime of historicity are concerned, Hartog argued, ‘If there is any lesson, it comes, so to speak, from the future, no longer from the past’26 (fig. 4.1-4.5).

Under the ‘modern’ regime of historicity, historical time is transformed into teleological time, because history itself transforms into the process in which (‘real’ or ‘historical’) nations are originating and developing in the direction of autonomous statehood – or not: that is in the case of ‘failed’
nations which didn’t pass the ‘threshold-principle’. Therefore under the ‘modern’ regime of historicity, national history is typically represented as a process of progress towards political autonomy alias statehood of the nation – or, less typically, in its inverted form, as a process of decline and of loss of political autonomy and statehood of the ‘failed’ nation.

In order to analyse this notion of time we can best follow Giorgio Agamben in tracing its roots. According to Agamben the conception of time in Western history derives from two sources: from the Greek cyclical conception of time and the Christian conception of irreversible linear time. Both ideas conceive of time in geometrical or in spatial terms: for the Greeks, time basically was a moving point on a circle and Christianity conceived of time as a moving point on a straight line. Although Christian thinking replaced the Greek cyclical representation of time by a linear representation, and also replaced the Greek directionlessness of time with a direction and a – Godly – purpose, or telos, it retained Aristotle’s definition of ‘fleeting’ time as ‘a quantified and infinite continuum of precise fleeting instants’. In this view, time is something objective and natural that envelops things that are ‘inside’ it: just as each thing inhabits a place, so it inhabits time. Simultaneously, the Christian conception of time, having a direction, implied that the flow of time became irreversible.
The modern ‘academic’ conception of time thus is a secularized version of the rectilinear, irreversible Christian time conception, stripped of its notion of an end and reduced to the idea of a structured process. Process – also known as temporal flow – therefore became the central notion of academic history, with a hidden connection to the notion of ‘progress’ as the teleological substitute of God in the secular versions of history.

Because time is conceived as a continuum of fleeting moments – or in other words, as a flux or a flow of discrete points – time is destructive of the here and now, as it ‘passes by’ and ‘carries’ it ‘away’, just like a flowing river carries away everything it contains. ‘Fleeting’ time by itself creates distance between the present and the past, by the very act of ‘flowing’. Therefore Herodotus justifies his writing of Histories with the stated intention ‘that time may not erase men’s undertakings’. Given the destructive or erasive character of ‘flowing’ time, both history and memory are always threatened by time. ‘It is the destructive character of time which Histories wishes to combat, thereby confirming the essentially ahistorical nature of the ancient concept of time’. 29

Only this ‘modern’ conception of ‘flowing’, teleological time, enabled historians to evaluate and explain developments and events (like revolts and revolutions) in national histories in terms of being ‘timely’ (‘successes’), or
as being ‘untimely’: as coming (too) ‘late’ or as coming (too) ‘early’ (‘failures’). In several cases, national histories have merged with histories of empire (e.g. Great Britain and Russia), but since imperial histories usually have also been modelled on one hegemonic nation, they too can be seen as a variant of national history. Similarly, national histories could also have an ‘imperial’ structure when they revolved around one hegemonic region within ‘the nation’ (e.g. Prussia within Germany in the nineteenth century or Holland within the Dutch Republic). The same teleological time conception can be found in class histories, also allowing for judgements of historical ‘success’ and ‘failure’.

National histories in Europe can be typified with the help of eight ideal-typical characteristics. These characteristics were most outspoken in their nineteenth-century versions, but usually persisted well into the twentieth century.

First of all, a special character or a unique national identity has been claimed for each nation in relation to other nations. The unique national identity could be represented in terms of ethnicity (including a mix of several ethnic entities like tribes), in terms of religious affiliation, in terms of race, in political terms (e.g. state – nations) or as mixes of the aforementioned criteria.

Second, such a unique identity was claimed on the basis of the exclusion of others. Each nation was defined primarily by delineating it from either internal foes/enemies and/or from other nations – usually neighbouring nations, which were often physically present in the form of minorities within the claimed territorial borders of the nation. National identity was primarily established by negating other nations and other groups within the nation.

Third, as a result of constructions of friend-foe relationships between nations, wars and battles have furnished the dominant storylines for many national histories. Smaller nations, however, could also construct their histories around some kind of mediating role they claimed between larger nations (e.g. the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Belgium).

Fourth, the identity of the nation was located in the common origins of its members and in their shared history ever since. All members of a nation were represented as sharing common glories and common victories, often presented as reasons for pride, and of common sufferings. This shared national history was usually exemplified in a common set of national heroes, martyrs, and villains. These also imply a gender dimension. Historiographical struggles over national identity therefore always include struggles over the nations’ origins.
Fifth, as the history of a nation was represented as continuity from its origins to the present, a nation was typically represented as always having been there. Its original identity is preserved through changes in time, although it may have been interrupted for long stretches of time, thereby creating the problem of continuity. The problem of continuity also arises in historiography when political ruptures change the accepted representations of continuity and parts of a nation’s history are rejected afterwards (e.g. the Nazi period in German history and/or the Communist period in many Central Eastern European states). Usually, the temporal structure of national history follows the Christian/Hegelian pattern: a phase of original birth and of flowering of an *Urvolk* is followed by a phase of existential threat, decline, and/or ‘death’, and ending in the – conscious and intentional – ‘rebirth’ or ‘resurrection’ of the nation. So the basic temporal pattern is one of progress amidst periods of decline.

Sixth, many nations were represented as a person (male/female) or as a family. Representations of nations therefore implied gendering. Nations, for instance, could be represented as being raped by other nations or could be rescued by heroes and/or heroines.

Seventh, a nation was essentially represented as a harmonious unity and only existing as a unity. This is already implied by the family model of the nation, but also by the family model of the multi-ethnic empires. In this sense, multi-ethnic empires were often represented as ‘a family of families’, headed by the ‘father’ of the hegemonic nation. The lesson of national history was unequivocally ‘united we stand, divided we fall’. This lesson was the implicit or explicit practical function of the study of national history, professional and otherwise. The nation itself knew of no internal dividing lines – and therefore national historians often discredited class history. The struggle against foreign oppression was usually represented as the struggle for internal freedom for the nation as a whole.

Eighth, a nation was usually represented as serving the cause of justice: ‘God is on our side’ held for each nation. Many nations claimed a special relationship with God including a special ‘protective’ Christian mission vis-à-vis non-Christian ‘intruders’ – usually Muslims. Nationalism has therefore been plausibly interpreted as the nationalisation of Christianity.31

It would take the two world wars before the future turned into a serious problem for historians – the identification of history itself with the ‘progressive’ development of individual nations and ‘their’ states in particular. It would take the Holocaust to discredit all essentialist notions of ethnicity, nationality, and race – including all ideas of ‘special missions’ and of privileged positions vis-à-vis others. After 1945, all essentialist forms of
ethical particularism lost their argumentative ground to ethical universalism – at least on the level of discursive legitimation. The acceptance by the UN of the ‘Declaration of Universal Human Rights’ in 1948 is often seen as the ‘point of no return’ in this respect. Another forty-five years – until 1990 with the implosion of the Soviet bloc and with the end of the Cold War – was needed to discredit similar essentialist notions of class. All conceptions of collective identity – from ‘the nation’ and ‘ethnicity’ to ‘class’, ‘gender’, and ‘religion’ in academic history have been deconstructed increasingly since the 1970s as social and political constructions.

With the deconstruction of all essentialisms, the very idea of History with a capital H was discredited, and with it the very idea of ‘objective’ origins and of ‘objective’ teleology. Since then, every origin and telos in history is being recognized as ‘man-made’. So, after almost two centuries of linear and teleological temporality in the form of essentialist historicism and essentialist nationalism, academic history is now forced to reflect on its notions of time again.

Given the intimate connection between the temporal and the spatial framework of academic history, it is not accidental that the ‘collapse of the future’ and the ‘collapse of the nation’ went hand in hand. At the latest since 1990, academic history is confronted by the ever-rising tide of world, global history, and transnational history. Whatever the exact meaning of those terms, they all clearly express the supranational wish to go beyond the nation-state. The very same holds for the discourse on ‘regionalisation’ and on ‘borderlands’ as subnational ways beyond the nation. Charles Maier’s recent introduction of the concept of ‘regimes of territoriality’ in history is therefore very ‘timely’. The fact that simultaneously discussions have been going on about the need to ‘Europeanize’ national histories in Europe – journals devoted to ‘European’ history are definitely a growth-industry – have certainly added momentum to this fundamental questioning of the nation state as the fundamental spatial frame of history. All this does of course not imply that national history has become a threatened species in practice – far from it – but only that it has lost its place as the unquestioned hegemonic form of academic history.

The questioning of the nation-state as the dominant spatial framework of academic history unsurprisingly also has led to a questioning of history’s traditional claims to ‘objectivity’. Earlier on I already pointed at the subaltern critique of the conception of the ‘impartial’ state, but similar fundamental critiques of hegemonic forms of partisan ‘bias’ built into academic history have been formulated by ‘others’ since the 1970s – ‘biases’ which were not recognized as impediments to writing academic history.
before. In the case of Ranke and of Von Humboldt, for instance, subscribing explicitly to the Christian religion had long not been regarded as being ‘partisan’ and as threatening history’s ‘objectivity’. For most historians well into the twentieth century, nationality simply implied a specific (state-) religion. Nor had subscribing explicitly to the cause of the (German) nation/state been regarded as such by most of the ‘Neo-Rankeans’ later on, nor to a purely Eurocentric worldview, nor to a (male) gender-biased or a (bourgeois) class-biased worldview. The very same held for the academic historians outside Germany, so in retrospect, the discourse in academic history concerning the identification of ‘biases’ and ‘partisanship’ (threatening history’s ‘objectivity’) just represents shifting boundaries between what could be stated and what not could be stated ‘academically’. Although this process of change has often been interpreted as a sign of the discipline’s ‘progress’ – due to the decrease of ‘biases’ – as a result of these combined critiques the long and happy marriage between the nation-state and academic history was showing serious symptoms of dissolution since the 1970s – or at least so it seemed.

3. **The rise of memory and the crisis of academic history: the transition from the ‘modern’ to the ‘presentist’ regime of historicity**

According to the analysis developed above, the spectacular rise of gender, ethnicity, religion, and, to a lesser extent, class as frameworks in history since the 1970s all testify to the declining significance of the nation as the ‘natural’ framework of academic history. The same has been argued for the rise of global, world, and transnational frameworks since the 1990s. However this may be, from the 1980s onwards and especially after 1990, another development can be observed which is undermining ‘the nation’ and, by implication, the ‘modern’ regime of historicity and the related conceptions of academic history: the rise of ‘collective memory’ studies. According to Jay Winter, collective memory even has taken the place in historical studies formerly held by the notions of race, class, and gender, so there are good reasons to reflect on this line of argument next.  

Specialists of memory studies all agree that the beginning of the ‘memory boom’ can be dated to the 1980s and that Pierre Nora’s *lieux de mémoire* project has played a pivotal role in it. They also tend to agree that the ‘memory boom’ and the ‘heritage boom’ are directly related – that is, the sudden displacement of ‘history’ by ‘memory’, ‘heritage’, and
‘patrimony’. This displacement is a clear sign that the relationship to the past in Europe is changing in a significant way since the 1980s and that academic historians are losing their privileged, specialist position as the interpreters of the (national) past to others – especially to the media – although there are divergent diagnoses in play here.

Hartog, for one, does not regard the 1980s, but ‘1990’ as the beginning of a new ‘regime of historicity’: the ‘presentist’ regime of historicity. He locates the origins of presentism in the crumbling of the Berlin Wall and in the dissolution of the Soviet Empire. In Hartog’s phrasing: ‘Historia magistra presented history, or supposedly did so, from the point of view of the past. On the contrary, in the modern regime, history was written, teleologically, from the point of view of the future. Presentism implies that the point of view is explicitly and only that of the present’. According to Hartog ‘presentism’ after 1990 is the consequence of the ‘collapse of the future’ and of the linear, ‘progressive’ time conception that has been underpinning national histories at least since Ranke’s days and which it shared with previous Enlightenment histories of ‘civilisation’ and with Christian history.

Although Pierre Nora does not use the concept of ‘presentism’ he clearly shares Hartog’s basic diagnosis. Moreover, he suggests explicitly that there is a direct connection between the rise of memory and the fall of – national – history. As long as history was predominantly national history, the communities carrying memory and history coincided in ‘the nation’ and there was no opposition between history and memory, and neither was there an opposition between favouring ‘the cause of the nation’ and history’s claim to ‘objectivity’. Characteristic for this – temporary – ‘symbiosis’ of history and memory beginning in the nineteenth century was ‘a tone of national responsibility assigned to the historian – half preacher, half soldier. […] The holy nation thus acquired a holy history: through the nation our memory continued to rest upon a sacred foundation.’ So in Nora’s eyes ‘the nation’ is the only possible spatial framework in (French) history. After ‘the nation’ had lost its ‘natural’ position academic history is therefore doomed to ‘fragmentation’.

Patrick Hutton has developed a similar argument to Nora, explaining why ‘memory’ was not perceived as a problem by historicism before the 1980s: ‘Historicists tended to emphasise the interplay between memory and history. From Jules Michelet in the early nineteenth century to R.G. Collingwood in the early twentieth, collective memory, construed as the living imagination of the historical actors of the past, was perceived to be the subject matter of historical understanding. Often sympathising with the political traditions they studied, particularly that vaunted the nation state as
Unstuck in time. Or: the sudden presence of the past

an instrument of progress, and historicists regarded history as an evocation of memory’s insights. They studied history so as to recreate in the present the past as it had originally been imagined. In evoking the images in which the world was once conceived, they taught, historians could re-enter that mental universe and so recover the presence of those times. The relationship between memory and history was fluid and uncomplicated’. So according to Nora and Hutton, national history is – or at least was – a form of ‘collective memory’ (or of what used to be called ‘tradition’), that subsequently was undermined by academic history as a form of institutionalized Traditionskritik during the twentieth century – especially in the form of the Annales conception of history of Braudel’s generation, which questioned both politics and the nation as frameworks of ‘scientific’ history. Nora’s distinction between history and memory thus is unambiguously based on – and inspired by – a conservative and nostalgic representation of ‘the Nation’ and of the traditional ‘science of the nation’, that is: national history. With Steven Englund and Eelco Runia it therefore makes sense to seriously question whether Nora’s confusing formulations about the relationship between ‘history’ and ‘memory’ are helpful at all, because they fail to make a workable distinction between the two.

Nevertheless, it is also clear that the ‘memory boom’ and the ‘heritage boom’ have been taking place and that these have changed the parameters of academic history fundamentally since the 1980s. Not the past in itself, but the diverse and conflicting ways in which the past has been experienced and represented by specific groups has moved to the centre of the stage, manifesting itself also in permanent public attention for controversies over monuments, museums, trials, truth commissions, and reparations payments around the world: ‘memory became virtually inescapable in everyday life’ as Rosenfeld argues. Therefore the question should be asked what this change consists of and how far Hartog’s explicit (and Nora’s implicit) analysis of ‘presentism’ is an adequate diagnosis of the changes in the dominant ways of experiencing time.

In a sense it is, but in my view both Hartog and Nora are ‘missing’ a fundamental dimension of the post-1980 ‘presentism’, which has been emphasized by Runia, Kansteiner, Chakrabarty, Bevernage, and Rosenfeld: the fact that ‘presentism’ since 1980 means the presence of a traumatic, catastrophic, and ‘haunting’ past – of a ‘past that won’t go away’ in the apt phrasing of Ernst Nolte. This observation is important because traumatic experience is based on a different time conception than the linear and irreversible time conception that has been underpinning academic history (and Enlightenment history prior to that). If the origin of academic history
has been based on the experience of a rupture or a radical break between
the present and the past – as has been argued by historians as diverse as
Koselleck, Pocock, White, de Certeau, and Ankersmit – it is clear that
traumatic experiences cannot be accounted for by the academic history and
its linear and irreversible conception of time because in trauma the past
stays present (and can return in ‘haunting’ forms). Hartog’s version of
‘presentism’ seems to be underestimating the continuing presence of the
traumatic past and also appears to be overlooking the circumstance that
when ‘the future collapses, the past rushes in’, as John Torpey formulated it.
Hartog concluded that, after the collapse of both socialism and of
nationalism as the two future-oriented ideologies of the twentieth century,
a serious distrust in any political grand scheme intended to plan the future
has grown. This distrust of the future is typically expressed in experiences
of ‘postness’ (e.g. in postmodernity).  

In order to make sense of the widespread experience of catastrophe,
Lawrence Langer’s distinction between ‘chronological time’ and
‘durational time’ may be helpful as a starting point. His point of departure
is Claude Lanzmann’s statement about the Shoah: ‘There is no greater
mistake you can make about the Shoah than to regard it as history’ –
emphasizing the continuing presence of the Holocaust. Langer described
the distinction between chronological and durational time as follows:
‘Chronological time is the “normal” flowing, passing time of “normal”
history while durational time resists precisely the closure – the putting an
end to the past – that chronological time necessarily effects; durational time
persists as a past that will not pass, hence as a past is always present’, as
Gabrielle Spiegel phrased it. It is for this reason that Langer, Spiegel, and
others have argued that the Holocaust has implications for history beyond
Holocaust historiography and this may explain its exceptional general
importance since the 1980s.  

With Chakrabarty it may be useful to introduce the general notion of
‘historical wounds’ in this context in order to make sense of the present
catastrophic predicament of the past. ‘Historical wounds’ are the result of
historical injustices caused by past actions of states which have not been
recognized as such. The genocidal treatment of the ‘First Nations’ by the
colonial states in the former white settler colonies represents a clear
historical example of this category. Quoting Charles Taylor’s analysis of
‘the politics of recognition’ Chakrabarty argues that ‘misrecognition shows
not just a lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its
victims with a crippling self-hatred’. Here it makes good sense to speak,
along with Chakrabarty, of a ‘particular mix of history and memory’.
‘Historical wounds are not the same as historical truths but the latter constitute a condition of possibility of the former. Historical truths are broad, synthetic generalisations based on researched collections of individual historical facts. They could be wrong but they are always amenable to verification by methods of historical research. Historical wounds, on the other hand, are a mix of history and memory and hence their truth is not verifiable by historians. Historical wounds cannot come into being, however, without the prior existence of historical truths’.54

Because ‘historical wounds’ are dependent on the recognition as such by the ‘perpetrator groups’ – usually at the level of ‘their’ state – they are ‘dialogically formed’ and not ‘permanent formations’. As their ‘dialogical formation’ is part of politics, their spatial framework is usually the same as in national histories: the framework of the nation-state. As their formation is group specific and partly the result of politics, the notion of a ‘historical wound’ – like trauma – has predominantly been approached with suspicion in academic history.

Now with the recognition of ‘historical wounds’ and of ‘durational time’, the traditional notion of ‘objectivity’ also becomes problematic, because since Ranke distance in time was regarded as an absolute precondition for ‘objectivity’. Temporal distance and ‘objectivity’ were directly connected because interested ‘partisanship’ (and interested actors) – religious, political, or otherwise – needed time in order to disappear and to give way to supra-partisan perspectives. This transformation from interested ‘partisanship’ to supra-partisan ‘objectivity’ was identified with the change from closure to accessibility of the state archives to historians.

Most historians regarded 50 years’ distance as the absolute minimum for (warm) memory to ‘cool down’ and to transform into (cold) history but 100 years was, of course, safer.55 Temporal distance between the past and the present was also seen as necessary because in historicism the consequences of events and developments – their future dimension or Nachgeschichte, so to speak – must be known before historians can judge and explain them ‘objectively’. This is another reason why the idea of ‘flowing’, linear time was the basis of the traditional idea of ‘objectivity’ in history.

This view on the relation between time and ‘objectivity’ explains the very late birth of contemporary history as a specialisation within academic history. Only in the 1960s – that is: in the aftermath of the Second World War and the Holocaust – did contemporary history slowly gain recognition as a legitimate specialisation of ‘scientific’ history manifesting itself in academic chairs, journals etc.56 Until then, contemporary history was primarily seen as an impossible mix of the past and the present – as a
contradictio in adiecto. Since then contemporary history has been silently accepted by the academic historical profession although its epistemological credentials (including its claim to ‘objectivity’) have never been clarified. With the rise of memory studies – which may be seen as a subspecies of contemporary history because of its focus on the present experience of the past – this clarification seems more urgent than ever.

4. **Picking up pieces of the past under the ‘presentist’ regime of historicity: heritage studies, ‘micro-history’, ‘global history’, and ‘representationalism’ in historiography**

Characteristic of the memory boom and the ‘presentist’ regime of historicity according to both Hartog and Nora is the obsession with the archive and with ‘heritage’ that marks the present age, attempting at once the complete conservation of the present as well as the total preservation of the past. This attempt is indicative of the ambiguity of the borderlines between the past and the present and it is visible in the explosive development of archives, museums and monuments – including archives consisting of recorded oral testimonies. Not knowing what to preserve, one tries to preserve almost everything – forgetting the practical necessity of forgetting.\(^{57}\) In recent years, the surge of patrimony, in phase with that of memory, has grown to a scale that reaches the limit of what could be ‘everything is heritage. […] This is a clear indication that the present is historicizing itself [-] according to Hartog.\(^{58}\) Steven Spielberg’s initiative to record the testimonies of all the survivors of the Holocaust – and similar projects inspired by it elsewhere – seems to support their diagnosis in this respect. Even biotopes and landscapes are archived as ‘sites of memory’ today.\(^{59}\)

Since the nation and its origins no longer confer a unity and continuity to the past, nor a telos in the future, history under the ‘presentist’ regime of historicity therefore tends towards disintegration and discontinuity, according to Nora and Hartog. In Nora’s phrasing: ‘Progress and decadence, the two great themes of historical intelligibility at least since modern times, both aptly express this cult of continuity, the confident assumption of knowing to whom and to what we owe our existence – whence the importance of the idea of “origins” […] It is this relation which has been broken.’\(^{60}\) Instead of the search for identity in the continuity between ‘us’ and ‘our forefathers’, which characterised the ‘modern’ regime of historicity, the search for alterity in the discontinuity between the present
and the past is characteristic for the ‘presentist’ regime of historicity now in place: ‘Given to us as radically other, the past has become a world apart.’ Micro-history and history of everyday life according to Nora are characteristic of this ‘presentist’ consciousness of the alterity of the past. This is, he suggests, a consciousness of alterity paradoxically clothed in the garb of directness (oral literature, quoting informants to render intelligible their voices being the characteristic of these two historical genres); ‘It is no longer genesis that we seek but instead the decipherment of what we are in the light of what we are no longer’. Although neither Nora nor Hartog even mentions global and world history, following their argument, both could also be seen as typical ‘presentist’ genres of history, because like micro-history they seem to privilege the synchronic dimension over the diachronical and thus discontinuity over continuity. The same goes for the growing popularity of ‘network approaches’ in history.

This diagnosis based on Nora and Hartog remains one-sided, however, if we don’t consider the tendencies which point in the opposite direction – that is: genres of history writing reaffirming ‘the nation’, national history, and its continuities. This includes the growth industry of histories of Europe in which the history of the European Union is conceptualized on the model of the (super) nation-state. Although seldom defended in theory, national history still has an overwhelming presence in popular history, in history education – the debates about the ‘historical canon’ are just one symptom in case – but also – mirabile dictu – in memory studies itself. Not only was Nora’s lieux de mémoire project itself fundamentally based on a national framework, as Englund has convincingly argued, but the same goes for all of its copies outside France. A growing number of national states from Luxemburg to Latvia have developed their own ‘sites of memory’ projects in the meantime – within a national framework. So Müller certainly is right in pointing out that in many states – especially those which have been subject to Soviet rule – ‘memory has become shorthand for a glorious past that needs to be regained in the near future (and the ‘near abroad’)’. The circumstance that recently also transnational ‘sites of memory’ are sought after does not alter this basic fact. Therefore the relationship between the memory approach and the national framework remains an ambivalent one because sometimes ‘memory’ looks suspiciously much like an incarnation of national history.

However this may be, Nora is undoubtedly right about at least one characteristic of the ‘presentist’ regime of historicity. I am referring to the total abandonment of the ideal of ‘resurrecting the past’ after the nation lost its status as the natural backbone of history, and to the ‘epistemological’
consequence of this ‘loss’: the central place occupied by the notion of representation. Presentism, according to Nora, means the acknowledgement of the fact that our relationship to the past is inevitably shaped by our present modes of representation.

Hutton has located the renewed interest in narrative in this self-reflective, ‘representational’ stage of historiography, which usually is also connected with the ‘linguistic turn’ in philosophy. This stage started with Hayden White’s Metahistory (1973) which manifested ‘the end of the traditional trust in the ‘transparency’ of narrative and of the ‘uncritical faith of historians in the neutrality of historical narrative, a faith whose bedrock was fact.’

According to Hartog this self-reflective representationalism is the result of the gradual ‘forgetting’ of the past and of the future with the omnipresence of ‘the present’ as a result. “Presentism” pretends to be its own horizon and it tries to shape both the future and the past according to its own image, so to speak, as a-temporal replicas of itself.

Hartog aptly exemplifies the ‘presentist’ condition in the transition from the ‘monument’ to the ‘memorial’, ‘as less of a monument and more a place of memory, where we endeavour to make memory live on, keeping it vivid and handing it on’. Therefore the ‘memory’ being referred to under the ‘presentist’ regime of historicity is not a ‘real’ memory at all: ‘Heritage associations demonstrate the construction of a memory that is not given, and therefore not lost. They work toward the constitution of a symbolic universe. Heritage should not be studied from the past but rather from the present and concerning the present.

Another example – which Hartog does not mention – is the phenomenon of the ‘interactive’ or the ‘experience’ museum which probably represents the future model of all museums. Why would you keep looking at bad black and white pictures taken at, for example, Verdun in 1916 or in Normandy in 1944, if you can have the experience of being virtually present in a muddy trench at Fort Douamont or taking cover behind a dead GI on Omaha Beach? Strange as it may sound, the ‘re-enactment’ and ‘resurrection of the past’ as ideals of academic history may make their ‘comeback’ as ‘living history’ in the experience museum of the future – in the form of digitalized and interactive virtual history.

Like Nora, Hartog emphasizes that the nation-state is no longer under control of ‘history-memory’, because its definition of ‘national history memory’ is ‘rivalled and contested in the name of partial, sectarian or particular memories (groups, associations, enterprises, communities, which all wish to be recognised as legitimate, equally legitimate, or even more legitimate).’ So, if Hartog is right – and given the private origins of
many recent monuments and museums he at least has a point – those
groups which are promoting other ‘codes of difference’ than the nation
have been successful at the end of the twentieth century.

As argued, above Hartog’s analysis of ‘presentism’ appears to be
underestimating the presence of the traumatic past and therefore is in need
of a revision. The reason for revision is that ‘forgetting’ the past and
‘forgetting’ the future cannot be located on the same plane – as Hartog does
– because the (traumatic) past may be ‘haunting’ the present in a way the
future cannot. Although Hartog acknowledges both that the twentieth
century has a catastrophic character, and that ‘presentism’ as a mode of
temporal thinking has serious flaws – because the ‘repressed’ past and
present may ‘return’ – he keeps handling the past and present as equivalent
temporal dimensions. With Torpey, however, I think there are good reasons
to see the ‘return’ of the past and the ‘collapse’ of the future as directly
connected. And with Eelco Runia, Ewa Domanska, and Berber Bevernage I
think that it is about time to turn the ‘presence’ (and the ‘absence’) of the
past into a renewed object of historical and of theoretical reflection.

Hartog illustrates the flaws of presentism with the illuminating
example of the presentist ‘museified gaze’ concerning the Berlin Wall after
1990 (fig. 4.6). The ‘museified gaze’ ‘would like to prepare, starting from

Fig. 4.6. Museumification of the Berlin Wall at the Bernauerstrasse.
today, the museum of tomorrow, assembling today’s archives as if they were already yesterday’s, caught as we are between amnesia and the desire to forget nothing. As soon as the wall was destroyed in 1989-1990, its instantaneous museification began as well as its immediate merchandising. Similar observations could be made related to the former GDR as such (fig. 4.7 and 4.8).

So, although apparently triumphant in the twenty-first century, ‘presentism’ seems fundamentally insecure of itself. In Hartog’s apt phrasing: ‘The past is knocking at the door, the future at the window and the present discovers that it has no floor to stand on’ (fig. 4.9).

Like Nora, Hartog thus interprets the craze for memory and heritage as a sign not of continuity between the present and the past, but as a sign of rupture and of discontinuity due to the acceleration of change; ‘Heritage is one way of experiencing ruptures, of recognising them and reducing them, by locating, selecting, and producing semaphores. […] Heritage is recourse in times of crisis.’

So, if Nora and Hartog’s analyses are correct in connecting the craze for memory and heritage with the experience of rupture and of crisis – as I think they are – memory and patrimony appear to be the clear winners in their competition with academic history since the end of the twentieth century. After almost two centuries, distance in time – which until the 1960s was regarded as a precondition of writing academic history and thus for being a ‘professional’ historian – apparently has very little left to recommend itself. As Hartog observes; ‘The past attracts more than history; the presence of the past, the evocation and the emotions win out over keeping a distance and mediation’. The touristification and the commodification of the past fit perfectly in this picture of vanishing distance.
Fig. 4.8. Check Point Charlie as a tourist museum.

Fig. 4.9. The ‘presentist condition’ of history: ‘no floor to stand on’.
So, all in all, after ‘1990’ both the past and the future seem to have collapsed as points of orientation, so to speak – and as a consequence academic history is stuck in the present and is in need of coming to terms with the presence of a catastrophic past. Indicative of this ‘collapse’ is, as was argued earlier, that both the temporal and the spatial frames of academic history have turned into topics of fundamental reflection and debates (which sometimes are referred to as the ‘spatial’ and the ‘temporal turn’). The earlier debates about micro-history and the ongoing debates about transnational, comparative, global, and world history all indicate that the nation-state is no longer the self-evident backbone – the spatial frame – of history, although the place of national history in history education is still quite strong. With the questioning of the nation-state, the ‘progressive’ future orientation of academic history is on the agenda, too – unless historians will develop an exclusive preference for histories of decline, that is: for the inverted forms of linear ‘progressive’ history. The renewed interest in histories of disintegrating empires should remind us that this is a real option to deal with anxieties about the future. In this context one could think of the bestselling imperial histories written by Niall Ferguson, Paul Kennedy, and Norman Davies (fig. 4.10).

The only sensible thing academic historians can do under the ‘presentist’ condition, according to Hartog, is to reflect on their own temporal and representational position in a comparative way and to argue for it explicitly. This does, of course, not ‘cure’ their temporal and representational condition, but makes it at least self-reflective.

A similar self-reflective approach to history has been proposed by Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann in their proposal for a *histoire*...
croissée (‘crossed history’ or ‘entangled history’): ‘In contrast to the mere restitution of an “already there”, histoire croissée places an emphasis on what, in a self-reflective process, can be generative of meaning’. ‘Histoire croissée raises the question of its own historicity through a threefold process of historification: through the object, the categories of analyses, and the relationship between the researcher and object’.

Interestingly, Hartog ends his reflections on academic history by returning to its origin, that is: to national history: ‘How should we write national history without reactivating the patterns of nineteenth century historiography: that is to say, the close association of progress and the nation (the nation as progress and history as progress of the nation), or without presenting the nation as a paradise lost? It is here that it would be especially useful to be able to reopen the past, and look at it as a set of possible pasts which were at one time possible future and to show how the way of the national state, with its national or nationalist historiography, generally won out’.

Hartog does not indicate what the alternatives for national histories would look like, nor is he very specific about the form that historiographical self-reflexivity should take. I think it is possible to be more precise than Hartog in this respect, among others by drawing on the debates in transnational and global history and by drawing a lesson from the history of national history writing. The basic track to follow suggested here is, I think, to analyse and historicize the conceptual frames in history in their epistemological, political, and ethical struggles with competing frames – thus in a sense taking Foucault’s idea of power/knowledge seriously. In case of the national frame of history – which, as argued above, has been regarded as the ‘natural’ frame by academic historians for almost two centuries – this implies conceptualising the alternatives for national history in a systematic way by tracing them over time in their competition and struggle with national histories.

From the political point of view a self-reflexive approach would mean to take the politics of history seriously in at least three senses. First, this implies to acknowledge and to analyse the inherent political dimension of academic history through its inherent connection to the state. This implies a farewell to the traditional idea that there is any direct connection between the state and ‘supra-partisanship’ or ‘objectivity’. The deconstruction of the ‘neutral’ notion of the state archive is a case in point.

Second, it means to acknowledge and analyse the discipline of history itself as a ‘disciplinary field’ in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu and of Michel Foucault, in which the struggle for power manifests itself in the vocabulary
of epistemology and of methodology. In short, this means to analyse all definitions of boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate statements in a discipline as ‘essentially contested’ and therefore as inherently political.

Third, it means to analyse the ‘politics of time’, because the temporal demarcations used in history (e.g. ‘progressive’ and ‘backward’, ‘timely’ and ‘untimely’) are as politically contested as the spatial demarcations (e.g. ‘national’, ‘European’ and ‘colonial’). Remarkably, the issue of ‘chronopolitics’ until now has primarily been addressed by anthropologists and not by historians. Bevernage, however, has recently been addressing this issue up front.

From the ethical point of view a self-reflexive approach in history would imply taking the ethics of history seriously – and not just as a side dish for special festival occasions or as a hobby of some reflexive emeriti. The catastrophic practical consequences in the twentieth century of all sorts of ethical particularism (especially in their ethnic, national, racial, and class variants) have created the ‘historical wounds’ I referred to earlier on and have caused the overwhelming presence of a traumatic past in the twentieth century. In this way the ‘exclusion of The Other’ has moulded the catastrophic history we are facing in the twenty-first century. Therefore the ‘inclusion of The Other’ – usually in the form of including the perspectives of all sides involved in histories – are on the agenda of history for some time now and so is the issue of universal human rights. Because the very recognition of ‘historical wounds’ is dependent on the recognition of universal human rights, the politics of recognition are constitutive of the very subject matter of academic historians. Antoon de Baets certainly has a point in naming the Declaration of Universal Human Rights (1948) one of the most important texts also for present-day historians.

From the epistemological point of view, a self-reflective approach in history would imply a reconstruction and deconstruction of the frames of representation which are competing with each other in history. Epistemologically self-reflective history would pursue the same objectives that Arif Dirlik has formulated for world history: ‘My rehearsal of the historicity, boundary instabilities, and internal differences – if not fragmentations – of nations, civilisations, and continents is intended to underline the historiographically problematic nature of [world] histories organized around such units. These entities are products of efforts to bring political or conceptual order to the world – political and conceptual strategies of containment, so to speak. This order is achieved only at the cost of
suppressing alternative spatialities and temporalties, however, as well as covering over processes that went into their making. A [world] history organized around these entities itself inevitably partakes of these same suppressions and cover-ups.’

So just like Hartog and Werner/Zimmermann, Dirlik argues that only through the historification of the representational codes and of the conceptual frameworks of history, can their contingency and their relationships with suppressed alternatives be restored. If there is no way out of our ‘presentist’ condition – and this appears to be the conclusion following from the arguments developed in this article – the best we can do is to face it and reflect on its consequences for the ways in which we are dealing with the past.

Notes

1. Samuel Huntington, who had predicted ‘a clash of civilisations’ in 1993, was a political scientist.
5. Wulf Kansteiner Compare Pierre Nora’s statement ‘whoever says memory says Shoah’, cited in Müller (ed.), Memory and Power, 14. Given the paradigmatic role of the Holocaust as Ürtrauma in history, it is remarkable that Frank Ankersmits’ recent attempt to give a philosophical account of historical experience leads him to the conclusion that the Holocaust does not represent a trauma. See F.R. Ankersmit, De Sublieme Historische Ervaring, Groningen 2007, 387.


17. Grafton, *Footnote*, 59-60, argues that Ranke himself was guilty of identifying specific archival information with ‘the past’ itself: ‘It became evident that he [Ranke, CL] had unjustifiably accepted certain classes of documents – like the official reports of Venetian ambassadors to their senate – as transparent windows on past states and events rather than colourful reconstructions of them, whose authors wrote within rigid conventions, had not heard or seen everything they had reported, and often wished to convince their own audience of a personal theory rather than simply to tell them what had happened’. Grafton also argues that ‘in his reliance on central archives and great family papers
Ranke had accepted, without reflecting hard enough, a certain interpretation of history itself: one in which the story of nations and monarchies took precedence over that of peoples or cultures [—]. For the problem of the ‘scientificity’ of national history in France, see Steven Englund, ‘The Ghost of Nation Past’, in: *Journal of Modern History* 64/2 (1992) 307-310.


20. See Koselleck et al. (eds.) *Objektivität und Parteilichkeit*. For *Volksgeschichte* see Peter Schöttler (ed.), *Geschichte als Legitimationswissenschaft*.


24. Koselleck has therefore rightly observed that the *Geschichtswissenschaft* and the *Geschichtsphilosophe* came into existence simultaneously: ‘It is no accident that in the same decades in which history as a singular discipline began to establish itself (between 1760 and 1780), the concept of a philosophy of history also surfaced’.[…] ‘History and philosophy of history are complementary concepts which render impossible any attempt at a philosophization of history’. See Reinhart Koselleck, ‘Historia Magistra Vitae: The Dissolution of the Topos into the Perspective of a Modernized Historical Process’, in: idem, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, Cambridge MA 1985, 32.

25. Harold Mah, however, has traced the direct connection of origin and telos in historicism back to the very origins of *Historismus*: ‘Both Herder’s and Möser’s historicist histories required the assumption of a mythical past. A mythical event or development functioned for them as a privileged origin establishing a standard whose continuous influence was then perceived to be disseminated throughout the rest of history, so that subsequent events or developments could be measured against it or legitimated by it. That originating event or development thus overshadowed what came after it; it reduced or even cancelled out the historical significance of subsequent events. German tribalism thus defined the truly German, while the French culture that many of Germany’s rulers had adopted in the eighteenth century was rejected as alien or anti-German’. ‘Historicism, in other words, can paradoxically be seen as the expression of a desire to overcome history, whether it was the cosmopolitan influence of French culture or other undesirable developments and political life’. […] ‘The importance of this ahistorical classical thinking in a deeply historicizing philosophy is a paradox that suggests the same motive that is suggested in historicist myths of origin – namely, that one attends to historical development in its most elaborate way in order to overcome history, to transcend its contradictions, transience, and mortality’. Harold Mah, ‘German Historical Thought in the Age of Herder, Kant, and Hegel’, in: Kramer and Sarah Mah (eds.), *A Companion to Western Historical Thought*, 143-166, here: 160-161.


30. See Welskopp and Deneckere, ‘Nation and Class’.


32. See Dennis Dworkin, *Class Struggles* (Series History: Concepts, Theories and Practice), Harlow 2007.


34. See Geoff Eley, ‘Historicizing the Global, Politicizing Capital: Giving the Present a Name’, *History Workshop Journal* 1 (2007) 1-35, and Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels Petersson, *Die Geschichte der Globalisierung*, Munich 2003, 12-15. As for transnational history, Michael Geyer has signaled a ‘growing consensus’ of what it is not: ‘The emerging consensus is also suitably vague. […] Almost everyone, it seems, agrees on the basic presupposition that there is history ‘beyond the nation state’ and that this history is more than national and inter-national history; that this history mandates a ‘global’ or, in any case, grander-than-national horizon for thought and action’. […] ‘For the time being [it] rather amounts to a project with many loose ends than a distinct approach and it is more of an orientation than a paradigm’. At: http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/2006-4-032, (visited on 25-10-08).


Unstuck in time. Or: the sudden presence of the past

40. Jay Winter, The generation of memory: reflections on the “memory boom” in contemporary historical studies, Bulletin of the German Historical Institute, Washington, DC 27 (2006) 69-92. The notions of memory and of collective identity are intertwined, however, as Müller, Memory and Power, 18, observes for national identity: ‘Wherever “national identity” seems to be in question, memory comes to be the key to national recovery through reconfiguring the past […]’.
44. Nora, ‘Between Memory and History’, 11.
46. Hutton, ‘Recent Scholarship on Memory and History’, 535.
52. This problem and distinction in fact has been with history and philosophy since St. Augustine. See Herman Hausheer, ‘St. Augustine’s Conception of Time’, in: The
503 - 512: ‘The essence of time is the indivisible instant in the present, which knows itself to be neither long nor short’ (504).


60. Nora, ‘Between Memory and History’, 16.

61. Nora, ‘Between Memory and History’, 17. However, Nora does not use Hartog’s terms ‘regime of historicity’ or ‘presentism’.

62. Nora’s diagnosis and imagery of the present state of history is also developed in F.R. Ankersmit, ‘History and Postmodernism’, in: F Ankersmit, History and Tropology: The Rise and Fall of Metaphor, Berkeley 1994, 162-182; more precisely in Ankersmit’s comparison of ‘modern’ or ‘essentialist’ history with a tree and ‘post-modern’ history with its leaves (pp. 175-6), and in his identification of history of everyday life and micro-history as the typical ‘present’ (or ‘postmodern’) genres of history (pp. 174-7).


65. For the debates about the historical canon see Maria Grever and Siep Stuurman (eds.), Beyond the Canon. History for the Twenty-First Century, Basingstoke 2007.

Unstuck in time. Or: the sudden presence of the past

8. Müller, Memory and Power, 8 and 9: ‘[...] the question of memory is often at the heart of issues about national self-determination, arguably the most salient political issue in eastern Europe after the end of the Cold War’. See also 17: ‘[...] the approaches to memory have been significantly different in different national contexts’.


74. See Wulf Kansteiner, ‘Alternate worlds and invented communities: history and historical consciousness in the age of interactive media’, in: Jenkins et al. (eds.), Manifestos for History, 131-149.


76. Hartog, ‘Time, History and the Writing of History’, 108-109; Hartog, ‘Time and Heritage’, 16: ‘After the catastrophes of the twentieth century, the many wounds and the significant accelerations in the actual experience of time, neither the sudden appearance of memory nor that of patrimony in the end come as a surprise. The question could even be: “Why did it take so long?”’


81. Hartog, ‘Time and Heritage’, 16. Müller makes a similar point: ‘There is also a rather vague sense that the preoccupation with memory is part of the changed structures of temporality at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. Against the “acceleration” of time through technical progress, the elimination of distance and the general blurring of territorial and spatial coordinates in an age of globalization, the recovery of “memory” aims at a temporal re-anchoring and even the much-talked-about “recovery of the real”. Rather than a simple exhaustion of utopian energies, memory might signify a resistance to the new utopia of globalisation and to teleological notions of history’ [...]. ‘If one cannot change the future, one can at least preserve the past’. See Müller, Memory and Power, 15-16.

83. See also John Torpey, ‘The future of the past: a polemical perspective’ in Seixas (ed.), *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, 240-255, esp. p. 250; ‘The discrediting of the twin forces that dominated the twentieth-century history – namely, nationalism and socialism/communism – has promoted a pervasive “consciousness of catastrophe” among the educated segments of Euro-Atlantic society’.


90. See my article ‘Drawing the line: “Scientific” History between Myth-making and Myth-breaking’ for a case study concerning the disciplinary genre of national history.


92. Werner Müller, *Memory and Power*, 12-13, arrives at a similar conclusion arguing that ‘historical and social scientific research about memory indeed cannot be entirely separated from normative questions – not least because so many memory tales are shot through with normative claims’, and 19: ‘The memorialisation of history is at the same time its moralisation […]’.


94. Antoon de Baets, ‘The Impact of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on the Study of History’, in: *History and Theory* 48/1 (2009) 29-44. This does of course not imply that there is one set of ethical values historians should subscribe to, as Müller, Memory and Power, 32, rightly argues: ‘[-] it is important to recognize that there might be genuinely tragic choices between incompatible or even incommensurable values here [-]. There might be unsolvable dilemmas in attaining truth, justice, reconciliation and democracy all at the same time’.

The Performative Turn
CHAPTER 5

Co-memorations.
Performing the past

PETER BURKE

History is the big myth we live, and in our living, constantly remake.
Robert Penn Warren

This exploration starts from the crossroads where two popular recent approaches to cultural history meet: the study of memory and the study of performance. It may be useful to distinguish at the start of this essay on the performance of memory between different kinds or genres of performance. At one extreme, we find historical plays from Shakespeare to Strindberg and beyond or the historical operas of Verdi, say, or Glinka; in other words, performances that are tightly organized, fully scripted, and carefully rehearsed. At the other extreme, there are loosely organized, unscripted, and unrehearsed attempts to re-enact past events in the sense of following past models.

In the Russian Revolution, for example, some participants, notably Trotsky, saw themselves as re-enacting the French Revolution. In 1789, some participants made comparisons between what was happening and the English Revolution of the 1640s. In 1688 in Ireland, an army officer, Captain Thomas Ash, wrote in his diary that there were rumours that the Catholics would rise and ‘act over the tragedy of one thousand six hundred and forty one’. In the 1640s, some Englishmen saw the events of the time as a kind of replay of the French religious wars of the previous century.

In between these extremes, come the regular re-enactments of historic battles such as Naseby, Gettysburg, and D-Day by groups of enthusiasts
dressed in the appropriate costumes. In the middle we also find the subject of this chapter, commemorations, in other words processions, pageants, or parades (cavalcades, motorcades) that mark the anniversary and evoke the memory of a historic event.

Performances of this kind have an important role to play in the construction of what was once called ‘folk memory’ and is now described either as ‘social’ or as ‘cultural’ memory. Following Aleida Assmann, I shall distinguish the two terms, associating them with two traditions of scholarship, one of them German and one French. The phrase ‘cultural memory’ will be used to refer (as Aby Warburg did in his Mnemosyne project) to an archive or – since the theme of this chapter is performance – a repertoire of symbols, images, and stereotypes which members of a given culture draw upon or re-activate whenever required, constructing what has been called a ‘prosthetic memory’ that is not natural in origin but, like an artificial limb, becomes part of the body.

As for ‘social memory’, the term will be employed here to refer – following the lead of Maurice Halbwachs – to what we might call the ‘cues’ given to individuals by their ‘memory community’ (whether family, village, church, nation or all of these), in suggesting both what to remember and how to remember it. This is what some French scholars now describe as ‘faire-mémoire’, doubtless on the analogy of Michel de Certeau’s ‘faire croire’.

How does the social memory work? Partly at least through participation in collective performances, as in the obvious case of ‘beating the bounds’ of the parish, in other words beating children so that generations later they would remember the boundaries of their community. In what follows, I shall be considering a range of performances from this point of view as ‘co-memorations’, in other words, collaborative acts of recall or recollection.

These acts may be viewed as statements that use the language of the past to say something about the present. They are also ‘performative’ statements in the sense that the philosopher John Austin used the term, in other words, statements that make something happen. They are rituals which ‘canonize’ particular events, in the sense of giving them a sacred or exemplary quality, making them ‘historic’ as well as historical. They tell a story, present a ‘grand narrative’, or make it grand by performing it. They reconstruct history or ‘re-collect’ or ‘re-member’ it in the sense of practising bricolage, assembling fragments of the past into new patterns.
The rise of centenaries

Commemorations have a long history. As Joep Leerssen has explained elsewhere, the jubilee, for instance, celebrated after 50 years, was a Jewish custom taken over by the early Christian Church. Centenaries, by contrast, were relatively rare before the seventeenth century, although the ancient Egyptians celebrated one around 1200 B.C., while the emperor Antoninus Pius celebrated the 900th anniversary of the foundation of Rome.

In early modern Europe, the celebration of the Luther centenary in Northern Germany in 1617 began a trend. The event chosen for commemoration was the famous posting of the 95 theses on the church door at Wittenberg, an event that according to some modern scholars never took place – but after all, commemorations are concerned less with what actually happened than with what people believed or desired to have happened.

By the eighteenth century, celebrations of this kind had become a common practice. Among the best-known examples are the events of 1769 (the bicentenary of the birth of Shakespeare), 1788 (the centenary of the Glorious Revolution), and 1792 (the tercentenary of Columbus’s discovery of the New World); all of these are examples that support the suggestion that the demand for commemoration was expanding in the later eighteenth century.

In the nineteenth century, centenaries reflected what might be called the ‘nationalization’ of the past, a trend that is also to be seen in historiography, history painting, historical novels, and elsewhere. The official or semi-official celebrations that took place in the US in 1876 and in France in 1889 are only the most famous instances of a general trend, which also included the centenaries of national heroes such as Cervantes, Galileo, and Voltaire. National consciousness also underlay the rise of anniversaries such as 4 July in the US and 14 July in France. Hence the French historian Pascal Ory has suggested that ‘plus encore qu’une territoire, une langue, une religion ou un régime, une nation, c’est une mémoire’.

The study of the sociology or anthropology of commemorations goes back half a century. A landmark in this field is a book called The Living and the Dead, published in 1959 by the American anthropologist W. Lloyd Warner. Focusing on a place he calls ‘Yankee City’ (later revealed to be Newburyport, Massachusetts) Warner presented a sociological analysis of what he called the symbolic life of Americans, focusing on three forms of the performance of memory.
In the private sphere, Warner and his research assistants investigated the place of what they called ‘the city of the dead’, in other words the cemetery, in the family life of the citizens of Newburyport. In the public sphere, the team examined the annual observance of Memorial Day and, in particular detail, the celebration in the 1930s – at the time of what has been called ‘the pageantry craze’ in the US – of the city’s tercentenary, a festival that included a pageant with 42 historical tableaux. The book’s message might be summed up in the paradox that commemorations of the past are really statements about the present.

One very large question raised by Warner’s study is that of the relative importance of consensus and conflict in a given community. Commemorations are supposed to be performances of consensus, an agreed interpretation of the past linked to shared views of the present. Like the Balinese cockfight, made famous in the academic world by Clifford Geertz, they represent a story that a given community tells itself about itself. In similar functionalist fashion, Warner had already described the Tercentenary celebrations as the story of ‘what the collectivity believed and wanted itself to be’.

The problem with these formulations is obvious enough. In three words: Who are ‘they’? This brings us to the question of the actors, the *dramatis personae* in the theatre of memory. Is no one excluded from the memory community? Does everyone (rich and poor, male and female, old and young) tell the same story? The rituals may well be attempts to achieve consensus, identifying with the past and attempting to annihilate or deny distance or disagreement.

On the other hand, these collective performances of memory often reveal cracks or even fissures in the community. In the case of the United States in 1876, for instance, the attempts of Afro-Americans to join in the celebrations in Philadelphia were rebuffed, while participation by Native Americans was cancelled after Congress had refused to supply funds. For this reason scholars have coined the phrases ‘counter-memory’ and ‘wars of memory’ to refer in particular to recollections of times of conflict such the Finnish or Spanish civil wars of the twentieth century, examples recently studied by oral historians. The official Grand Narrative coexists with counter-narratives. As one historian of public memory in the US puts it, ‘The shaping of a past worthy of public commemoration in the present is contested and involves a struggle for supremacy’.

Yankee City was not socially homogeneous either. On the contrary, like so many American cities, it was an urban mosaic of ethnic groups which had mostly arrived in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the case of the tercentenary celebrations, each group sponsored a float. A problem
arose when the leaders of the Jewish community were asked to sponsor a float representing Benedict Arnold, the revolutionary general who turned traitor and joined the British. In other words, whether consciously or unconsciously, the organizers seem to have identified the traitor Arnold with Judas and Judas with the Jews. Following what Warner describes as an ‘embarrassing public situation’, the Jewish community were offered a different float.\textsuperscript{14}

Another literally dramatic example of the lack of consensus, on a much grander scale, was offered by the bicentenary of the French Revolution in 1989. This occasion raised a series of dilemmas for the government of François Mitterand. Which revolution should be celebrated – the moderate revolution of 1789 or the radical revolution of 1793? Should there be a celebration at all, since a substantial minority of Frenchmen and women had opposed the Revolution? In 1989, what was called the Mission du Bicentenaire tried to emphasize harmony, while French Right organized an Anti-89 movement, and the Communist Party’s Vive Quatre-Vingt-Neuf stressed the social aspect of the revolution more than the official festivities were doing.

In similar fashion, at the time of the Bicentennial of the American Revolution in 1976, there was a conflict between the official ARBA (American Revolution Bicentennial Administration) and the radical PBC (People’s Bicentennial Commission), while the Australian Bicentenary of 1988 led to protests by the Aborigines.\textsuperscript{15}

In other words, the events of 1989 commemorating the events of 1789 offer vivid examples of recurrent problems. The attempt at what Aleida Assmann calls ‘national memory construction’ went wrong (from the official point of view) on this occasion because different actors had their own ideas about the play to be represented.\textsuperscript{16} Ironically enough, it was the very performance of consensus that brought the latent conflicts to the surface.

In the two case studies from the British Isles that follow, different voices and different tunes will be heard. They deal with commemorations of seventeenth-century events in which the past has been continually reconstructed: Bonfire Night in England and in Northern Ireland the anniversaries of the battle of the Boyne and the relief of Derry. This cluster or family of performances shares a mythology in which anti-Catholicism is central, summed up in the slogan ‘No Popery’, a phrase which summons up a series of associated memories, ideas, and emotions. All the same, in the course of this account, major contrasts between the English and the Irish performances will become apparent.
Bonfire Night

The day of the foiling of the attempt by Guy Fawkes and his fellow conspirators to blow up the Houses of Parliament, 5 November 1605, was officially designated a day of thanksgiving for deliverance from the plot, an early example of what has been called ‘legislated memory’. The festival of 5 November was soon described by an English bishop as ‘our Passover’ and ‘our Purim’.18

The festival has a long but discontinuous history, with various changes or ‘slippages’ of meaning over the centuries. Under James I the celebrations were official. Under his successor, Charles, when the Establishment in Church and State appeared to be quasi-Catholic, the celebrations became unofficial and even subversive. After the Restoration, when Charles II was suspected (rightly, as it turns out) of being a secret Catholic, while his brother James was an open one, the bonfires again signified opposition to the regime. In the late 1670s and early 1680s, the time of the so-called ‘Exclusion Crisis’, the Green Ribbon Club, a Whig group, organized processions in which effigies of the pope were ceremonially burned. These processions, recorded in engravings at the time, were not exactly spontaneous and may have been early examples of ‘rent-a-crowd’, but it remains significant that the Whig party should have drawn on festive traditions in order to further their campaign for the exclusion of the future James II from the succession to the throne.19

The festival was more or less depoliticized in the eighteenth century but re-politicized in the early nineteenth century in response to Catholic emancipation and the re-establishment of Catholic bishops in Britain. Thus 5 November presents a vivid example of a recurrent phenomenon, the re-activation of cultural memory by political events.20 It was only in the twentieth century that Bonfire Night became ‘folklore’, a festival that is above all for children. As David Cressy puts it, ‘Guy Fawkes Night had been tamed’.21

The ritual of November 5 includes an evocation of memory.

Please to remember
The fifth of November
Gunpowder, treason and plot.
I see no reason
Why gunpowder treason
Should ever be forgot.
Despite these verses the historical meaning of the festival is being forgotten, fading away, passing from the social memory into the cultural memory. Until about the 1980s one could see children displaying a rag doll in the street and asking passers-by for ‘A penny for the Guy’. Today, little more than the fireworks remain in most parts of England, a display without a clear connection to a historical event, even if the quatercentenary, celebrated in 2005, was an opportunity for historians to remind the public through the media of the original meaning of the festival.

There is one major exception to this forgetfulness: the small market town of Lewes in Sussex (as well as minor exceptions in Eastbourne, Hastings and elsewhere, recent revivals on the Lewes model). In Lewes, 5 November remains a major event organized by the so-called ‘Bonfire Societies’. There are six bonfire societies in existence today, each with its own slice of urban territory: Cliffe, Commercial Square, Lewes Borough, Nevill Juvenile, South Street, and Waterloo. The ‘Bonfire Boys’, as the societies used to be called – though many women now join them – organize processions through the town culminating in the burning of a number of effigies, especially that of the pope – not the current pope (though Pius IX and Leo XIII were burned in their day), but Paul V, who was pope in 1605 – whether the choice is made out of tact or historicism or both (fig. 5.1-5.3).

Why Lewes? In some ways the town is a typical small English town, socially and politically conservative. In the nineteenth century the ‘Bonfire Boys’ were supporters of the monarchy and the empire. However, Lewes also has a radical tradition. Seventeen Protestants were burned there during the reign of Queen Mary. An anti-Catholic tradition survived into the later twentieth
When I was living near Lewes in the 1960s and 1970s, a story circulated about a leading member of one of the bonfire societies. He was knocked down by a car and rushed to hospital. In the hospital he was asked his religion and instantly replied ‘No Popery’, a slogan regularly displayed on Bonfire Night. In Lewes, radical Protestantism is combined with radical politics. The radical Tom Paine lived in the town from 1768 to 1774 and his memory is still honoured there today. Unlike many small English towns, Lewes has a tradition of voting for Labour Members of Parliament.

The town’s special mixture of conservatism and radicalism is reflected in the Bonfire Night ritual. The Bonfire Societies were founded in the 1850s, the result of a kind of compromise between the authorities and the organizers of unofficial celebrations, which sometimes led to riots, notably in 1847. In the nineteenth century, the societies were mainly composed of young men, often the sons of shopkeepers. By this time, the upper classes, once involved, had abandoned the festival to ordinary people. They used Bonfire Night as ‘a vehicle for the vilification of local figures’ (the coexistence of local and national meanings for commemorations is of course important in many places besides Lewes).

Today, the societies organize processions in fancy dress. Apaches, Vikings, and hoplites walk through the streets and preachers condemn the pope and Guy Fawkes to the flames. There is a greater role for children than there used to be (a bonfire society has been founded especially for them, Nevill Juvenile). Vestiges of politics survive in the rituals of 5 November. Since the First World War, the societies lay wreaths at the war memorial and carry signs ‘Lest We Forget’. They also burn effigies of unpopular political figures such as Mrs Thatcher or George W. Bush.

It might therefore be argued that Bonfire Night in Lewes – like many other performances of the past – should be interpreted in terms of what Mikhail Bakhtin called ‘heteroglossia’, an event that has had different meanings for different groups of participants, some of them emphasizing tradition, others democracy, and yet others popery or the carnivalesque aspect of the ritual. All the same, Bonfire Night is peripheral to English political culture. In Northern Ireland, by contrast, commemoration remains an intensely political activity and a provocation to violence.

**Northern Ireland**

The idea that performances of the past carry messages about the present, like the idea of conflicts of memory, could hardly be confirmed more
dramatically than by examples of commemorations from Northern Ireland today.

Among the most politicized annual ‘performances of memory’ – a phrase used in this context by Neil Jarman in 1997 – are those that take place on 12 July, the ‘glorious 12th’, as participants call it.25 On this day Protestants celebrate the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne, in which William of Orange defeated James II in 1690. The battle was actually fought on 1 July, Old Style, but the date was changed to 12 July when the Gregorian calendar was adopted in Britain, leading to the paradox of the date of an anti-papal festival being calculated according to a papal calendar.

Celebrations of the victory took place in the eighteenth century but it was only in the later nineteenth century that they became regular, important, and highly political events, a nice example of Eric Hobsbawm’s ‘invention of tradition’. The celebrations expressed what has been called ‘the new unionist sense of history’, arising out of political conflicts.26 At the same time, in a manner parallel to developments in Lewes, what had been relatively undisciplined performances became less rowdy and more tightly controlled, at least for a time.

As in the case of 5 November, the meaning of the performances has changed over time. From the 1870s onwards, the parades expressed and mobilized unofficial Protestant opposition to the movement for ‘Home Rule’, in other words self-government for Ireland within the British Empire. In the 1920s, when Northern Ireland had its own Protestant-dominated parliament at Stormont, the parades expressed official attitudes – indeed, in 1926, the 12th was declared a public holiday. In the 1970s, however, when Northern Ireland was governed from London, the parades became once again an expression of opposition.

In other words, heteroglossia rules. ‘At various times the 12th of July has been used both by and against the state, by those demanding parliamentary reform and those hostile to it, by those demanding tenant-right and those opposing it, by working class radicals and even home rulers.’27

Throughout the troubles in Northern Ireland from the 1960s to the present many walls have displayed the slogan ‘Remember 1690’, sometimes abbreviated to ‘REM 1690’ or accompanied by an image of William III on horseback. This is not antiquarianism, but a statement about the present couched in the language of the past. “‘Remember 1690’ … is not the motto of a historical cult … so much as the reminder of present threats to the Ulsterman’s security and independence’.28

The evening of 11 July is a time of Fawkes-like bonfires, on which it was customary to burn an effigy of the pope (now often replaced by the
tricolour of the Republic of Ireland). 12 July is marked by parades organized by the lodges of the Orange Order (founded in 1795), marching in their bowler hats and sashes, and by other Protestant societies such as the Royal Black Institution. Once again, we see the importance of voluntary associations. The parades are dominated by men, although a few women march and many more cheer the marchers on or sing and dance along beside them. These performances are clearly a re-affirmation of collective identity, defined against that of the Catholics, the rival memory community. Other events besides the Boyne are also commemorated in these parades, notably the Battle of the Somme, in which the Ulster Division went into action on 1 July, allowing a conflation of the battle with that of the Boyne of the kind that is often found in myths.

The music of the flute-and-drum bands (sometimes known as ‘blood and thunder’ or ‘kick the pope’ bands) makes the performances still more dramatic and aggressive, notably the thundering of the Lambeg drums (large double-headed drums that have been used on these occasions from the 1890s onwards), and the playing of tunes such as ‘The Sash my Father Wore’, ‘Croppies Lie Down’ and ‘Boyne Water’, provocations to violence to which the Catholics often respond by throwing missiles at the procession. No wonder then that 12 July poses an annual problem for the government, that of deciding whether or not to allow processions and what routes the marchers should be permitted to take. The political temperature rises every July, as the ‘marching season’ begins. On 12 July 2005, for instance, 80 policemen were injured in Belfast alone, attempting to keep Catholics and Protestants apart when the marchers entered a Catholic zone, the Ardoyne Road to the north of the city.

A performance of memory in a still more precise sense is another festival in Northern Ireland, centred on the city known to Catholics as Derry and to Protestants as Londonderry. To be more precise, Derry is the scene of two annual parades. What is commemorated in both cases is an event, the shutting of the gates of the city on 18 December 1688 and the relief of the siege of the city the following August. The theme of the parades along the walls of the city may be summed up in the slogan attributed to the defenders of the city: ‘No Surrender’.

The two events were already celebrated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In 1788, for example, the centenary of the shutting of the gates (coinciding with the centenary of the Glorious Revolution) was marked by the burning in effigy of Colonel Robert Lundy, the military governor of the city who had argued that the city was indefensible and has entered the cultural memory as a traitor, the local equivalent of Guy
Fawkes.\textsuperscript{32} The burning later became an annual event. The festival of 5 November seems to have ‘contaminated’ 12 August as well as 12 July. In any case, traitors are prominent in the memories of many cultures, part of the emplotment of the past as a myth in which heroes and villains play key roles. This point may help explain why the citizens of Newburyport designed a float around Benedict Arnold.

All the same, as in the case of the Boyne, serious commemorations date from the nineteenth century. The organizers of the Derry parades are, once again, voluntary associations, notably the Apprentice Boys, named after the 13 apprentices who shut the gates in 1688 but founded in 1813, at a time of the movement for Catholic Emancipation (in parallel with the re-politicization of 5 November). The Boys are now divided into eight clubs, the oldest of which is the ‘No Surrender’ Club.\textsuperscript{33} Incidentally, in Lewes in the 1970s, I remember seeing men in black leather jackets lettered ‘No Surrender’, as if 12 August had contaminated 5 November, or Ulster Protestants had infiltrated a Sussex festival.

The phrase ‘No Surrender’ illustrates the uses of the past, a transition from the siege itself to the ‘siege mentality’ of Ulster Protestants today. It has been a leitmotiv in the fiery speeches and articles of Ian Paisley, for instance, himself a member of the Apprentice Boys. The moderate government of Terence O’Neill in the 1960s was described by radical Protestants in terms of ‘Lundyism’, or, in other words: treachery.\textsuperscript{34} The myth of an embattled but pure community coexists with a messier reality of power sharing and everyday social interactions across the cultural frontier.

As in the case of 12 July, the route taken by the marchers is a matter of political importance, since Derry is now a divided city with a majority of Catholics in an area called the Bogside (below the old walls), and confrontations are not uncommon, notably in 1969, when riots lasted for three days and ushered in thirty years of what the Irish call ‘troubles’. Both performances may be described as examples of ‘construction’, the construction of identity via the construction of the past. The problem is that in Northern Ireland the same space – and the same past – is shared by two nations, the orange nation and the green nation, with rival interpretations of the past, views of the present and hopes for the future.

To conclude, it may be useful to reflect on the metaphor of ‘performance’. These commemorations take place on a ‘stage’, in particular places in Lewes, Derry, Belfast, and elsewhere. In our age of globalization, Orangemen march on 12 July not only in Australia, Canada, and the US, but in Accra as well, thanks to Irish Protestant missionaries.\textsuperscript{35}
Despite these exceptions, performances of memory are usually linked to particular localities, to the ‘places of memory’. As the American pageant master William Langdon put it, ‘The pageant is a drama in which the place is the hero and the development of the community is the plot’. In the Northern Irish case, the term ‘arena’ is even more appropriate than ‘stage’. Belfast and Derry evoke rival memories and easily turn or return into battlegrounds.

What of the actors? The main actors in these performances are collective, voluntary associations such as the Bonfire Societies, the Orange Order, and the No Surrender Club. Voluntary associations often play a leading role in the organization of collective performances, from medieval guilds to the Green Ribbon Club in seventeenth-century London and the escolas de samba in the Carnival of Rio de Janeiro today. However, the gap between audience and spectators is a narrow one. Many spectators participate, in the Northern Irish case by attacking or defending the marchers. The sharpest line is not between performers and spectators but between the immediate spectators, present on stage, and the remote spectators, viewing the marches on television or in the photographs in the next day’s newspaper. Even the remote spectators have their memories re-activated or shaped by what they see on the screen.

Is there or isn’t there a script for these performances? Yes, in the sense that there is a good deal of repetition, and that participants act on their memories of past performances. No, in the sense that there is always room for improvisation, to say nothing of the event going ‘wrong’ in the sense of turning out different from expectations. Hence historians need to adopt the method the French call histoire sérielle, studying the performances in chronological order with eyes open for both repetition and variation.

These performances have no director and, even on the same occasion, different actors may have somewhat different aims. Commemorations, like other festivals, used to be studied as performances of consensus, as in the case of the studies by Warner and Geertz. By contrast, the last generation of historians and anthropologists alike has placed more emphasis on heteroglossia and the conflicting interpretations of participants in the ‘same’ performance. This approach is an appropriate one, as we have seen, to the case of Bonfire Night and still more to the Northern Irish commemorations.

All the same, an exclusive preoccupation with the multiplicity of voices in a performance may miss something important. To Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia we need to add his concept of dialogue. In their performances as in their everyday life, the Catholics and the Protestants of Northern Ireland engage in dialogue. It might be described as a dialogue of the deaf,
of the kind represented in Pinter’s plays, but it is a form of dialogue nevertheless. The point is that Catholics and Protestants respond to each other’s performances, by imitation or adaptation as well as by violence. Orange and Green are like Siamese twins. They define their identities against each other (‘Micks’ versus ‘Prods’). The Orange Lodges have their complementary opposite in the Ancient Order of Hibernians, which also parades through the streets. The two nations share a mythologized past, even if one reconstruction is the mirror image of the other, the heroes and villains reversed. Latent in everyday life, the annual performances make these rival images manifest and open old wounds. They dramatize memory wars that also exist elsewhere, in Finland, for instance, and in Spain. They are the scene of memories of conflict that are also conflicts of memory.

Notes


30. Ibid. 133, 142.


33. Ibid. 38, 47, 49.

34. Denis Cooke, Persecuting Zeal, Dingle 1996, 159, 174, 177; McBride, The Siege of Derry, 73.


36. Quoted in Glassberg, American Historical Pageantry, 69.


38. Glassberg, American Historical Pageantry, 21-2; Bodnar, Remaking America, 16, 75; David M. Guss, The Festive State: Race, Ethnicity and Nationalism as Cultural Performance, Berkeley 2000.

CHAPTER 6

‘Indelible memories’: the tattooed body as theatre of memory

JANE CAPLAN

In 2003 the Staten Island Historical Society (SIHS) in New York mounted a photographic exhibition, ‘Indelible Memories: September 11 Memorial Tattoos’, commemorating the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center. The tattoos on display had for the most part been acquired by firefighters and police officers who had been involved in the rescue effort, or by family members of those who had perished when the towers collapsed. The fact that this exhibition took place on Staten Island was not coincidental. The Island, one of the five boroughs of New York City, is home to a largely white working-class, Catholic population that is heavily over-represented in the New York City police and fire departments (NYPD and FDNY), and hence also among the 343 firefighters who died as a result of the towers’ collapse. The Island numbers about five per cent of New York City’s total population of eight million, but accounted for more than twenty per cent of the firefighters who perished in the disaster. As well as these seventy-eight FDNY deaths, almost two hundred of the other victims were residents or recent residents of the Island – about ten per cent of the total killed. One parish alone, St Clare’s, lost eleven firefighters and nineteen other parishioners. ‘Staten Island’, wrote one commentator, ‘was at the epicenter of the quake.’

The photographs on display at the SIHS were the work of a professional photographer, Vinnie Amessé, whose studio is located in the same Staten Island building as a FDNY counselling centre that was set up immediately
after the disaster to support surviving firefighters and their family members. From conversations with the centre’s clinical supervisor, Mary A. Cole, Amessé learned that many of those using the centre bore commemorative tattoos. Intrigued and moved, and with Ms Cole’s aid, he set about making a systematic photographic record of these images. Fifty-five of his photographs were then shown in the temporary exhibition in 2003, and they remain part of the permanent collection of the SIHS.4

The Historical Society’s mission is the preservation of documents and artefacts of Island history. Like their counterparts in the better-known New York Historical Society, the National Museum of American History (part of the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C.) and the New York State Museum in Albany, the SIHS curators set about collecting numerous types of material evidence related to the Trade Center disaster almost as the events unfolded.5 This evidence consists not only of records of the event itself and artefacts from the towers’ site (some of them fished out of the mountains of debris collected at Staten Island’s Fresh Kills landfill), but also of objects and photographic records from popular culture. These include the spontaneous shrines and memorials (flowers, posters, plaques, flags) that sprang up at firehouses and other public sites; installations in people’s front yards; murals; and personalized and commercial souvenirs. Amessé’s photographic record was echoed in a longer project by another New York photographer, Jonathan Hyman, who has spent five years recording ‘American vernacular responses to the attack’, including decorated vehicles, home-made shrines, memorials, and murals, as well as tattoos.6 There is also now at least one commercial website featuring images of 9/11 tattoos and inviting visitors to submit their own.7

The 9/11 tattoos and their easily available reproductions are as much evidence of the newly acceptable status of the tattoo in US culture as they are a tribute to the shattering impact of the Trade Center disaster on those most directly affected by it. For a historian of tattooing in modern Western cultures, they also prompt some analysis of both the continuities and discontinuities that these acts of commemoration and identification embody. This essay therefore aims to locate the 9/11 tattoos in the broader history and theory of the iconography of memory and identity imprinted on the body’s surface.

If we refer to any of the theorizations of the skin and its markings, some of which have been invoked in recent histories of the tattoo,8 we will recognize the topological peculiarity of the tattooed skin as both surface and depth, plane and involution. The skin can be seen as an interface that articulates the relationship between internal and private aspects of the
body on the one hand, and external and public aspects on the other, and which enables a form of communication between them. Its commemorative ornamentation in these tattoos, which was intensified in their public display at the SIHS, suggests a kind of double dialogue. The image writes itself into the body at the same time as it speaks out to a virtually universal national public memory. These tattooed inscriptions also invoke something about the ontological status of the body and its relation to memory that I will discuss further below.

1. The 9/11 tattoos

The impulse to mark 9/11 by means of tattoos emerged immediately after the event. It was not confined to those people directly involved in the disaster, but was an element in the surge of patriotic energy that led to so many public displays of defiance, solidarity, and grief in the US. Studios noted a measurable increase in the demand for patriotic tattoos in the course of September, and in the New York area at least, some tattooists were offering reduced rates or even a free service as a token of their solidarity. Their clients included police and firefighters who were involved in the rescue operations or whose comrades were there, as well as members of the public, mainly working-class men by all accounts, who wanted to demonstrate their sympathy with the afflicted or their outrage at the attack.

It was notable that most of the chosen images did not reflect the cutting-edge eclecticism of contemporary ‘tribal’ tattoo culture. Instead, the tattooed favoured a more ‘traditional’ style of vernacular iconography that reasserted itself from an older era of working-class tattooing and called on a repertoire of easily legible emblems, including the stars and stripes, eagles, flames, and badges.

The group of Staten Island tattoos is invested with an immediate poignancy which distinguishes them from tattoos acquired out of a more remote sense of projected solidarity, but iconographically they conform to this general pattern. In most cases the meanings are inescapably obvious and tragic: catastrophe, loss, identification, and commemoration – of the event itself, of a family member or a fire company, and of the nation and patriotic solidarity. Images connoting revenge are rarer than one might expect, and few of those interviewed mentioned this as a motivation for their decision or choice of design. More characteristic motivations included the desire to have ‘something that will be with me forever’ (Clifford H.) and the hope that the tattoos would prompt those who see them to ask
about them, thereby allowing the bearers to tell the story of their loss and keep it alive (Alice G., Francis C.).

Alongside the quasi-heraldic images of US flags and eagles (fig. 6.1) figure the fire service badges, helmets, and company emblems of lost firefighters (fig. 6.2). Many depict a firefighters’ numerology that is arcane to those outside the community: ‘343’ denotes the number of firefighters killed; ‘5-5’ is the signal denoting a two-alarm fire; ‘5-5-5-5’, the traditional alarm signal for a lost firefighter11 (fig. 6.3). Some are in effect collective tattoos, with several surviving members of the same fire company bearing the same image memorializing their lost comrades. Among the most striking of Amessé’s photographs is a group photograph of half a dozen family members, most of them women, who carry the same memento of a
lost relative tattooed above the ankle (fig. 6.4). Other images include more or less naturalistic illustrations of the towers and the scene of the collapse, some with an angel hovering over the scene (fig. 6.5), and reproductions of photographic portraits of lost family members (fig. 6.6). In the exhibit each photograph was accompanied by a short statement by its subject, explaining the choice of image and its significance to the bearer. From these statements, which are corroborated by evidence from press accounts, it appears that only a minority of subjects already had tattoos before the event; most were driven to take this step by the enormity of the disaster and its emotional impact.

In itself, it was the occasion rather than the subject of the exhibition that was unusual. Since the last quarter of the twentieth century, the tattoo has been making one of its periodic transits from the margins to the centre of Western visual culture – or if not exactly to the centre, then at least to an arena of public visibility and acceptability not paralleled since the late nineteenth century. Tattooing is now more physically and culturally visible than at any other time in Western societies. Where previously tattooing seems to have hovered on the edges of visibility, now tattoos are embedded in vernacular culture; they are openly displayed on people’s bodies and are recorded and celebrated in exhibitions, documentaries, and publications both scholarly and popular.

This shift in the angle of vision has obviously enabled people to choose the tattoo as a means of memorializing the events and victims of 9/11, where previously it might not have suggested itself. But does the choice of the tattoo as a means of memorialization reflect something more substantive about the status of the marked body in contemporary western cultures or in the repertoire of memorialization? It is the argument of this paper that these questions can be best addressed if both the imagery and the fact of these tattoos are set into the longer historical context of European and Western societies, in which the tattoo has always had a deeply ambivalent status.

2. Tattooing in Europe

For many centuries tattooing has not been a socially embedded practice in Europe and its derivative societies overseas. Since the disappearance of tribal tattooing in the post-Roman era, the tattooed or otherwise permanently altered body has not been securely anchored in the dynamics of social reproduction or cultural expression. Despite the fact that the tattoo
has been the most widespread and persistent form of permanent body alteration in the West (compared with e.g. scarification, branding, or piercing), we cannot ascribe to the tattoo the kind of coherent cultural
location that we could in the case of hairstyles or clothing, for example. In most of Europe, tattooing seems to have provoked a certain cultural unease about permanent marks or alterations of the body, and it has largely been seen as aberrant outside those limited groups among which it was practised. It has long been associated with the tattoos, brands, and mutilations that have been used intermittently to mark criminals and slaves since Graeco-Roman times. Concomitantly, it has often been dismissed as a disreputable practice drawn from the customs of savage, pre-civilized cultures.  

Nevertheless, the tattoo also carries other traces of meaning that cut across this history of repudiation and introduce a note of greater ambivalence. Tattoos have a strong affiliation, almost forgotten until recently, to religious commitment and to pilgrimage, which fed into their later and more familiar secular denotations of mobility and memorialization. Early Christians appropriated the tattoo from its Graeco-Roman penal and servile uses, in order to make it signify both their own subservience to Christ and their distance from dominant pagan culture. It was thus deliberately chosen as a stigma (a mark of exclusion) that was also a badge of honour (a mark of inclusion). Indeed, it was the ability of the tattoo to serve as a simultaneously exclusionary and inclusionary sign that underwrote its adoption by Christians in predominantly non-Christian regions on the eastern and southern rims of Western Christendom. Thus, religious tattooing persisted among Christian communities of the eastern Mediterranean as they became minorities in predominantly Muslim areas (fig. 6.7).  

Conversely, tattooing does not seem to have been common inside Western Christendom. However, the range and visibility of the tattoo extended as crusades and pilgrimage brought Western European Christians into contact with their Mediterranean co-religionists, though the early evidence is mostly fragmentary and elusive. Some crusaders are said to have had themselves tattooed in order to ensure their post-mortem identification as Christian and thereby their right to a Christian burial. More securely documented is the fact that pilgrims acquired tattoos in the Holy Land, in Jerusalem or Bethlehem, where the practice never died out. Such tattoos become well attested in the seventeenth century as more European travellers made their way to the Holy Land; many described the Christian tattoos they saw there, and some acquired their own tattoos as a pious memorial and mark of faith (fig. 6.8).  

By this time, the linkage of tattooing with travel and commemoration was given secular reinforcement as European voyagers came into contact with ‘traditional’ tattooing cultures in the Americas and south-east Asia.
Performing the past

Like the pilgrims to the Holy Land, European seafarers and settlers began to get themselves tattooed with commemorative or identificatory images at least as early as the seventeenth century, while tattooed natives of North America and the Philippines were occasionally brought to Europe for public exhibition. How far this growing familiarity with the tattooed body prompted or reinvigorated local tattooing is unclear, but it culminated in the European and American encounter with Polynesian tattooing in the mid-eighteenth century. The Pacific cultures exercised a well-known fascination among Europeans, and this briefly translated the discursive status of the tattoo from savagery to exoticism. Yet exoticism was an insecure foundation for any real integration of tattooing into Western culture. Instead, the trajectory of the tattoo dispersed into a number of coexistent practices that were united only by their common association with masculine community and imperial mobility.

Best remembered here are the tattooed sailors, soldiers, indentured servants, and transported convicts – the carriers of Europe’s imperial projects whose lives were uprooted, de-personalized, and often dispossessed, whose flesh was in a sense their sole inalienable property as their bodies were flung about the globe. They were tattooed either by some proficient comrade, or by a native tattooist of Japan or Polynesia, and their tattoos were usually small in size and largely sentimental and identificatory – initials, hearts, anchors. The imagery attested to their loss of familiar ties, their regimentation in disciplinary communities, the fact that they could carry little or no movable property with them, and the possibility of anonymous death far from their communities of origin.

These men and women were the vector for the wider diffusion of tattooing among the European and American working class, where it conserved some of its associations with travelling and identity. The typical tattooed working-class man in nineteenth-century Britain, France, Germany, or the United States was, if not a soldier or sailor, a manual labourer, or craftsman, perhaps a tramping artisan, or often a vagrant or petty criminal on the edges of settled society. Records on tattooed women are even sparser than those on men, but there is sufficient evidence of tattooed images on transported female servants and convicts since the early eighteenth century and, later on, prostitutes. At the other end of the social scale were the aristocratic officers and gentlemen who acquired their tattoos overseas as mementoes of their naval or military service: members of an equally mobile community, but whose status allowed them to ignore social conventions. Thus by the later nineteenth century, the tattoo was found at the geographical, social, and semiotic margins of
European civilization, but specifically not among the representatives of bourgeois culture whose settled prosperity was supported by this imperial traffic in people and commodities. The self-appointed critics of tattooing at this time were criminologists and modernist critics – the representative names here are, respectively, Cesare Lombroso and Adolf Loos – who treated it as a sign of the survival or recurrence of primitive savagery in the bosom of civilization. In this critique, the tattoo was a mark that identified the most atavistic or degenerate members of society: that is to say, hereditary criminals and aristocrats, each the captive of a fatal inheritance, but each hopefully destined to die out as a result of social and eugenic progress.

Despite the (re-)incorporation of tattooing into Western culture, it is clear that the tattoo has nevertheless preserved its status as a practice that is not fully at home in ‘civilized’ society, so that the practice itself still demarcates civilization from ‘barbarism’, as in classical Greece. The significant phrase here is ‘not fully’. In his stimulating study of power, hierarchy, and meaning in traditional Polynesian tattooing, the anthropologist Alfred Gell theorizes the Polynesian tattoo as an essentially oppositional mark, a mark of what he calls ‘honourable degradation’, at once admirable and disfiguring. It was ‘a stigma of humanity’ that distinguished humans from their non-tattooed gods: the tattoo signified the inequality between divinity and mortality, in what Gell calls ‘the basic cosmological antagonism of mortal selves and encompassing, consuming divinities’. Gell’s interpretation is based on a specific and comprehensive study of the varieties of traditional Polynesian tattooing. He is cautious about the extent to which the oppositional status he ascribes to the tattoo can be seen as a cultural universal, irrespective of whether the tattoo is integrated in social reproduction, as in Polynesia, or largely marginal to it, as in Western cultures (though one may note that historical Christian tattooing certainly carries something of this oppositional quality). In any case, Gell comes close to suggesting that the tattoo as such is charged with an inherently ambivalent or paradoxical character that derives from its intermediate status vis-à-vis the body. For the tattoo inheres insecurely in the skin as an organ possessing both surface and depth, conducting an exchange between what is exterior and what is interior to skin and body alike. Unlike body painting, the tattoo is not clearly just on the skin; and unlike branding, it is not clearly inserted into the body either. Rather, it is the tattoo’s integration in the skin that produces ‘a paradoxical double skin [such that] the skin and the tattoo are integrally one and indivisible’.
Fig. 6.1. Richard H., firefighter. The eagle clutches a firefighter’s axe against the background of the US flag. (© Vinnie Amessé)
Fig. 6.2. Bob A., firefighter. His fire company lost six members on September 11.  
(© Vinnie Amessé)
Fig. 6.3. Greg B., firefighter. The Maltese cross (a traditional firefighters’ emblem) contains the fire alarm box number of the World Trade Center as well as the date of the attack and the 5-5-5-5 signal. (© Vinnie Amessé)

Fig. 6.4. Family C. Four sisters whose brother Robert, a firefighter, died in the 9/11 attack. Each bears a slightly different version of her brother’s company badge. (© Vinnie Amessé)
Fig. 6.5. Danny B., firefighter. Richard H. (Fig. 1) also has a second tattoo, on his back, of an angel ‘so that he would always have an angel looking over his shoulder’. (© Vinnie Amessé)
Fig. 6.6. Anthony D., firefighter, The image commemorates his brother, David, a firefighter who died in the 9/11 attack. (© Vinnie Amessé)
Fig. 6.9. ‘Sailors’ Grave’ tattoo, Germany, late nineteenth century.
Fig. 6.12. Ex voto, Pioggia (copy of 1910 original).
Fig. 6.13. Michael G., firefighter. The tattoo, ‘[which] will last a lifetime’, commemorates his fellow firefighters and features an angel because ‘my angels were looking over my shoulder that day’. (© Vinnie Amessé)
Gell’s reading of the tattoo remains a highly suggestive elaboration of the more general interpretations of the skin referred to above, and I will draw on it to frame an interpretation of the particular case under discussion here. Obviously, the tattoo has to be treated as a historico-cultural formation, and not in terms of an ahistorical concept of ‘the body’ or ‘flesh’ and its meanings (and the attempt to legitimate tattooing by affirming the ‘respectable’ side of its origins and lineage seems to me to miss the point).21 Despite the enormous popularity of tattooing in North America and Europe in recent decades, I do not think it can be emancipated from the complex and ambivalent history I have sketched above. But the biggest shift that has taken place recently is the fact that the tattoo itself has become the traveller, where once it was the bearers of tattoos who were so mobile. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that traveller status has always been a shared property of both the images and their bearers, but that in recent decades the hierarchy of that association has been reversed, as the tattooed have appropriated images from a world of cultural repertoires without leaving their own hometowns.

It is well understood that the tattoo often marks a journey, whether this is geographical or autobiographical: it marks a life-stage, an elected or acquired identity, the moment of distinction between a ‘before’ and an ‘after’.22 Nevertheless, the tattoo is still caught in its specific oppositional history; it carries a freight of contrariety and uncertainty that not only cannot be discarded at will, but that is integral to its meaning and uses. Like the skin itself, it sits at a threshold: standing at the boundary between inside and outside, self and other, inclusion and exclusion, permanence and impermanence, it is composed of layers both visible and invisible. By analogy, the tattoo has been neither integral nor external to western culture; neither fully included nor entirely excluded. It has remained marginal and ambiguous, something that sits on the edge of visibility, that always seems to have come from somewhere else lying just beyond the horizon of vision. In that sense, the tattoo offers itself as a profuse and even delicate mechanism for the production of subtly intertwined meanings – even before we take into consideration its technical capacity to reproduce all kinds of specific images and texts, down to the most literal representations of writing and image. By contrast, scarification and branding remain on the extreme, beyond the horizon of acceptability, and are for physiological reasons iconographically restrained by comparison with the tattoo’s sophisticated visual range.
3. Interpreting the 9/11 tattoo

What, then, are the meanings carried by the 9/11 tattoos within this general schema? Statements by the tattooed themselves emphasize their desire to ‘keep alive’ the spirit of a dead family member or friend; to mark the enormity of the event; and to ensure that the dead are not forgotten. I think we can elaborate on these insights in a number of ways.

To begin with, for the men and women who elected to get themselves tattooed as a commemoration of 9/11, the decision itself was something momentous, out of the ordinary. Most had no previous tattoos; some explicitly declared that they would never get another. The 9/11 tattoo denoted an extraordinary rupture in their own lives, a threshold demarcating a prior normality from the chaotic event which is now permanently associated with their own flesh. Although this temporal rupture is characteristic of most schemes of body modification, I suggest that these tattoos transact a particular exchange between the flesh as life and presence, and the body as death and absence. They constitute a kind of traumatic pilgrimage performed on, rather than with, the body. They represent a choice to imprint profoundly painful and intimate memories directly onto the flesh: in other words, onto something which we regard as most intimately ours but which is also vulnerable to public scrutiny, and whose marking and exposure both exact suffering.

This doubling of pain and intimacy appears to be a primary meaning carried by the 9/11 tattoos. According to firefighter Paul C., his tattoo (an elaborate design on his upper arm including an I-beam cross from the towers, a firefighter’s helmet and the inscription ‘Never Forget’) required ‘two and a half hours of pure torture, but nothing compared to what those guys went through’. The tattoos are thus voluntary assumptions of identification with the fate of the deceased that also partake of some of the physical pain of their deaths; they mark the loss both viscerally and graphically. As one New York tattooist whose clients included many firefighters and policemen put it, ‘They want it burned into their skin as well as their mind’.

Then, there is the permanent presence of the image on the body, the fact that it is virtually un-effaceable during the lifetime of its bearer, yet only during that lifetime. Beyond that, it is not a permanent memorial, indeed it is inevitably self-erasing. Eventually and ineluctably, the tattoo will accompany that bearer into the death that has already claimed the victims, uniting and telescoping two mortalities into a shared extinction. Up to that point, however, it functions as a sign of mourning that might be compared
with the now abandoned practice that flourished in the nineteenth century, of weaving the hair of a dead intimate into a wearable memento, often a ring or a locket. Like those mementos, the 9/11 tattoos are not necessarily always visible on the bearer, but once they are seen, they are less discreet and more closely identified with the bearer; they invite anyone who sees them to query their meaning and learn their story. Their location on the flesh also promotes a fierce intimacy of belonging that cannot easily be disrupted by the sometimes disconcerting trade in 9/11 mementos and souvenirs. The tattoo itself may be the result of a commercial transaction with the tattooist (though it may also have been a gift, as we have seen), while tattoo images are also seen in commercial circulation as decals or transfers and they may be reproduced as objects of commercial exchange, as for example in this essay itself. The exclusion of the tattoo itself from the circuit of commodities is not wholly guaranteed, to be sure, but it is arguably less vulnerable to this exploitation than some other highly personal relics of the disaster, including salvaged objects or medals.

Further, the cataclysmic collapse of the World Trade Center produced a radical absence as one of its most shocking and disturbing effects. Bodies were pulverized into nothing, or at least nothing that could be recognized and reclaimed. This monumental absence of human remains has endowed the site with a particular aura for those who lost family and friends in it, and this has made planning the future of the site and the character of the memorial a peculiarly fraught process. Might we therefore see the tattooed memorial on individuals as a registration of absence that also, by embodying the literally disembodied, defies this absence for the duration of another life which insists on its privileged relationship to the life or lives that have been lost? In this sense, some of the memorial tattoos invert the trope of the Unknown Soldier, who has a body but no name. For almost all of the 9/11 victims, by contrast, there was a name but no body, and so the portrait or name tattoo inscribes and denominates a surrogate body, joining flesh and identity together once more.

As well as borrowing something from the character of a war memorial, the memorial tattoo also gestures towards a reversal of the conventionalized but no less poignant tattoo image of the ‘Sailor’s Grave’, once commonly borne by seamen as a talisman against the ever-present threat of anonymous death at sea (fig. 6.9). All bodies are doomed, after all, to be finally consumed after death, to lose any meaningful relationship with the living individual, and to become absorbed into some other generic biological material. But it appears especially painful to tolerate the absence of physical remains that could otherwise be incorporated into a more
Performing the past

Fig. 6.9 See coloursection p. 134.

Fig. 6.10. Regimental badge tattoos, c.1914-18. From: Erhard Riecke, *Das Tatauierungswesen im heutigen Europa* (Jena 1925).
durable memorial, whether this is a grave marker or a geographical site of scattered ashes. In this case, we might say that the body of the tattooed survivor stands in both for the lost body of the deceased and for the impossibility of its interment.

Finally, it is worth pointing to links between some of the 9/11 tattoos and images of identification and commemoration from similar sources or adjacent practices. As suggested above, the 9/11 tattoos disdained the styles associated most closely with the recent tattoo renaissance, and returned to a more traditional iconography that was the most favoured style before the 1970s. But some of the 9/11 images seem to return, if unconsciously, to an even older genre of vernacular tattooing. The fire service badges recall the popular regimental tattoos of the nineteenth century (fig. 6.10), and they also evoke the almost forgotten trade or artisan tattoos that were once popular in pre-1914 Europe. The latter were emblems of a craftsman’s pride in his skills. Their images were drawn from a repertoire of guild imagery that had been in circulation for many centuries, and that decorated surfaces other than the skin (fig. 6.11). And is it too fanciful to discern the influence of an older but also more durable vernacular art of commemoration – the imagery of catastrophe and salvation represented in the European ex voto? Ex votos are painted images or physical objects placed in churches to commemorate a divine favour received, often in circumstances involving a risk of death (fig. 6.12). They are first recorded in seventeenth-century Europe, but they persist up to the present day in Catholic regions of the world, especially in Spain and Italy,

Fig. 6.11. Baker tattooed craft emblem, 1908; undated. From: Erhard Riecke, *Das Tatauierungs-wesen im heutigen Europa* (Jena 1925).
and were surely familiar to Catholic parishioners on Staten Island, many of them of Italian extraction. Painted ex votos normally honour an episode of miraculous protection or rescue – in a shipwreck or a traffic accident, or in fires, explosions and collapsing buildings – but they also evoke those comrades and workmates who were not so fortunate or blessed. The painted ex voto often records the moment of catastrophe, just as some 9/11 tattoos represent the Twin Towers, while the hovering presence of the protective Madonna or saint finds, I think, an echo in the angels incorporated in other 9/11 images (fig. 6.13). Moreover, in maritime communities the ex voto can offer a substitute presence or a kind of compensation for the unrecovered bodies of those who died in shipwrecks: ‘for the impossible tomb is substituted a plaque in the parish church or funeral chapel, bearing a list of the names of those who perished at sea; thus are they inscribed in the Book of Life’.

4. Conclusion

The memorial tattoo turns the body of the surviving family member or fellow worker into a living ‘book of life’, inscribing the names or images of the dead into life itself. This makes it a peculiarly powerful instance of the tattooed skin’s role as a ‘[memory place] for reconstructing the person as a locus of remembered events’. In Steven Connor’s words, ‘the marked skin means memory, means never being able or willing to forget’. The permanence of this inscription is the physiological expression of the tattoo’s indelibility on the individual, while in anthropology or history its immutability is often read as the incarnation of an involuntary exchange between the law and the imposition of an ascribed meaning – as evidence
of the bearer’s subjection to fixed social or penal norms. In contemporary western culture, where the tattoo no longer carries only these automatic associations, both the decision to get tattooed and the meaning of the images may appear to be more self-willed than imposed. But in the 9/11 tattoos (and this may also be Connor’s implication), imposition and voluntarism are not posed as alternatives, but are fused in a single act of self-stigmatization. This forces the flesh to bear witness to what memory does not want to forgo, to make the event itself indelible and to mark the transition from one subjective state to another with an irreversibility equal to the event itself. As Al S., a firefighter who lost four members of his engine company, explained, ‘I don’t think I can ever honestly say that I am the same person I was on September 10th, because what I witnessed will always be there to haunt me’. How this insistent presence of the dead on the living will figure in the work of mourning is presumably something that will only become clear in time.

The memorial work I have been describing also draws on a deeper cultivation of empathetic identification in the contemporary US (and not only there). This is especially the case when we move from the immediate circle of surviving colleagues and family members – those whose grief is uppermost – to the wider circles of those without any direct personal relationship to the dead. It is among the latter that images connoting revenge, anger, or hatred are more likely to be found, in contrast to their virtual absence in the Staten Island group. Empathetic identification and substitution are not peculiar to this event or this technique of commemoration alone; they are a widespread feature of contemporary memorial practices, and are evidence of the current investment in trauma and survivorship as mechanisms of subjectivity. Catastrophic deaths have prompted spontaneous gestures of memorialization within a local community, as with the roadside shrines that commemorate a car crash or a particularly tragic murder. They have also caused national or even international responses, especially in the cases of celebrities such as the death of Princess Diana in 1997 or major disasters such as the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995. In these large-scale or highly publicized events, the shockwaves expand from those immediately affected to widening circles, with distance threatening to substitute drama for grief. With the internet enabling a further extension into the virtual reality of the universally accessible ‘cybershrine’, reclaiming an authentic association with the dead may become especially urgent. For those directly affected by 9/11, what more potent a way to achieve a fusion with the dead and the event that killed them than the tattoo’s merger of the image of loss with the flesh of the living.
Notes

1. I would like to express my gratitude to Vinnie Amessé for generously permitting the reproduction of his photographs, and to thank Maxine Friedman and her staff at the Staten Island Historical Society in Historic Richmond Town for invaluable help in the preparation of this paper. All opinions and interpretations are my own, except where otherwise attributed.


11. Picciotto and Paisner, Last Man Down, 1.


19. Alfred Gell, Wrapping in Images. Tattooing in Polynesia, Oxford 1993, 314. Cf. Connor, Book of Skin, 93: ‘The skin may be...a third thing, between the alternatives of a screen that lets things through, or a slate on which things may be deposited.’


21. My cue here is the dominant theorization of ‘the body’ that treats its ontological and cultural statuses as two sides of the same coin: there is not the body and then its historical and cultural inscription, but only already constructed, discursive bodies – bodies integrated to a greater or lesser extent in systems of meaning-constitution and communication. Some of the most relevant literature is usefully excerpted in two collections in particular: Aberdeen University Body Group (ed.), The Body. Critical Concepts in Sociology, 5 vols., London 2004, and Londa Schiebinger (ed.), Feminism and the Body, Oxford 2000.

22. For temporality as a specific property of the body-mark and tattoo, see Connor, Book of Skin, 84-86, and Kuwahara, Tattoo, 17-19.
23. Kilgannon, *New York Times* 23 Sept. 2001. The memorial tattoo also appears to have spread among US marines to commemorate comrades killed in Iraq and Afghanistan—this is a milieu in which tattoos were already common, but the memorial tattoo appears to be a recent adoption; see Wayne Wolley, ‘Much-decorated Marines wear tattoos proudly’, *New Jersey Star-Ledger* 1 April 2003; Tony Perry, ‘For Marines, tattoos are a reminder of the fallen’, *Los Angeles Times* 2 April 2007.


26. See for example *Puglia Ex Voto*, Bari 1977, the catalogue of an exhibition of ex votos held in Bari, e.g. plates 20 (buildings destroyed in an earthquake in Casamicciola, 29 July 1883); 42 (collapse of a cistern onto workers, March 1967); 90 (aerial bombardment of a concentration camp containing Italian prisoners in 1945).


30. Thus Michel de Certeau has claimed that ‘There is no law that is not written on the body...It inscribes itself on parchment made from the skin of its subjects. It constructs them as a juridical body, makes them into its book’: Michel de Certeau, ‘Des outils pour écrire le corps’, *Traverses* 14/15 (1979), 3.


In the summer of 1998, our parents/in-laws, Lotte and Carl Hirsch, visited the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) photo archive where they had been invited to donate some of their family pictures from Czernowitz, the East European city where they were born, grew up, and
survived the Holocaust.² The photos were intended to enhance the museum’s small archival collection of images from that city and the Bukowina province of which it had once been the capital (fig. 7.1). Selected pictures would be catalogued by date, place, and type, and labeled with additional information provided by the donors. Some of the photos, Carl and Lotte were told, might be chosen for display on the museum’s website.

It has been the goal of the museum’s photo curators to document and display Jewish life in Europe broadly, before, during, and after the Holocaust, balancing the archive of atrocity photos that dominate the museum’s permanent exhibition. Over the course of years, the museum archive has thus acquired many photographs through private donations as well as from images scanned from books and collected holdings in other institutions. In Washington, we observed Carl and Lotte’s donation, and the oral history interview that accompanied it, with close interest because we wished to gain some sense of how such a photographic archive is constructed, and of the assumptions and presuppositions that shape its development. Since both of us viewed the Washington DC museum as a site where an ‘official story’ of the Holocaust (and of the Jewish life that was destroyed by it) was displayed for public consumption and archived for scholarly study, we wanted to learn more about how that story takes form, and about the role that visual images play in shaping it. According to what questions and suppositions are images selected for the archive – both by individual donors and by the archivists who receive, catalogue, and display them – and what role do private, family photos play in the archive’s constitution?

Lotte and Carl approached the donation with divergent interests and investments. Carl, an engineer by profession, was systematic. He had researched the archive and its mission and carefully read the instructions sent to potential donors. At home, he had searched through his albums and photo boxes and had chosen images that he believed would be of interest to the museum – a very small number. He picked out the only remaining, somewhat torn and faded, portrait of his parents – their wedding photo from ca. 1910; an old picture of his mother and her sisters dating from the 1930s; some school photographs from the elementary and high schools he had attended; and a few pictures of his labour Zionist youth group, Hashomer Hatzair – portraits of members as well as informal snapshots of summer outings and trips³ (fig. 7.2). He selected no pictures of his brother and two sisters, nor of other family members, and no informal snapshots of himself. He did, however, bring some twenty additional images to the museum, all of them connected to his institutional affiliations, schools, and job before the war. He labelled each
photo with a brief description, dating it carefully, and identified all the depicted persons he could remember.

Lotte was much more hesitant, almost resistant. Why would a museum be interested in some poor-quality snapshots of her friends and relatives? Or in school pictures of her class in the Hoffmann Gymnasium? Who would ever care to look at what after all were private images, meaningful only to her and her family and friends? At home, she had gone back and forth examining the photo albums and boxes, choosing, discarding, but also considering backing out of the donation altogether. She did have just one photo she believed to be significant: a portrait, taken in the 1920s, of her father’s Freemason lodge – of a group of affluent, well-dressed, rather plump men and some of their wives – no doubt invited for a special occasion – looking quite cheerful and self-satisfied. Eventually, she decided to bring this photo and about a dozen from her own collection to the museum: school photos of students and teachers; of outings at the local riverfront; of fun times with other young people. Last, she added some of herself with relatives and friends taken by street photographers on the
Herrengasse, Czernowitz’s main street, as it was called in the era of Austrian rule. These were among her favourites, she said (fig. 7.3).

At the museum, the archivist began the donation interview with Carl. She asked him to provide his family history, and to supply the names, birth, and death dates of his parents and grandparents. After doing so, Carl succinctly described his family’s flight to Vienna when Czernowitz was threatened by Russian forces during World War I, the death of his father at the end of that war in which he had been a soldier in the Austrian infantry, Carl’s own evolution from observant Jewish practice to secularism, and his membership and involvement with the Zionist youth group, Hashomer Hatzair. He presented a brief account of Romanian nationalism and anti-Semitism in the 1920s and 1930s, and told how these increasingly impinged upon the lives of Jews in his native city and Romania at large. He explained about Czernowitz’s large German-speaking Jewish population and their profound assimilation to the Austro-German culture they had acquired during the Habsburg era. He spoke of their continued identification with that culture and the German
language even after Czernowitz had in fact been annexed by Romania (and renamed Cernăuți), and then the Soviet Union (and renamed Chernovtsy), and even after many tens of thousands of the city and province’s Jewish inhabitants had been deported or dispersed by the Holocaust.

The archivist then asked him to focus on his recollections of the Second World War years in Cernăuți, and Carl explained, with exact dates and precise details, about the first Soviet occupation of the city in 1940, and about the retreat of the Soviets and the return of Fascist Romanian forces with their Nazi-German allies in the summer of 1941. He also told of the Jewish ghetto that was established in the city, and of the deportations of Jews to Transnistria in October of 1941 and the summer/fall of 1942. He explained that he and his family were able to evade deportation by acquiring special waivers to remain in Cernăuți – authorizations given to some professionals like himself (a civil engineer working for the Romanian railroad) identified as essential for the city’s functioning.

And then it was Lotte’s turn. Except for inserting a detail or small correction on a couple of occasions, she had been listening intently, without interrupting. Carl had already explained so much, and with such authority, what could she be expected to add? But then she also told about her family, childhood, schooling, and university study of languages – and about the war years. The archivist prompted her further, but with questions different from those she had asked Carl. She wanted to know about Lotte’s home life during the war, especially during those middle years of Romanian/German rule marked by deportations and severe menace. ‘What did you do? How did you spend your days?’ she asked. ‘I was home with my mother, father, and sister,’ Lotte responded, ‘and after Carl and I married in the ghetto, with Carl’s sisters and mother as well.’ She gave a few German lessons to a Romanian officer, she added, and he brought them some food in exchange. It was actually not an unhappy time for her, she explained. She and Carl got together with whatever friends were left in the city, spent the night at each other’s houses so as not to violate the curfews, played cards and talked. But they also spent many of their free hours trying to sell household items in order to buy food – and then trying to find the food that they could barter or buy from the farmers that brought it into the city.

Lotte’s narrative was not a smooth one. She made astute observations, but the questions she was asked did not seem to fit into any conventional and expected narrative frame, as Carl’s had. The story of daily life under Fascist rule and persecution was not one she had spoken about at great length before. Would she have been more comfortable, we later wondered, telling her version of Carl’s historical account, the more dramatic ‘master
narrative’ punctuated by anecdotes about decisive action, good fortune, dangers evaded? This narrative contained the core account of their survival that both of them had related to us on a number of previous occasions. And yet on this occasion, Lotte did convey the humiliation of wearing the yellow star: what it felt like to be marked publicly in that way. Through voice and affect, she clearly communicated her sense of sadness and loss. The home she had so cherished as a child had indeed turned into a place marked by danger and threat.

The photos visibly affected Lotte emotionally, and we were moved to be witnesses to the memories they so evidently evoked, as she contextualized them and placed each, briefly, into her life narrative.

The archivist selected some of the photographs and discarded others with confident gestures. What determined the choices, we asked her? An important material consideration, she responded, was the quality of a print. But more importantly: she was not interested in photographs that could have been taken anywhere (she rejected Carl’s precious portrait of his parents). She preferred images of public and institutional rather than personal, familial life. She was thrilled by the image of the Masonic lodge group to which Lotte’s father had belonged, and quickly called over one of the museum’s resident historians working on a project on Freemasons to show it to him. And she also selected all the photos taken on the city’s main commercial street, the Herrengasse. From every European city or town, she emphasized, she wanted to have at least one pre-Holocaust photo showing Jews in normal circumstances, walking comfortably and confidently down its main street.

Much, of course, could be said about all this: about the interview at the museum and the photographic selection process there – about the speed and confidence with which the archivist seemed to have chosen the photos for the archive, and about her preference for public and institutional over personal and familial images. Much could be said about the gendered nature of the questions she asked Lotte and Carl respectively, and the narratives they, in turn, provided. In the remainder of this essay, however, we want to focus on the street photos in particular. In light of the archivist’s desire to acquire photos of East European Jews in circumstances of pre-Holocaust ‘normalcy’, it is fascinating to consider what these Czernowitz/Cernăuţi street photographs do and do not in fact reveal to us – about the place, about Jewish life in that city before and during the war, and about the role of family photos in individual, social, and cultural memory. A close look at these vernacular photos, we suggest, can supplement and at times even challenge the written and oral accounts of witnesses and the interpretation of historians and of descendants.
2. **Looking at street photos**

As in so many other European and American cities in the decades between the First and Second World Wars, street photographers on Czernowitz/ Cernăuți’s main pedestrian shopping and coffee-house streets photographed passers-by and strollers – earning money by selling small prints of the images taken. The photographs were made with portable, compact, tripod-mounted box cameras using foldable optical viewfinders and single-speed shutters tripped by a non-removable cable. The image was exposed on 2.5 x 3.5 inch direct-positive paper (sometimes on postcard stock with an imprint of a photographic studio) that was developed on the spot in a tank attached to the camera. This relatively quick procedure – a predecessor of ‘instant’ Polaroid technology – permitted photographers to offer the public inexpensive, finished, souvenir pictures to take home or, in cases where the photographers were sponsored by a studio, the opportunity to order enlargements or more formal posed portraits\(^5\) (fig. 7.4).

Numerous street photographs exist in the family albums and collections belonging to Jewish Czernowitz/Cernăuți emigrants or their present-day relatives, and over the course of the past few years (through word-of-mouth interest and an Internet listserv request) we acquired copies of many

---

Fig. 7.4. Street photography and the Mandelette camera with developing tank.
such images – some from the 1920s, the majority from the 1930s, but also a few that particularly stand out, from the Second World War years, the early 1940s. Like the archivist in the USHMM, we assumed that the images would confirm our understanding of Jewish life in Cernăuți before and during the war; in fact, however, it took persistent looking and no small amount of self-scrutiny for us to allow the photos to testify to the more complicated past to which they wanted to bear witness (fig. 7.5 a-d).

Certainly, when one looks at the street photos of passers-by and strollers one sees in almost all of them that the people centrally depicted seem to project a sense of confidence and comfort. In the vast majority of the street photos we acquired in our research, that characteristic seems as consistent as the fact that the people pictured are usually walking, on the move – subjects of a quickly snapped photo, not a posed one. The street photos are telling objects, portraying how individuals perform their identities in public: how they inhabit public spaces and situate themselves in relation to class, cultural, and gender norms. Indeed, the desire to recall and display such a performance may be one factor explaining why persons bought and kept the original photos (or their enlargements), and why they exhibited them in family albums. When they are then transferred from a personal/
family holding to a public archive – as in Lotte and Carl’s Holocaust museum donation – these images, at the juncture of private and public, of domestic and urban space, bridge a gap between memory and history.

Conveyed within these street photos is the essence of all photography: the photographic ‘capture’ of an image at a particular moment in time – the fact that a photo (in the pre-digital era) is assumed to ‘adhere to’ its referent and as such, as Roland Barthes has observed in *Camera Lucida*, ‘in Photography [we] can never deny that the thing has been there’, that the image depicts something “‘that-has-been’… absolutely, irrefutably present’ before the camera. Hence the documentary value of photographs to an institution like the Holocaust Museum that aims to construct an authoritative historical archive while also hoping to reactivate and re-embody it as memory. Each of the street photographs also reflects a place and a space – an urban street location depicting buildings (in often recognizable architectural style), as well as storefronts, display windows, and commercial signs. These are background to the street strollers, to be sure, but they also carry information about the larger social context in which life in this city took place. This ‘information’, which Barthes called the ‘studium,’ contributes to historical understanding.
At the same time, the connection between the viewer and the individuals depicted in the images – whether these viewers are contemporaries of the subjects in the photo, familial descendants, or more distant, unrelated, observers – provokes the work of memory in a way we have termed ‘postmemory’: through the inherited remembrance of subsequent generations. In fact, like all photographs, these street photos also reflect something ‘already deferred’ (to quote Barthes again), not only the instant of time when they were snapped but the change-over-time central to their historicity – change between photos of the same subject, as well as of different subjects on the same street, taken at different moments in time; and change between the time when these photos were actually snapped and the present time when we, as viewers, look at them.

People who look at these photos, whether in private collections or in public museum holdings, do of course bring knowledge to them that neither their subjects nor photographers would have possessed. Not only may these viewers be able to contextualize the images historically, inserting them within a broader tapestry of cultural/collective or personal/familial remembrance, but they also bring to them an awareness of future history – of events-yet-to-come that could not have been known to the subjects of the photographs or their photographers at the time when the photos were taken. This is at the heart of the Holocaust Museum archive’s desire for them: in the archive’s conception, they reveal a normalcy and a social integration that was then violently disrupted and destroyed with the beginnings of persecution, ghettoization, and deportation. Familial descendants might recognize in the photos some of the fabric of family life that had been passed down through stories and behaviours; extra-familial viewers might connect to them in a different way: through their own repeated exposure to a shared transgenerational archive of private and public street images that provide visual glimpses into urban life of the past. The very conventional nature of street photographs, and their place in the family album, invites an ‘affiliative’ and identificatory look on the part of viewers. Through such a look, viewers can project familiar faces and scenes onto them, adopt them into their own repertoire of familial images, and, in this way, use them to re-embody memory in a ‘postmemorial’ way.

When viewed as nothing more than historical documents, however, the street photos from Czernowitz/Cernăuți are quite limited. On first glance, we might in fact see them as the archivist had hoped – as images of urban Jews in apparent comfort, strolling down a busy main street of an Eastern European city in the years before the outbreak of the Second World War,
Incongruous images. ‘Before, during, and after’ the Holocaust

seemingly belonging to the place, indistinguishable from other people who share their economic background. In Lotte Hirsch’s collection of street photos, and in all the others we have amassed and viewed, the clothing worn by the strollers – generally fashionable and frequently elegant if not ostentatious – suggests their class situation and affluence, their membership in the city’s bourgeoisie, and their public assertion of this fact. (fig. 7.6).

Indeed, in their seemingly casual walk down the city’s main avenues, and in their apparent willingness to let themselves be photographed and to purchase the prints, the persons photographed seem to be publicly displaying their freedom to inhabit and to claim public spaces and to move through them, flaneur-like, at ease and in leisure within the urban landscape, declaring their unmarked presence there, glancing about but also ready to be looked at and to be seen.

And yet what remains invisible in these photos, or hardly perceptible behind the palpable display of Jewish bourgeois comfort, is the assimilationist trajectory that this class identification manifests and represents. Only through a comparison and contrast – with ‘shtetl’ Jews residing in Cernăuți’s nearby villages or with less affluent working-class Jews; or with impoverished non-Jews relegated to the background and perhaps invisibility in the photos – can one begin to gain a concrete, visual sense of the class mobility and differentiation that Habsburg-era Jewish emancipation had engendered and enabled here. These are the historical, economic, and cultural layers that the snapshot of one moment in time
cannot possibly reveal (fig. 7.7). To access these layers we must bring other sources to bear on images – sources, however, that because of the limitations of their own medium, may provide only partial knowledge about the past circumstances they record.

Thus, perhaps even less apparent in the street photographs than the process of class aspiration and Jewish assimilation is the fact that the city through which the strollers move is no longer Czernowitz, the ‘Vienna of the East,’ the liberal, predominantly German-speaking city with which the large Jewish bourgeoisie there had so strongly identified. Physical evidence of the transformation of the Austrian Czernowitz into the Romanian Cernăuți, to be sure, can be detected in some of the photos: street names have been changed, and they, as well as the store signs and placards, are written in Romanian, not in German. The ideological environment accompanying the Romanian takeover, however, is hardly evident: the reality that, not long after the political transfer to Romania at the end of World War I, the region’s new rulers instituted a strict policy of Romanianization that had immediate, dire consequences for Czernowitz.
Jews. Under its rubric, the Romanian language was instituted as the language of transaction in business and governmental affairs, and as the primary language of instruction in state schools. Romanian-born nationals were also privileged in professional and public appointments and promotions, and Romanian cultural institutions and nationalist values were foregrounded to the detriment of others. Jews were relegated to the status of Romanian ‘subjects’, not ‘citizens’, and many of the emancipatory civil and political rights that they had acquired were taken away from them. Most ominously, the street photos do not even hint at the existence and rapid and virulent growth of Romanian anti-Semitism and Fascism in the decades of the 1920s and 1930s – the increasing restrictions, quotas, discriminatory exclusions, harassment, and violence that Jews came to face and endure under Romanian rule. It was, for example, outside of the Café l’Europe on the Strada Iancu Flondor (as the Romanians had renamed the Herrengasse) – almost directly across the street from where photographers snapped pictures of strolling passers-by – that an incident occurred in the fall of 1926 that fed right-wing Romanian anti-Semitic hatred, and that resulted in the assassination of David Fallik, a Jewish student.\(^{11}\)

The photos, moreover, cannot disclose to us the contradictions at the heart of the city strolls: that the middle-class Jews depicted within them continued in large measure to live and walk through the street, as though they were really still in Habsburg Czernowitz and not in Romanian Cernăuți. In all likelihood, the conversations they had with each on their street walks, in the stores, at the cafés, like those at home, were in German and not in the mandated Romanian. In not being able to reveal their subjects’ adherence to the language and life-ways of the past, the photos cannot expose either the nostalgic yearning for a lost world of yesterday or the resistance to Romanianization and the restrictive political and ideological environment that was, in effect, taking place even at the very moment that they were being snapped.

‘In spirit’, the poet Rose Auslander wrote of this interwar period, ‘we remained Austrians; our capital was Vienna and not Bucharest’.\(^{12}\) The poets depicted in fig. 7.8 a-c – Alfred Margul-Sperber, Paul Celan, and Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger – all wrote in German throughout the period of Romanian rule. With the benefit of historical contextualization, therefore, the pre-Shoah ‘normalcy’ and ‘comfort’, and the documentation of Jewish ‘belonging’ that the Holocaust Museum archivist wanted the street photographs to display, is significantly compromised.

Moreover, nowhere does the limitation of the chronological schema of ‘before, during, and after the Holocaust’ that structures the museum
archive’s selection and display appear more problematic than when we consider the Cernăuți street photographs from 1942 and 1943. In fact, these photos challenge the visual record that has traditionally shaped the museological exhibition of this period. And, we want to suggest, they also fracture the family album’s affiliative look.

The two photos numbered 7.9 and dated above are two photos dated ‘1943’ and ‘around 1943’ that exhibit Jews wearing the yellow star. Yet in every other way these images very much look like the street photos from the pre-war era. Some two years before these photos were snapped, however, in the fall of 1941, about two-thirds of the city’s Jewish population – around 40,000 people – were deported to the ghettos and forced labour camps in Transnistria, where about half of their number perished. Those who were still able to remain in the city, like the subjects of these photos, endured severe restrictions and strict curfews, and were obliged to wear the yellow star. Men were routinely taken off the street to do forced labour. In the summer/fall of 1942, there was a second wave of deportations to Transnistria or further east, across the Bug River, into German-administered territories, and to an almost certain death. By 1943, therefore, when these street photos were taken, it was not at all clear that there would not be further deportations or ‘cleansings’ of Jews.
In all likelihood, during such a time of extreme oppression and totalitarian persecution, photography itself – and public photography especially so – came under suspicion as a potentially threatening instrument of surveillance and exposure. The street itself becomes quite literally, in the terms Walter Benjamin used to describe the ominous Paris photographs of Eugène Atget, ‘the scene of the crime’. And yet these street photos seem to refuse to testify to the alarming context in which they were taken and which we, as postmemorial viewers – viewers in subsequent generations – stubbornly want to expose in them. As in pre-war times, the Jews they depict are walking through the city – ostensibly on the former Herrengasse – and are having their pictures taken by a street photographer. Most curiously, they also purchased the photos after their development. Their stroll seems ‘normal’, as though the temporal and political moment in which their photos were snapped, and the mark of ‘otherness’ that they were publicly forced to display with the yellow star, were hardly relevant.

The two photos are certainly different: Ilana Shmueli (now an Israeli writer and poet) and her mother do perhaps look somewhat apprehensive; only the young Ilana is looking at the photographer while her mother looks straight ahead, seemingly avoiding the photographer’s gaze. This photo

![Fig. 7.9. Wearing the yellow star on the Herrengasse: a) Ilana Shmueli and her mother (courtesy Ilana Shmueli); b) Berthold Geisinger (left), Dita (surname unknown), and Heini Stup (right). (Courtesy Silvio Geisinger)
shows the two women on a bare and isolated street, perhaps at a time of day when few others were out walking around. They appear to be, in every sense, exposed. In contrast, the three young people in the Geisinger/Stup photo look more carefree: two of them are smiling, and the third, Bertold Geisinger, on the left, while looking somewhat puzzled at the photographer, does not appear to be intimidated. In this image, the street is busy and the photo reveals a great deal of the contextual information that we seek in such images – street signs in Romanian; fashionable clothes, affect, and gesture – that truly present a snapshot of a moment. And yet both photos raise the same set of questions: How could their subjects walk down the street during this terrible time with such apparent ease and freedom? Why did the photographer, surely not Jewish, take pictures of Jews who were so publicly marked by the yellow star? Was his interest merely in selling the print – a monetary one only – or were there other motivations as well? How did he look at his subjects; how did he see them? Did he view his own role as that of a witness to victimization or as a disengaged bystander distanced from the fray? And why, in turn, did the walkers stop to buy the street photo? Can we interpret their purchase as an act of defiance or resistance against the humiliation to which they were subjected? Or did they buy it in the same spirit that earlier street photos had been bought, with a sense of a future – with the intent or will, in other words, to archive it within their family album or collection and hence to transmit their story, this particular story, to generations yet to come?

Looking at these photos now, we do need to be sensitive to Michael André Bernstein’s warning that reading the past backward through retrospective knowledge can be a dangerous form of ‘backshadowing’ – in his words, ‘a kind of retroactive foreshadowing in which the shared knowledge of the outcome of a series of events by narrator and listener is used to judge the participants in those events as though they too should have known what was to come’. Yet the task of looking at photos from the past requires the ability to expose and maintain an awareness of the disjunction between the incommensurable temporalities of then and now. What, in this sense, can these truly incongruous photos tell us about the past, about our present relationship to it, and about photography’s evidentiary value?

We again see that, as historical documents, they raise more questions than they answer. They do indeed testify to differences between Cernăuți and other East European cities like Łódź or Warsaw, where no such commercial photos of Jews walking on streets outside of the ghettos could have been snapped at this time. Like wartime diaries and survivors’ memoirs, they can also tell us something about moments of relative normalcy.
that exist even in extreme circumstances, and provide us with glimpses into tranquil instances that helped to keep some hope of survival alive.

But it is as memorial objects that these street photographs pose the greatest difficulty. If these photos were bought and placed in family albums in the effort to transmit history and memory, they challenge the postmemorial viewer by resisting and defying the affiliative look that characterizes family photos. On the one hand, they appear to fit into the family album like the street photos from an earlier period. On the other, we would argue, our perception of and apprehension regarding the yellow stars arrest and confound our look, rendering us unable to integrate the ‘Jew star’ into the rest of the picture that we see. In each photo, the star is Barthes’s punctum as detail, but a detail that, once perceived, annihilates the rest of the image. In Barthes’s words, it ‘rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces [the viewer]’. The total image, in its apparent normalcy, cannot hold or absorb that detail: we either separate that detail out, or we refuse to see it at all. In Benjamin’s terms, the star is the ‘shock’ that ‘bring[s] the mechanism of association in the viewer to a complete halt’. Only captions, Benjamin insists, can enable speculation and understanding. Without them, images remain ‘bound in coincidence’.

The Geisinger/Stup photo is instructive in this regard. While, as the caption added by Lilian Madfes (who gave us the photo) states, the men visibly wear the star, the woman in the middle, smiling and not looking at the photographer at all, wears something that looks like a large white kerchief in the same spot on the left where a star would have been displayed. Is she perhaps not Jewish and not in fear of being seen without the star? Or might the star be covered by her hand, perhaps for the instant the photo is snapped, or by the kerchief itself? At the centre of the photo, wearing a bright white blouse, she is the figure that immediately attracts our gaze, and the kerchief provides us with an alternative focus within the image – an alternative punctum that permits us to block the stars from view long enough so we can take in the entire scene. Our look follows the trajectory of the colour white that dominates the photograph: when our eyes move from the white raincoat, to the kerchief, to the white socks, they are momentarily able to bypass the two stars—momentarily, because, unavoidably, the stars finally attract and absorb our gaze, making it difficult to see anything else. The stars, invisible at one moment, become hypervisible, and thus shocking and arresting, at another. It is this visual oscillation between the wildly divergent details of the image that allows us, finally, to look at this picture and to adopt it into the family album. And it allows us to accept the will to normality that drives these city strolls in moments of extremity.
An image from our own family has evoked a similarly oscillating look for us. It is a tiny street photograph of Carl and Lotte strolling on the Herrengasse (Strada Iancu Flondor as it was then called), one that has always been in one of our Hirsch family albums (fig. 7.10 a-b).17

‘Here we are, during the war’, Carl said to us some years ago, when we looked at this small photo together. We had always wondered how Lotte and Carl could walk down the street during the war with such an air of normality, but we did not become aware of the photo’s radical incongruity until we extracted it from the album and turned it over, verso, and saw that
Incongruous images. ‘Before, during, and after’ the Holocaust

Fig. 7.10b. Lotte and Carl, newlyweds.

Fig. 7.10c. Verso: Czernowitz 1942. (Hirsch collection)
Carl’s handwriting on the back side dates it precisely: ‘Cz. 1942’ – a year when Jews in Greater Romania were required to wear the yellow star and suffered major hardship and persecution (fig. 7.10c). But no star is visible in the image, nor does the affect that one would expect from photos taken in Cernăuți during that devastating time seem to be present within it. When

Fig. 7.11. Lotte and Carl, ‘Cz. 1942’: first enlargement.
we began to write about wartime in that city, we digitally scanned and
enlarged the little street photo, blowing it up several times, searching to
find what it might help us to learn about the wartime in Cernăuți, and what
might not be visible to the naked eye.

Amazingly, when it came up at about 4 x 6 inches on the screen, the
image and the story it told seemed to change dramatically – at least on first
glance (fig. 7.11, blowup 1). All of a sudden, it looked like there was
something on Carl’s left lapel that had not been noticeable before. A bright
light spot, not too large, emerged just in the place where Jews would have
worn the yellow star in 1942. Perhaps the picture was not as puzzling as we
had thought. We printed the enlargement, took out magnifying glasses,
went up to the window and used the best lamps in our study to scrutinize
the blow-up. We played with the enlargement’s resolution on the computer
in Photoshop. This must be the yellow star, we concluded, what else could
he be wearing on his lapel? We blew the picture up even more, then again,
and even more – yes, of course, it had the shape of the Jew star. Or was it?
(Fig. 7.12: blowup 2; fig. 7.13: blowup 3; fig. 7.14: blowup 4).
Fig. 7.13. third enlargement.

Fig. 7.14. fourth enlargement.
We began to reread the photograph’s content, its message, against Lotte and Carl’s facial expression and body language – which were now also much more clearly visible. Still, the incongruity between their appearance and bearing and what we knew about the events of the time did not diminish. All of our frenzied sleuthing merely opened more questions, related to the ones posed by the other two wartime street photos: if Carl Hirsch is wearing a star, then why is Lotte not wearing one? If they went out without it, illegally, why did they stop to buy the photo? Weren’t they afraid of detection? Or, possibly perhaps, is there in fact no star in this little street photo? What if the spot on the lapel is dust– nothing more than a small dot of dirt on the camera lens that had blocked out a minute detail on the developed photo? Or what if the date on its verso side is incorrectly marked? What if the photo was really snapped in the later months of 1943, after Romania no longer required Jews to wear the yellow star? These questions, unfortunately, have no definitive answer. Certainly, the mystery associated with this little photo again illustrates the contradictions embodied in images of Jews walking down East and Central European city streets during the war – the oscillating look they elicit, and the difficulties we have in integrating the yellow star into the affiliative and narrative context of the family album.

Why these difficulties? Diaries, testimonies, and memoirs, including the stories of Lotte and Carl that we have heard repeatedly, should have precluded our surprise at seeing these ordinary strolls through the streets of Cernăuți in extraordinary times. The pre-war street photos and the wartime ones resist not only what we think we know about this past but what we think we can and should see in any visual records from and about the time. The pre-war images disguise the persecutions that led up to the war, and the sense of danger and threat that was already present in the city though not captured in the images. Similarly, in testifying to a will to normality and ordinariness during wartime extremity, the wartime photos challenge the visual landscape of atrocity that dominates the memorialization of the Holocaust.

Both thus enable us to consider the specificity of photography, especially vernacular street photography, as a medium of historical interpretation. While testimonies and diaries record subjective reflections and private experience, photos taken in urban spaces bear witness to public acts and encounters. The incongruity we find is thus not in the images themselves, but in the events these images record and prompt in those who look at them – the events of their production, their purchase, and the retrospective acts of looking to which they give rise. Perhaps, ultimately,
they tell us more about what we want and need from the past than about the past itself.

3. The photo selection (Bukowina Jewish Museum of History and Culture, Chernivtsi, 2008)

‘What about the photos of Jews on the Herrengasse wearing the star in 1942/43?’ we asked Natalya Shevchenko, the curator of the new Bukowina Museum of Jewish History and Culture, when we discussed with her the composition of the case that was to contain the Holocaust displays. It was May 2008 and we were in Chernivtsi to consult about this museum, which was scheduled to open in the fall on the occasion of the city’s 600th anniversary celebration. The museum had not been planned by the municipal government, however, but by the Jewish Federation of Ukraine in Kiev, and the Holocaust display was an afterthought. Initially, the planners had intended to feature two hundred years of Jewish life in the region up to the start of World War II but did not want to include the war years in the exhibition, and certainly not the Holocaust, in order, as they put it, to ‘focus on life and not death’. For them, the focal era to be displayed was the ‘before’: the thriving Hasidic life in the villages, as well as the development of secular culture in the city, highlighting the contribution of Jews to civic, political, and artistic growth. And yet, ultimately, in response to the objections of Czernowitz survivors around the world who, through Internet communications, had been outraged to learn that the museum was intending to display ‘pictures of family reunions, weddings, smiling faces’ while totally excluding ‘shootings, deportations, and mass emigration – the most fateful aspect of our history’, as one of them noted, planners were convinced to include one case on the Soviet occupation of the city in 1940–1941 and another on the Holocaust years. We quickly discovered in our conversations with the historian in charge of this display and with the museum curator that these two cases were, for them, the most difficult to conceive.

‘The Holocaust display will have three parts’, Oleg Suretsov, the historian, told us through our translator, Natalie. ‘We begin with the summer of 1941, the Einsatzgruppen killings in the villages, the shootings by the Pruth River, the yellow star. Then we have the Cernăuti ghetto and the deportations in the fall of 1941. And then, life in Cernăuti between 1942 and 1944 for those who were spared. We plan to show one or two deportation
photos but Transnistria itself will not be included’, Oleg continued to show us a few documents that had been selected for the display cases: a ghetto ordinance and some identification cards marked by a yellow star. ‘There are so few images and objects from that period: we don’t know how to make the exhibit compelling’, he added. What, we wondered, could be more stunning than the street photos displaying the Jewish star from 1943? ‘See, here are two of them’. We had brought the photos of Ilana Shmueli and Bertold Geisinger with us. ‘The stars are very visible, and yet these Jews are strolling down the Herrengasse (Strada Iancu Flondor) as they did in previous times. Don’t you find these fascinating testaments to the will to normality in times of extremity? Surely your visitors will be moved as well’, we insisted, sharing some of our speculations about these images.

It was hard to read Natalya’s expression as she shook her head, hurriedly searching through her files. She pulled out a picture of a young man with a depressed look in his eyes, dressed in tattered and patched clothing, wearing a large yellow star. The background was blank but the image was labeled ‘Return from Transnistria’. ‘This is the one we must show’, she said. ‘Look at the others—they are smiling. They give the wrong impression’ (fig. 17.15).

We knew this image well since it had first been reproduced in Hugo Gold’s massive two-volume Geschichte der Juden in der Bukowina. As one of only a handful of photographs identified as being from Transnistria, this pictured has been invested with a great deal of historical and symbolic importance. Besides this image, the archives contain only a few photos of the deportation marches, a few of the crossings over the Dniester River into Transnistria, a number of images of the Jagendorf foundry in Moghilev, but none of the other ghettos or camps, and a few of repatriated orphans at the end of the war. Nothing in this image of the young man, however, links it to its attributed source, and, in fact, we had always been sceptical of its label. The most obvious problem is the yellow star: Jews in Romanian-administered territories were no longer required to wear the yellow star after 1943, and repatriations from Transnistria did not begin until early fall of 1944. The armband, marked XII, also does not match historical accounts of the Transnistria deportations or repatriations.

Indeed, it may be its very simplicity and lack of specificity that enables the young man’s photo to acquire the representative status that appealed to the Chernivtsi curator and made it an appropriate icon for this very small museum exhibit. The look in the young man’s eyes, the yellow star, the tattered clothing all evoke the extreme hardship, humiliation, and suffering associated with ‘deportation’ and ‘camp life’. Its iconic status overrides the
mismatch between its label and the factual information it carries. The Cernăuţi street photos may be too complicated and ambiguous, too incongruous, to serve as icons of the ‘Holocaust experience’ for which the historian and the curator were searching. The fuller and more layered story that they tell might, indeed, ‘give the wrong impression’ to hurried visitors looking to be emotionally touched by an exhibit case called ‘The Holocaust’.

The historian Sybil Milton has shown that many, if not most, Holocaust photos have come down to us like this one, without specific information about the photographers, or about the context, place, or exact date of production. Photographs are often archived or exhibited with very

![Image](image_url)

**Fig. 7.15.** ‘This is the one we must show…’ (Courtesy Yad Vashem).
incongruous images. ‘Before, during, and after’ the Holocaust

incomplete or inadequate attributions, mostly indicating current ownership, rather than the original site where they were taken: ‘Although more than two million photos exist in the public archives of more than twenty nations’, Milton writes, ‘the quality, scope, and content of the images reproduced in scholarly and popular literature has been very repetitive’.18

With their preference, the Chernivtsi curators, like the archivists at the USHMM, place themselves within a well-known trend. They display images that readily lend themselves to iconicization and repetition. But while this choice may allow them to stir viewers’ emotions and to gain their sympathetic attention, it also impedes troubling the well-known narratives about this time. It restricts their visitors’ engagement with the Holocaust’s more complex – and less easily categorized – visual and historical landscape. And, in so doing, it delimits the rich interpretive possibilities that this vast archive of private and public photographs can open and enable.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this article was delivered as a talk at the conference ‘Exposed Memory: Family Pictures in Private and Public Memory’ held in Budapest, Hungary, in 2007 and published in Hungarian as Exponált emlék: családi képek a magán- és közösségi emlékezetben, edited by Zsófia Bán and Hedvig Turai, Budapest (Hungarian Chapter of International Association of Art Critics) 2008. This version appeared in History and Theory 48/4 (Dec. 2009).


4. For the deportations and Transnistria, see Ihil Benditer, Vapniarca, Tel Aviv 1995; Matatias Carp, Holocaust in Rumania: Facts and Documents on the Annihilation of Rumania’s Jews 1940–44, Budapest 1994; Shattered! 50 Years of Silence: History and Voices of the Tragedy in Romania and Transnistria, edited by Felicia Carmelly, Toronto 1997; Julius Fischer, Transnistria: The Forgotten Cemetery, New York 1969; Matei Gall, Finsternis: Durch Gefängnisse, KZ Wapniarka, Massaker und Kommunismus. Ein Lebenslauf in Rumänien 1920–1990, Constance 1999; Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, ‘“There was never a camp here”: Searching for Vapniarca’ in: Locating Memory, edited by Annette Kuhn and


7. Ibid., 25-27, 41.


17. A more detailed account and analysis of this image can be found in Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, ‘What’s Wrong with This Picture? Archival Photographs in Contemporary Narratives’, Journal of Modern Jewish Studies 5/2 (July 2006) 229-252.

'I was reading Alessandro Portelli’s *The Order has Been Carried Out*, writes Mario Martone, a filmmaker and former director of Rome’s public theatre, ‘and I could almost hear the voices of the many witnesses, women especially, that run through it. I thought there was the material there for a performance that would allow us to really hear these voices as they tell their stories’.¹

*The Order has Been Carried Out* is an oral history narrative of the memory, meaning, and history of the most traumatic and symbolic event in the history of World War II in Italy: the Nazi massacre on 24 March 1944 at the Ardeatine Caves in Rome, in which 335 men were executed by the Germans, ostensibly in retaliation for a partisan attack that killed 33 Nazi policemen attached to the SS the day before. The action had been taken by an underground group known as GAP (*Gruppo di Azione Patriottica*), as part of the urban guerrilla warfare that opposed the German occupation of the city of Rome (8 September 1943 – 6 June 1944). The Germans’ immediate response was mass retaliation: ‘ten Italians for each German killed’. Men were rounded up in the city jail, in the SS detention house at Via Tasso, and literally off the street. They were brought on trucks to an abandoned quarry known as the Ardeatine Caves (*Fosse Ardeatine*) and shot in the back of the head until the corpses piled up and almost filled the narrow underground space.

In the post-war years, conservative forces (including the Catholic Church and mass magazines) instilled in the public opinion the false belief that before carrying out the massacre the Germans had requested the
partisan ‘perpetrators’ to deliver themselves. Thus partisans’ failure to do so made them, rather than the Nazis, responsible for the death of the 335 men executed at the Fosse Ardeatine. In fact, the Germans decided to proceed with the retaliation immediately, they never requested the partisans to turn themselves in, and they didn’t even actively search for them: they were less interested in punishing the ‘perpetrators’ than in frightening the population. This false belief, however, was instrumental in demeaning the morality and meaning of the Resistance and undermining the anti-Fascist culture on which Italian democracy was based.

The book is based on nearly two hundred interviews with survivors of the victims, partisans, ordinary citizens, and young people in Rome. My purpose was less to offer another reconstruction of the events, which were a matter of record and well known to historians, than to deal with the historic fact of memory itself. Especially after the mid-1990s, when the Berlusconi coalition for the first time brought an openly neo-Fascist party to power in Western Europe, the revisionist narratives about the Resistance became a way of legitimizing a sharp turn to the right in Italian politics and culture. Therefore, the memory of the Ardeatine Caves was not just a matter of historical interest but a hot contemporary political issue that had direct bearing on people’s political choices.

In order to create a critical reconstruction of this memory, I interviewed about 200 people: survivors of the victims, former partisans, some Fascists, many young people, from all walks of life, all parts of the city, all political persuasions. The interviewed voiced the contrasting memories, the false and wrong narratives, the myths surrounding those events. Also, because the victims of the massacre literally came from every social class, political denomination, and generation from every neighbourhood in the city, reconstructing their lives and experiences was a way of reconstructing a popular oral history of Rome itself, from its proclamation as Italy’s capital in 1870 to World War II. Finally, the stories of the survivors – parents, wives, children – brought the story up to the present, both through their own experiences and through the battle for memory and meaning they were forced to carry out against myths and misconceptions.

As I was putting the book together, I was in some way already thinking of a possible theatre version. The montage of voices, the large cast of characters, the representation of the spoken word, all suggested a play – rather than a film: oral narratives, like the theatre, cannot be separated from the presence of the speaker’s body.

Yet, I imagined it more as some kind of mass miracle play, a solemn, almost sacred performance with music and ritual. On the one hand, I always
thought of the writing of oral history as some version of the musical
oratorio, with its counterpoint of choral pieces, solo arias, narrative
recitativo. On the other, there was a dominant presence of mass death in the
story, that suggested solemnity of form. Giovanni Gigliozzi, the president
of the association of the victims’ families, and a theatre critic in his own
right, had told me in his interview that the theatre text on the Ardeatine
Caves had already been written: it was Euripides’ The Women of Troy.
Indeed, in the descriptions of the forms of mourning after the massacre
I had recognized the traces of both the southern Italian ritual keening for
the dead, and classical Greek tragedy. Yet, that was not the right key. I had
misunderstood both the language of the theatre and, to some extent, the
essence of orality.

When I met Mario Martone at Rome’s public theatre, I told him about
my idea of a theatre version of the book. He suggested another form: a
storyteller, the kind of one-man narrative theatre that was gaining
ascendancy in Italy’s theatre of memory. The first name that came to mind
was Marco Paolini, whose one-man theatre narrative of the tragic flood that
killed two thousand people in the Vajont valley in 1963, had had a
tremendous impact both in live performance and on television. There was
a hitch, however: Paolini is from Veneto, in northern Italy. And this was
very much a story of Rome, and needed to be told in the language and
inflections of Rome. It was several months before Martone called me back
and said he had found the right person, and suggested I go see this new
young person, Ascanio Celestini, who had just won a contest for young
theatre actors and authors and was performing at the Teatro Argentina,
Rome’s most prestigious traditional theatre.

I went, and I was moved, intrigued, and unconvinced. Ascanio Celestini
told stories, folk tales and imagined visions of the end of the world, and
sang songs (some from my own field recordings of folk music from central
Italy, Lazio and Umbria, collected in the 1970s, though he didn’t know at
the time), with a lightness, a sense of humour, and a feel for the absurd that
were utterly irresistible but also very distant from what I had imagined.
How could such an artist, whose keynote was humour and levity, deal with
the heft of the tragedy of the Ardeatine Caves? Anyway. We talked, we
liked each other, he read and liked the book, and we decided to try.

Ascanio could tell right away that what made the book different – or at
least, what interested him – was less that it was a book of history, than that
it was a book of stories from, within, and about history. In his introduction
to the book version of Radio Clandestina, Ascanio Celestini writes:
Portelli’s book is shocking. But it is not shocking like those books that shock us by baring hidden truths. This book reveals the scandal of memory. Of something that we did know, but have forgotten. It is easy to become indignant when learning a truth we didn’t know; there is a much more contradictory effect when someone reminds us of something that belongs to us. There are many books about the German occupation of Rome and the Ardeatine Caves massacre. Portelli’s book does not add much to the history we knew, but what he does is adding the stories… Sandro’s book does not reveal a hidden scandal, but reminds us that history concerns us all, because all have a perspective in history. Because all live in history, even though they may dwell only in its periphery.

Ascanio’s theatrical art was based on a long experience of listening to stories, learning from oral storytellers, and teaching storytelling to children and adolescents. He knew that the greatest oral narrators do not emphasize, do not aim for the grand and the dramatic, but rather tend to understate. They do not dramatize, hardly ever emote; they do not add to the story. If anything, they subtract. I remember listening to a 21-year-old student tell the story of how he was tortured by the police (with hundreds of others) after the demonstrations against the G8 meeting in Genoa, in 2001: he never raised his voice, kept the same vocal register throughout, never paused for effect, never twisted his face to dramatic effect. Yet, he gave me goose bumps and chills all over. The same is true for the way Ada Pignotti, my book’s most effective voice, had told me of the terrible archaeology of unearthing and identifying her husband’s and relatives’ bodies from the heaps of the dead in the Ardeatine Caves, where they had lain for months under the dirt and garbage strewn by the Nazis in order to hide the place of the massacre (the mass grave was opened after the liberation of Rome by the Allies on 24 June). And for the way Piero Terracina, an Auschwitz survivor, tells young people of his arrival at the death camp and what came after – and explains that he will not, cannot, tell everything, that he will spare us the worst. The power of these narrative performances lies in their serene dignity, in their moral firmness, in the restraint, in the use of irony and sense of the absurd, in the anti-heroic understatement, in the silences and the untold stories that open the space for imagination.

Throughout Rome, one can see plaques and stones commemorating the victims of the Ardeatine Caves. They are usually redundant with the adjectives and verbs of horror: ‘Nazi brutality’, ‘barbarously slaughtered’, ‘cruelly massacred’. I had already noted how this rhetorical emphasis prevails in the plaques placed in later years by the institutions, rather than those placed soon after by the victims’ neighbours and comrades, in which
remembering the humanity of the victim is more important than loudly blaming the inhumanity of the perpetrators. It seemed to me that these rhetorical flourishes were a figurative way of raising the voice to make up for an inadequacy of feeling. This is why I decided that, in my book, I would simply say that the victims were ‘killed at the Ardeatine Caves’: if this was not enough to cause anger and emotion, then no supplementary verb or adjective would do it.

Now, in Ascanio Celestini’s theatre version, Radio Clandestina, there are very few adjectives and verbs. Ascanio does not dictate our emotions, but creates a space and a time in which, if we know how to feel, we can find them within ourselves. All he needs are a few subtle touches, all related to the use of the voice as a rhythmic and tonal instrument, in order to evoke a complex play of unequal power and cultures, of tensions and conflicts between the language of bureaucracy and folk speech, between writing and orality, between the arrogance of the occupiers and the confusion of the occupied. At one point, he tells how his grandfather – who could read, in a largely illiterate Rome – reads out for his circle of acquaintances the press release in which the Nazis, after the fact, announce that the massacre has been completed and ‘the order has been carried out’. As he does, the voice takes on a rhythmic pace that breaks down the syntax and the logic of the text, so as to estrange it entirely – it’s Italian, but a foreign Italian, the Italian of the oppressor, and it makes no sense. Much as in the unforgettable opening of Toni Morrison’s The Bluest Eye, in which the language of school books is transcribed in ways that reveal its total absurdity, Ascanio Celestini creates a distance between rhythm and logic in order to proclaim the absurdity of that text and of the events that it tells about.

The performance is filled with little gems like this. Ascanio’s grandfather (a character in his performance – not in my book: I will talk about this later) works at a movie theatre to which Ascanio formulaically refers, over and over, as ‘cinema Iris, odierno cinema Gioiello’ – ‘Iris Theatre, nowadays Gioiello’: by itself, the very word ‘odierno’ evokes the bureaucratic language of a city of government offices and civil servants like Rome, stages the almost oracular relationship between the illiterate audience and literate reader (whose failure to match rhythm and logic, however, suggests that he is closer to his listeners than to the authors of the text), and marks for the audience the distance between past history and present story.

The rhythmic and tonal use of the voice, and the rhythmic structure of the story, culminate in Celestini’s sophisticated use of the oral storyteller’s tools of repetition and formula. The formula is an indispensable brick in the construction of oral performance – from Homer’s ‘rosy-fingered dawn’ to
Martin Luther King’s dream, to Ascanio Celestini’s almost obsessive ‘odierno cinema Gioiello’. The formula is the hinge between the fixed and the movable parts of the performance, a hook for the storyteller, a memory aid for the listener, and a shared rhythmic experience for both. Most importantly, the use of formulas indicates that, once the most exact and effective way of expressing an idea or defining an object has been found, there is no need to change it merely for variety’s sake.

This is where the culture and practice of orality part from the consumerist ideal of the ‘added and enhanced’ and of innovation at all costs. Shaped by the experience of scarcity, the cultures of orality have developed, rather, a poetics of subtraction: honing expression as to evoke worlds with a minimum of words, setting aside formulas, words and images for future re-use, saturating space and time with just one voice, one body, perhaps one instrument, and with the imagination of the watchers and listeners, and perhaps extending the time and pleasure of the performance by repetition and digression. The blues works this way, and so do most folk songs and folk tales.

When I began to imagine that the story I was working on could also be told through theatre, I assumed that the words on the stage would be, more or less, the same words that I was putting on the page, the words that I was repeating from the interviewee’s narration. This assumption was reinforced after I heard Iaia Forte, an extraordinary Neapolitan film and theatre actress, read a passage from the book on the night it was awarded the Viareggio Book Prize. Once again, however, Ascanio Celestini knew and practiced the logic of orality and theatre much better than I did.

As opposed to the written text, the oral narrative is renewed at each telling, as it goes through the body and the mind of the speaker. Thus, even when singers and storytellers endeavour to repeat the story and the song ‘as I’ve heard it’, ‘as it’s always been told’, and believe that they do, the oral performance is an ever-changing, time- and space-specific experience, moulded by the listener’s response as much as by the performer’s state of mind. Thus, even in the most oft-told story, there is always a degree of improvisation and reinvention. The story told becomes part of the story of the teller and that of the listeners – just as in the case of the south Italian rural storytellers who, as folklorist Aurora Milillo showed, told traditional folk tales as if they were stories of emigration, and stories of emigration in the form of folk tales.²

Ascanio Celestini did the same with my book: rather than a staging of what I had written, *Radio Clandestina* became an independent, very different, work of art. It took its start from my book, but then, as it should,
Radio Clandestina. From oral history to the theatre

it went its own, creative way as it transferred the stories to another medium and context. Ascanio took the basic structure of the book – the Ardeatine Caves as a vantage point for the retelling of the history and identity of Rome; he adopted and retold (in his own words) some of the most important and effective narratives; and then he mixed them together with his own stories and the stories of his father and grandfather (at the ‘odierno cinema Gioiello’), and with stories his own imagination and invention.

Perhaps the most exciting invention is that of a listener: Ascanio Celestini knows that there’s no storytelling without story-listening, and therefore he doesn’t just tell the story (as do other actors-narrators, notably Marco Paolini and often Dario Fo) but stages a storytelling situation by inventing an imaginary character to whom the story is told – the ‘bassetta’, the ‘little short lady’, who is almost an embodiment of old folk characters in Rome. The little short lady doesn’t just listen but acts as a counterpoint, sometimes as a comic relief, to the main narrative. Incidentally, she is illiterate. Thus, the main narrator doesn’t just retell the stories of the Fosse Ardeatine, but also repeats to the audience the comments and stories of the little short lady. The performance begins with the story of how she asked the main narrator to read her some for-rent signs, under the pretence that she has lost her glasses. As in the ‘odierno cinema Gioiello’ scene, she is not part of the world of writing: but, as our contemporary, she is also a living memento of another time (‘if the Americans find out about you’, the main narrator says, ‘they’ll put you in a museum – a real living illiterate person! – in one of those glass cages. Small as you are, you won’t even be cramped in it’).

Her cultural otherness, and the odd ways in which she changes the theme to get back to her own concerns, are also a metaphor for the difficulties that the story of the Fosse Ardeatine had in finding an audience and a shared memory. And yet, some of her stories are very moving in an absurd, tall-tale fashion steeped in sentiment and irony: the story of when her father, in wartime, couldn’t find candles for her (non-existent) birthday cake because ‘the Duce said that everybody hates us Italians, including the Eskimos, who refuse to sell us whale oil to make candles with’; or her tall-tale description of the widening of boundaries of the city (‘pretty soon the periphery of Rome will reach Tunisia and we’ll have to take to helicopter to shop for vegetables and fruit at the market’). Her absurd narratives match the absurdity of the massacre itself, and her spatial imagination matches the book’s and the performance’s concern with the urban spaces of Rome. But she is also the one who tells the story – shared by a whole wartime generation of Romans – that gives the performance its title, about listening in secret – Radio Clandestina – to the broadcasts from London (and being
fascinated by the coded images that to her evoked strange and exotic worlds). Of course, there is no such character as the ‘bassetta’ in my book; but she embodies perfectly its geography, its sense of the absurd, and its thirst for telling and listening to stories.

Ascanio Celestini’s staging also responds to poetics of subtraction and minimalism: a chair, a basic wooden frame of three wooden slats nailed together, and a light bulb that he handles, hangs, picks up again, turns off and on creating effects of light and shade on his own face that match those of sound, tone, and silence in his voice. The body and the voice are the scenic tools that the artist carries with him wherever he goes, travelling light and creating his own space in the most unlikely places. For years, Radio Clandestina has been performed all over Italy, in big theatres and damp cellars, school and culture clubs, for mass audiences and for a few listeners, on television and in occupied universities, always with the same intensity.

Thus is why it is very significant that both the debut and the filming of Radio Clandestina should take place in the cramped spaces of Via Tasso, a former Nazi prison turned liberation museum in the centre of Rome. I was unable to get in on debut night, because the space was already overcrowded. But I recall the day of the filming: Ascanio and his frame and light bulb in a room smaller than my living room, and facing him a few of us, myself, my wife, three or four young people from Circolo Gianni Bosio, and the old, beautiful faces of the men and women of the Resistance, whose history and honour the performance rescued and praised.

Via Tasso – writes Ascanio Celestini in his introduction – was the ideal place. It had been a jail, but it had also been a normal apartment. You can still see the lamps, the switches, the sockets of sixty years ago. It looks like anybody’s grandparents’ home – except that the windows are walled. The cell where we filmed has only two narrow slits and, on the green-cloth-covered walls, an oblong of bricks that used to be a window before the Nazis used the place. If you look closely at the walls, you can still read the graffiti left by the prisoners during their detention.

Via Tasso, we thought, was very close to the spirit of the performance and of Portelli’s book. We thought it was a space in which the history of World War II and the memories of those who lived through it were merged into one body. And they were well represented by the normality of an apartment like any apartment, which, touched by Nazism, became a place of history without taking on the rhetoric of the monument.
In a way, this is also a definition of Celestini’s masterpiece (and of what I had attempted to do with my book): not a commemoration, but a living memory, that comes to life again at each telling. We needed it: the story of the Fosse Ardeatine has been told in so many false and distorted ways for many years, and its meaning has been reshaped by a revisionism that – by erasing or tainting the Resistance and absolving Fascist and Nazi crimes – erodes the very foundations of our shared social experience. Ascanio Celestini didn’t just give us a brilliant and original piece of theatre of narration and memory: he helped us retrieve and understand the reasons and meaning of our Resistance-born democracy. And, in doing so, he turned a book of oral history and stories into an independent work of art that has carried the book’s message to audiences that the book would never be able to reach, and even if it did, could hardly impress with the same emotional power.

Notes

1. This paper is a re-writing of my preface to the book-cum-DVD edition of Ascanio Celestini’s Radio Clandestina (Rome 2005), a one-man narrative theatre performance based on my book The Order has Been Carried Out, Rome 1999, New York 2003. Quotes from Mario Martone and Ascanio Celestini also come from the introductory material to the book.

2. Aurora Milillo, Narrativa di tradizione orale. Studi e ricerche, Roma 1977. Aurora Milillo was one of Ascanio Celestini’s teachers at the University of Rome La Sapienza.
Media and the Arts
As an art working with time and addressing the ear, music, like poetry, requires and challenges memory. As early as the fourth century, Augustine used the example of music to illustrate his meditations on time and memory, describing the process of understanding a melody that unfolds in time,¹ and Edmund Husserl, in his *Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins*, used music as the most obvious example of how memory and expectation or, in his terminology, retention and protention, cooperate in the perceptive construction of a melody.² Perceiving and understanding a melody requires memory, the same kind of short-term memory which is required to understand a sentence. We are dealing here with a form of memory that accompanies and enables cognition, but not ‘remembering’ in the proper sense. Remembering requires a kind of ‘past’ to refer to by an act of remembering. Short-term memory and the interplay of retention and protention have nothing to do with the past, rather, they constitute the present. Music, it is true, has much to do with performing the present as an aesthetic idea and making the present aesthetically sensible. Music is per se an art of memory; it requires memory to be perceived, enjoyed, and understood; it creates and works upon what could be called the memory of an implied listener.

Music draws on two different forms of memory. On the one hand, it employs almost regularly, at least until the twentieth century, certain traditional rhythmic and melodic gestures which are easily identified as allusions to or evocations of certain moods and tempers without functioning as real ‘signifiers’ and may even quote well-known formulae or
tunes, or refer to other musical styles or pieces by ways of intertextuality. On the other hand, under certain conditions it may create a ‘past’ and a memory of its own as it unfolds in time. We may call the first form ‘extratextual’ memory, because it refers to elements outside the musical text itself, and the second form ‘intratextual’ memory, since the elements referred to belong to what the listener has already heard within the same piece some minutes ago.

Musical styles and pieces can relate to intratextual memory in two different ways, which are related to two different ways of receiving and understanding music. Music may be received as a finite form, a temporal gestalt with a beginning, middle, and end; it may also be received as a stream or flow without recognizable formal contours. These are obviously two ways not only of listening to music, but also of composing music. Until Schubert, all composers seem to have conceived of a musical piece not in terms of flow but of form. Schubert was arguably the first composer, at least in some of his later pieces, to wilfully abolish the form aspect of music in favour of its flow aspect, a tendency that Richard Wagner brought to fullest fruition one generation later. Music as form relies strongly on memory. Form is made audible mostly by recurrence. Cognition implies recognition. The obvious example is the classical sonata with its first part expounding two antithetical themes, its repetition, then the second part, starting with the development of the thematic material and ending with the recapitulation, a slightly altered repetition of the first part. We are dealing here with a musical form, in which a trained listener knows at every moment where he stands in the piece even if he hears it for the first time. Memory and expectation or, in Husserl’s terms, retention and protention, cooperate in his perception of musical form. Husserl applied his terms to the perception of a melody, but under the conditions of strong formal traditions they may also be applied to larger pieces including whole movements of a symphony stretching over something like 20 minutes.

The romantic idea of music as flow corresponds closely to the concept of the sublime, in that it swamps our capacities of musical comprehension which consist of retention and protention. This kind of music is neither easy to retain nor to expect. ‘Nur ist’s nicht leicht zu behalten, und das ärgert unsere Alten’ as Hans Sachs has it in Wagner’s Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg. However, Richard Wagner, who certainly was the most prominent exponent of the flow concept of music exploited more systematically than any other composer its memory aspect. His new technique, for which Hans von Wolzogen coined the term Leitmotiv, made use of recurrences and variation and, while defying expectability, relied
heavily on memory and recognition. This new stress on memory was obviously meant as a compensation for the lack of predictability. Retention and recognition are different things. Husserl, speaking of the reception of melodies or musical themes in general distinguished between retention and reproduction; recognition has to be located somewhere in-between, but much closer to reproduction than to retention.4

What could, however, count as ‘past’ with regard to music? The peculiarity of music over and against narration and film lies in the fact that music cannot (normally) refer to the past as narration does. A story and a film are units that unfold in time and refer to events that unfold in time. There are two levels of time involved, narrated time and the time of narration. Music knows only one temporal level corresponding to the time of narration. It cannot ‘refer’ to the past in the way a text and a film can, but it can refer to the past in two ways: it can create its own past to which it can refer in the course of its temporal progression, and it also can refer to music of the past. The first case corresponds to intratextual, the second to extratextual and intertextual memory, respectively. The interesting fact about this in the context of cultural memory is the existence of several ways of creating such a memory and referring to an internal past; even more important is the observation of rather fundamental shifts in these concepts. The use of the memory metaphor seems the more revealing the longer and more variegated the piece is whose unfolding in time we observe.

The conscious appeal to memory in the construction of a musical composition seems to be a comparably late phenomenon. There are, of course, many forms of repetition in music before the age of Mozart and Haydn, but it would be an unnecessary and even illicit extension of the concept of memory to interpret a ritornello or a da capo as an act of memory. In order of a repetition to work as a recall in music, it must occur after a significant distance both in time and in substance. The musical piece must have moved through very different regions before a return is felt as a recall. It seems that Mozart and Haydn were the first to consciously exploit the possibilities of music to play with time and memory.

In his book *Bach’s Cycle, Mozart’s Arrow. An Essay on the Origins of Musical Modernity,*5 Karol Berger showed that a transformation occurred in the western sense of time around the middle of the eighteenth century. Until then, time was primarily experienced in and associated with the cycles of nature; in the course of the eighteenth century, it became primarily the dimension of history and progress. This general shift from cyclical to linear models of time was, according to Berger, related to a process of secularization. Not only the cycles of natural life, but also the idea of divine
eternity kept the idea of linear, historical, and homogeneous time at bay. Only after 1750 was time in the sense of change, history, and progression actually discovered by composers as the proper dimension of music. A work in which this new sense of time becomes manifest in a particularly impressive variety of forms is Mozart’s last opera, *Die Zauberflöte*. In its musical texture, Mozart employs virtually all forms in which music is able to work on and with memory.

## 1. Short distance recalls within one number

The classical example of reference back within one number is the traditional da capo aria, since it implies a more or less verbatim repetition of the A part. This form was introduced into the opera at the end of the seventeenth century and prevailed triumphantly in the Neapolitan opera seria during the first part of the eighteenth century. There is not one example of this classical form in the whole of *Die Zauberflöte*. The only aria that comes near the da capo form is Tamino’s short *Dankgesang* to the gods and to the flute ‘Holde Flöte durch dein Spielen’ (in no.8), but here, the reprise is discontinued after three bars ‘holde Flöte, durch dein Spielen selbst wilde Tiere Freude… doch Pamina bleibt davon’. With these words, the key changes from C major to C minor and the joyous melody into a lament. Obviously, Mozart uses the da capo form only to make the abrupt break all the more sensible.

There are only four real arias in the *Zauberflöte*: no. 4, the aria of Tamino ‘Dies Bildnis’, no. 17, the aria of Pamina ‘Ach ich fühls’ and the two arias of the Queen of the Night, nos. 5 and 14, in the opera seria style. All the other ‘arias’ are songs in the German singspiel tradition: Papageno’s ‘Der Vogelfänger’ (no. 3) and ‘Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen’ (no. 20), Monostatos’ ‘Alles fühlt der Liebe Freuden’ (no. 13), Sarastro’s ‘O Isis and Osiris’ (no. 10) and ‘In diesen heiligen Hallen’ (no. 15), and also Pamina’s and Papageno’s duet, ‘Bei Männern welche Liebe fühlen’ (no.7), where we have several stanzas on the same melody and therefore much repetition.

The song is a cyclical genre based on cyclical memory. What Mozart does to the form of the aria is best described as a linearization of memory and, therefore, a distantiation from the more popular forms of singing, a step towards artistic refinement and sophistication.

The dismissal of the da capo aria and of repetition in favour of progression, however, has to be compensated for by other forms of reference. Mozart introduces a quite novel device, for which Eric Smith has coined the
term ‘vestigial recapitulation’? Instead of literal repetition of whole phrases, vestigial recapitulation operates with small units and only partial assonances, sufficient to create in the listener a sense of coherence and unity in spite of an otherwise linear progression without any obvious repetition.

For examples, let us look first at Tamino’s aria ‘Dies Bildnis’ (fig. 9.1). It starts with one of Mozart’s favourite melodic lines, to which I will return later, and then leads in bar 10 to a very expressive figure, almost an outbreak of emotion, on the words ‘dies Götterbild’: a leap up on the seventh followed by a stepwise descent. This figure returns in different form, not as a leap but an ascent, a run in seconds, in bar 36-38 on the words ‘O wenn ich sie nur finden könnte! O wenn sie doch schon vor mir stände!’ and similarly in the thrice-repeated figure in the first violins on Tamino’s words ‘Ich würde sie voll Entzücken …’ (bars 46-48).

![Fig. 9.1](image-url)
These bars are in voice and accompaniment an elaborated recapitulation of bars 29-32 on the words ‘die Liebe, die Liebe’ (fig. 9.1a).

![Fig. 9.1a](image)

One could even go so far as to see in Tamino’s concluding leap ‘and ewig’ an echo of his similar leap at the beginning ‘Dies Bildnis …’ (fig. 9.1b).

![Fig. 9.1b](image)

Pamina’s aria in G minor, in Mozart’s musical language the key most charged with emotion, begins with another of Mozart’s favourite melodic lines starting at the fifth and descending to the tonic, a line which the Queen of the Night already had used for her lament ‘Zum Leiden bin ich auserkoren’ and which here appears in a much more expressive form. Even the fifth, with the ensuing leap on the upper octave, occurs elsewhere:
in the theme with which the piano enters in Mozart’s concerto in d minor K. 466, in the Adagio of the Quintet for strings in g-minor and in the song ‘Die Engel Gottes weinen, wenn Liebende sich trennen’ K. 519, for instance. But this has nothing to do with the kind of memory which is our topic here. Mozart, in using this formula, certainly does not appeal to the memory of a listener knowing these and other of his works. In using these figures, he speaks his own personal language without presupposing a knowledge of this language which is only accessible to a scholarly reconstruction a posteriori. We should perhaps distinguish between ‘formulae’ and ‘memory motifs’. Memory motifs operate within the limits of a piece, formulae operate within a code, be it the personal code of a composer or the conventional code of a time period or a genre. Here we are dealing with Mozart’s personal code or language of musical expression, and we always have to be aware of an interplay or intersection between these two functions, the memory function creating aesthetic unity and the expressive function, drawing from an individual or cultural fund of figures and formulae.

The text of this aria is a song with two stanzas. Mozart, however, disregards this structure and sets the words into music in linear progression. The last lines, however, ‘meinem Herzen mehr zurück’ and ‘so wird Ruh im Tode sein’ ‘rhyme’ musically (fig. 9.2). The particularly expressive line in bars 13f. on the words ‘meinem Herzen, meinem Her...’ recurs not only a third deeper in bars 31f. on the words ‘so wird Ruhe, so wird Ruh...’, but both are elaborated or ‘figured’ versions of bars 25-26 on these same words ‘so wird Ruhe, so wird Ruh (im Tode sein)’.
Particularly expressive is the leap downwards by a diminished seventh, from a'' flat to b' and b'' flat to c' sharp (fig. 9.3). This is what in baroque musical rhetorics is called *saltus duriusculus*. The wind instruments first show how to do it, after a run upwards in semiquavers (bars 16-19), the voice follows considerably later (bars 27 and 29, with an interesting change of accent: ‘Fühlst du nicht der Liebe Sehnen, fühlst du nicht der Liebe Sehnen’). This is an example of an interplay between memory motif and conventional figure. The motif is first introduced as an expressive formula, even a ‘pathos formula’, but turns into a memory motif since it is ‘remembered’ by the progressing piece in its later development.

A magnificent example of such an interplay between formula and memory motif occurs in the second aria of the Queen of the Night, ‘Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen’. At the beginning, in bars 4-6 on the repeated words ‘Tod und Verzweiflung’, we hear a Neapolitan sixth which Mozart uses here and in other works as a particularly efficient pathos formula. Whereas this chord usually serves as a transition from one step to another within the sequence of the cadence, Mozart loves to dwell on this
chord for one or even two or three whole bars as an expression of utmost pain, suffering, or even despair: ‘Tod und Verzweiflung’. It occurs this way even in his instrumental music.\(^{11}\)

At the end of the aria, in bars 80-82, after a very long distance and in a rather different context, we meet with this same formula again on the words ‘alle Bande der Natur’. The Neapolitan sixth is used here both as a conventional formula expressing pain and furor, and as a memory motif in the form of a vestigial recapitulation. This is not a repetition appealing to cyclical memory but a reference back within linear progression in the course of which the queen has worked herself up in a veritable paroxysm, an ecstatic of fury and murderous hatred.

This is precisely the dramatic idea that lies behind the change of the aria form from static repetition to dynamic progression implying linear instead of cyclical memory. The da capo aria of the traditional opera seria was built on the ideal of the prince or princess able to master his or her affects. He/she may be carried away into another state expressed in the B or middle part but he/she regains his or her initial state and returns to the A part. The noble character is static.\(^{12}\) The characters that Mozart depicts in his late operas undergo a change, a development towards something new, either a total loss of control like the Queen of the Night in her second aria or a resolution as in her first one.

2. Middle distance references across numbers

Let us now proceed to references across numbers, appealing to long term memory in order to be recognized. We know this type of reference especially under the term ‘leitmotif’ from the work of Richard Wagner.\(^ {13}\) Wagner made a systematic use of leitmotifs as a compensation for his abolition of both conventional forms such as the aria and the recitative, as well as the periodic structure. We should therefore reserve the term leitmotif for Wagner. But the use of recurrent sound symbols within an opera is much more widespread and goes back to the eighteenth century. We may call these memory motifs. This device becomes more and more frequent at the end of the eighteenth century, the time which put an end to the da capo aria and other forms of cyclical memory. The memory motif is connected with the dissolution of the closed forms, the ‘numbers’ of the traditional opera form, into a coherent flow and thus with a thorough ‘linearization’ of musical structure and the implied memory. Mozart is a pioneer of this tradition. Memory motifs, therefore, occur in all of his
mature operas. They are not so much meant to create unity and coherence, but to carry a specific meaning. In this respect, they are real ‘symbols’.

The most obvious example is the threefold chord that sounds like an enigmatic hieroglyph in the middle of the overture, strangely interrupting the vivid fugato with sounds that seem to come from another planet. The overture, it is true, starts with a threefold chord, but this one is different. The opening chords are played by all the instruments, full orchestra. The harmony changes, from tonic to parallel minor to a third-sixth chord. These chords sound like an opening fanfare similar or at least comparable to the overture to *La Clemenza di Tito* and many others. The chords that sound in the middle are played by the wind instruments alone. Nine beats – three times three: \( \underline{-\underline{-\underline{-}}{-\underline{-\underline{-}}}} \) instead of five: \( -\underline{-\underline{-\underline{-}}\underline{-}} \). They sound like a strange signal, full of significance but yet undecipherable. The chords are meant to leave an imprint on the memory of the listener who is supposed to recognize them (and it is indeed impossible not to recognize them) when they occur again more than one hour later in the ‘solemn scene’ at the beginning of the second act. At their second sounding, they clearly reveal their true nature and significance: they are part of the ritual of initiation. The chords function as an acoustic motto comparable to the chords accompanying the words ‘*Così fan tutte*’ which sound first, without words, equally enigmatically, in the overture, to be heard later with the words when the riddle of their meaning is resolved. This device may be termed quotation, rather than ‘vestigious recapitulation’, but the direction of the quotation is cataphoric, not anaphoric (referring forward, not backward) and has to do more with expectation than with memory. The quote does not take up something that has been said before, but anticipates and foreshadows something that will be said later. We do not understand the quote at its first occurrence, we only feel that it is a quote and must have a very specific meaning.

The *Zauberflöte* is particularly rich in sound symbols. This applies above all to the ascending line of the first three chords: tonic, third, fifth (fig. 9.4). This figure occurs again immediately afterwards in the introduction, in C minor, on Tamino’s words ‘*Zu Hilfe, zu Hilfe, sonst bin ich verloren*’, then at the beginning of his portrait aria, and for a third time, very significantly, at the beginning of Sarastro’s and Pamina’s encounter before Pamina’s words ‘*Herr, ich bin zwar Verbrecherin*’, in the very same 5-beat-rhythm as at the beginning of the overture.
In the second act, we have to wait until the famous march through fire and water to hear them again in what sounds like a free, almost improvised variation on Tamino’s portrait aria, immediately afterwards in the chorus ‘Triumph, triumph’, and, again immediately afterwards and very surprisingly, at Papageno’s aria ‘Papagena! Papagena! Papagena!’ It seems obvious that we are dealing here with a sound symbol the meaning of which is related to the ritual of initiation. Each of the three initiates receives this symbol like a sign of admission: first Tamino, twice, first in minor, then in major, in its proper form. Pamina follows, Papageno is last. All of these instances are, of course, variations of the true initiation signal that sounds first in the overture and then several times during the ritual proper.

Another obvious sound symbol is the melodic line which starts Tamino’s portrait aria, the upward leap by a sixth, followed by a
descending line (fig. 9.5). It recurs at a very sublime moment: the final encounter of Pamina and Tamino before the ‘gates of horror’, the Schreckenspforten, on the words ‘Tamino mein! O welch ein Glück!’ In the following march through fire and water, Tamino plays on his flute a free variation on his portrait aria, combining the two motifs, the ascending chord and the leap with the descending run. The meaning of this second motif is doubtlessly ‘love’. The recurrence of these motifs does more than creating coherence: they point to the significance of the operatic action which is a combination of initiation, the ascent to higher knowledge, insight and cognition, and love, the final union of two lovers who were sure of their love right from the start but had to overcome a series of obstacles in order to become finally united.

Another memory motif whose meaning is univocally ‘love’ is the motif which is first played by clarinets and then is taken up by Tamino on the words ‘Dies Etwas kann ich zwar nicht nennen’ (fig. 9.6). We hear it again when Sarastro assures Pamina: ‘Zur Liebe will ich Dich nicht zwingen’, intimating that Sarastro does in fact love Pamina. Pamina takes the motif up in speaking of her mother: ‘Mir klingt der Muttername süße!’. For a fourth time, we hear the motif in the terzetto of the ‘last farewell’ in C minor on the words ‘wie bitter sind der Trennung Leiden’.

![Fig. 9.5](image-url)
A third example of a recurrent motif serves as a bracket, marking the beginning and the end of the last trial. We hear it first in C minor with very obvious connotations of lament, suffering and severe earnest, and finally in C major with equally obvious connotations of triumph and bliss. The scene with the two armed men guarding the gates of starts with the note C played in unison by the strings and the three trombones in a slow rhythm long-short-long, followed by a descending, typically threnodic line made famous by John Dowland as the lacrimae motif. The closing chorus at the end of the opera starts in a similar way, but in E flat major. Here, the E flat is played in unison somewhat faster in the marching rhythm long-short-long long, followed by the same descending line but now in major where it acquires a totally different, triumphant character.
3. Reference beyond the opera

References beyond the opera have the character of quotations. The most popular examples are the quotations of music from other operas by other composers and by himself in the banquet music in *Don Giovanni*, or the quotation of a *fandango* from Gluck’s ballet *Don Quichote* in *The Marriage of Figaro*. As far as I can see, there are no such obvious quotations in *Die Zauberflöte* except the melody on which the two armed men read aloud to Tamino the inscription over the gates of horror: ‘*Der welcher wandert diese Strasse voll Beschwerden*,’ for which Mozart used a chorale by Martin Luther dating from 1524. To use a protestant chorale on the Viennese opera stage is in itself very surprising. Much more surprising and even unique, however, is the way in which Mozart treats this melody.

He has the two armed men sing this melody in unison and parallel octaves as a cantus firmus over a fugato accompaniment played by the strings in the purest style of Johann Sebastian Bach. There is not one note that could not

---

*Fig. 9.7. The hieroglyphic inscription at the entrance to the trial by water and fire: stage design to Act II Scene 28 of Mozart’s *Zauberflöte* by Simone Quaglio (Munich 1818).*
have been written by Bach himself and would betray Mozart’s authorship. What is quoted here is not the music itself which is an invention of Mozart’s, but the style, the musical language. In the treatment of these lines, Mozart, as it were, speaks a foreign musical language, in order to translate into music the idea that the two armed men are reading or translating an inscription in a foreign language, possibly in hieroglyphs (fig. 9.7).

The two themes which Mozart combines in this accompaniment are using two typical figures of baroque musical rhetoric. The first subject – the ascending and descending line – uses the figure called ‘ascensio’ and translates the idea of ‘wandering’, the counter-subject uses the figure of ‘suspiratio’ – sighing – translating the notion of Beschwerden – pain, suffering, trouble (fig. 9.8). This is precisely the way in which Bach translated his cantata textbooks into the language of music.
Mozart did not find the themes of the fugato accompaniment at first go and it is very interesting to compare the final version with a sketch that Maximilian Stadler has found among Mozart’s papers (fig. 9.9). It is commonly assumed that the sketch has nothing to do with the final version, but I think there is an obvious relationship between the two. All we have to do is to exchange the first bars.

Instead of beginning with the ascending and descending quavers, which in the sketch come only in the second bar, the sketch starts with the long notes which in the final version appear in the second bar. The line with the quavers is slightly changed in the final version in order to sound a bit more interesting and less regular. The most important addition, however, is the addition of a contrasting second theme, a ‘counter-subject’ as it is called, turning the fugato from a fuga a uno soggetto into a fuga a due soggetti. It is this addition which gives the fugato its unmistakably ‘bachisch’ character. Nothing like it had ever been heard before – or since – on the opera stage. Mozart not only quotes a style which belongs to an age foregone by 50 years, he also quotes the situation, context, and atmosphere...
of a protestant service which serves as a symbol for the mysteries of Isis – and all this on the stage of a Viennese Vorstadt theatre.

The case of inserting an exact style quotation in an opera seems rather unique. Even outside the operatic genre, one looks in vain for exact parallels. Haydn and Mozart, it is true, loved to write fugues. The six quartets of Haydn’s Op. 20 each close with a fugue in ascending degree of complexity (with one, two, three, four subjects), and also Mozart’s early quartets in F major K. 168 and K. 173 in D minor close with such a fugue in the baroque style, but nobody would ever think of taking these fugues for genuine baroque music. In his later work, Mozart tries to integrate the form of the fugue into the classical sonata form as in the last movement of the G major quartet K. 387, the grandiose finale of the Jupiter symphony and also in the overture of the Die Zauberflöte itself. There are magnificent fugues in Mozart’s church music, especially in the Requiem which he composed more or less simultaneously with the Zauberflöte, and the Kyrie is an almost direct quotation of Handel’s Dettingen Anthem.

But in none of these works, the use of baroque models has this memory function, the character of ‘performing the past’. Only in the Zauberflöte, where this stylistic quotation is staged in the form of an ancient ritual and of the recitation of an ancient inscription, its character as an appeal to memory and a conjuring up of an old and almost forgotten tradition is evident.

On the modern operatic stage, as well as in the concert hall, performing the past, i.e. performing music that has been composed during the last 400 years has become a completely familiar and normal practice. In Mozart’s time, this was different. Some baroque music was still in use in the churches, but the romantic revolution of musical cultural memory with its rediscoveries, reanimations, and renaissances (starting with Mendelssohn’s centenary performance of the St Matthew Passion by J. S. Bach in 1829) lay still far ahead. Mozart was a pioneer in this respect, instigated by Baron Gottfried van Swieten, the director of the imperial court library, who was not only a passionate collector of musical manuscripts but also an amateur musician. G. van Swieten acquainted Mozart with the music of Bach and Handel, and Mozart arranged for the baron and for private performance a considerable number of keyboard fugues by Bach for string trio and quartet and later four oratorios by Handel for public performance. Another strong stimulation in this direction must have meant for Mozart his encounter with Bach’s vocal music during his visit to Dresden and Leipzig. Among these scores he might have found Bach’s cantata No. 2 which is in its entirety based to the chorale Ach Gott vom Himmel sieh darein. This is the
melody that Mozart used in the *Zauberflöte* with the precise intention of performing the past.

Performing the past: this is in fact the idea that underlies the whole plot of the *Zauberflöte*. What is performed here are the mysteries of Isis, an ancient rite belonging (as it was believed then) to the most remote past. Mozart is careful, in writing the music for this opera, to avoid any orientalizing exotism. In his imagination, the action is certainly not set up in ancient Egypt for which he would probably have used other musical idioms. This excursion into another and very foreign style is the only kind of exotism which he allows himself and it does not point towards ancient Egypt nor to the orient but to the past, to a very distinct past which, to a Viennese public, must have appeared as foreign and strange as possible. Foreign and strange is the inscription which the armed men are supposed to read or translate to Tamino. ‘Whoever travels this road of troubles becomes purified through water, fire, air and earth. If he can overcome the horror of death, he will ascend from earth to heaven. Illumined will he then be able to dedicate himself wholly to the mysteries of Isis.’ This inscription, as well as the mysteries of Isis, is centuries old, going back to ancient Egypt, but – this is the idea – these mysteries are still alive or can always be reanimated and reactivated. In performing these mysteries, we are performing the past, but as a still-living reality, and not as part of a long foregone civilization which we have to excavate and to reconstruct. Moreover, the past which Mozart and Schikaneder were performing in the *Zauberflöte* was different from the past which usually provided the great themes of the operatic stage: oriental and classical antiquity and the heroic Middle Ages which now in early Romanticism began to push aside the classical themes. In the *Zauberflöte* we are dealing with a kind of timeless and placeless past – vaguely associated with ancient Egypt, it is true – which can always and everywhere become present again when and wherever the mysteries of Isis were performed. This is precisely the kind of past which the Freemasons were studying, celebrating, and performing not only in their lodges, but also in their parks and gardens where they installed pyramids and obelisks, grottos, towers, artificial ruins, and subterranean passages. The Freemasons considered themselves to be the heirs and continuers of ancient traditions which, in their circles, were still alive. The remoteness of this past was considered to be not a matter of archaeology but of secrecy. In the shelter of secrecy, a past has survived which otherwise lies buried under the sand of the desert and the churches of Christianity, under forgetting, repression, and persecution. In performing this past on the opera stage, Mozart transforms the shelter of secrecy into the mystery and memory of art.
Notes

1. Confessiones XI, 28.38. Augustine exemplifies the relation of music and memory by the experience of the singer, not of the listener.

2. Edmund Husserl, Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins, edited by Martin Heidegger, second printing Tübingen 1980, especially 385 (19)-408 (42) and 409 (43)-411 (45).

3. Act II, Scene 2. ‘Yet it’s not easy to keep in mind and this vexes our elders’.

4. Husserl distinguishes between retention and reproduction or primary and secondary remembering and illustrates the first with listening to a melody and the second with remembering this same melody after the concert. It is this ‘secondary remembering’ which is implied in our ability to recognize a recurrent theme within a musical piece of some length.


6. The general principle of the three-tiered song with a B part and reprise of the A part is, of course, much older as it is still familiar in folk songs and popular music. It is one of the basic forms of Western music, and its introduction into the opera is doubtlessly due to a rapprochement between the high academic style of the Monteverdi tradition and the folk music of the time.


10. For these diminished septs, which Mozart uses to express intense pain, see Steven B. Jan, Aspects of Mozart’s compositions in g minor. Toward the Identification of Common Structural and Compositional Characteristics, New York/London 1995, 69f., and Stoffels, loc. cit.


13. The term has been coined to describe Wagner’s technique, not by Wagner himself but by Hans von Wolzogen.


17. Baron Gottfried van Swieten spent seven years between 1770 and 1777 as imperial ambassador at the court of Frederic the Great at Berlin where he befriended Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and Princess Anna-Amalia, a great lover of Bach and Handel. When Van Swieten was called back to Vienna in 1777 to become director of the library, he brought home to Vienna a large collection of sheet music of German composers especially by
Johann Sebastian Bach and Georg Friedrich Handel which he had played every Sunday in a circle of friends (the Gesellschaft der Associerten) to which Mozart was invited as soon as he arrived in Vienna in 1781. Mozart transcribed a number of fugues from the Well-tempered Clavier for string trio and quartet (K. 404 and 405) and wrote fugues and other forms in the baroque style of his own invention. Later, he also arranged four of Handel’s oratorios, Messiah, Acis & Galathea, Alexander’s Feast, and Ode for St Cecily’s Day for great orchestra to be performed in concert. The two last mentioned share with the Zauberflöte the theme of music as an all-transforming power.

18. On his journey to Berlin in 1789, Mozart twice visited the old cantor of St Thomas, Johann Friedrich Doles, and studied Bach’s scores of vocal music: motets, cantatas, oratorios.
Between the inspiring and the ‘has been’

Despite poor health foreshadowing his death later that year, Walter Scott spent the spring of 1832 with his son and daughter in Naples. He was fêted by all and sundry, among others by the Austrian minister who organized a masquerade ball in his honour on the theme of the Waverley novels. The invitations to this literary masquerade apparently led to some commotion, Scott’s son Charles describing how ‘one beautiful Italian woman has been in tears for the last week because her family are too Catholic to allow her to take the character of Rebecca the Jewess’.2 Refusing a Catholic permission even to make believe that she is a Jewess betrays a remarkable concern with the transformative power of role-playing. But in the first place, the anecdote illustrates how the Waverley characters had become household words even in Scott’s lifetime. In particular it exemplifies the international popularity of Ivanhoe (1819), Scott’s romance of the Middle Ages in which Normans and Saxons are pitted against each other in determining the future of England and where Jews, like the afore-mentioned Rebecca, are left on the outside.

If we fast-forward almost two hundred years, we read that the main character of Jonathan Franzen’s The Corrections (2001) also experiences
some commotion in the run-up to a festive occasion. Having fallen out of favour with the world and his family, he has forgotten about Christmas and now looks in his panic to Walter Scott:

He’d solved the problem of family Christmas gifts on the last possible mailing day, when, in a great rush, he’d pulled old bargains and remainders off his bookshelves and wrapped them in aluminium foil and tied them up with red ribbon and refused to imagine how his nine-year-old nephew Caleb, for example, might react to an Oxford annotated edition of Ivanhoe whose main qualifications as a gift was that it was still in its original shrink-wrap.³

That Franzen should use the example of an annotated edition of Ivanhoe to exemplify a totally inappropriate gift for a young nephew indicates a dramatic loss in status for a novel that had got so many people excited in the 1820s. The amusing reference to a permanently shrink-wrapped edition fits in with the more widespread perception of Scott and all his works as an egregious ‘has been’, as someone who used to be very popular, particularly among young people, but who no longer is. He is at most preserved in annotated editions, Franzen hints, but no longer actually unwrapped and read. Yet he is apparently not totally forgotten: the very fact that Franzen can enjoy this little dig at Scott presupposes that his readers will still recognize the name ‘Ivanhoe’ and remember more or less what it refers to. Almost two centuries after its initial publication Ivanhoe persists – if only as an icon of a ‘has been’ and as a shrink-wrapped material relic of the literary past.

That the name ‘Ivanhoe’ is still recognizable to a contemporary public is itself testimony to the immense popularity of Scott’s story across several generations and across several continents. The reception of this particular novel, as of so many of Scott’s works, yields mind-boggling statistics. There have been countless editions in the English language; it has been translated into at least thirty-six languages and it continues to generate new translations, most recently in Dutch, Croatian, and Vietnamese (the Library of Scotland has recorded more than 600).⁴ It has been abridged and illustrated for juveniles, and adapted to the stage, comic book form, cinema, radio, television, and computer gaming. Indeed, the familiarity with the name that Franzen presupposes nowadays is probably due not so much to direct familiarity with Scott’s text itself, but with the dissemination of his story in these various other media. In short, Ivanhoe is arguably the best-known, most widely disseminated, most internationally successful, and most enduring of all Scott’s works, several of which were record-
The many afterlives of Ivanhoe

breaking best-sellers.\(^5\) It has influenced the perception of the Middle Ages among several generations of readers, including a number of historians who have admitted being so inspired or, alternatively, so goaded by its romantic distortions as to turn to history as a vocation.\(^6\) In short, ‘Ivanhoe’ (that is, the text and its reception) represents a media phenomenon that stretches from the early nineteenth century, when the novel became an international bestseller, to the early twenty-first century, where it persists on the outer reaches of the cultural margins, arguably in the process of disappearing from sight like a flare that is almost, but not quite, extinguished. Providing a direct link back to the world of 1819, the longevity of this particular story bears witness to cultural continuities that persist in the age of mass media and modernization. Because of this relative longevity, Ivanhoe also offers a unique opportunity to examine the role of literature as a medium of cultural remembrance over a longer period of time and from the perspective of its dynamics.

In what follows I examine the cultural afterlife of ‘Ivanhoe’ and analyse the different uses to which the text was put by the various generations who interpreted it as a means to re-imagining their collective past and defining their relationship to it. Thus rather than conceptualize literature in static terms (as a symbolic object whose meaning is stabilized at the moment of production), I shall show how the role and status of a novel can continue to change along with the changing social frames in which it is interpreted.

**Text, remembrance, performativity**

Given the historical importance of literature as a cultural medium, it is not surprising that considerable attention has already been paid to literary texts within the broad field of cultural memory studies. By and large, however, literary scholars have taken a ‘rear-view mirror’ approach and, looking backwards in time from the text, have focused on its unique relationship to the past events it creatively recollects. In keeping with long-established critical traditions, moreover, most attention has gone to the ways in which individual works of literature engage with dominant views of the past and offer alternatives to them. Within the Anglo-American school of criticism in particular, works of literature are often assumed *qualitate qua* to provide a critique of hegemonic histories and, when re-interpreted by the contemporary critic, to offer a counter-memory which does justice to the historical experiences of hitherto marginalized groups or explores alternative ways of reflectively engaging with the past.\(^7\) Some of
these themes will surface again at a later stage in this analysis. But my point of departure is nevertheless very different from the traditional one in that I propose taking a forward view, rather than a rear-view one, focusing less on the writing itself and more on the cultural work done subsequently by that writing as an operative element in cultural remembrance.

It is something of a commonplace that works of art are ‘timeless’ or ‘untimely’ (in the German sense of unzeitgemäss) in that they have a capacity to speak to the imagination of later generations: they have a complicated relation to time being both rooted in, and yet ahead of, the time at which they were produced. Moreover, not only is their afterlife complex from a temporal point of view, it is also multidimensional; literary works can persist and play a cultural role in a variety of guises: as material objects (witness the cherishing of old editions), as symbolic artefacts (words that can be reproduced in new editions), as stories (characters and series of events that may be represented in a new text or an alternative medium), but also as icons (Proust’s work, for example, as shorthand for high-brow complexity). How to take these complexities into account when considering the role of literature as a medium of cultural remembrance?

Luckily the ground has been prepared by developments within the interdisciplinary field of cultural memory studies. Recent years have seen the beginnings of a shift of emphasis away from static models, centred on the concept of ‘site’ and the idea of storage, to more dynamic models, centred on the multifarious activities involved in cultural remembrance and its changing manifestations. As the word ‘remembrance’ itself suggests, this paradigm shift involves moving from an analysis focused on discrete products to an analysis focused on the cultural processes and mnemonic practices involved in the ongoing production of images of the past and modes of engaging with them. In the light of this shift from sites to dynamics, and from products to activities, literary works become more than just the written records of a particular way of recollecting the past. They become open to new sorts of analysis as active agents in the ongoing shaping of views of the past and, linked to this, in the shaping of imagined ‘mnemonic communities’ for which they provide a communal point of reference.

Elsewhere I have elaborated at greater theoretical length on the multifarious roles literary works may play as active agents in the dynamics of cultural remembrance: in shaping, preserving, and recalibrating commonly held views of the past and in being themselves canonical objects of recollection. Suffice it here to indicate that a single narrative can play all of these roles, and that the relative importance of these roles will shift over
time, though not in any linear or accumulative way. In other words, literary works may indeed facilitate the emergence of oppositional views of the past by recalibrating commonplace views (I will show examples), but this role is neither exclusive nor necessarily the most salient. As we will see in the case of Ivanhoe, for example, Scott’s novel has provided at various times a vehicle of remembrance (offering a perspective on the Middle Ages), a model for remembrance (providing a basic scheme for understanding other events in the past) and, not least, an object of remembrance (a media event that is itself recalled in other cultural practices); and sometimes it has been all of these things at once.

As I will demonstrate, the dynamics of Ivanhoe’s afterlife have been determined, on the one hand, by the nature of the text that lends itself to certain types of appropriation and, on the other hand, by the horizon of expectations of those doing the appropriating. As my use of the term ‘appropriation’ indicates, reception is understood as an active engagement with a story from the perspective of shifting interpretive frameworks and shifting agendas. It needs to be stressed from the outset that this active engagement is more than a matter of cognitively adapting the text to meet latter-day frames of reference. It is also a means of acting in the present. Making sense of a story is a way of playing a role, however modest, in the here and now. Like musicians who perform a musical score, so too do readers perform texts. In what follows, then, I propose to use the term ‘performatie appropriation’ to describe such active modes of engagement with earlier texts.

Within the field of memory studies the ground has also been prepared through the shift to dynamics mentioned above for a specifically performative approach that sees remembrance not only as an ongoing process, but also as a form of action, as the exercise of agency in the present. Indeed, the fact that the present collection bears the title Performing the Past is indicative of a general turn towards performativity in memory studies. As we shall see in the case of recollections of Ivanhoe, however, the word ‘performatie’ has to be used not just in the generalized sense of agency, but also in the strong and more specific sense of theatricality and role-playing: remembrance as re-enactment. Thus, as Helen Solterer has shown in her studies of medieval theatricality in twentieth-century France, re-enactments of earlier scenarios, whether on stage or in daily life, can be a way of literally performing identities in the modern world: historical role-playing provided a means for people to orient themselves and shape their own actions amidst the crises and complexities of twentieth-century history. Taking its cue from Solterer’s analysis of what she calls ‘medieval
roles in modern times’, my study of the afterlife of *Ivanhoe* will reach beyond its critical reception on the part of professional readers to the various re-enactments of the story in the form of embodied role-playing in other media and situations – including the carnival ball mentioned at the beginning of this essay. ‘Performative appropriation’ whether in the form of reading, of re-writing, or re-enacting, represents a particular form of remembrance whereby people play out roles in the present through the intermediary of a story from the past.

**The (in)stability of the story**

As readers of *Ivanhoe: A Romance* will know, Scott ‘painted’ the world of medieval England in vivid, almost theatrical scenes centred on a relatively small cast of highly colourful and hence highly memorable figures. At first sight, the novel also offers a text-book example of what Hayden White has called ‘the value of narrativity in the representation of reality’ in that his medieval England is not only full of visual detail, but is also highly emplotted: the story is centred on the opposition between the traditional and the modern, between the Saxons and the Normans, and works through various crises towards a closure in which conflicts between Normans and Saxons are ostensibly resolved and a new England/Britain can emerge on the basis of their fusion (while the Jewish characters take themselves amicably and conveniently elsewhere).¹³ In this highly narrativized way, the ‘author of Waverley’ shaped a collectively accessible and coherent figure of memory in which the Middle Ages were translated into imaginable characters and situations. It thus provided a cultural frame for remembering the Middle Ages and the origins of modern Britain at a time when there were few contemporary narrative representations of that period available.¹⁴ The imaginative force of the story made it memorable, I would argue, despite – or even because of – its tenuous connection to documented history. In its combination of memorability and historical unreliability, *Ivanhoe* exemplifies the controversial power of imaginative literature to over-write prior beliefs about the past in the service of contemporary identity politics.¹⁵ Scott was the first to admit (this ambivalence is part of his attractions, as I shall argue below) that the coherence he had projected on the early history of Britain was an imagined one: as he made clear in his dedicatory epistle and even in the subtitle, he was offering a historical ‘romance’ to his readers in which he had taken liberties with historical information, but through which he nevertheless
hoped to give a vivid sense of the lives of our medieval ancestors.\textsuperscript{16} Indeed, the romance element was even more egregiously present in \textit{Ivanhoe} than in Scott’s earlier novels, which had all dealt with well-documented and highly charged topics from the history of Scotland in the seventeenth and eighteenth century about which both he and his readers were more fully informed.\textsuperscript{17} The combination of longevity with romance in the case of \textit{Ivanhoe} is particularly interesting in light of Amy Elias’ contention that there is a structural affinity between historical fiction and forms of \textit{un}realism. In one of the most interesting re-assessments of the historical novel in recent years, Elias has drawn attention to the fact that historical fiction has been marked from its inception by a ‘romance’ streak, associating it with the ideal, the imaginary and the uncannily ungraspable rather than with the documented and the real, and argues that this uneasy combination of romance with realism accounts for its particular cultural power.\textsuperscript{18}

To those familiar with Scott’s earlier ‘Scottish novels’, his first sortie into England and the distant Middle Ages seemed less like a breakthrough than a falling back into the hyper-romanticism of popular novels and a falling off from his earlier achievements into a form of self-emulation. As the earliest lukewarm responses show, many reviewers saw the conflict between Normans and Saxons, with Ivanhoe stuck between them, as just another version of the conflicts between Highlanders and Lowlanders, or between Covenanters and Government, that had structured his earlier novels set in Scotland. \textit{Ivanhoe} is indeed another variation on the earlier ‘Waverley’ narratives. The fact that Scott published his fiction anonymously as the ‘author of Waverley’ facilitated this branding of his novels as variations on a pattern, but the repetition can also be explained by the sheer fertility of the basic ‘Waverley’ model. For what arguably represents Scott’s real innovation in the field of historical writing, more than the notorious local colour to which his work is often reduced, is the way in which it sees the emergence of modern nations from the historical conflict between two ethnic groups, one being indigenous and traditional, the other being intrusive and modernizing. Scott himself always highlighted figures who, by occupying a space between these opposing groups, revealed the common points between them; but it was the basic oppositional scheme that appealed most to his emulators. Samuel Taylor Coleridge predicted in 1820 that Scott’s work would continue to speak to later generations because of his reiterated preoccupation with the conflict between the forces of progress and the forces of tradition:
the contest between the Loyalists and their opponents can never be obsolete, for it is the contest between the two great moving Principles of social Humanity – religious adherence to the Past and the Ancient, the Desire and the admiration of Permanence, on the one hand; and the Passion for increase of Knowledge, for Truth as the offspring of Reason, in short, the mighty Instincts of Progression and Free-agency, on the other. In all subjects of deep and lasting Interest, you will detect a struggle between two opposites, two polar Forces, both of which are alike necessary to our human well-being, and necessary each to the continued existence of the other.\textsuperscript{19}

As Coleridge astutely saw, Scott’s preoccupation with the past was as much a symptom of his fascination with modernity as of nostalgia for times past. To be sure, Scott’s use of all sorts of dramatizing and narrativizing techniques in order to revive former ages could be seen as symptomatic of what Svetlana Boym has called ‘restorative nostalgia’: a reaction to modernity that takes the form of imagining the past, not as a foreign country, but as a homeland to which one can actually return.\textsuperscript{20} Scott’s work fits this model only in part, however, since an equally strong case can be made on the basis of his plot structures that he accepted the inevitability of ‘Progression and Free-Agency’ and even promoted it. For even as he went to great lengths to evoke the past and its romance, he usually did so only in order to let bygones be bygones: in each case it is the modernizers who win the day, while the disempowered are given the greatest aesthetic force. It is as if Scott was intent on giving a consolation prize to the disempowered by showing the fascination of their culture even as he shows the inevitability of their being left behind by events: in his tantalizingly ambivalent narrative world, the appeal of chivalry does not stop the fact that the age of chivalry had to go.

Coleridge’s analysis of Scott’s work as being built around a struggle between Progression and Permanence points to the fact that Scott’s novels did more than offer narrativized figures of memory for British history: they also offered a basic paradigm, a model of remembrance for dealing with other events in which a comparable struggle between modernizers and traditionalists, or between intruders and natives, was played out. And indeed, Scott’s narrative matrix became a catalyst for other acts of remembrance, dealing with other groups and events. This recycling of the basic model had already occurred within Scott’s own oeuvre, as we have seen, where the basic ‘Waverley’ model had been transferred from Scotland in the eighteenth century to England in the Middle Ages. Moreover, Scott’s work, including \textit{Waverley} and \textit{Ivanhoe}, was not only widely circulated in
other countries, but its underlying narrative matrix was also adopted elsewhere.\textsuperscript{21} Thus the French historian Augustin Thierry praised Scott for having brought out the ‘poetry’ of Scottish history in showing how it was structured around the opposition between Highlanders and Lowlanders, before going on to propose adopting this basic model of ethnic conflict in his own historical work.\textsuperscript{22} Similarly, Hendrik Conscience produced a new version of \textit{Ivanhoe} in his novelistic epic \textit{De leeuw van Vlaanderen} (1838) about the struggle between the French and the Flemish in the late Middle Ages. This international appropriation of the basic ‘Waverley’ model shows how literature as a medium of remembrance crosses over the borders of mnemonic communities and helps create new ones by providing a language and a template for shaping a fresh memory of hitherto marginalized topics. Thus although \textit{Ivanhoe} represented ‘more of the same’ in relation to the other Waverley novels and hence a falling off in terms of complexity and nuance within Scott’s \textit{oeuvre}, the fact that it dealt with the Middle Ages also meant that its applicability to other situations was arguably broader than in the case of the more specifically Scottish conflicts of the eighteenth century. Precisely because it was more schematic, in other words, it provided the conditions for its further survival in the form of appropriations by a wider range of groups.

Nevertheless, the schematic and narrativized character of the \textit{Ivanhoe} plot is not enough in itself to account fully for its long-term cultural life. As I mentioned above, Scott’s work is also characterized by ambivalence, by a self-consciousness about its own fictiveness and, even more importantly, by a ‘de-stabilizing’ tension between the outcome of the story and its emotional economy. Already present in \textit{Waverley}, this ambivalence was particularly strong in the case of \textit{Ivanhoe} and revolves around the clever and beautiful Rebecca, whose Jewishness represents a third cultural strand outside the basic opposition around which the plot revolves. That Rebecca was the most interesting character in the novel was acknowledged by most reviewers in 1820 and reflected in the many portraits later made of her (it was also implicit in her popularity among the masquerade-goers in Naples, as we have seen).\textsuperscript{23} Yet, in spite of all the sympathy invoked for her and despite the nascent love between herself and Ivanhoe, Rebecca ends up conveniently removing herself to Spain as an eternal outsider, while Ivanhoe ends up with the blond and bland Rowena. In this way, the national reconciliation between Saxons and Normans celebrated at the end of the novel, and symbolized by the marriage between the Normanized Ivanhoe and the Saxon Rowena, cuts across the emotional economy of the story. Had Scott used his freedom to invent to have Ivanhoe and Rebecca
marry, as the logic of the romance demanded, then this would have been at the cost of historical plausibility, as he pointed out to one of his critics. As it was, the story he offered to the public is at once highly schematic and charged with tension. Or, to use Michael Riffaterre’s term, it is charged with an ‘ungrammaticality’ that invites correction, re-working and puzzling through. This was certainly the effect on the many playwrights (more than 30 published versions exist) who adapted the story to the stage throughout the nineteenth century: they looked for all sorts of different solutions to the story’s ‘ungrammaticality’ so that Rebecca could stay in England or, against all historical plausibility, marry Ivanhoe. This structural tension between the logic of the plot and its emotional economy, between modernization and nostalgia, makes for a fundamental tension or imbalance in the work which brings it closer to Boym’s category of ‘reflective nostalgia’ (an unsettling and reflective form of nostalgia) than to the purely restorative variety. One way or another, the ambivalence at the heart of Scott’s work surely helps explain its aesthetic longevity: by making it more difficult to merely consume, appropriate, and forget, it has invited generations of readers to engage creatively with it.

Since a complete study of the ‘working life’ of Ivanhoe would go far beyond the scope of a single essay, I shall concentrate on a number of exemplary cases of performative appropriations of Scott’s story. Following through on an earlier argument about literature’s role as a mediator between mnemonic communities, I have chosen to focus my analysis on the different ways in which Ivanhoe was ‘performed’ and appropriated, not in the British Isles (its ostensible subject), but in the United States. Of central concern will be the interplay between Scott’s narrative as a fixed point of reference and the shifting contexts in which it is both recollected and put to use. Whether the reception of Ivanhoe is considered from the perspective of the way it is adapted to new subjects, interpreted within a new cultural framework, or re-worked as a story: in all cases, recollecting Ivanhoe involved a productive engagement with the text that reflects as much on latter-day concerns as it did on Scott’s view of the Middle Ages.

As we shall see, the reception of Ivanhoe did not evolve in a linear way. Even though the appropriations of the story generally worked accumulatively (each version building on the previous one), the original text, highly narrativized and ambivalent as it is, continued to persist as a point of reference to which people could always return in search of a new starting point. Behind my analysis of this process lies a more general contention about the specificity of the arts as media of collective remembrance; namely that they are characterized by a temporally convoluted combination of
‘monumentality’ (persistence as is) and ‘malleability’ (openness to appropriation by others) and that it is this combination which affords them their particular role as mediators in public memory.

The novel as script: re-enacting and re-framing

On 26 August 1842 a ring tournament was held at Fauquier Springs, Virginia, in which an ‘Ivanhoe’ knight among others fought for the honour of crowning some lady the ‘Queen of Love and Beauty’. The event belonged to the contemporary fashion for literary masquerades, specifically masquerades based on Waverley themes, such as the Naples event mentioned earlier. Within the North American context, it also fitted in with a burgeoning tournament tradition that had been partially inspired by the spectacular medieval tournament organized in Ayrshire in 1839 by Lord Eglinton (unfortunately rather spoiled by an unplanned downpour), news of which had spread across the Atlantic. This extravagant event had itself been modelled on the Ashby-de-la-Zouche tournament in Ivanhoe and, while its main purpose was entertainment and the possibility for wealthy aristocrats to make believe they were medieval knights, it was also construed by organizers and commentators alike as a political statement on the part of Tory aristocrats asserting ancient traditions and rituals in face of a Whig government that had ignored such traditions in the coronation of Victoria in April 1838 (not a trace of this contemporary context is to be seen in the idealized representations of the tournament in circulation; see figure 10.1).
Among the estimated hundred thousand spectators at the Eglinton event was a William Gilmor from Maryland who, on his return to the States, imported the Ayrshire model and organized a first tournament in 1840 at his estate in Baltimore. This was to prove the beginning of a fashion which was concentrated in Maryland and Virginia in the pre-war period, and became widespread after the war in all of the Confederate states, only diminishing in popularity after the 1880s. The combination of re-enactment, entertainment, and political performance evident in the Eglinton event also played into the development of what became something of an annual ‘invented’ tradition in the southern American states. Popular among the upper-class white elite, it became the marker of the ‘aristocratic’ values of the slave-owning society.

These latter-day medievalist tournaments picked up on existing local traditions – ‘tournaments’ involving cock-fighting and horse-racing and displays of horsemanship – and transformed them into ‘chivalric’ displays albeit ones attended by people in top hats and crinolines (fig. 10.2). It was arguably because of this affinity with existing pastimes that the tournament

![Fig. 10.2. The Alabama State Fair: The Tilt (From a Sketch by Nixon). Harper's Weekly, 27 November 1858. (Reproduced courtesy of Birmingham, Alabama, Public Library Archives, Cat.# 1924.1.28)](image-url)
became as popular as it did in the southern states where it was coloured by various local touches (these included at least one occasion in which the figure of an Indian was used as shooting target). The ‘tournaments’ involved high-order pageantry, where gentlemen riders took on the name of a knight and, often dressed in an appropriate costume, ran jousting poles through rings so as to compete for the privilege of crowning some lady the ‘queen of his heart’ according to protocols that, within a short time, became quite formalized. The names adopted by the gentlemen-knights were regularly taken from literature – from Scott, but also from the works of Spenser, Tennyson, and Cervantes. Especially in the later tournaments the frame of reference became wider and many of the adopted names were whimsical inventions or, after 1865, references to the Civil War. Scott was by no means the only inspiration, therefore, or the only point of reference. But running like a red thread through all the tournaments, his work seems to have had a privileged role and Ivanhoe was the most popular of his characters. The Richmond Enquirer, for example, provided a graphic account on 2 September 1845 of another tournament in Fauquier Co., Virginia, in which local gentlemen engaged in tilting, jousting, and heralding, with all the trappings of medieval pageantry and using the titles of Ivanhoe and Bois-Guilbert, but also comically joined at the last moment by a burlesque Don Quixote. Such pageant-like jousting in imitation of literary models, sometimes accompanied by the Queen of Sheba, an ‘Indian Chief’, or even the comic ‘Knight before last’, took place at regular intervals in Virginia up to the Civil War and there are even reports of their taking place among the Confederate wounded in the closing years of the conflict. The drawing by Léon Joseph Frémaux reproduced above (fig. 10.3), which
was probably made in 1862, literally projects the name of Rowena onto an encampment of Confederate soldiers and, in the process, reveals the extent to which the story of Ivanhoe had penetrated into hearts and minds of the age. The post-war tournaments, which were often attended by former military leaders and used as fundraisers for monuments to the confederate dead, saw the regular appearance of Knights of the Lost Cause along with jousters, such as the Knight of Bull Run, recalling specific events in the war.

The Southern tournaments are interesting in themselves as a locally specific precursor of modern-day re-enactment events. They are also interesting for what they reveal about the shaping of a regional identity and the cultural memory of the South. If the tournaments began as a pastime for the plantation-owning elite, they ended up as markers of a self-conscious tradition: the prominence of the Knights of the Lost Cause and the association with the confederate army suggests that the tournaments, by being repeated annually, had become self-reflexive expressions of affiliation with a specific ‘Southern’ culture and its recent history. In playing out their tournaments the southern ladies and gentlemen were not only having a good time. From a certain point on, they were also actively shaping a particular tradition as well as giving public expression to their identification with that tradition, conceived as a distinguishing marker with respect to their fellow Americans in the northern states. What may have started as a ludic blow-over from Britain seems to have become fairly quickly established as a marker of local identity which was self-reflexively ‘cultivated’ as such.

The appropriation of ‘Ivanhoe’ in the form of local tournaments thus fed into a larger cultural movement in the 1840s and 1850s in which the cultural identity of the South was defined in its difference from the North and in opposition to its perceived progressivism. Here, too, Scott played a role. As Rollin Osterweis has shown in his study of Southern nationalism, Scott’s work provided some of the language with which the South identified itself, several of the key words regularly used to define the distinctiveness of southern culture being actually neologisms borrowed from Scott’s earlier poetical work: ‘aristocratical’ and ‘Southron’, together with the concept of ‘the Chivalry’, were all branded with ‘Scott’ his mark. In more general ways that are less easy to pinpoint, the ‘Waverley’ model also seems to have provided one of the blueprints for interpreting current political differences as a new version of an old conflict. The clash between Loyalists, bent on preserving tradition, and Progressives, bent on shaping the future, provided a ready-made template for understanding the differences between North
and South as a historical clash between two cultures with contrasting European roots (with the black population left out of the picture). Since Scott’s own work was suffused throughout by a preoccupation with ethnic differences and the power struggles between forward-looking and backward-looking groups, it resonated with many contemporary concerns and helped articulate them. Although his novels dealt with Scotland or with medieval England, then, they provided a model for understanding what was going on in nineteenth-century America in terms of a historical clash between two ‘races’. An article in the *Southern Literary Messenger* entitled ‘The Difference of Race Between the Northern People and the Southern People’ (1860) described the current conflict as follows:

The people of the Northern States are more immediately descended of the English Puritans, who emigrated to this continent during the reign of James I ... The Puritans at home constituted as a class the common people of England, at least a portion of it, and were descended of the ancient Britons and Saxons. [...] On the other hand, the Southern States were settled and governed, in a great measure, under supervision of the crown, immediately by and under the direction of persons belonging to the blood and race of the reigning family, and belonged to that stock recognized as cavaliers – who were the royalists in the time of Charles I, the commonwealth, and Charles II, and directly descended from the Norman Barons of William the Conqueror, a race distinguished, in its earliest history, for its warlike and fearless character, a race in all times since, renowned for its gallantry, its chivalry, its honor, its gentleness, and its intellect.40

In this sleight-of-hand genealogy, various historical oppositions are conflated whereby the Northerners are implicitly identified with the Saxon-Puritan group (who have ‘severe traits of religious fanaticism’, p. 404), while the ‘Southrons’ (p. 406) are identified with the Norman-Cavalier aristocrats who, ever since the time of the Crusades, have been sallying forth to grandeur and victory: ‘men, whose plumes have waved in triumph in all the martial scenes of modern Europe’ (p. 407). As William R. Taylor has shown, the historical opposition between ‘Roundhead’ and ‘Cavalier’ had been very much in the air since the 1820s, and had its roots in the different patterns of settlement in New England and Virginia. It belonged to the commonplaces of the period where thought was saturated with racial and ethnic oppositions.41 But the extension of this opposition back in time to the Saxons and Normans, in utter disregard of the niceties of historical fact, carries the definite mark of *Ivanhoe*. In this self-
representation, and others like it, the Scott model was re-enacted as it were on the live stage of contemporary politics and used as one of the templates for interpreting the present in the light of other conflicts in which an aristocratic and highly civilized group had been pitted against levellers and newcomers. On both sides of the divide, historically nonsensical references to syncretic ‘Norman cavaliers of the South’ brought together various discursive sources, including *Ivanhoe*, in order to provide a common template for the expression of differences.42

Since the particular identification with the Normans was a by-product of *Ivanhoe*, it offers a prime example, albeit at the level of the group rather than the individual, of what Alison Landsberg has called ‘prosthetic memory’: imagined affiliations with groups in the past that are created through the virtual experience offered by narrative representations.43 But whereas Landsberg suggests that prosthetic memory operates across cultural borders in an unproblematic and unselective way, this is not borne out by the antebellum appropriation of *Ivanhoe* where local filters were clearly active. Appropriations of Scott’s story in the Southern states were highly selective, marked by the current frame of reference and the current needs of those invoking it. Not only was the outsider figure of Rebecca overlooked, so too was the fact that the Normans had been portrayed in rather negative terms by Scott. Even more significantly, the mediating role of Ivanhoe, who helps bridge the gap between the parties to the deep-seated civil conflict, and between the old order and the new, was ignored. In this way, the ‘Southron’ re-enactment of Scott picked up on the novelist’s fascination with ethnic differences and with the way in which one group may or may not be absorbed into another; it also picked up on his fascination with honour-based aristocratic cultures. But it was blind to the conflictual, reconciliatory and, indeed, progressive logic of the plot and, while extolling the virtues of chivalry, overlooked the fact that Scott himself, although ready to evoke the chivalric tournaments in all their pomp and colour, had ended up by relegating unadulterated Norman culture to the past and been quite critical of medieval chivalric traditions.44 Remembering *Ivanhoe* also meant misreading it.

**Reflecting: the novel as icon**

‘He did measureless harm; more real and lasting harm, perhaps, than any other individual that ever wrote. […] But for the Sir Walter Scott disease, the character of the Southerner – or Southron, according to Sir Walter’s
starchier way of phrasing it – would be wholly modern, in place of modern and mediaeval mixed, and the South would be fully a generation further advanced than it is.’ In this 1883 diatribe, Mark Twain famously lashed out at Scott, accusing him of having turned back the tide of modernization in the South and misled people into a sham and outmoded medievalism. Scott had contributed as much as slavery to the recalcitrance of the South, Twain continued, because he had held people in the thrall of aristocratic and feudal values. Indeed, ‘Sir Walter had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the war, that he is in great measure responsible for the war.’

More harm than any other individual who ever wrote? Responsible for the war? Twain’s hyperbolic and highly quotable piece of Scott-bashing was a post hoc assessment of his influence. The evidence I have presented here suggests that Scott’s work was at most a facilitator, not a cause. But a facilitator it was. As we have seen above, it did inspire cultural practices in the South and, more indirectly, informed the construction of a specifically southern nationalism. As Osterweis has argued against Twain’s exaggerations, however, this was more a matter of Scott’s seed falling on fertile ground than of actual political influence and more a matter of his providing a common language than of his dictating how people actually thought. We have seen, moreover, that his influence was contingent upon many other factors and was combined with that of other writers.

Susan Manning has recently argued in a compelling analysis of the famous case that Twain himself was guilty of misreading Scott’s view of chivalry, of overlooking the fact that Scott too was dealing with civil war, and of reducing his ambivalence to a one-dimensional nostalgia of the restorative kind which he could then parody. Given Twain’s critical acumen, Manning’s argument continues, this misprision of Scott can only be explained by a certain anxiety of influence vis-à-vis the ‘Great Enchanter’ and, more generally, an anxiety about the fact that Twain’s own division between North and South, modernizers and idealists, present and past, was constantly coming under pressure from a reality that was more complex and nuanced. He needed ‘Scott’ as it were as a kicking boy.

From the perspective of cultural remembrance, however, the really interesting question about Twain’s condemnation of Scott is not whether it was justified. But how did so much influence come to be ascribed to just one writer? And why should Twain’s comments have had such a tenacious afterlife as a commonplace? It recurs in most discussions of antebellum culture and continues to shape even the most recent critical discussions.
The return of Twain’s judgement as commonplace exemplifies the power of writers, in this case through the use of irony and personal charisma, in formulating collective views of the past. More fundamentally, Twain’s focus on Scott and its reiteration by later writers draws attention to the fact that cultural remembrance, as I have argued elsewhere, works according to the ‘principle of scarcity’. Remembrance tends to converge on a limited number of figures of memory which are then continuously re-invested with meaning. These include the figure of ‘authors’, once aptly described by Michel Foucault as principles of economy in the proliferation of meaning.

From a certain point on, Scott’s work – or rather, ‘the Sir Walter Scott disease’ – became an icon or figure of memory, whose invocation provided a shorthand reference to an entire period and culture. But even more than Scott-the-author, it was *Ivanhoe* that acquired this iconic function. This particular novel was singled out as exemplary of ‘the Walter Scott disease’ even though his other work, especially his poetry, is known to have been very influential throughout North America. Thus Twain rounded off his anti-Scott tirade (the focus of his criticism of the Southern failure to be progressive) with a shot in the direction of the novel which sums up everything that ‘went wrong’:

A curious exemplification of the power of a single book for good or harm is shown in the effects wrought by Don Quixote and those wrought by Ivanhoe. The first swept the world’s admiration for the mediaeval chivalry silliness out of existence; and the other restored it. As far as our South is concerned, the good work done by Cervantes is pretty nearly a dead letter, so effectually has Scott’s pernicious work undermined it.

As a ‘single work’, the ‘pernicious’ *Ivanhoe* offered Twain a figure of memory with which to evoke a whole era and sum up the ethos of an entire generation. His reference indicates that he could trust his readers to recognize the title as a household name and it was presumably *Ivanhoe*’s association with the highly visible tournaments that allowed it to serve this purpose more easily than the poetry or the other novels. Somewhere along the line, ‘Ivanhoe’ as a book and a media event had itself become a figure of memory, meaning that it recalled its reception in the Southern states in the nineteenth century, and all the hype around it, as much as it did the green pastures of medieval England. In the process, the fact that the burlesque Don Quixote had sometimes appeared side by side with Ivanhoe at the tournaments (witness the Fauquier Springs event mentioned earlier) had been forgotten.
There is no evidence that the initial reception of Scott’s work itself, to the extent that this can be reconstructed in any great detail, had been any more intense in the Southern states than elsewhere in North America in terms of the number of books sold or the frequency with which his stories were read. Indeed, on the occasion of his centenary in 1871, the biggest celebrations were in Boston and New York. What makes the Southern reception of Scott so significant in the long term was the fact that it fed into the cultural politics of the period and subsequently became the icon of antebellum Southern culture and, later, of the Confederate defeat. Twain’s remarks have cast their retrospective light on all studies of the topic (and have muddied the view of the antebellum period). Nevertheless they do seem to have clinched a process that was already occurring and that involved public expressions of affinity with ‘Ivanhoe’ and, through its role as a figure of memory, to a specifically Southern heritage. After a certain point, demonstrations of an affinity with Scott had become a marker of affinity with the cultural heritage of the antebellum South and later, drawing arguably on Waverley more than Ivanhoe, with the idea that a lost cause could be dignified and not just quixotic.

The process whereby ‘Ivanhoe’ became this highly charged icon can be illustrated by the popularity of naming people and places after Scott’s work, being a way of publicly and, in the cases of towns and estates, permanently expressing an allegiance to his writings and what it had come to stand for. Thus ‘Ivanhoe’ had turned up from the 1830s onwards, as the assumed name of at least one writer in the Daily Express of Petersburg and as a given name among the children of Scott’s first readers in Virginia, who were thus branded for life with their parents’ tastes. From the 1840s onwards there were also ‘Ivanhoe’ plantations to be found in the states of Georgia, South Carolina, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Virginia; and towns called ‘Ivanhoe’ in North Carolina, Virginia, and Georgia.

There were many ‘Scott’ towns elsewhere in North America (Waverley was particularly popular) and a more systematic study of their distribution and dating would be necessary before making any definitive judgement as to their relative popularity in the Southern states. But pending such a study, it is already clear that there are no Ivanhoe towns in New England (though there is a Waverley in Massachusetts) and that the occurrence of these Ivanhoes in the South was interpreted in the post-war period by both parties as symptomatic of the South’s ‘special relationship’ with Scott. The use of ‘Ivanhoe’ had become a way of performing in public an affiliation with a distinctively ‘southern’ heritage (just as Twain’s invocation of ‘Ivanhoe’ in 1883 was a way of distancing himself from it). Thus the Virginian town of
Red Bluff was changed to Ivanhoe in 1885 and in the same year, a confederate veteran successfully moved to have the town of Hawkins Prairie in Texas renamed Ivanhoe. In both cases, the renaming was presumably in remembrance of an antebellum world that had now, like Scott’s Highlanders, become a ‘lost cause’. In light of this interpretive frame, it seems (retrospectively) fitting that one of the Civil War blockade runners, an iron-hulled steamer that ran aground off the coast of Alabama in June 1864 and was sunk by a Union force, should also have been called the Ivanhoe.

Because ‘Ivanhoe’, helped on by Twain’s egregious comments, later became synonymous with antebellum Southern culture, it is sometimes difficult to disengage the retrospective view of Scott’s influence from what was actually happening in the South in the pre-war period. (The power of the ‘Scott legend’ is illustrated by the fact that the website giving the history of Ivanhoe, Texas, simply points out that the name-giver was a ‘confederate veteran’ and presumes that the significance of this fact in relation to a preference for ‘Ivanhoe’ is self-evident.) Whatever the actual importance of Ivanhoe in antebellum southern culture – as I have been showing, there is evidence that it was important though not exclusively so – it certainly became the most manifest figure of memory in subsequent representations of what happened: the shorthand version and icon of why the South was lost. As such it has figured in later historical fictions bearing on the South, often working in close conjunction with the memory of the tournaments. Allen Tate’s The Fathers (1938), a historical novel set in Virginia in the second half of the nineteenth century, gives a prominent place to the description of a tournament and explicitly connects it to Ivanhoe. On hearing as a child that a tournament was to take place, the narrator recalls, he started imagining what it would be like: ‘I had never been to a tournament and I saw knights riding in armor, with fettered lances, clashing in mortal combat before pavilions gaily colored, in which lay beautiful ladies swooning in the anxiety of their delight. I saw the Black Knight charging down a dusty course and I rose and walked a few steps to the high bookcase with glass doors that stood in the far corner of the room. Opening the doors I tip-toed on the red ottoman to the tall brown volume of Ivanhoe […].’

Revisioning: the novel as touchstone

Given its status as a figure of memory, ‘Ivanhoe’ was available to later writers as a shorthand way to invoke a cluster of commonplaces regarding
the chivalric self-representations of the South and as a shorthand way to explain why indeed the South should have become a ‘lost cause’. It comes then as no surprise that in Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mocking Bird* (1960), the book that the young Jem is forced to read to the scarifying old lady Mrs Dubose is *Ivanhoe*: the reference is brief, but the name says it all. Once the book had gained such iconic notoriety, however, it also started to provide a focal point for generating a counter-memory of the same period and for reflecting critically on nostalgic commonplaces. As we shall see from the following cases, this meant bringing ‘Ivanhoe’ back into play both as an *icon* of Southern ‘chivalry’ (building on its reputation) and as a *story* about ethnic differences in the Middle Ages (building on Scott’s original narrative).

Charles W. Chesnutt’s novel *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900), generally considered a landmark in African-American writing, can be seen in many ways as a new version of *Ivanhoe*. Chapter 5 is called ‘The Tournament’ and it describes the annual ‘lists’ organized by the Clarence Social Club and the impact this has on the emotional life of the young characters. This might just be considered a historical echo of the many tournaments that did take place, but Chesnutt carries the Scott reference further: not only does the name of the principal female character recall *Ivanhoe* (she is alternately called Rowena or ‘Rena’), but on several occasions the characters at the tournament themselves draw parallels with Scott’s fictional tournament at Ashby-de-la-Zouche. The narrator informs us, moreover, that the local bookseller had got in extra copies of *Ivanhoe* in preparation for the tournament because ‘the South before the war was essentially feudal, and Scott’s novel of chivalry appealed forcefully to the feudal heart. During the month preceding the Clarence tournament, the local bookseller had sold out his entire stock of ‘Ivanhoe’.’ In this highly concentrated way, the character of Southern culture is sketched as a background to the actual drama of the book: that of mixed-race siblings trying to pass for whites in a racially divided South. The title of Scott’s novel serves in this way as an icon of the old South at the same time as Scott’s original story provides a template for revising the historical view of Southern culture: ‘Rowena’ is turned into the mulatto Rowena (more often called Rena) who, instead of living happily ever after with her Ivanhoe, ends up being tragically rejected by her all-white lover. In fact, one of the other characters remarks on hearing that R(ow)ena is ‘dark, rather than fair, and full of tender grace’, that she might well have been called Rebecca. This particular comment was made with reference to the colour of her hair by a character still ignorant
of the fact that Rowena has ‘black blood’ in her veins and hence, following the racial logic of the characters, that she belongs to ‘them’ rather than to ‘us’. Within the larger framework of the story, however, Rowena’s identity is indeed confirmed as being closer to that of the outsider Rebecca than to her novelistic namesake (with the one difference, that Chesnutt’s Rebecca/Rowena actually dies a victim to her outsider status). In this way, The House behind the Cedars invokes Ivanhoe as an icon of a particular southern heritage at the same time as it re-fashions elements of Scott’s story in order to mark its difference from that heritage and to introduce a counter-memory highlighting the horrors of racism behind the chivalric facade. The outsider Rebecca, who was so prominent in the British reception of the novel and largely elided from the American, thus re-emerges from the pages of the book as a central figure in Chesnutt’s narrative, albeit in disguise. Re-writing Ivanhoe is used in this way in the margins of Chesnutt’s book to recalibrate the collective memory of the South around the period of the Civil War, and to highlight those groups which never fitted at all into the Norman-Saxon divide.

Re-writing of another sort goes on in a recent essay by Franklin Burroughs on his recollections of a children’s story called Johnny Reb. Although he has forgotten the name of the author, the details are branded in his memory. He recalls how the book Ivanhoe figured as a material object in the plot of Johnny Reb where it is given by a Southern landowner to a poor white boy whom he adopts. The boy’s family, however, seize upon the book as an alien presence and burn it in an iconoclastic auto-da-fé that clearly reflects their rejection of this particular piece of heritage. Later on in the story, the boy finds himself on the Confederate side facing his own siblings who, not surprisingly given their burning of Ivanhoe the book, have now joined the union. In this way, the giving and burning of the novel are used to represent the struggle going on within the between the haves and the have-nots. Burroughs’ reflections on this youthful reading experience provide him too with an occasion to introduce his own counter-memory of the South, no longer dominated by notions of the Gentleman (as in the original ‘chivalry’), or by racial anxieties (as in Chesnutt), but by the experiences of poor whites, descendents of the Scottish immigrants who had been victims of the Highland clearances and represented a significant percentage of the settlers in the South. Once again, re-visioning ‘Ivanhoe’ became a way of rewriting the memory of the South. Clearly for Burroughs (born in the 1930s) and his generation, Ivanhoe still works as an icon of the antebellum South. As such it can play a role as a mnemonic wedge that helps make way for an oppositional memory: the recollection that the
‘South’ was not only made up of tournament-going, Ivanhoe-reading gentlemen but also of poorer folk who found every reason to fight for the other side. The canonical status of *Ivanhoe* allows it to function as a measuring stick against which alternative perspectives on the past can be staked out.

**Conclusion**

The novel persists throughout all these different performances as a ‘monumental’ point of communal reference against which new standpoints, and new visions of the past are calibrated. Even as *Ivanhoe* continues as a fixed point of reference, the nature of that reference keeps changing as the actual familiarity with Scott’s own work recedes. A story about the Middle Ages, it becomes a title recalling a nineteenth-century media phenomenon and, in the case of Burroughs, a material object symbolizing ideological allegiances; finally it becomes, in its shrink-wrapped form in Franzen’s *Corrections*, an icon of pastness itself.

Franzen’s shrink-wrapping may be the end of the road for ‘Ivanhoe’ as a medium of remembrance: its vitality has been fed until now by the combination of Scott’s text and the many cultural frameworks in which it has been appropriated. The 1997 BBC television version indicates that there is still life in Scott’s story for those who can reinterpret it (here Rebecca is revisioned as an empowered Jewish woman who chooses to leave Ivanhoe). But it is unlikely that Scott’s text will ever again be the subject of so many appropriations and provide such a readily recognized common point of reference for elaborating social and political differences.

This particular work of literature seems to be heading for obsolescence. Indeed, some would argue nostalgically that literature as such will never again exercise the cultural power it enjoyed in the nineteenth century when it did not seem too absurd to suggest that a novel caused a civil war. It is undeniable that the role of literature as a cultural medium and as a mediator of cultural remembrance is changing in the new media landscapes of the twentieth-first century. However, if Coleridge was right in saying that the struggle between the forces of tradition and the forces of progress and free agency is ongoing, then presumably the need for mediators of collective remembrance remains unabated. So what will be *Ivanhoe’s* successor?
Notes

1. I am grateful to Joep Leerssen, Helen Solterer, and Jay Winter for their suggestions and feedback on earlier versions of this study.


4. For details see the invaluable Scottish Literature in Translation site (BOSLIT) at the National Library of Scotland.

5. William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, Cambridge 2004, provides extensive evidence of the impact of Scott’s writings, first his poetry and then his novels, on the publishing scene; *passim*.

6. See for example, ‘Entretien avec Jacques Le Goff par François Busnel’, *Lire* May 2005: ‘J’ai lu très jeune Ivanhoe, le roman de Walter Scott, qui m’a passionné. Je crois que c’est à partir de là que tout a commencé’.


15. *Ivanhoe*’s portrayal of the hybrid origins of contemporary Britain can be seen as a contribution to the ongoing elaboration of a new concept of Britishness within the framework of the United Kingdom, with which Scott, as a Scottish writer, was


26. A list of the many stage adaptations can be found in: Philip H. Bolton, *Scott Dramatized*, London 1992. Another failed attempt was made as late as 1946 to have Rebecca marry Ivanhoe in a film by Paramount; the background to this incident in relation both to American and British sensibilities is described in detail in Jonathan Stubbs, ‘Hollywood’s Middle Ages: The Development of *Knights of the Round Table* and *Ivanhoe*, 1935-53’, *Exemplaria* 21/4 (2009) 398-417.


28. Esther J. Crooks and Ruth W. Crooks, *The Ring Tournament in the United States*, Richmond VA 1936, 34. While it provides the most extensive information to date about the tournaments and is clearly based on extensive research in local archives, the authors regrettably do not list their sources in detail.

France, Ithaca NY 2004, 163. Waverley masquerades apparently took place in Edinburgh and London as late as 1844; James Colston, History of the Scott Monument, Edinburgh; to Which is Prefixed a Biographical Sketch of Sir Walter Scott, Bart., Edinburgh 1881, 77-78.

30. Ian Anstruther, The Knight and the Umbrella: An Account of the Eglinton Tournament 1839, London 1963. The political background to the tournament is described in Marc Girouard, The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman, New Haven CT 1981, 88-110. That Ivanhoe provided a model for the tournament is made clear by the tie-in publication: Walter Scott, Tournament at Ashby-de-la-Zouche [n.p. 1839], with its wordy subtitle: ‘As described by Sir Walter Scott, in the popular novel of “Ivanhoe”, containing the best account of the Ancient and Chivalrous feat of Arms in our Language, and admirably Illustrative of the approaching Tournament at Eglinton Castle’ (1839). According to Linda Colley, there were precedents for latter-day tournaments going back at least as early as 1778 to British troops stationed in Philadelphia; Colley, Britons, 147.


33. Crooks and Crooks, The Ring Tournament refers to the presence of Ivanhoe in, among other places, Blakistone’s Pavilion, MD, in 1857 (p.12); at Point Outlook, MD, in 1860 (p.13); Huguenot Springs, VA, in 1950 (p.34); at Harper’s Ferry, WV, in 1865 (p.59); Bunker Hill, WV, in 1871 (p.63). Other ‘Scott’ knights include ‘Peveril of the Peak’ (p.58), Rob Roy (p.109), Rhoderick Dhu (pp.58, 109), and ‘Waverley’ (p.68).

34. Quoted in Rollin G. Osterweis, Romanticism and Nationalism in the Old South, New Haven CT 1949, 4-5.


36. I am grateful to Patrick J. Geary for having drawn my attention to this sketch.

37. Connections with confederacy fundraising are mentioned in Crooks and Crooks, The Ring Tournament, pp. 15, 19, 51, 101, 107, 111, 130. For the presence of ‘Knights of the Lost Cause’, see ibid. pp. 19, 51 59, 81, 107, 152. The cult of the ‘Lost Cause’ in the period before 1880 was closely associated with the Southern elite; see Gaines M. Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, The Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South 1865 to 1913, Oxford 1987, esp. 5-6.

38. The extensive diary which Mary Chesnut kept during the war years reveals the extent to which literature was a formative influence on her generation and the educated class to which she belonged: Scott’s oeuvre, along with that of other writers, provided multiple quotations and parallels for her description of the world around her; Vann C. Woodward (ed.), Mary Chesnut’s Civil War, New Haven CT 1981.


42. Osterweis, *Romanticism and Nationalism in the Old South* (p.101), quotes a newspaper editor from Louisville, Kentucky, who declared in 1862 that the ‘slave oligarchs’ had framed the Constitution of the United States, run the government until ‘61, and controlled the Yankees, just as ‘Our Norman kinsmen in England, always a minority, have ruled their Saxon countrymen in political vassalage up to the present day’. The editorial then expressed the opinion that ‘the Norman cavalier of the South cannot brook the vulgar familiarity of the Saxon Yankee’.


47. Landrum, ‘Sir Walter Scott and his Literary Rivals’ argues for seeing Scott’s influence in relation to other contemporaries, including Byron and Moore (263).

48. Manning, ‘Did Mark Twain Bring down the Temple on Scott’s Shoulders?’ Robert Crawford similarly portrays Twain as suffering from a certain anxiety of influence (isn’t there something of a Waverley in Huck Finn?, he asks); *Devolving English Literature*, Edinburgh 2000 (1992) 215.


50. See Rigney, ‘Plenitude, Scarcity and the Circulation of Cultural Memory’.


52. Twain, *The Unabridged Mark Twain*, vol. 2 423.

54. Osterweis, Romanticism and Nationalism in the Old South (43-44) echoes Twain in arguing that people in the South had stuck to Scott while Northerners had moved on to new styles of writing, including Dickens. Mary Chesnut’s Civil War gives ample evidence, however, of an interest in Dickens; passim.

55. Richard Ivanhoe Cooke gave an address at William and Mary College, on 15 May 1847, on the anniversary of the political independence of Virginia (in Landrum, ‘Sir Walter Scott and His Literary Rivals’, 262). Ivanhoe Talley (1850-58) was son of Jameson Madison Talley; Library of Virginia: Virginia Historical Inventory (www.lva.lib.va.us).

56. Louis Marshall Fielding built his home ‘Ivanhoe’ in Fauquier County, VA, sometime between 1840 and 1860; Library of Virginia: Virginia Historical Inventory (www.lva.lib.va.us). The records of the plantation names are spread over various sources: Georgia (www/ ga.nrcs.usda.gov); South Carolina (http://south-carolina-plantations.com); Louisiana (www.nature.org/wherewerwork/northamerica/states); Mississippi (www.covingtonhistory.co.uk/mississippi-htm). For the names of towns, see www.usps.com.


60. See note 58.


64. Ibid. 87. Eric J. Sundquist provides background to the novel in racial discourses, but curiously does not mention the Scott intertext: To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature, Cambridge MA 1993, 394-400.

65. Discussions of Rebecca seem to have only come up later and concentrated, on sometimes flimsy evidence and with a tendency to tunnel vision, on the purported real-life model for Scott’s character in the person of Rebecca Gratz, an acquaintance of Washington Irving; see Joseph Jacobs, ‘The Original of Scott’s Rebecca’, Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society 22 (1914) 53-60; Dianne Ashton, Rebecca Gratz: Women and Judaism in Antebellum America, Detroit 1997; Judith Mindy Lewin, ‘Legends of Rebecca: Ivanhoe, Dynamic Identification, and the Portraits of Rebecca Gratz’, Nashim; A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies & Gender Issues 10 (2005) 178-212.


67. It seems all the more appropriate that Jerome McGann, in developing an interactive platform for engaging with literature in a new way, should have taken Ivanhoe as a starting point: see ‘Ivanhoe: Education in a New Key’.
CHAPTER 11

Novels and their readers, memories and their social frameworks

JOEP LEERSSEN

This chapter focuses on literature and the reading act as a nodal point, a relay station, in the dissemination (in space) and transmission (across generations) of cultural memory. In doing so, it draws attention to three interrelated problem areas: 1) the currency of literature is principally shaped by the language of its expression, whereas the currency of memories is principally shaped in societal or political frameworks; 2) the social and political frameworks (i.e. states and institutions) in which cultural memories are current can be less durable and more fluid than the canonicity of certain literary texts; 3) the literary evocation of identity is not just a matter of straightforward transgenerational perpetuation, but forms part of a complex self/other dialectics. These issues are traced with reference to the case of literary historicism from the Flemish (as opposed to Dutch) historical novel.

Private reading, social memory, imagined community

In 1920, Ernest Claes (1885-1968) published De Witte, a Tom Sawyer-style novel destined to become one of the perennial sellers of Netherlandic literature. It reached its 100th reprint in 1962 (it is now in its 126th). A statue to the author was erected in his birthplace in the 1960s; the book was filmed twice (in 1934 and 1980) and a television series based on its setting and on
Claes’s other works (Wij Heren van Zichem, 1968-1969) became a benchmark in Flemish broadcasting.

The book describes the rebellious pranks of a boy, the eponymous ‘Whitey’ (so named after the colour of his hair and based loosely on Claes himself and on a fellow villager), and is set in the poor agricultural east of Flemish-speaking Belgium. The frugal traditionalism of its peasant setting is evoked with whimsy, sentimental nostalgia, and melancholy. In the course of the book, the boy escapes his peasant background and its harsh authority figures (father, schoolteacher) by a mixture of waywardness and a lively literary imagination (as did Claes himself). The turning point in his pre-adolescent life is his reading of another perennial classic of Flemish letters, Hendrik Conscience’s De Leeuw van Vlaanderen (The Lion of Flanders, 1838). The chapter thematizing this experience is, typically, a mixture of broad humour and wistful empathy. Whitey is punished, once again, by the choleric, violent schoolteacher, and locked up in a storeroom containing books. There he discovers The Lion of Flanders, that Scott-style celebration of the revolt of the Flemish cities led by the Bruges guild masters against French suzerainty. That revolt culminated, in Conscience’s retelling, in the 1302 Battle of Courtrai – a historical incident known as ‘The Battle of the Golden Spurs’, when Flemish foot soldiers annihilated the French cavalry.

Whitey is so absorbed by his reading that he forgets the world around him. He steals the novel from the storeroom, spends all his spare time reading in the fields, and emerges from his reading all aglow with a fanatical enthusiasm for the Flemish heroes of 1302. He re-enacts the crucial scenes and stances of the book, shouts out the stirring battle cries (‘What’s French is false! Slay them all!’) and imagines himself one of the great protagonists: Jan Borluut, Pieter de Coninck, or Jan Breydel. He even fashions himself a jousting spear and in a play of make-believe charges headlong at a sheaf of wheat which he imagines to be a French soldier; but ‘his Flemish ardour’ is tempered when he trips, misses the sheaf, and hurls headlong into a thorn hedge. His worried mother, who dresses his cuts and scratches, cannot make head or tail of his heated literary references and the household is disturbed to hear him wake up at night with shouts of ‘Flanders the Lion! Slay them all!’ In the overall structure of the book, the episode – an admirable exercise in literary irony, affectionately invoking and at the same time mocking the enthusiasm of the boy that Claes used to be, and affiliating himself to a tradition of Flemish nationalism which he also depicts in its more bathetic aspects – marks Whitey’s incipient turning away from the grinding peasant life of his family.
This little scene (the subject of Chapter 12, ‘De Witte en “De Leeuw van Vlaanderen”’) is noteworthy for a number of reasons. To begin with, it corroborates, from an unexpected quarter, the arguments developed by Ann Rigney in various studies concerning the importance and the self-proliferation of narrative fiction as a ‘theatre of memory’. A rattling good tale such as The Lion of Flanders activates what Coleridge calls the ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ like no other type of text. The reader enters into the scenes of the narrative on the basis of a make-believe identification with the actors becomes one with the action and imagines himself participating in a real-life course of events brought into actuality in the here and now. The memories of 1302 as evoked in a novel of 1838 become part of Whitey’s very own, personal remembrance, in an apt example of that internalization process described by Alison Landsberg as ‘prosthetic memory’. That is the power of historical fiction – one of performative immersion and identification – for which historians like Macaulay and Michelet envied Walter Scott so much. Claes’s description of Whitey’s reading experience illustrates this power of bringing the past, quite literally, to life. Whitey struts around the wheat fields of his native village as if they are the very battlefield of Courtrai, and his mental activation of the scenes of 1302 as related in the book of 1838 are a veritable ‘theatre of memory’ – a virtual, solitary, and slightly silly one, but none the less intense and influential for all that.

Not only does this scene evoke the peculiar psychological power of narrative, particularly with readers of an impressionable age (and thereby offering a possible explanation why historical fiction should have become a juvenile genre in the late nineteenth century); it also illustrates how that power establishes the capacity of literary texts to influence their readership beyond the passing moment of the reading experience itself. Such reading leaves powerful after-effects and can constitute a formative, life-changing experience. What we have here is the rare and valuable record of what a formative juvenile reading experience feels like – something which has been experienced by most of us, but singulatim and privately rather than collectively, and therefore not normally thematized or generalized in literary studies. When discussing ‘the influence’ of The Lion of Flanders, one usually traces it by way of external, social reverberations – reprints, sales figures, adaptations, and other repercussions in the public sphere; but for the actual emotion-driven propagation of its patriotic message, its capacity to actually change the minds of its readers and to mobilize their affects, it is the accumulation of private reading experiences that matters, where the theatre of memory is not a public forum but rather the world one carries within one’s own head.
The social reverberations of Conscience’s *The Lion of Flanders* are remarkable; in Flemish history and among Belgian historians, both author and novel are of crucial importance. Yet the case of Conscience’s *Lion* and its theme of the Battle of the Golden Spurs has so far elicited but little theoretical reflection on the curious power of historical narrative to project itself, by way of many different generic adaptations and ramifications, into the public sphere and to form a collective cultural memory. Itself based on a historical painting based on the archival discoveries of a local historian, the book galvanized Flemish historical culture in the 1840s and after – at a time when the bilingual common Belgian cultivation of the past (which had been strong throughout the 1830s, the first decades of the country’s independence) was running aground in growing Francophone-Flemish animosity. Hendrik Conscience, the great follower of Walter Scott, the ‘man who taught his nation to read’, was also a leader in the gathering language movement and the increasingly urgent claim to see the use of Flemish given full legal parity in what was a predominantly Francophone Belgium. The *Lion of Flanders* itself did its share to transmute the memories of a medieval conflict between Crown and Town into a nineteenth-century culture clash between French and Flemish. In 1887, the two leaders of the 1302 insurrection (the guild masters Breydel and De Coninck) were honoured with a huge statue on the Bruges market square; the committee behind it had been under the patronage of the ageing Conscience himself. By 1883, there was already a statue of Conscience himself in his native Antwerp, and the commemoration of 11 July (the day of the Battle of the Golden Spurs) was beginning to be an annual consciousness-raiser in various Flemish cities. The sixth centenary of the battle, in 1902, was considered a national Flemish event, and related centenaries have punctuated the growth of Flemish nationalism ever since: that of Conscience’s birth (1912) and of the appearance of *The Lion of Flanders* (1938). The book was adapted into commedia dell’arte-style puppet shows and comic strips (both of these genres being important popular art forms in Flanders), into plays more than once, and into a film (1985) by the leading Flemish author Hugo Claus. By now, 11 July, the day of the Battle of Courtrai (which had been largely forgotten until Conscience’s book enshrined it as a festival date) is the national feast day of Belgium’s Flemish community – a decision announced in 2002, the year of the battle’s seventh centenary.

This social process of ongoing public recall, in the theatre of public opinion, had just begun to gather steam (between the 1887 erection of the Bruges statue and the 1902 centenary) when the impressionable pre-
adolescent Ernest Claes, far from the hubs of social congregation in his rural peasant village, went through his formative reading experience later laid down in De Witte. It must have been one of the first experiences that set him on the track towards his own association with the Flemish Movement later in life, as a student in Louvain.

Thus the scene in De Witte indicates how public and private, often seen as complementary and distinct spheres, dovetail. The influence of the historical memories evoked in The Lion of Flanders reach, not only into the public areas where the book is celebrated and showcased, but into the remote corners of a catchment area that extends as far as its readers can be found. That catchment area is commensurate with a readership which, by the act of identifying with the narrative as Whitey did, constitutes a virtual community, or what Benedict Anderson has memorably called an ‘imagined community’.

**Reading community and language area**

But how far, exactly, does this imagined community extend? Is it co-extensive with a society, a nation, a language area? The Netherlandic language area includes Dutch and Flemish variants (which in their written forms are as indistinguishable as American and British English); and much as Huckleberry Finn is read in Australia and Ireland as easily as it is in Manitoba, Massachusetts or California, so too De Witte and The Lion of Flanders are as easily read in Amsterdam as they are in Antwerp. Local colour, the occasional use of dialect dialogue or regionalisms are at most an extra tinge in what is otherwise a straightforward continuum of linguistic unity. In most histories of Netherlandic literature, and in the teaching of Netherlandic literary history in secondary school and in the universities, both Ernest Claes and Hendrik Conscience are unquestionably part of a common-Netherlandic canon.

At the same time, the Netherlandic language area has been culturally and politically divided throughout most of its history. Political unification came around the same time as the public consolidation of its vernacular, in the course of the fourteenth century; by 1600, the Low Countries were split into antagonistic halves, the Union of Utrecht (where the Reformation had gained firm footing and the revolt against the Spanish crown was being pursued vigorously) and the Union of Arras (where the Reformation and the Revolt had been crushed by the might of Spain’s armies). After 1600, a Protestant republic in the north has remained separate from a Catholic
south under monarchical rule (Spanish or Austrian Habsburg). A brief attempt at unification following the Congress of Vienna maintained itself only for the period 1815-1830, and by now the old north-south divide takes the form of the division between The Netherlands (‘Holland’) and Belgium (‘Flanders’).

Such centuries of different political and religious destinies cannot but leave their traces in cultural life. The Netherlandic area is often described as consisting of ‘one language and two cultures’. The literature of the South, while linguistically part of the same Netherlandic category as that of the North, has had certain typological traits setting it apart: close contacts with French literature (most egregiously so in the case of the ‘Francophone Flemish symbolists’ like Maurice Maeterlinck and Emile Verhaeren) as well as a more vigorous genre of rustic realism (Stijn Streuvels and, indeed, Ernest Claes).

This typological specificity within a unified linguistic category has long been a matter of considerable interest in the academic discipline of comparative literature. The minutiae of this need not concern us here; suffice it to say that within the Netherlandic language area, there are subsidiary ‘niche markets’ for Flemish and Dutch literature in the narrower sense of the term, and that only the more important and canonical authors make it across the cultural divide into the ‘other half’ of the language area.

This insight from comparative literature has special relevance for the question of historical memories. The national histories taught in Flemish and Dutch schools are specific to the respective countries, i.e. to political rather than linguistic entities. While the brief periods under common rule (the Burgundian period in the late Middle Ages and the period of unification between 1815 and 1830) are not altogether absent, and certain ‘canonical’ figures or events (Charlemagne, Charles V, William the Silent, the literary figures of Reynard the Fox and Uilenspiegel) are of pan-Netherlandic importance, most historical memories are limited in their currency to either a Flemish or a Dutch political circuit, regardless of linguistic unity. For example, the twentieth century in Flanders is dominated by the language movement and the German occupations of 1914-1918 and 1940-1944, while in Holland the dominant experiences are the verzuiling (the denominational diffraction of society) and the occupation of 1940-1945.

Thus the systemic peculiarity of the Low Countries as having ‘one language and two cultures’, when applied to the currency of historical memories, becomes one of ‘one language and two sets of memories’. It is here that historical fiction, with its capacity to evoke and mobilize historical
memories, occupies an interesting in-between position. While names like Conscience are canonical throughout the language area, the memories activated by him need not be. The Battle of Courtrai has little more resonance in Holland than the Battle of Stirling or the Battle of Morgarten. The names of Jan Breydel and Pieter de Coninck, if known at all, will be a nodding acquaintance – like Wilhelm Tell or Cola di Rienzi – rather than members of the nation’s ancestral lineage. And Conscience’s *The Lion of Flanders* is read more or less like Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe*. Indeed, Conscience’s other novels such as *De Loteling* (which address episodes in Flemish history outside the Dutch frame of reference) are practically unread and unknown in Holland although they continue to enjoy some fame or familiarity in Belgium.

What we face, then, is an ambivalence. The communal language enables familiarity with authors; but it does not necessarily constitute identification with the memories evoked by their narratives. Memory identification effortlessly travels all the way from Courtrai, in the furthest west of present-day Belgium, to Claes’s home village in the furthest east, by way of the stepping stone of the Antwerp author Conscience; but its outreach drastically diminishes at the Dutch-Belgian border. In what follows, I wish to explore further the ambivalence between the power of books to trigger mnemonic identifications and their impotence at doing so outside their proper social framework. What makes the matter of the ‘social framework’ particularly complex is that these *cadres sociaux* – to recall the title of Maurice Halbwachs’s pioneering study – are often very fluid and indeed shape-shifting, as, again, the Flemish/Dutch case demonstrates.

**Retrofitting the past in a shape-shifting present**

*The Lion of Flanders* addresses a set of historical memories which had surfaced, after centuries of near-oblivion, during the period of Dutch-Belgian unity under King Willem I (1815-1830). It was in this brief ‘Greater Netherlandic’ period that local archivists and amateur historians from Courtrai began to draw attention to the epic battle that had taken place there in 1302. The Battle of Courtrai was immediately seized upon for the historicist propaganda of Dutch royal house in their newly acquired Southern Netherlands: it was seen as a historical parallel to that other great anti-French battle of more recent memory, Waterloo. Shortly after 1815 and his acquisition of the territory in question, in 1824, Willem had a huge commemorative hill constructed on the Waterloo battlefield – more
precisely on the spot where his son, the Prince of Orange (later Willem II), had received a bullet wound – crowned by a defiant Dutch lion growling in the general direction of France. During those years, commemorative poems on the Battle of Courtrai were beginning to be produced as well – for instance, a dramatic sketch by Prudens van Duyse (1804-1859, then a budding young poet) from the selfsame year 1824, as an entry to a prize competition under the auspices of the Bruges Literary Society and dedicated to Willem I, on ‘The heroism of the Flemings against France, under their Count Guy of Dampierre’ (Over den heldenmoed der Vlamingen tegen de Franschen, onder Gui van Dampierre). Guy of Dampierre had been the elderly Count of Flanders during the time of the Battle of Courtrai; he features in a much more passive role in Conscience’s 1838 novel. Obviously, Van Duyse’s treatment was foregrounding the importance of noble leadership (as befitting a piece that was obliquely in honour of Willem I and his son the Prince of Orange), which throws an interesting sidelight on what appears to be the deliberate counter-strategy on the part of Conscience, fifteen years later, to marginalize the role of the feudal nobility and instead to showcase the citizens of the trading cities as the heroic protagonists of the tale.

The same medieval Flemish-French conflict was once again activated during the 1820s, that decade that saw the false dawn of a Greater Netherlandic historical novel at a time when the Greater Netherlands themselves were about to split apart. In the fateful year 1830, there appeared a historical novel by Henri-Guillaume Moke set in the medieval County of Flanders at the eve of the Battle of Courtrai. Working on the same episode as Van Duyse and, afterwards, Conscience, Philippine van Vlaenderen, of de gevangenen der Louvre was published both in Dutch and in French and was immediately afterwards bulldozed into oblivion by that year’s political revolution, the Belgian Secession, which gave the Low Countries another constitutional and territorial division – the fifth in four decades.

To recap those shifting shapes: 1) The French Republic’s armies had cleared the ancien régime map of the Low Countries in the 1790s; the Austrian Netherlands had been incorporated into France as départements while the erstwhile United Provinces were given a new central puppet regime as the ‘Batavian Republic’. 2) This was entrusted in 1806 to Louis Bonaparte as the ‘Kingdom of Holland’, which in turn 3) was annexed by Napoleon and merged into his empire in 1810. From the ruins of Napoleon’s empire emerged, between 1813 and 1815, 4) Willem I’s Greater Netherlandic Kingdom, which 5) split up in 1830.
The Greater Netherlandic period is now seen as a mere intermezzo, a ‘failed state’ episode that only after the Belgian Secession crystallized into viable polities; but between 1815 and 1830 it had a fifteen-year innings that was more durable than anything in the previous decade-and-a-half, and was as formative culturally as it was abortive politically. It marked the advent of Romanticism and the spread of Walter Scott-style historicism; and it was the period in which the battle of Courtrai was resuscitated from near oblivion.\(^\text{15}\)

Seen against this background, Conscience’s 1838 book must be read in a slightly different light: as an attempt to re-inscribe the Battle of Courtrai as a specifically Flemish rather than a generically Netherlandic victory, in a Belgian rather than Willemite context. Accordingly, the evil opponent (the French monarchy) is, for Conscience, slightly adapted: while for Van Duyse, the French king was a symbolic ancestor of Napoleon, for Conscience he represents the hegemony of French elite culture which dominated Belgium, including Flanders, and which to Flemings around 1838 was becoming increasingly irksome. *The Lion of Flanders* with its famous anti-French Flemish assertiveness is, then, a double attempt at transmutation. On the one hand it transmutes, as is well known, a medieval feudal conflict (between the Crown and a restive county with its merchant cities) into a modern moral one (between two cultural-linguistic traditions in a modern state).\(^\text{16}\) On the other hand it takes a historical event and strips it of the symbolical meaning it had begun to receive in the previous decades (as a Netherlandic, dynastically led victory over the French) in order to reinvest it with a fresh, more apposite one.

What we can infer from this background check is that the dynamic of historical remembrance has an important retroactive thrust. New events will trigger re-calibrations and even re-inscriptions of established memories; each fresh turn of events will lead to a re-inventory and reassessment as to how it affects the usefulness and constitution of the available memory reservoir. In all their twists and turns, the constitutional changes that the Low Countries went through in the course of the nineteenth century offer various illustrations of the ongoing retrofitting of the past in the light of the developing present. A Walter Scott-inspired literary historicism reached the Low Countries in the opening decades of the nineteenth century, when the country was careening from one constitution and territory into another.

However, the actual emergence of the historical novel, though prepared in the period of Greater Netherlandic unity, only took place when Belgium and Holland had parted ways. In Belgium, the decks were being cleared for
Conscience’s revisionism; the history of the County of Flanders and its anti-French resistance would henceforth be dealt with in a Belgian rather than a Netherlandic perspective, and Conscience would claim them back for Flanders against an earlier Greater-Netherlandic appropriation. The constitutional divorce between the two countries also led to a divorce in their memory reservoirs.

**Divorced memories**

While in Belgium, the young state tried to establish a symbolical legitimation by activating its medieval inheritance (and in that respect following a generally prevalent European taste for Romantic medievalism), Holland (what remained of the Netherlands after the Belgian secession) seemed to lose its taste for the Middle Ages. An indicator to this effect is the remarkable lack of Dutch participation in the European vogue for philological text editions of medieval vernacular ‘classics’. Following the editions of the *Nibelungenlied* in 1807 and *Beowulf* in 1815, medieval vernacular classics were hitting the printing press all over Europe. German philologists like Jacob Grimm and Hoffmann von Fallersleben repeatedly turned to the Dutch Academy and to Leiden University in their search for ancient texts, and invariably met with a disappointing response. Dutch antiquaries had little interest in anything predating the fourteenth century. While Grimm and Fallersleben (who in 1824 edited the Dutch chivalric romance *Charlemagne and Elegast*) initially saw the 1830 secession as yet another sign of the lack of national feeling among the Netherlanders, and viewed the Belgian state with suspicion as a French puppet regime, they soon found to their surprise that among Flemish intellectuals and bibliophiles there was a far greater medieval interest than in Holland. It was a Fleming who finally procured an edition of the Netherlandic Reynard Fox fable (Jan Frans Willems in 1834), it was Brussels that housed a wealth of codices and manuscripts, and Grimm and Fallersleben soon turned to Flanders as the best point of access to, and the liveliest hive of interest in, the medieval literature of the Low Countries. Only in the 1840s did Dutch philologists begin to catch up with the more advanced state of medieval studies south of the border.

The cult of the medieval in Belgium, and particularly in Flanders, is signalled in its ongoing tradition of historical novels, of which *The Lion of Flanders* is only one. Thus, Conscience’s *Jacob van Artevelde* of 1849, celebrating the medieval civic leader of the city of Ghent, reverberated
across Flanders as part of a generalized Artevelde cult involving, among other things, his statue in Ghent erected in 1863. Significantly, the novel passed wholly unnoticed in the northern Netherlands.

What took the place of medievalism in the Dutch cultural memory was a fresh interest in the Reformation period, the revolt against Spain, and the rise of the Dutch Republic. It was here that the Dutch historical novel found a new focus – one which was largely absent from the Flemish cultural memory. In Holland, too, a medievalist literary agenda had developed during the pre-1830 Greater Netherlandic period; it had even had some minor impact in the late 1820s, but declined after 1830. In its place came a renewed preoccupation with the heroes and key events from the period 1550-1700, an older and never-quite-abandoned tradition of literary remembrance of the historical glories of early-modern Holland, celebrated largely in verse and drama rather than in the newly burgeoning genre of the novel. The most enduring Dutch historical novel, Ferdinand Huyck (by Jacob van Lennep, 1840) is set in the seventeenth-century mercantile republic and is closer in tone to Thackeray’s Henry Esmond (1852) than it is to Scott. And the main canon of nineteenth-century Dutch historical novels we owe to Geertruida Bosboom-Toussaint (1812-1886), who dominated the genre with a number of tales set in sixteenth-century Holland or Elizabethan England and chronicling the consolidation of Protestantism. Also in Holland, then, a retrofitting of the past was undertaken after 1830. Medieval chivalry was neglected in favour of a celebration of the Protestant nation’s bourgeois virtues – a spirit of reliability, enterprise, and true morality.

The divergence between the Dutch and Flemish sensibilities in the historical novel may best be illustrated by juxtaposing the opening scenes of two representative texts. The Flemish representative is, of course, Conscience’s Lion; the Dutch representative is the most famous of Bosboom-Toussaint’s novels, Het huis Lauernesse (The House of Lauernesse, 1840). In both cases, the heroic qualities of the protagonist are highlighted by introducing him in opposition to antagonists and their vices.

Conscience’s Lion opens, very much in the style of Scott’s Ivanhoe, with a cavalcade of noblemen trying to find their way to the evening’s destination, and invoking the guidance of a recalcitrant rustic underling. The scene both in Ivanhoe and in the Lion serves to demonstrate the aristocratic arrogance of the noble horsemen and to steer the reader’s sympathy towards the local lower-class guide, who stands for the mass of the native nation and stands up against the overweening haughtiness of the foreign rulers.
‘Upstart!’ De Chatillon shouted, ‘you laugh, you mock me... Whoa, soldiers, have that serf hanged so that he may become food for the ravens!

Now the young man no longer smiled; the corners of his mouth pulled downward and a great pallor spread across his cheeks.

‘Hang a Fleming?’ he grumbled, ‘take heed!’

With this, he took a few steps back, placed himself with his back against a tree, pulled up the sleeves of his smock as far as his shoulders and pulled his flashing dagger out of its sheath. The red muscles of his bare arms were taut, and his face took on a lion-like expression.

‘Woe to anyone who touches me!’ he forcefully cried. ‘The ravens of Flanders shall not eat me; they prefer French flesh!’

The rhetorical effects of this passage are obvious. The solitary hero deserves our sympathy on many accounts. The conflict is not of his making, but provoked by his adversaries; those adversaries indulge in arrogant injustice based on unearned privilege; he faces this unjustified aggression alone against many, but nonetheless displays stalwart and undaunted courage. As we identify with the man of the people against the overbearing feudal lord, we also identify with his heavily emphasized Flemishness against French aggression. Class and nationality are compounded and aligned with moral values.

A similar overdetermined confrontation is set up by Bosboom-Toussaint for the opening scene of The House of Lauernesse. Again we see a demure and unaggressive solitary hero display dauntless prowess when taunted by a gang of arrogant bullies; and even the physical symptoms used to signal this stance (swollen veins, pallor) are in the same mould. However, the opposition here is not between a cavalcade of noblemen and a man of the people, but between a coven of carousing friars and a young bible student...

They were five friars. They wore the habit of the Benedictine order [...] they had placed dice on a gaming board and commenced playing with the ravenous eagerness of a starving man who has just been given food. Styntje [the serving maid in the inn, JL] had brought beakers and a pitcher; repeated libations of the sweetly spiced wine were lavished around. [...] They gamed; they quarrelled; they bandied about objectionable comments. Worse than that: they importuned and harassed Styntje [...] at which a young man present, Paul, begins to take offense, JL. Restrained indignation caused the veins on his forehead to swell, and a noble wrath sparked in his eye [...] ‘Pray for yourselves, you wretches, who insult the God whom it is your duty to proclaim.’
‘You at least have no call to admonish us, you layman!’ one of the Fathers cried with monkish pride.

‘The call concerns all of us, much as Scripture concerns all of us’, Master Paul replied gently but with a certain emphasis.

‘Scripture for all! Do you hear that, brethren, do you hear? Foolish novice! In what convent do you propose to make your profession? And in which Church Father have you found that notion?’

‘I have made my profession, to speak in the name of the truth, and I search my knowledge by the sole source of all light.’ Here he took up the book that he had been reading, and fervently pressed it to his breast. It was a new Latin translation of the Gospels.

The structural parallelism between the two scenes highlights the differences in their ingredients: Chivalry, daggers, and medieval honour in Flanders; theology, Bible, and early-modern virtue in Holland. Each scene in its way sets the hero on a trajectory towards the glorious ending, which for Flanders is the assertion of national independence, and for Holland the consolidation of the Protestant Reformation.

This aptly summarizes the divergence between the countries in their respective canons of cherished national memories. These are by and large medieval for Flanders and Belgium, and by and large early-modern for Holland. That is a sweeping distinction which would need much empirical research into specific case studies, and of course the contrast is by no means black and white, but the tendencies are clear. While the historical novels from Belgium (as listed by Nele Bemong in her study of the genre during the period 1827-1850) show a spread of commemorated periods with a good deal of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century topics but with a definite gravitation towards the Middle Ages, medievalism in Holland is minimal when compared to the great cult of the Revolt against Spain and the consolidation of the colonial empire and the ‘Golden Age’ of seventeenth-century letters, painting, and maritime expansion. Similarly, of the fifteen or so large public statues erected in honour of historical personalities in Holland in the nineteenth century, only one features a pre-1500 figure; a marked contrast with the rash of medieval heroes honoured in Belgium’s public spaces, from Godefroi of Bouillon in Brussels and Charlemagne in Liège to Maerlant in Damme, Jan van Eyck as well as Breydel and De Coninck in Bruges and Artevelde in Ghent. Newly built suburbs constructed in nineteenth-century Holland almost invariably feature street names after the naval heroes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, or the painters and writers of the ‘Golden Age’. Unlike De Witte, juvenile
readers in Holland would find very few heroic examples from the Middle Ages to fasten their youthful enthusiasm on; instead, the inspirational drift was towards the seventeenth century’s naval glories as experienced by the boy protagonists in Johan Been’s *Paddeltje, de scheepsjongen van Michiel de Ruijter* (1908) and Johan Fabricius’s *De scheepsjongens van Bontekoe* (1923).

Thus the constitutional split between Holland and Flanders entailed a divorce between the stock-in-trade of their historical memories, each country developing a canon of historical remembrance that was by and large meaningless to the other. It is worth emphasizing this for two reasons. To begin with, the modern onlooker may easily be given the impression that this state of affairs reflects the actual essence and character of the countries in question: that Flanders had its heyday in the Middle Ages and Holland its rise to greatness in the seventeenth century, and that this state of affairs is naturally and organically reflected in the public spaces of the two countries. Against this essentialist interpretation it should be pointed out that those public spaces were actively fashioned, shaped, and retrofitted in the nineteenth century, and that the forces at work in that process were not only historical realities but also contemporary ideologies and selection mechanisms. Thus in Flanders sixteenth-century Renaissance culture would be coloured as an extension of the late Middle Ages, while in Holland it would be seen as the dawn of the Modern period. Most unprepared readers will admit to some surprise, for instance, at the realization that Erasmus (1469–1536) lived two generations before Brueghel the Elder (1525–1569), since we see the former (Dutch) as a forerunner of the Reformation and the latter (Flemish) as the painter of pre-modern, medieval peasant life.

The other point to be borne in mind is that ‘identity’ is only one side of the coin if we look at the public impact of memory narratives. To be sure, memory narratives create an identification across generations and form an important factor in the diachronic propagation and perpetuation of identity: we have seen this from the case of *De Witte*. But we also know that identities are always silhouetted against an outside, a Significant Other, and that identities begin taking shape as alterities, which means that memories, too, are often contrastive and oppositional in nature, part of a self-distinguishing process, part of a tug and pull between competing foci of identification. That tug and pull we can witness in all its dynamism in the centrifugal and centripetal forces in the Low Countries between 1815 and 1850. And the dynamics are even more complex than that: for the tugs and pulls between competing foci of identification existed not only between Holland and Flanders, but also within each of those two countries.
Fissioned memories, divided constituencies

The reader will be familiar with the argument by Ernest Renan, in *Qué’est-ce qu’une nation?*, that the unity of national feeling may require not only a cultivation of memories, but also an erasure of them. As Renan points out, nations’ histories, while they possess many shared glories and traumas that inspire solidarity, also contain the memories of recriminations and internecine strife which in the national interest ought to be laid to rest; and, so Renan goes on to point out, the progress of the historical sciences might unearth blood-stained subaltern histories, skeletons in the nation’s cupboard, that may yet come to threaten the emotional fabric of national fellow feeling. Renan may have been thinking of the memories of the Albigensian and Cathar crusades of the twelfth century (which in the course of the 1860s and 1870s had been retrieved from oblivion) or possibly of the stories of the Cevennes Camisards which were gaining popularity as a literary and historiographical topic, or perhaps of the Breton memories of the Chouannerie and Vendée wars. Whatever the precise case he had in mind, the point remains that cultural memory may divide a nation as much as bolster it.

Both in Belgium and in Holland that process can be observed. Flemish historical consciousness from the 1840s onwards was being used increasingly (by Conscience, among others) to oppose a Flemish sense of identity against the French-dominated state of Belgium. In Holland, the celebration of the Reformation and the revolt against Spain ran into the obvious snag that not all of the Netherlands are Protestant. While Protestantism was the country’s dominant religion as well as the religion of the house of Orange, the country contained a very sizeable Catholic minority – some 40 per cent of the total population. These religious differences vitiated the cohesion of Dutch society almost as badly as in the case of Prussian-controlled Catholic areas like Silesia/Posen or the Rhineland, or Ulster. In Holland, by the end of the century quarrels over education would lead to a process called *verzuiling* or social denominationalism, where various denominations (Protestant, Catholic, socialist or secular-liberal) organized into their own separate public spheres with their own social and cultural organizations and media, and with little or no exchange between them.

This denominationalism in Dutch public life made itself felt much earlier in the century – indeed, almost immediately after the Belgian Secession – in the sphere of historical remembrance. The work of Bosboom-
Toussaint already indicates how strongly, by the 1840s, the celebration of nationality and of the Protestant reformation are intertwined; conversely, any Catholic historical remembrancing was contentious and tended to meet with friction and resistance. Thus, a Catholic priest’s attempt in 1845 to commemorate the fifth centenary of the Amsterdam Miracle of 1345 (which had established Amsterdam as a major place of pilgrimage in the Middle Ages) was blocked by the city authorities amidst much acrimony, leading to a ban on all Catholic processions in public spaces, enforced in the Constitution of 1848. Denominational strife was further exacerbated by international tensions in the period 1845-1855. And Dutch memory culture was deeply affected by this.

To begin with, the cultural leader of the Dutch Catholic population, Joseph Alberdingk Thijm, was also one of the main proponents of medievalist taste. Linked by marriage to the Catholic architect Pierre Cuypers (advent of Pugin and Viollet-le-Duc), and at the same time a stalwart advocate of ultramontanist Catholicism, Thijm’s taste for the medieval and the Gothic did much to make this suspect to protestant parts of the population. A historical tale published by him (under pseudonym) in 1851 was widely denounced as papist propaganda for featuring a Jesuit in other than derogatory fashion and thematizing the sacrament of Confession. Accordingly, one critic lambasted this ‘mystical stuff’ as a glorification of the ‘nighttime of the Middle Ages’. While Cuypers managed to secure the commissions for the design of the Rijksmuseum and Amsterdam Central Station, his historicism likewise sparked anti-popish misgivings – even though Cuypers wisely opted for a neo-Renaissance, rather than a neo-gothic, style. Thijm sought support, both for his Catholicism and for his medievalism, south of the border, in Flanders. He is today remembered as one of the early proponents of Dutch-Flemish cultural solidarity, as is his review Dietsche Warande (founded 1855), which contained a good deal of medievalist material. The constituency of the Dietsche Warande was a combination of Flemish and Dutch Catholics, often drawing on connections that went back to the period before the secession of 1830.

The conflicts over denominational remembrance came to a head shortly afterwards. Following its recognition of Belgian independence in 1839, the Netherlands consolidated its shaken sense of identity by a series of civic commemorations. Some of these concerned the Ten Days’ Campaign against Belgium of 1830, or the ousting of Napoleon. Most importantly, however, the crucial events of the Revolt against Spain all hit jubilee years in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Battle of Heiligerlee was commemorated in 1868, the taking of Den Briel in 1872, the lifting of the
Leiden siege in 1874, the Pacification of Ghent in 1876 and the Union of Utrecht in 1879. As Albert van der Zeijden has shown,\(^7\), this roll-on series of commemorations became progressively more burdened with confessional frictions; Catholic and Protestant assessments of the events in question differed sharply, and each new commemoration recalled the debates of the previous one with increasing acidity. In particular the tercentenary of the taking of Den Briel in 1872 sent relations into a tailspin.\(^8\)

For the Protestant part of the nation, this event had been the first major coup by the maritime rebels (*watergeuzen*) against the might of the Spanish Army. For Catholics, the taking of the port town had been marred by the fact that twelve inoffensive monks had been taken by the rebels, and transported to Gorcum where they were hanged. The ‘martyrs of Gorcum’ had been declared blessed by the Catholic Church; when the Franciscan Order was re-established in the Netherlands in 1853, it was placed under their spiritual patronage; and a mere five years before the Den Briel commemoration, in 1867, they had been canonized as saints by Pius IX.

Thus the denominational diffraction of Dutch society, which dominated the political scene from the 1890s onwards, had already started to cast its shadow backwards over the past in the decades following 1830. History was placed under a mortgage by the sharply divided religious ideals in Dutch society; no less sharp than the linguistic divisions were which were beginning to dominate Belgian politics. Some decades before the process of *verzuiling* hit educational policy and institutional politics, it had already fissioned Dutch historical memory; and the historical novel had been an early expression and indicator of this trend. The assessments and indeed the stocks of memories that circulated were as sharply opposed between Protestant and Catholic in Holland as they were, for instance, in Ireland. Each cultivated their own historical antecedents in their own remembrancing, their rituals, commemorations and historicist culture. While architecture and public-space manifestations proclaimed these different sets of memories in their various sections of public life, it was in verse and (as the case of *De Witte* suggests) in narratives, and in particular in the genre of the historical novel (now becoming increasingly a juvenile-oriented genre) that these different sets of memories were transmitted transgenerationally and lodged in the awareness of the nation’s youth.

At the same time, while the literary and narrative imagination are obviously crucial factors in collective memory transmission, it would appear from the case outline here that they have little mobilizing power unless they are read in a social setting congenial to their historical references. Reading *The Lion of Flanders* under the shadow of a statue to
William of Orange and of a commemoration of the Spanish Revolt cannot have fired Dutch boys as it did ‘Whitey’ in De Witte – while conversely the aforementioned Dutch juvenile classic Paddeltje, de scheepsjongen van Michiel de Ruyter (1908) reverberates against the background that its author, Johan Been (1859-1930), was born and raised in Den Briel, had written the libretto to an opera on the taking of that city by the maritime rebels in 1572 (De Watergeuzen, composed by Marius van ‘t Kruys, 1896), was deeply involved in a variety of commemorative initiatives and also specialized in biblical tales.39 Been and Paddeltje thus fit a particularly ‘Dutch’ and definitely non-Flemish cadre social – the very counterpart of Ernest Claes.

Memories, then, have a variable currency and applicability; they are brought to life in different theatres or circuits. Novels (like song, verse, and other literary genres) may spread across entire language areas; historical memories will apply in particular to the social and political unit of the state; but they may also affect constituencies that are defined neither linguistically nor politically, but along other lines (e.g. those of religion), and whose very outline is defined and reinforced by the transgenerational impact of the narratives current within it.

There is, then, a variable ambivalence between familiarity with a historical memory and active identification with it. That ambivalence is closely connected with the one between countries and language areas, or even that between ‘states’ and ‘nations’.40 Narratives of collective memory circulate in political, social, and cultural infrastructures, and their circulation is in part determined by those overlapping but not necessarily identical frameworks. At the same time, their circulation helps to outline and demarcate the silhouette and extension of those circuits. Memory narratives produce, both in social space and across the generations, the communities that constitute the ambience of their circulation. The memory constitutes the audience as the theatre displays the memory.

Notes

1. The full text is available on-line in the Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren (www.dbnl.org). Claes himself gave background information on the gestation and reception in his Ik en De Witte, Antwerp/Amsterdam 1962 (4th edition). In the light of what follows here it is of some interest to point out how Ik en De Witte repeatedly highlights the extent to which his ‘Dutch’ readership from the Netherlands, as opposed to Flanders, approached the book from a foreign, exoticist position.

2. Thus unwittingly participating in a vogue of tournament re-enactments that the chivalric historical novel had triggered; cf. Ann Rigney’s contribution to this volume.


6. For certain corpuses, e.g. Ireland-related fiction in English, there are exhaustive bibliographies demonstrating this trend, e.g. Rolf Loeber & Magda Loeber, *A Guide to Irish Fiction, 1650-1900*, Dublin 2006.


9. The critical studies on the language movement or *Vlaamse Beweging* are, again, too numerous and diverse to be adequately represented here. The standard NEVB offers an excellent conspectus in its three volumes and 3800 pages; for the nineteenth century, there is an old but still useful survey by Paul Fredericq, *Schets eenemer geschiedenis der Vlaamsche Beweging*, 3 vols; Ghent 1906.

10. A terminological clarification: ‘the Netherlands’ refers to the country of that name in its present-day outline; ‘Holland’, though technically only a part of the Netherlands, is used colloquially as referring to the whole, much as ‘Flanders’ refers to the entire
Netherlandic-speaking Northern half of Belgium. I call ‘Netherlandic’ the language shared by both Holland and Flanders – which in their separate geographical contexts may be referred to colloquially as ‘Dutch’ or ‘Flemish’, both words referring to one and the same language, with only minute regional variations (at least in the standardized and written form).


12. Unlike Belgium, neutral Holland remained unoccupied in the First World War; in the Second World War, Holland was a Nazi Reichskommissariat for five full years while Belgium was under military occupation for four years.


15. Indeed in his own Quentin Durward (1824) Scott saw the Low Countries as an undifferentiated whole, to the point even of describing the city of Liège as a Flemish town (‘one of the richest in Flanders’) dominated by a stadthouse and administered by a burgomaster, inhabited by stolidburghers with names like Peterkin and Nikkel Blok, calling each other meiheer. Cf. my ‘Image and Reality – and Belgium’, in: Europa Provincia Mundi. Essays in Comparative Literature and European Studies Offered to Hugo Dyserinck on the Occasion of his Sixty- fifth Birthday, edited by J. Leerssen & K.U. Syndram, Amsterdam 1992, 281-292.

16. The exordium has become famous: ‘You Fleming, who are reading these pages: reflect, in view of the glorious deeds it recounts, what Flanders once was, and what it is now; and even more, what will become of it if you should forget the sacred example of your forefathers!’ (for the full text, in Dutch, see the Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren, www.dbnl.org).

17. In an ultimate irony, the 1985 film version of The Lion of Flanders, by Flanders’s foremost author Hugo Claus, had the heroic parts played by Flemings, while Dutch actors (with their markedly different accent in the pronunciation of Netherlandic language) were cast in all the villainous French roles. This gave the national Flemish tale a fresh antagonistic barb, anti-Dutch in this case.
18. It can be argued that the Walter-Scott style historical novel is not only a literary-fictional genre alongside historical drama and verse, but also a form of ‘productive reception’ spinning off from the sudden wave of medieval text editions occurring from c. 1800 onwards; cf. my ‘Literary Historicism: Romanticism, Philologists, and the Presence of the Past’, *Modern Language Quarterly* 65 (2004) 221-243.


22. Witness David Jacob van Lennep’s discourse on ‘the importance of Holland’s territory and antiquities for sentiment and the imagination’ of 1827 (*Verhandeling over het belangrijke van Hollands grond en oudheden voor gevoel en verbeelding*).

23. There were some historical novels set in the Dutch Middle Ages, such as J.F. Oltmans’ *De schaapherder* (1835) and Jacob van Lennep’s *De Roos van Dekama* (1836), but none came even close to gaining the importance in the Dutch cultural memory that Conscience’s *The Lion of Flanders* had in Belgium.


25. The full texts quoted here, in the original Dutch (translated by me) are, again, in the *Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren*, www.dbnl.org.

26. Bemong, *Vormen en functies*, 553-559 (‘Overzicht van de historische romans [...] per jaartal’).

27. Jensen, *De verheerlijking*, 224-227 (‘Romans met vaderlands-historische stof, 1800-1850’).

28. Laurens Janszoon Coster in Haarlem, who throughout the nineteenth century was believed by Dutchmen, erroneously but stubbornly, to have invented movable-type-printing before Gutenberg. At best one could add the statue to Charlemagne put up in a restored Servatius Church in Maastricht – not, strictly speaking, a public space. The later figures honoured with public statues in nineteenth-century Holland include Count Adolf van Nassau (Heiligerlee), Jan Pietersz. Coen (Hoorn), Hugo Grotius (Delft), Count Jan van Nassau (Utrecht), Michiel de Ruyter (Vlissingen), Rembrandt (Amsterdam), Rudolf Thorbecke (Amsterdam), Hendrik Tollens (Rotterdam), Joost van den Vondel (Amsterdam), Pieter van der Werff (Leiden), William the Silent (twice, The Hague). No fewer than six of these were by Louis Royer, on whom cf. note 35 below.


31. The more frequent, but less felicitous English translation of verzuiling is ‘pillarization’.


33. Among these are: the ultramontanist policy of the Vatican, leading to the re-establishment of a resident episcopacy in the Netherlands, much to protesters’ dismay and indignation; the intense secular-Catholic educational debates in France of early 1845, leading to the banning of the Jesuit order from France (regarding which, cf. Laurens van der Heijden, De schaduw van de jezuïet: Een pathologie van de Franse publieke opinie tijdens de schoolstrijd van 1841-1845, dissertation University of Amsterdam 2004); the Prussian-Catholic tensions in the Rhineland over mixed marriages and divorce legislation, culminating in the Trier Pilgrimage of 1845 and foreshadowing the later Kulturkampf (concerning which, cf. Pieter de Coninck, Een les uit Pruisen. Nederland en de Kulturkampf, 1870-1880, Hilversum 2005). For an excellent synoptic survey of the Catholic-denominational dimension in national politics across Europe, cf. Owen Chadwick, A History of the Popes, 1830-1914, Oxford 1998.


35. Bernadette van Hellenberg Hubar, Arbeid en bezieling: De esthetica van P.J.H. Cuypers, J.A. Alberdingk Thijm en V.E.L. de Stuers en de voorgevel van het Rijksmuseum, Nijmegen 1995. The Catholic triumvirate of Thijm, Cuypers, and De Stuers was strengthened by the Belgian-born (!) sculptor Louis Royer, who was responsible for a good few of Holland’s nineteenth-century public statues (De Coster, Vondel). Royer was (again) linked to Thijm by marriage, and his early career had taken shape in the context of Willem I’s Greater Netherlands – he had been the first laureate in 1823 of the Netherlandic Prix de Rome. Guus van den Hout, Eugène Langendijk (ed.), Louis Royer 1793-1868. Een Vlaamse beeldhouwer in Amsterdam, Amsterdam 1994.

36. The semicentenary of the 1813 restoration was celebrated in 1863 with a monument on Plein 1813 in The Hague; the 25 years’ commemoration of the 1830 campaign was marked in 1855 by instigating a monument to ‘the spirit of national concord’ on Dam Square in Amsterdam (this monument was removed in 1914).


Barely two years after the Second World War had ended, a few of the barracks on the former site of Auschwitz-Birkenau were rebuilt. Along with the restored *Appellplatz*, they served as the set for *The Last Stage* (OSTATNI ETAP), a film by the Polish director Wanda Jakubowska, who had been interned for years herself, first in the women’s concentration camp at Ravensbrück, later in Auschwitz. By filming on location, she and her fellow prisoner Gerda Schneider, the scriptwriter, wanted to create the most authentic possible image of the horrors that they had experienced, but also of the close ties of mutual solidarity between the prisoners in the women’s camp – a message perfectly suited to the contemporary political climate in Poland, which was governed by a motley coalition of left-wing parties until 1948, when the Stalinists made short work of their former allies.

One striking thing about *The Last Stage* is that hundreds of survivors took part in it as actors or as extras – a method with which other directors were also experimenting around this time, such as Rossellini in *Roma, cittá aperta* (*Rome, Open City*), the seminal film of Italian neo-realism. But while most other feature films, documentaries, and semi-documentaries about the war took place in a familiar setting, *The Last Stage* transported the viewer to a world where people lived on the brink of the *Endlösung*. In Poland and elsewhere – it was released in fifty countries – Jakubowska’s film made a powerful impression. It won a number of prizes at international festivals, though its barely concealed leanings toward pacifism and international socialism drew criticism from some quarters.
Judging by the plot and the style of the film, its makers had two main motives. First of all, they wanted to spread a political message. The Last Stage is a film about solidarity – women’s solidarity – based on collective suffering, irrespective of one’s background or nationality. Jewish prisoners are equated with non-Jewish war victims, even though it becomes clear that the Jews are the only ones being systematically murdered in the gas chambers. At the same time, the film aims to bear witness, giving people who were never in a concentration camp an impression of what went on there. It was the first time that the public was shown how innocent victims had been swallowed up by the netherworld of the Nazi camps. Jakubowska directed that process like an anthropologist, starting from the first shot of round-ups in Warsaw, followed by an extended, thirty-minute section showing the arrival of prisoners in a thick night fog – how they disembark from the sealed freight cars, all speaking their own languages; the chaos; the families’ panic as they are separated from each other on the platform; the entire process of dehumanization that ends with the branding of each prisoner. Although the camera avoids scenes of ultimate cruelty, mutilation, decay, and emaciation, it is precisely this aspect of the film – its anthropological, descriptive realism – that is its most compelling feature.

The Last Stage stands at the beginning of a long line of films and documentaries about Nazi terror, persecution, camps, and ultimate destruction, generally based on true stories: historical accounts, personal recollections, and other narratives. At the other end of this timeline is the Hungarian film Fateless (Sorstalanság; 2005). Some sixty years apart, and despite all their technical differences, both films show striking parallels. For instance, like The Last Stage, Fateless aspires to optimal historical accuracy; the concentration camp at Buchenwald had been recreated so precisely that the Nobel prize winner Imre Kertész, on whose autobiographically inspired novel Sorstalanság (Fatelessness) the script of the movie is based, was overcome with emotion and had to leave the set.2

Still, Fateless, directed by Lajos Koltai, is a subdued film. The shit, the stench, the vermin, and the brutality of the SS are absent from it. At the same time, it is devoid of facile drama and false sentiment, and the film’s detailed cinematography, its colours, and its striking resemblance to an original documentary make it seem powerfully authentic, evoking the horrifying world of the concentration camp in short sequences where the main character, an admirably naive fourteen-year-old boy named György, seems to wander almost aimlessly.

The episodic nature of the film shields it from the objections raised against so many treatments of this theme, which were said to be overly
conventional melodramas, making audiences cry for the wrong reasons and creating the impression that a happy ending, partial or complete, was a real possibility in a war in which millions could not escape destruction. Fateless is a work of a decidedly different order. However, the question is whether a film like this may succeed to penetrate to the heart of the universe concentrationnaire. Though it shows horrifying events taking place, the viewer might wonder whether, at the end of the film, he has any more insight into his experiences than György’s neighbours, who ask him all sorts of questions after he returns home but cannot begin to understand what he has been through. György appears as ‘a traveller poor of words’, as the Dutch novelist Durlacher, a former inmate himself, depicted the survivors returning home; the staged authenticity of Fateless, however, doesn’t seem to help to come any closer.

The ethics of memory

Jakubowska and Schneider, Kertész and Koltai obviously felt that they had to fulfil a moral duty, just like many other writers and directors. The number of noteworthy feature films, documentaries, reports, television programmes, interviews, and testimonies on the Nazi horrors is impressive. Among these are works of outstanding post-war directors like Visconti, Fassbinder, Truffaut, Kramer, Polanski, Wajda, and Tarkovsky, not to mention milestones like The Diary of Anne Frank (1959), the television series Holocaust (1978), and Spielberg’s Schindler’s List (1993), three blockbusters, made in Hollywood style, reaching huge, worldwide audiences, and on the other hand, classic cinematographic documentaries like Alain Resnais’ Nuit et Brouillard (1955), and Shoah (1985) by Claude Lanzmann. And yet even now the stream still doesn’t run dry.

The lasting concern with the history of the Second World War may be understood as a manifestation of a widely felt ‘obligation to remember’, as Avishai Margalit put it. The source of this obligation, Margalit argues, originates ‘from the efforts of radical evil forces to undermine morality itself, by, among other means, rewriting the past and collective memory’. Witnessing, writing, performing, filming, historical research – these are the tools to keep alive the memory of these very efforts to annihilate the moral values of our society.

Obviously historiography and public memory of the Nazi destruction don’t fit the dominant patterns of contemporary historical culture, as indicated by Pierre Nora in his often quoted introduction to the first
volume of his edition of essays, Les lieux de mémoire. Memories of the Second World War, and its industrial mass murder in particular, are far from ‘noncommittal’, ‘individual’, ‘arbitrary’, ‘distanced’, or ‘amoral’ – adjectives Nora used to depict present-day historical culture, thus revealing his distinctive French perspective, oriented towards the symbols of the national state. Historiography and memory with regard to the Nazi atrocities are strongly intertwined and enjoy an intimate communion, an almost symbiotic complementarity at every level, both having a strong moral and political awareness, a condition which resembles Nora’s description of the ‘natural’, fundamentally presentist, social and moral commemorative consciousness of earlier epochs. The way Margalit relates the main issue of his lucid and critical re-appraisal The Ethics of Memory – the question whether there are things that we, as social beings, ought to remember – to the history of Nazi extermination policies and other gross crimes against humanity, proves Nora to be a poor guide to distinctive patterns of contemporary historical culture.

The initiative taken by director Steven Spielberg, right after filming Schindler’s List in 1994, to record and preserve the testimonies of all living survivors of the Shoah, Jews as well as Sinti and Roma, Jehovah’s Witnesses, political prisoners and homosexuals, supplemented with a large number of interviews with eyewitnesses, rescuers, resistance fighters, liberators, victims of the eugenic programmes, and participants in post-war trials, offers a striking illustration of the living nature of our memory culture with regard to the Nazi era. The website of the Shoah Foundation, holding nearly 52,000 video testimonies in 32 languages, representing 56 countries, proudly announces ‘to be the largest archive of its kind in the world’, but there is no doubt that an overwhelming number of these testimonies will never be used as a primary historical source on the past they witnessed. Considering the fact that the events and the testimonies are separated by more than half a century of history, and have been recorded in a rather non-professional manner, these testimonies appear to have a moral and ritual, rather than any rigorous historiographical or factual, value.

**Image and evidence**

Fiction films, documentaries, testimonies, and television programmes have become, without any doubt, the main source of historical knowledge for a vast majority of people all over the world. This goes perhaps even more so
for the Second World War⁷ – and this has been the case from the very outset, due not only to the fact that National Socialism and Fascism excelled in exploiting photography and the moving image to express their political beliefs, thus shaping the historical representation of their epoch.

Already before the end of the war, the Allies, in the East as well as the West, produced visual evidence to show the audience at home what they had discovered at the liberation of the concentration camps. The first images of the Nazi annihilation camps were shot by the Soviets at the liberation of Majdanek in July 1944, but these failed to attract much attention, due to ‘the willingness to disbelieve, the tendency toward benign representation, the experience of World War I atrocity stories, and traces of anti-Semitism’, apart from a general distrust of Soviet reporting, according to Barbie Zelizer.⁸ Nevertheless the Majdanek reports were to set the framework for future efforts to report Nazi crimes, based on eyewitnessing and visual evidence.

After visiting concentration camp Ohrdruf in April 1945, Dwight Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander of western Allied forces, fearing charges in the future that ‘these allegations’ were merely ‘propaganda’, had summoned a delegation of British and American congressmen, senators, religious leaders and representatives of humanitarian organizations to visit Buchenwald and Dachau, where they were to be filmed in the act of witnessing.⁹ For that purpose, however, some scenes had to be staged, since the delegations arrived at Buchenwald only two weeks after its liberation. So piles of corpses had to be reconstructed several times, with the bodies of former prisoners who had died after the Allied forces had entered the camp (fig. 12.1).¹⁰

From early April 1945, just after the liberation of Ohrdruf, newspapers in Britain and the US began to publish images from the camps, exposing horrifying scenes of stupefying atrocity. ‘It is my duty’, one British journalist began his report, ‘to describe something beyond the imagination of mankind’.¹¹ The following months the reports spread throughout the world. Leading magazines like Life and Vogue published lengthy reports with shocking images from Dachau and Buchenwald.¹² In the meantime the US Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality ordered the film footage shot by British and American army units at several sites, including Mauthausen, Dachau, Bergen-Belsen, Ohrdruf, Hadamar, and Buchenwald, to be put into a documentary, Nazi Concentration Camps, that was to be shown as evidence at Nuremberg Trials on 29 November 1945, alongside eleven other films. It was the first time in history that audiovisual material was to be used as evidence. The other films included
a 90-second-long 8-mm film of a pogrom in 1941 shot by a German soldier, a four-hour-long compilation of German newsreels and documentaries – among which Riefenstahl’s *Triumph des Willens* – and a Soviet documentary on Nazi atrocities.

While the last film started with a collective statement of the cameramen, attesting that none of the images had been fabricated, *Nazi Concentration Camps* opens with two affidavits attesting to the authenticity of the scenes. The first one was signed by Army Signal Corps
Lieutenant Colonel George C. Stevens, a Hollywood director who had been responsible for the photography, the second by E.R. Kellog, an expert on film effects, attesting that the images had not been distorted or otherwise altered. What follows is a map of Europe, crowded with the names of the camps, Leipzig being the starting point of this filmic journey, the very first images testifying of a terrible massacre of more than two hundred prisoners, burned, shot, and electrocuted, just before the arrival of the Allied forces. Many horrifying scenes follow, showing mass graves and mutilated victims, shots of piles of corpses, both wide-angled and close up, the remains of humans used for medical experiments and vivisections, the camera lingering upon emaciated bodies of whom it is sometimes hard to say whether they are dead or alive – but also images of German guards and officers who had been taken prisoner. The film ends with the now-iconic images of bulldozers at Bergen-Belsen, pushing heaps of obviously putrefying bodies into a mass grave.

The 59-minute documentary was deliberately composed out of more than 15 hours of footage, not only to present to the court a revealing view of the criminal and atrocious character of the Nazi regime, but to do so in a way that would make the film irrefutable as evidence. By showing the Nazi Concentration Camps, by itself an unprecedented novelty, the Tribunal ‘acted not only as in the interest of efficiency, but also in the interest of securing the most reliable and complete representations of unspeakable atrocities’. But that was not all: the screening in Court was also meant to be a deliberate confrontation of the perpetrators with the consequences of their actions. Media accounts mentioned the impact of the screening on the defendants – something that could be observed, while along the front of the defendant’s dock, where Speer, Schacht, Frank, Seyss-Inquart, Rosenberg, and other accused leaders of Nazi Germany were sitting, a dimmed light was constructed to light up their faces.

**Shock and penance**

Not only the Nazi leaders, but also their assumed followers were subjected to this regime of confrontation. So the inhabitants of Weimar were summoned by US general Patton to inspect Buchenwald immediately after its liberation – and they did so, thousands of them, in a long row, often dressed in Sunday clothes. Similar scenes took place at other concentration camps, like Nordhausen, but also in towns and villages where mass killings had taken place, like Gardelegen, where more than a thousand prisoners
Fig. 12.2. Scenes from Gardelegen: bodies of forced labourers, still burning when the Allies entered the camp (u); inhabitants of the town forced to dig graves (m); civil authorities from neighbouring towns watching the bodies (b)
had been killed deliberately during their hasty transfer only a day before the American army arrived (fig. 12.2).

Although in some cases the orders for these forced visits seemed to have been issued spontaneously by local commanders, they fitted well into the Allied policy of shock and penance. As early as the spring of 1945, Allied headquarters decided that the photographs and footage, shot at the liberation of the camps, was also to be used to re-educate the German people. Through a confrontation with these irrefutable facts the German people would be convinced that the atrocities of the camps had really occurred, as Robert McClure, chief of the Psychological Warfare Division of Supreme Allied Headquarters argued, to impart upon them a deep sense of collective guilt and creating the necessary conditions for moral recovery.18

Forcing ordinary Germans to pay a visit to the places of terror was part of this policy, just like the order to the assembled Germans to bury and rebury the victims with bare hands, as in the case of Gardelegen in April 1945, a ritual that was ‘to engrave the memories of the crimes into their body and their senses’.19 The execution of this ‘shock’, being captured by the Allied camera, was to be reproduced all over Germany: being filmed and photographed the shock was, so to say, ‘staged’, with the ordinary people as actors, as the Stellvertreter des Tätervolkes, symbolizing the collective guilt, forced to do penance by paying respect to the victims, to bury them and to place a cross on their grave.

Shock, penance, and collective guilt were the principal ingredients of the Allied policy of enlightenment and re-education, and various strategies were employed to bring these about. So it was arranged that reports of the Tribunal at Nuremberg were widely carried on radio and the press. The cinema, however, was to play a key role in this process of enlightenment, which demanded a sensitive approach.20 When it became clear that the original footage shot by the army cameramen was not suitable to be distributed – a test screening of a mere compilation to German prisoners of war appeared to leave the audience ‘unmoved’, ‘dulling their minds’, with the effect that ‘towards the end the corpses seem[ed] to be more and more like rag dolls and dummies’21 – skilled directors like Billy Wilder were hired to create a convincing and authentic image of the camp atrocities. These documentaries, known in Germany as Anklagefilme (‘accusation films’), like Death Mills/Die Todesmühlen (Burger, 1945) and Germany Awake / Deutschland Erwache (US Army Signal Corps, 1945) were fully in line with the Allied policy and explicitly addressed the collective guilt of the German people.22
The films were planned to be screened all over Germany. Initially British and American authorities wanted to compel all German adults to view them, drawing up plans as early as May 1945, for screening in the re-opened cinemas, requiring people to have their ration cards stamped as proof of attendance. At the end however, it was decided to decree that Die Todesmühlen should run in all local theatres simultaneously. Figures indicate that a third and sometimes half of the regular film-goers chose not to visit the cinema that week.23

As mentioned before, the Allied films and photographs did not only testify to the atrocities but also to the act of witnessing itself. The camera displayed a special interest in the reactions of the alleged perpetrators, be it the leading Nazis before the Nuremberg Tribunal or the German citizens of Weimar and Gardelegen. We see people turning their heads away, showing looks of disgust, horror, and shame, unable to view the dead and mutilated bodies right at their feet. Some had to be supported, so as not to faint, others held handkerchiefs over their mouths to minimize the effects of the stench. These scenes were not only to prove guilt and shame, but were also aimed to raise a similar response among the spectators – after all these images were meant to be shown first of all to the German people.

Fig. 12.3. Inhabitants of Weimar during their forced visit to Buchenwald, observed by the camera. April-May 1945.
Notwithstanding the fact that still two years after the war about half of the German population thought that national socialism had been ‘a good idea badly carried out’, while less than a third viewed it as a mere ‘bad idea’, the strategy of re-education by methods of shock and penance was given up in favour of a more subtle policy. Instead of stressing the collective guilt, equating German people = Nazi Party and Hitler = concentration camps, the occupational authorities recognized that ‘the interests of establishing control were better served by a more nuanced approach which differentiated degrees of complicity with the Third Reich’.

The Anklagefilme had appeared to raise rather ambiguous responses: many Germans, while accepting the authenticity of the images, took the evidence as an alibi, as they personally had been absent from these sites; others regarded the camp films as a cover for the victors’ own alleged crimes, such as the ‘strategic bombing’ and the atrocities of the Red Army. Some even rejected openly the imagery as proof of the victims’ innocence – an attitude that was fostered by the fact that during the first years after the war the Allies didn’t address genocide but war crimes before the Nuremberg Tribunal. So after two years the films were taken out of circulation, although it has been argued that the Cold War also played a role in this decision – to win the support of the Germans by giving up the idea of a collective guilt.

L’univers concentrationnaire

It took a few years before the footage of the army cameras turned up again, as the raw material from which the French director Alain Resnais composed Nuit et Brouillard (1955, Night and Fog/Nacht und Nebel), a stunning though reflective documentary that marked the beginning of the cinematographic tradition of representing Auschwitz.

The documentary, which takes only 32 minutes, also grew out of an initiative in the field of education, albeit not in Germany but France, an exhibition entitled Resistance – Liberation – Deportation, organized by the national committee for documentation and research on the Second World War (Comité d’Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale) in November 1954. Resnais, a young director who was to become a prominent representative of the experimental Nouvelle Vague, got involved because the organizers of the exhibition wanted a film to be made. First he declined, since he did not have any first-hand experience of the camps. However, he reconsidered the commission after Jean Cayrol, a former Mauthausen inmate and author of the impressive collection Poèmes de la nuit et du brouillard (1946) had promised to write the commentary.
The film had to be completed within half a year, which left hardly any time for in-depth research. Apart from the contemporary colour sequences, shot at Auschwitz and Majdanek, Resnais had to rely on black and white footage in museums and archives. It was hard work. Throughout his research he had nightmares and would wake screaming at night, while Cayrol literally fell ill watching the initial montage. He was forced to write his commentary text based on what he could recollect.

*Nuit et Brouillard,* according to François Truffaut, Resnais’ kindred spirit, ‘is no documentary, but a meditation on the most important phenomenon of the twentieth century’. The film does not present a coherent story nor historical explanations, but displays, testifies, coerces the viewer to follow the eye of the camera. Past and present are intertwined by way of a dialectical procedure, a deliberate use of contrasts in the text as well as the images, colours, camera positions, movements and – not least – the music, written by the German composer Hanns Eisler, one of Arnold Schönberg’s pupils, who had gone into exile in 1933, and was forced to leave the US as one of the first targets of the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

Immediately the opening sequence of the film offers an excellent illustration of Resnais’ style: a long tracking shot, depicting a serene landscape, as one may see it now – as the colours indicate – when we hear the voice of the narrator:

> Even a peaceful landscape, an ordinary grass-covered field with crows flying over it, with harvests and grass fires, even a road where cars, peasants and couples pass, even a resort village, with a fair and a steeple, can lead to a concentration camp.

And, after naming some camps:

> The blood has dried, the tongues have fallen silent. Now the blocks are visited only by the camera.

The idyll is broken, the image is deceiving: the grass is green, thanks to the grey ashes of millions. The serenity is an illusion, as it is said in the epilogue: ‘the war slumbers, keeping one eye always open’.

Such contrasts keep the film in balance and give it a particularly subdued character, a style Resnais learned from his mentor Jean Renoir: ‘The more emotional the material, the less emotional the treatment’. The low and tranquil, but insistent voice of the narrator, the actor Michel Bouquet, but above all Eisler’s composition reinforce this visual strategy of
counterpoint: ‘the more violent the images, the gentler the music’, according to Resnais. So the spectator hears a rather lyrical melody, vaguely reminiscent of Schubert’s famous *Quintet in C Major*, along with horrifying images on the screen. The subtle orchestration through montage, commentary, and music ensures that the most horrible scenes may be seen with clear eyes, thus giving the footage of the army cameras a new, even more penetrating, power than the original compilations, as may be illustrated from the last part of the documentary.

This part begins with an overview of the concentration camps, mentioning their immense size and their exploitation by large German industrial companies. What follows are horrible images of corpses, skulls, emaciated people with terrified eyes, the iconic images of a bulldozer ruthlessly shoving piles of bodies into a mass grave, SS guards, women and men taken prisoner – a sequence that leads to images of Nazi defendants on trial:

I am not responsible, says the kapo
I am not responsible, says the officer
I am not responsible
*Who* is responsible, then?

Piles of corpses again, jumbles of naked, emaciated, mutilated human bodies.

As I talk to you the water soaks into the death chambers, water of marsh and ruins. It is cold and turbid as our bad memory. The war slumbers, keeping one eye always open.

What follows is a tracking shot of grass and buildings – grass growing at the *Appelplatz* and around the blocks, ‘like an abandoned village, still full of menace’. The narrator, however, leaves no doubt about what we are viewing: the remnants of a site of horror, the pile of concrete is the crematorium, a landscape haunted by millions of dead victims. And while another ruined building appears, the voice-over continues:

Who among us is standing watch and warns us when the new executioners come? Do they really have a face different from ours? ... And there is us, who, when looking at this rubble, sincerely believe that the racial mania is forever buried underneath there, us who see this image vanishing and act as if we were creating a new hope, as if we really believed that all that belongs to one time and one country, us, who look past the things next to us and don’t listen that the scream is not silenced.
Although a full understanding of the film would require a thorough, in-depth analysis, at least two themes should be mentioned here in particular. The first relates to the representation of the camp as a world of its own, as another planet, \textit{l’univers concentrationnaire}. This concept implies a more synchronic approach, stressing the idea of the camp as a perverted version of the normal world, where words and acts came to have an infernal, reverse meaning, where life – food, music, zoo, medical care – served death.

The term ‘concentrationary universe’, which was taken from the writings of French survivors, notably David Rousset, who published a lucid analysis of the camp system under that very title as early as 1945,\textsuperscript{32} was at odds with dominant representations of the Nazi camps at that time. The same goes for the second theme I want to address briefly here, the juxtaposition of past and present, by universalizing the question of guilt. The message of Resnais and Cayrol is clear: the book of history is not closed, the monstrous evil is among us. The liberation of the camps, the images of emaciated prisoners of whom it is hard to say whether they are dead or alive, amidst piles of bodies and skulls, do not help the audience to leave with a feeling of relief.

From that perspective \textit{Nuit et Brouillard} may also be seen as an examination of repressed memory, a scathing indictment of the conscious, deliberate obscuring of truth – an oppressive truth with moral and universal repercussions. The title of the film already bears this second meaning, referring not only to the German decree on the treatment of civilian opponents within the Reich, signed on 7 December 1941, ordering that serious offenders were to be dissolved into ‘night and fog’ after their arrival in the camp, but also to the subconscious suppression of knowledge and culpability for the resulting horror of the committed atrocities.

Although the ideas that carried \textit{Nuit et Brouillard} were not wholly absent during the first post-war decades – in France and elsewhere, writers, poets, artists and philosophers, some of them with roots in the circles of the Resistance, like Resnais himself, turned away from the traditional commemorative discourse – the film took a deviating, or even consciously dissenting position vis-à-vis the dominant cinematographic representation of the war experience. Apart from the work of the experimental young directors of the ‘Polish School’,\textsuperscript{33} war films tended to follow the narratives of heroism and nationalism, stressing the idea of historical continuity, which implied that all the suffering had not been in vain, that the dead were \textit{victims} in the true and literal sense of the word, whether as martyrs for a higher cause or as innocent civilians victimized by the Germans in their struggle against the national, religious, and humanist values and ideologies, including ‘real’ socialism.
Nuit et Brouillard was even to face difficulties with the keepers of this national commemoration culture. The French censors demanded the removal of one specific shot besides some sequences that were considered to be too ‘violent’. The incriminating image was deemed to be offensive towards the armed forces. It showed the camp at Pithivier, where foreign-born Jews arrested in France were kept prisoner, while in the left-hand corner of the frame a policeman surveys the scene, wearing a képi that unmistakably states his nationality: French. The still thus pointed to the collaboration of French officials, a theme that was at odds with the carefully cultivated myths created by De Gaulle representing France as a martyr, struggling with imperialist Germany in a war that lasted thirty years, unified, unyielding, thanks to its inner strength, la Résistance.34 The film threatened to break the taboo of widespread collaboration – a self-protecting silence that had to be maintained.35

Resnais compromised under the pressure of the censors, obscuring the képi by retouching it. He refused however to give in to the second request and to remove, at the end of the film, images which had been deemed to be ‘violent’: these were images of bodies. The censors apparently could live with this compromise.

In January 1956 Nuit et Brouillard won the prestigious Prix Jean Vigo, and a few months later it was chosen to represent France at the Cannes Festival in the court métrage (short film) category. A few weeks later, however, it had to be withdrawn from the contest at the request of the West German Embassy, on the grounds of Article 5 of the festival regulations, stipulating that if a film might be considered offensive to the ‘sensibilities of a participating country’, its representatives could demand its withdrawal. The same happened to other films these years.36

The conflict didn’t do any damage to its reputation, on the contrary. The film was screened at the festival, albeit out of competition, while the director of the Berlinale, instructed by the West Berlin House of Representatives, invited Resnais to have it screened at his festival. Upon this occasion, the president of the Berlin parliament, Willy Brandt, denounced the diplomatic move of the government to have the film banned and argued that Germans ‘should not forget, to have other people forget what has been brought upon them.’37 In the years that followed, Nuit et Brouillard was to be shown all over Europe. In various countries, the commentary was rewritten and read in the national language, in the Netherlands by the well-known writer Victor E. van Vriesland and in Germany by the young poet Paul Celan.

In the history of the representation of the Nazi terror and mass murder, Nuit et Brouillard occupies a distinct position. From the beginning it
was widely acclaimed as an impressive and important document. Elie Wiesel called it ‘dazzling because of its authenticity’, while Annette Insdorf, in her profound survey of the cinematic representation of the Holocaust, considers it to be ‘still the most powerful film on the concentration camp experience’, challenging ‘existing visual language’, ‘beyond a facile stimulation of helpless tears’. Even today her students – as well as my own – are shocked and profoundly moved when they watch the movie, just as she was herself, years ago, as a student at Yale, getting, for the first time, an inkling of what her parents, being survivors themselves, had endured.

There is no doubt that Resnais’ documentary prefigured later images of Nazi atrocities in film and television, in documentary as well as fiction – notwithstanding growing criticism in the 1980s. It was held against him that he did not explicitly mention the destruction of European Jewry, making no distinction between concentration camps and death camps, and taking an ideological stand by picking a title that primarily referred to the fate of political prisoners. One may consider this criticism as part of a clash of commemorative cultures, between the widely growing consciousness of the specific character of the Nazi genocide on the one hand and the traditional ideologically inspired public memory of the first post-war decades on the other. From that perspective it looks as if Resnais indeed showed himself to be a child of his time, in which there was little attention paid to the genocidal dimension of Nazi policy, as has already been mentioned in relation to the Nuremberg Trials and the early documentaries. And the title of the film may indeed be seen as proof of Resnais’ and Cayrol’s orientation on political resistance and the victims of the Nacht und Nebel decree.

There are, however, good arguments for a less narrow interpretation of the documentary. First of all it should be mentioned that the footage actually does show Jewish prisoners, wearing yellow stars, while the commentary recalls several unmistakably Jewish names of victims from various European cities, and indicates their place in the hierarchy of l’univers concentrationnaire. At one point in the film, the text literally brings up the theme of annihilation, referring to the second visit of Himmler to Auschwitz:

1942. Himmler pays a visit. Annihilation is required, but productively. Leaving the issue of productivity to his technicians, Himmler tackled the issue of annihilation.
In the original script Resnais had been more explicit, mentioning ‘the “final solution of the Jewish problem”, decided in 1942’, but Cayrol preferred to concentrate on the theme of the world of the concentration camps and to universalize the issues of guilt and terror – at a moment that France was involved in a cruel colonial war over Algeria.\footnote{39}

*Nuit et Brouillard* deals with the destruction of human beings and human values in the perverse world the Nazis created, and doing so, it makes a universal claim, pleading for eternal vigilance, demanding that everyone should examine one’s own potential complicity. So although the film does not explicitly point to the death camps – its rationale being the *Endlösung* – the title, understood as a metaphor, may be taken as inclusive. For this reason the documentary should be seen as an essential step in the history of the memory of the Final Solution, and this applies even more to the history of its representation, taking an exceptional position, till this very day, because of its style and imagery, as well as the way it is ‘constantly setting up obstacles to undisturbed vision’.\footnote{40} Film scholar Ilan Avisar has argued that ‘despite the employment of rich and complex cinematic language, the message is enhanced while avoiding the effect of pleasing aesthetics or the special gratification of indulgence with profundities, two standard reactions to works of art that in the case of the Holocaust threaten to desensitise or deflect the beholder’s consciousness.’\footnote{41}

**Echoes of the past**

There are numerous voices attesting to the profound impression *Nuit et Brouillard* made on its viewers.\footnote{42} Many of these are from Germany – which is, at the first sight, quite remarkable. Following the incident at the Cannes Festival and the screening at the Berlinale, a German version was made, sensitively translated by Paul Celan and released under the title *Nacht und Nebel*. Approximately two hundred copies were made available for rental from various government agencies, enough for a wide circulation in schools, youth clubs, parish halls, police stations, and at union meetings. In Germany’s northern states the film was screened in the higher classes of secondary schools through to late in the 1960s.

The wide distribution of the documentary would appear to contradict the generally accepted view that, during these ‘leaden years’, Germans – in the words of Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich – were ‘unable to mourn’, not only about the victims of national socialism, but above all
about the loss of their once-beloved Führer, thus denying their collective and personal guilt.\textsuperscript{43} In an effort to ‘normalize’ the newly founded Bundesrepublik the denazification process had been brought to an end around 1950. However, this did not prevent an active minority to seriously promote a policy of denazification and the reinforcement of democratic and humanist values. It was these circles which urged the prompt release of Nuit et Brouillard in Germany.

In the late 1960s the documentary had become part of the collective memory of a whole generation. The German writer Anne Duden (born 1942) considered the film to be the beginning of a trauma and a turning point in her life. She watched NACHT UND NEBEL when she was thirteen years old: ‘I saw how the piles of corpses in Bergen-Belsen were shovelled away. We were forced to watch the film at school, but nothing was explained’. There had been rumours, according to Duden, about concentration camps and gassing, and suddenly they saw these horrible images – she would never be able to put them out of her mind.\textsuperscript{44} This was also true of the following generation: when Christiane Peitz (born 1959), a critic at the Tageszeitung newspaper, interviewed film director Christian Petzold (born 1960), they discussed their shared experience of watching NACHT UND NEBEL as sixteen-year-olds: ‘we were traumatized for weeks’.\textsuperscript{45}

The screening of NACHT UND NEBEL and its profound, often traumatic, impression on German youth is itself thematized in the prize-winning film by Margarethe von Trotta, Die Bleierne Zeit / German Sisters (1981). Its script is loosely based on the life of Gudrun Ensslin, one of the founders of the violent left-wing Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF), known also as the Baader-Meinhof Group, and her sister Christiane, a feminist journalist. Although the film parallels the real lives of the Ensslin sisters, Von Trotta chose to focus on the fictionalized relationship of the two sisters and their everyday lives. In a flashback to their youth, halfway through the film, we see the sisters as adolescent girls, Juliane and Marianne, in the late 1950s, watching NACHT UND NEBEL. The sisters, who appear to be quite close, are the children of a decent Protestant family, born in the last years of the war. Juliane, the main protagonist of the film, is clearly the rebel in the family, provoking her strict father and her teachers with her choice of clothes, her behaviour, and her attitude. She reads Sartre and prefers Celan and Brecht to Rilke, whose poems she ostentatiously denounces as ‘kitsch’.\textsuperscript{46} The younger sister, on the other hand, is more quiet and obedient, a daddy’s girl, at least until that moment, as the film suggests, because seeing NACHT UND NEBEL appears to be a turning point in Marianne’s life.
To the question of how this soft-hearted and idealistic girl became radicalized to the point of deciding to join a terrorist organization, the film offers just two closely connected clues: the screening of Nacht und Nebel and some news footage of Vietnam, with shocking images of napalm bombings and dying children, people in despair, and destroyed villages. The scene in which the two sisters are watching Nacht und Nebel is set in the heart of the story, the quote lasting for more than three-and-a-half minutes, linking the origins of left-wing terrorism in Germany directly to a deeply felt guilt and shame about the Nazi past, coupled with a serious vow to never make the same mistake again – ‘Who of us is standing watch’ – in the case of Vietnam, for instance, as the second screening within the film makes clear.

Von Trotta dwells on the notion of the inescapable bearing that the past has on us as much as the idea of repression of memories, lasting from the 1950s until the heyday of RAF terrorism. The film even derives its title from this silence – these were ‘the leaden years’, die bleierne Zeit – a phrase borrowed from a Hölderlin poem – when the children grew up fully aware of Germany’s immense guilt, as this scene illustrates. When Nacht und Nebel is shown, Marianne and Juliane’s father, Pastor Klein, is standing behind the projector, watching his daughters, but he is obviously unable to talk about the events portrayed. He does not associate the recent past with his own rather dictatorial behaviour toward his children. He is in the same situation of ‘leaden’ silence as Juliane’s teacher, who sent her out of the classroom when she ostentatiously demands to read Paul Celan’s Todesfuge (Death Fugue) and Bertolt Brecht’s Ballade von der Judenhure Marie Sanders (‘Ballad of the Jewish Whore Marie Sanders’), a poem that criticizes the Nuremberg Laws – for which Eisler, the composer of Nuit et Brouillard, also wrote music. From this perspective, Von Trotta seems to understand terrorism as ‘a cry in the echo chamber of the Nazi past’.

The scene in Von Trotta’s film, in which Nacht und Nebel is screened, echoes yet another phenomenon: the compulsory re-education of the German population by the Western Allies. The scene not only points to the fact that the post-war generation was confronted with the same images as their parents immediately after the war, it also exhibits the same physical response to these images. When Juliane and Marianne watch the horrible scenes of corpses, skulls, emaciated people with terrified eyes, the bulldozer shoving piles of bodies into a mass grave, they can’t stand it any longer and escape to the bathroom – a scene that echoes the images of Germans seeing post-war pictures and Allied documentaries, literally
turning their heads away, unable to view the dead and mutilated bodies right at their feet, or holding a handkerchief over their mouths. The spectacle not only aroused feelings of anxiety and horror but were actually indigestible and unbearable.

**Grounding images**

Its repulsive character may have been the main reason why the original images – apart from iconic pictures and short fragments, for example in Stanley Kramer’s *Judgement at Nuremberg* (1961) – have largely disappeared from the public domain. *Nuit et Brouillard* seems to have functioned as the sole carrier of the early, shocking imagery of the camps, while Margarethe von Trotta was one of the last directors to show a lengthy segment of this material. It is true that most footage, including documentaries like *Nazi Concentration Camps* and the *Anklagefilme*, can be found online at the *Steven Spielberg Film and Video Archive Collection* at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, and even on YouTube, but they are seldom shown to the general public anymore, and similar photographs and stills are sparingly used in books, magazines, and newspapers, even in studies about the death camps (fig. 13.4 a-d).

The question at stake here is, why have these images almost completely disappeared from circulation, why they are safely tucked away from public gaze, while they were and still are considered to be so impressive? In her classic work *On Photography*, Susan Sontag testifies:

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

*Fig. 12.4 a-d. Stills from Allied ‘accusation films’, 1945.*
Nothing I have seen – in photographs or in real life – ever cut me as sharply, deeply, instantaneously. Indeed, it seem plausible to me to divide my life into two parts, before I saw those photographs (I was twelve) and after … When I looked at those photographs, something broke. Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horror; I felt irrevocably grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead; something is still crying.50

The vanishing of the original images – except for some iconic stills and photographs – is hard to understand, particularly in the light of the observation of Lawrence Douglas, that ‘the filmic landscape that we inhabit is very much the visual legacy of films such as [Nazi Concentration Camps], a cultural universe defined by the production and circulation of graphic images of extreme violence’.51 This makes it even harder to understand why this footage and these pictures have disappeared from sight.

An answer to this question may be developed along three lines. Firstly, public reticence may be elicited because people don’t want to be confronted with these feelings, watching images of ruthless killing, utter desolation and, above all, complete desacralization of the human body. Secondly, these pictures may be considered as non-effective, because of their repulsive nature. Lastly, it may be that we think we ought not to show them for ethical reasons.

Already a few months after Liberation, a Christian former resistance newspaper in the Netherlands, reviewing a small book with 30 clandestine drawings by the artist Henri Pieck, depicting the life of his inmates in Buchenwald, wrote:
Later such a document will appear to be more valuable than all those horror pictures together. Whereas these images are unable to mention more than just facts, Pieck tells about the desperate life of thousands of people in the hell of Buchenwald, in a tone free of either hate or revenge. A deep humanity was his sole motive and inspiration.

This profound longing for traces of humanity in the midst of horror, as revealed in this early comment, may be the main reason why people prefer the story and imagery of more redemptive films, varying from The Last Stage to recently made documentaries on survivors – not to mention melodramas like Schindler’s List, whose director, Steven Spielberg, made a deliberate attempt to avoid tear-jerking scenes and to employ a more subdued style. Although no one questioned his integrity, the film met with a merciless reception from many critics. Claude Lanzmann even called Schindler’s List a ‘kitschy melodrama’ about the rescue of Jews by a German, a film that appears authentic in every respect but does not even begin to approach what actually happened – namely, that millions of Jews were entirely cut off from any form of assistance and had no chance whatsoever of escaping death. Even Fateless, which aims to stay close to the authentic scenery as well as the novelist’s memories, presents, after all, a predominantly mild, aestheticized vision of the horrors of the camps, framed in a dramatic narrative that ends with the homecoming, however lonely and not understood, of the young boy.

The original footage and pictures, on the other hand, appear to resist any narrativization. As documents, they give proof of and epitomize the atrocious tragedy in its barest form, but as such they are – also in this respect – ‘indigestible’, not letting themselves be absorbed by a story that takes the viewer away. They don’t offer any comfort or opportunity for empathy or understanding, but evoke feelings of shock, shame, terror, and guilt – images we want to banish from our world, just like other pictures of past horrors, like the mutilated faces of soldiers of the First World War, the chopped heads of the Rwanda killing fields, or the people jumping from the Twin Towers.

There may also be ethical motives for public reticence with regard to these gruesome pictures. Some point to the obscene nature, provoking disrespectful intrusion into the suffering of those exposed to extreme violence and mutilation. That very same term ‘obscene’ is also used by critics who, in line with Claude Lanzmann, argue that no images can ever give access to the historical reality of Auschwitz. Psychoanalysts Gérard Wajcman and Elisabeth Pagnoux, writing on an exhibition of camp pictures
in Paris in 2001, use terms such as ‘idleness’, ‘obscene’, and ‘vanity’ with regard to the idea that Auschwitz can be ‘proven’ or ‘represented’ by images. It was this view which underlaid Lanzmann’s *Shoah*, the 9-hour-long cinematographic documentary which has become paradigmatic in the representation history of Auschwitz. Although the work resembles in some respect the film of Resnais, Lanzmann refused to use any historical footage, working instead to open a space for the work of reflection, as a way to escape ‘the obscenity of understanding’.

In opposition to Wajcman and Lanzmann, art historian Georges Didi-Huberman, discussing the status of four photographs, secretly made in 1944 by the Sonderkommando from crematorium V at Auschwitz and showed at the above mentioned Paris exposition, defended not only their extraordinary value, but also the exhibition – not as proof, but as traces, literally extracted from the camps, which we are to safeguard, as traces indeed, of the real, not the real itself. The title of his lengthy essay: *Images malgré tout* – ‘Images In Spite of All’.

There is, however, another argument why we can’t discard this early imagery. One may argue that the films and other works of art, exploiting a variety of strategies to keep the memory of the horrors of annihilation and destruction alive, and even aiming to preserve the overwhelming and petrifying qualities of the original footage and pictures – without using them – are in a sense dependent on this material. Even better, they are interdependent, as Adolphe Nysenholc has argued in relation to Lanzmann’s criticism of *Nuit et Brouillard* and his plea for withholding these images of destruction. In other words: the existence of these indigestible images is presupposed, for in the end, the screening of this footage in our imagination is a prerequisite for the other works of art to be effective.

The term ‘grounding’ in relation to this footage may thus be understood as referring to mutual knowledge, beliefs, and assumptions as well as to the way other films, being dependent on this imagery, get their meaning. One might even say that all representations of the Nazi past are rooted in this material and as such these images escape the distinction between ‘archival memory’ and ‘working memory’; they actually don’t circulate but are nevertheless present in minds. However, one may wonder whether younger generations, who may not be aware of the existence of these images, will have the same experience. If not, these images may very easily end up fading into oblivion.

*Nuit et Brouillard* demonstrates how these grounding images may be incorporated into a cinematographic piece of work, challenging all those who claim that the Holocaust is beyond representation, and at the same
time presenting an impossible challenge to representation. Even now, more
than half a century after it was made, the documentary is impressive,
shocking, and, at the same time, moving, evoking a deep sense of love for
man, as André Bazin remarked.\textsuperscript{57} Or, in the words of Jacques Doniol-
Valcroze, Bazin’s fellow founder of \textit{Les cahiers du cinema}, after having seen
the film for the third time, responding to the rawness of the imagery: ‘all
these mingled bodies, let us love them as if they were living, because they
will never leave us’.\textsuperscript{58}

Without closing the book of the past, without giving any conclusive
answer to the questions of ‘how’ and ‘why’ – ‘Hier ist kein Warum’ as Primo
Levi was told, when he entered the camp – Resnais successfully exploits
what film may do, to reach beyond words to etch images in our
imagination, and to present them as the essential building blocks of moral
judgment – which is, after all, the aim of representation of this episode of
history, to reaffirm the possibility of moral thinking.\textsuperscript{59}

Notes

Women’s Studies} 8/2 (May 2001) 221-239; Stuart Liebman and Leonard Quart, ‘Lost and
2. As mentioned in the PR materials for the film. \textit{Fateless} was directed by Lajos Koltai,
starring Marcell Nagy as György, music by Ennio Morricone (140 minutes); the film was
shot at Budapest, Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and Zeitz.
lieux de mémoire. Vol. I La République}, Paris 1984, xvii-xliv. For an elaborated critique of
Nora, see ‘Auschwitz and the Origins of Contemporary Historical Culture. Memories of
World War II in European Perspective’ in: Attila Pók, Jörn Rüssen, and Jutta Scherrer
7. The overwhelming presence of World War II at the US History Channel was reason to
nickname it as ‘Hitler Channel’.
8. Barbie Zelizer, \textit{Remembering to forget, Holocaust Memory through the Camera’s Eye},
9. \textit{Ibidem}, 64; Lawrence Douglas, ‘Film as Witness: Screening Nazi CONCENTRATION
CAMPS before the Nuremberg Tribunal’, \textit{Yale Law Journal} vol. 105, p. 449; Cornelia Brink,
\textit{Ikonen der Vernichtung. Öffentlicher Gebrauch von Fotografien aus nationalsozialistischen
14. ‘Iconic’ in the sense of what Thomas Elsaesser calls ‘audiovisual lieux the memoire’.
15. Nazi Concentration Camps is to be found streaming at the Steven Spielberg Film & Video Archive at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, with descriptions.
18. Quoted by Brink, Ikonen der Vernichtung, 43.
22. These films were reissued in 2006, together with a documentary, in a DVD edition DEMOKRATIE LERNEN. RE-EDUCATION IM NACHKRIEGSDEUTSCHLAND, Göttingen IWF Wissen und Medien 2006. For a detailed analysis of DEATH MILLS see Fritz Baur Institut Cinematographie des Holocaust, www.cine-holocaust.de.
30. Freely quoted from the French text of NUIT EN BROUILLARD by Cayrol, the original (and


36. For a detailed overview of the conflict and its consequences: Van der Knaap, *Uncovering the Holocaust*.

37. “Wir dürfen nicht vergessen, damit anderen vergessen, was ihnen angetan wurde,” quoted in Van der Knaap, *De verbeelding van Nacht en Nevel* 73.


42. For an elaborated version of the following pages, see Frank van Vree, ‘The Echo Chamber of History’, in: Jaap Kooijman, Patricia Pisters, & Wanda Strauven (eds.), *Mind the Screen*, Amsterdam 2008, 310-321. For an analysis of the German reception of *Nuit et Brouillard* as well as the dense literary references in *Die Bleierne Zeit*/*German Sisters* in relation to *Nacht und Nebel*, see Van der Knaap, *Uncovering the Holocaust*.


46. For an analysis of the dense literary references in *Die Bleierne Zeit*/*German Sisters* in relation to *Nacht und Nebel* see Van der Knaap, *De verbeelding van Nacht en Nevel*, 98-102.


59. I would like to thank Julia Noordegraaf, Catharine Lord, and Jay Winter for their comments.
Identity, Politics and the Performance of History
The French Revolution of 1789 marked a breach with the past on a scale unprecedented in Western history. The foundations of what was to become known as the Ancien Régime were shaken to the core, even wrecked, with iconoclastic violence. The revolutionaries found it in their best interest for this break with the past to seep into the public’s consciousness. Hence the demolition of the Bastille, the decree to remove all symbols reminiscent of the Ancien Régime, the storming of the royal tombs in Saint-Denis (only partly prohibited by Alexandre Lenoir), and the decapitation of the king and queen of France. And hence, finally, the profound wish to regenerate both society in general and its individual participants, a longing for time and history to start anew. This desire to break with the political and social past seems to be contradicted by one of the most important cultural achievements of the French Revolution: the creation, or at least, establishment of the museum as an institution on a national scale. This contradiction leads us to question the way in which the past was presented in the revolutionary museum and how this was perceived and experienced by its visitors, in France and beyond.
Stations of the Revolution

There is a strange paradox in the way the Revolution relates to the past. The term ‘revolution’ suggests a return to a system and a form that society must once have known, before corruption set in. The Revolution’s legitimacy is partially founded on this return to supposedly traditional values, rights, and privileges. Some of these could only be found in and projected unto a mythical past, usually in a strongly idealized society, far away in time, be it of classical or indigenous cut. On the other hand, the revolutionaries wanted to represent the post-revolutionary era as a new order, as something never seen before. If too many references to the past were made, it could be experienced as a cumbersome, even potentially dangerous, anti-revolutionary dead weight. The establishment of a new order was in itself an accomplishment of immense historical importance, but the event was mostly represented, experienced and more often reflected upon in ahistoric forms and terms rather than in historic ones. As Robert Paulson pointed out, French revolutionaries found it difficult to give the revolution as an event a symbolic form, as he states on one of the first pages of his book Representations of Revolution: ‘How does a writer or artist represent something he believes to be unprecedented – hitherto unknown and unexperienced?’ Paulson conducted his fascinating research into this topic mainly along the lines of the new stylistic expressions of the period: the beautiful, sublime, grotesque, and the picturesque. Others concentrated on the image and self-image of the Revolution. Representations of the revolution that were at the time (and are still) considered the most persuasive and compelling were natural phenomena like volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. These were the symbolic representations, mental, literary, or artistic, that came closest to the unique and renewed vigour of a Revolution that in one gigantic stroke had to settle with the past.

When compared to these violent symbolic images (and the reality!) of the Revolution, it is striking how static the past, and how it was experienced, was portrayed in revolutionary public festivals. On the whole, history played a very modest role in these festivals organized by the new authorities. The Fête de l’Unité et de l’Indivisibilité de la République, held in Paris on 10 August 1793 at the height of the Terror, was one of the few occasions when the new citizen could reflect on the image of the pre-revolutionary past. The artist Jacques-Louis David designed six monumental ‘stations’ for the festival (fig. 13.1), one entitled ‘La Liberté
assise sur la ruine de la tyrannie’ for the Place de la Révolution (now Place de Grève) and another, ‘Le peuple français terrassant le fédéralisme’, for the Place des Invalides. In the first one, the Old Regime is reduced to a ruin, decorated with a pile of the ancient monarchy’s redundant paraphernalia and dominated by an allegory of Liberty. The second image suggests a greater dynamic, not so much as a reference to the revolution as a whole, but rather as a reflection of recent political developments. The People are represented here (as elsewhere in revolutionary iconography) as a colossal heroic Hercules, standing firmly on the montagne of radical revolutionaries and destroying the monster of federalism, so detested by the montagnards. The stability and immutability of authority, however, symbolized by the fasces Hercules carries with him, seems of far greater importance than the event itself: like the classical contraposto of the hero, it is apparently complete and perfect as if brought to a standstill.5

In the above, I have used the word ‘station’ on purpose, first of all because it is found in the official descriptions of this Parisian festival, but also because it refers to the Stations of the Cross in Roman-Catholic rite. In
that context, the stations are places of reflection in a ritual circuit, which enable the pious to relive, time and again, the passion of Christ. Every station in this rhythmic movement towards the Cross enforces a moment of standstill, reflection and introspection upon every participant. The stations of the revolutionary festival had exactly the same function, even though there was no opportunity to identify with a person or deity. On 10 August 1793 in Paris, the Way of the Revolution started with a station depicting the regeneration of man atop the ruins of the Bastille. Apparently, the revolution was already over before it had even begun. In 1793, the symbolic images of revolution and nation building had to be interpreted primarily as phenomena that were unshakeable, transcending time and history.

The museum as a new beginning

August 10, 1793 was not only the day of the festival of Unity and Indivisibility in Paris, it also marked the opening of the Musée central des Arts, housed in the former royal palace, the Louvre. Its realization embodied both the unification of the Republic and the removal of the previous republic’s monstrous federalism. Just like the festival of Unity and Indivisibility, the new museum symbolized a breach with the past. The museum displayed objects and artworks confiscated from the king, aristocracy and the church that were once accessible only to the privileged few. Free access to these old royal and aristocratic collections was a guiding principle for the new museum. This policy of free access was presented in France as a revolutionary and entirely new principle even though the Vatican museums and the museum in Florence had already applied it long ago. This policy could not mask, however, the fact that almost every object exhibited in the museum was a product of the pre-revolutionary Ancien Régime. For this reason, the revolutionary museum, in and outside Paris, is the place par excellence where the conversation with the past, including the artistic past, is seriously subject to tension, a tension which can best be described as the heritage paradox.

I am not the first to point out that the concept of ‘heritage’, or at least that of national, cultural heritage was invented during the French Revolution. Armand-Guy Kersaint was one of the first citizens to apply the legal term patrimoine, inalienable patrimony, to the antiquities, monuments, and works of art which remained or were confiscated and that had come to the nation in the process of revolution. In a Discours sur les monuments
publics, pronounced in the Paris Assembly on 15 December 1791, Kersaint called these objects ‘le patrimoine de tous’, the patrimony of us all. These objects deserved to be maintained at the expense of the state. In his view, the French nation was the rightful heir to this inheritance and it should and would be governed in a sensible and orderly way. F. Puthod de Maisonrouge, a former officer in the royal army and at that time a member of the Assemblée nationale, described his pride on seeing ‘un patrimoine de famille devenir un patrimoine national’ on October 4 of that same year. In other contemporary papers, like the comprehensive Instruction sur la manière d’inventorier et de conserver […] (1793–1794), one speaks of a héritage, a rich inheritance that had until then been abused to please the few, but was from now on governed by the grande famille of the nation, the keeper of this deposit.

On the other hand, the assignment of the term ‘heritage’ to cultural objects and their placement in museums in France implied a conscious elimination of their cultural and political potential. Expropriating the original (or acquired) social and cultural setting from an object fundamentally changes the way it is observed and interpreted. The heritage paradox lies mainly in the fact that the preservation of an object for the future, realized through the conscious decision to conserve it in museological conditions, often effectively kills the object’s previous meaning. In the revolutionary era, for the first time and on an unprecedented scale, the processes of expropriating and alienating cultural objects runs parallel to those of nationalization and the establishment of museums, so typical for the formation of ‘heritage’. For the first time in history, large groups of objects from the past were made available to a larger audience in a museological context, stripped of their historical meaning. In this way the concept of heritage and that of revolution are each other’s counterparts: the revolution could only succeed by declaring the past as dead and nullified; ‘heritage’ could only survive by ignoring its cultural past.

Which new cultural interpretation could be and needed to be assigned to ‘heritage’ to make its conservation meaningful? What role did the past still play in the public’s perception of historical objects in the museum? We will make a short detour to the Netherlands to visit the National Art Gallery in The Hague at the beginning of the nineteenth century, to put into perspective the different ways of formulating answers to questions like these which arose in Paris, in those days the cultural capital of Europe.
The National Art Gallery in The Hague was one of the institutions, like the National Library and the National Archives that were established on the brink of the nineteenth century, specifically in the years 1798-1801, in the Netherlands. These institutions testify to a policy aimed at creating a unified national state, an entirely new phenomenon in the Netherlands that traditionally had more than 200 years of federal republicanism, with seven completely autonomous provinces. The National Art Gallery is in many ways an interesting case: even though the museum opened its doors on 31 May 1800, only a few years after its famous predecessors in Paris, it was already rather old fashioned from a historical and museological point of view. At the same time, however, the museum in The Hague presents an alternative for how the Revolution could live with the past.10

The museum was housed in a wing of the former country residence of the princes of Orange, in a forest just outside The Hague. The main part of its collection consisted of works of art that had been confiscated from several House of Orange palaces after the Batavian Revolution of 1795 and nationalized. Works of art from abolished republican institutions, like the admiralties, were added to the stock. The best works of art, as well as important sections of the library and the collection of naturalia owned by the prince William V of Orange, the last stadholder, had been demanded by the French as compensation for their efforts to liberate the Batavian people and confiscated as war booty, the property of a hostile prince. There was a twelve-penny fee to enter the museum and the adjacent ‘Orangezaal’, an octagonal room decorated in the 17th century with triumphal scenes commemorating the military accomplishments of stadholder Fredrik Hendrik. There were 4,500 to 6,000 visitors to the museum annually. They were given a tour by Jan Gerard Waldorp, an artist of limited talents but strong patriotic feelings, who followed a fixed route through the museum’s seven rooms. From the few reports by foreign tourists we have, we can deduce which pieces were central to Waldorp’s elucidation. His interpretation of the objects in the collection, his analysis of the coherence or, in contrast, differences between individual works of art determined the image of the museum that remained with its visitors. Waldorp was keeper of the national government’s ideological intentions for the newly founded museum, and as the interpreter in situ, he had to allude to the past while guiding the visitor’s mind and emotions through the collection.
A visit to the National Art Gallery started in the National History Room. There, Waldorp would point out some key objects that clarified the way the new Batavian government looked back on the history of the nation. The 80 Years’ War against Spain, a struggle for political and religious freedom, was of course central to this presentation: Waldorp always praised certain paintings of sea battles, sieges of cities, the portraits of patriotic heroes and heroines, and a painted allegory of the religious disputes. He would compare the faces of real true-hearted patriots to the hateful features and character of the Spanish duke of Alba. In doing so, Waldorp acknowledged a long tradition of considering and interpreting portraits physiognomically. A striking feature of the National Art Gallery was the attention given to honouring William the Silent, prince of Orange, Father of the Fatherland, and his seventeenth-century successors. On the other hand, portraits of later, eighteenth-century stadholders were kept in a separate cabinet, which Waldorp would open on occasion to individual visitors. As a result of a policy of active acquisition, the museum was able to present to the public the images of several political adversaries of the seventeenth-century princes of Orange, like Grand Pensionary Oldenbarnevelt, the remonstrant preacher Johannes Uittenbogaart, international lawyer Grotius, and the De Witt brothers. A small painting depicting the bodies of these brothers after being horribly beaten by the populace in 1672 was covered with a curtain to avoid frightening women and children; Waldorp could lift the curtain during his tour, with remarkable effect. Naval heroes were the final category of historical figures honoured by the Batavians in the national museum. Michiel de Ruyter was given pride of place in the presentation as a visual pendant to Jan Asselijn’s *White Swan*, a painting that in those days was considered an allegory of the other anti-Orange patriotic hero, Johan de Witt.

Other rooms in the museum were devoted to history painting (works of art with subjects derived from mythology or biblical and classical history), mainly from the Italian school, and to seventeenth-century Dutch paintings. The so-called Monument or Rarities Room housed a number of national antiquities from the collection of the former stadholder that were ceded to the Batavians by the French in 1795: the wooden sphere into which late-sixteenth-century rebellious Protestant ‘Beggars’ had hit a nail to symbolize their alliance against Spain, and other historical relics, like a sword and baton that once belonged to De Ruyter. Finally, people could visit the Orange Room, which Waldorp considered a symbol of Orange tyranny: in the past, the Dutch were allowed to come and watch the stadholder and his court eat copious meals there.
Compared to the Parisian museums that I will deal with later, the National Art Gallery was different in many ways. Although it was housed in a former palace, like the Louvre, it was situated out of town. While the French national museums had a policy of free entrance, there was a relatively high entrance fee for the National Art Gallery. The Gallery made an art historical division between two schools of painting only, Italian and Dutch. National pride of the latter was prominent in the presentation and in Waldorp’s explanation during the tour. The national-historical element in both, however, was at least as important. By far the majority of the objects on show were historical in nature and the vision of many works of art in the museum was historically tinted. Apart from the Musée des Monuments Français in Paris, at that time there was no other museum in Europe in which the national, historical element was as prominent as in the National Art Gallery in The Hague. This historical vision – and here we encounter the most important difference with the museums in Paris – was guarded and interpreted by a single tour guide, Waldorp. In a literal, as well as a metaphorical sense, Waldorp was appointed the official keeper of the historical heritage of Dutch Ancien Régime. There was explicit ongoing conversation with the past in the National Art Gallery, with all the heirlooms that had been detached from their original function and context and placed in this new, museological setting. In a description of Waldorp’s performance by a contemporary visitor, we can sense the heritage paradox mentioned earlier: ‘With special veneration and true national pride the attendant here also showed us the sword and baton of Admiral Ruyter, and in doing so got himself into a state of great excitement with regard to the present situation of his fatherland. In these days of convulsive political changes, objects from ancient times like these have become more interesting to one, and therefore I have noted it in my diary.’ In this way, objects taken from the collections of an ancient regime were invested with new meaning and relevance by revolutionary interpreters in a museum setting.

**Nature, history, and art**

Compared to the small number of reports by visitors to the National Art Gallery in The Hague at our disposal, we can consult numerous journals and diaries, many of them published, by visitors to the museums in revolutionary Paris. Three philosophical categories seem to have determined their discourse: nature, history, and art. Roughly speaking, each of these categories was assigned to one of the three most important
Parisian museums: the Muséum d’Histoire naturelle and its accompanying Jardin des Plantes, the Musée des Monuments Français housed in the former monastery Petits-Augustins and the Musée central des Arts and its successors in the Louvre. However, these three categories were not strictly divided, at least not in the eye and mind of the visitor.

In the final chapter of his remarkable book Musée, patrimoine, nation, Dominique Poulot meticulously analyses the dozens of contemporary travel journals written by foreign visitors to Paris in the years 1793-1815. Some of them are ‘stupéfait’, ‘bewildered’ or ‘speechless’ when confronted with the endless quantity and high quality of all that was on show in this cultural metropolis. Many took refuge in their guide books or museum catalogues to direct their attention and opinions and to help them give an account of their visit. This irrevocably and repeatedly led to the praise, in rather unoriginal wording, of some of the canonic highlights in the museums: the Apollo Belvedere, the Venus de’ Medici, the Laocoön, Raphael’s masterpieces, all in the Louvre; Abélard and Héloïse’s tomb and the monument to Henri IV in the Musée des Monuments Français; the elephant and the dromedary in the menagerie of the Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle.

Poulot speaks of a new ‘ethics for visiting a museum’, determined by the fact that the museums in Paris were free, accessible to all on certain days of the décade (the revolutionary ‘week’ of 10 days) and that the visitor was not guided – unlike most other private and public collections in Europe – by a cicerone who was usually in a hurry and eager for money. He or she – a remarkable number of female visitors and children can be discerned from contemporary images – could roam the rooms freely, follow their own predilections, study or admire a work of art for as long as they like, read in the catalogue, discuss with fellow visitors, take notes, etc. Many visitors are quite explicit in their positive evaluation of these circumstances, which they generally consider a huge step forward compared to the old regime. This did not mean, however, a lack of any kind of guidance or explanation. Museum catalogues were sold at the entrance of the Louvre at a modest price. The director of the Musée des Monuments Français, Alexandre Lenoir, appears to have frequently walked around during visiting hours to talk to visitors and to elucidate the features and qualities of some of the works in his museum. Of all the museum directors, Lenoir was the most diligent in putting down in writing his personal view of the collection.

Without a guide who with word and gesture could rhetorically bring the philosophy and the ideology of a national museum to life, like in the
National Art Gallery in The Hague, in Paris it came down to the visual quality of the works displayed and their presentation. Theatrical means determined their effectiveness to a certain extent. A select group, who in 1802 were given a private showing to the museum of natural history, that ‘theatre of nature’, found the glassed showcases along the walls covered. ‘But in less than two minutes we were most agreeably surprised by a display of beauty, richness and grandeur of which no pen can do sufficient justice. The attendants withdrew the curtains, a blaze of creative glory dazzled our sight, and in this moment of admiration I could not refrain from whispering to the philosopher from whom I had before received several lessons on the different degrees of French Atheism: “There is a God!”’ A visitor to the Musée des Monuments Français remarked that the museum’s exterior and garden (the Élysée) ‘présentent l’effet d’une décoration [de] théâtre’. Lenoir did not shun theatrical effects when designing the presentation of the works of art in the Musée des Monuments Français. The objects were grouped in chronological order in a succession of rooms that began with the art of the Middle Ages which was dimly lit, each room that followed, the Renaissance and later periods, getting progressively lighter. The last room was filled with the art of French sculpture, the summit in Lenoir’s view. Visual axes, which gave a strong theatrical effect, were deliberately designed in the Musée des Antiques on the ground floor of the Louvre. These kinds of romantic and theatrical effects were maximized during the occasional nocturnal visits to the museum by the Emperor or Empress and their retinue.

In several publications, Lenoir emphasized that the sequence of the centuries, the rise and fall of art, was the guiding principle that regulated all his activities as keeper of the museum collections. Most visitors to the Musée des Monuments Français experienced this concept while admiring the collection ‘without losing sight of Nature’, as a Dutch tourist remarked. Although every monument in the museum had to be considered, according to Lenoir, as ‘un livre historique et un traité de morale’, it was principally non-political in nature. Lenoir had only been able to defend certain monuments so courageously, thereby saving them from vandalism by the radical revolutionaries of 1793, by explicitly denouncing their dynastic or historical-ecclesiastical features. Instead, he took recourse in the artistic value of these objects. Detachment from their original place and function and the subsequent transfer to the museum, which this position implied, could only happen in the denial of their political and religious meanings. Therefore, it is fully justified that Prince Charles de Clary-et-Aldringen, courtier to Empress Marie-Louise,
remarked at a visit to the museum in 1810, that this collection was something ‘qu’on pouvait seulement créer dans les circonstances du bouleversement révolutionnaire’. Lenoir had made different choices in his Musée des Monuments Français than those made by the governors to the National Art Gallery in The Hague, where the political past of the former Dutch Republic was emphatically present and interpreted in the light of new revolutionary circumstances. In the Musée des Monuments Français, on the contrary, history had become art.

**A gallery of national schools**

The Louvre followed a different strategy to make the past aesthetic than the Musée des Monuments Français. Lenoir had tried to influence the conceptualisation of the Louvre’s design towards a chronological presentation, but his plea fell onto infertile soil. Instead, the conservateurs of the museum favoured an arrangement according to different schools of painting, which was supposedly useful in contemporary art education as well. In the eighteenth century, the French made a distinction between three principal schools: the Italian, the French school and the école Flamande, which usually implied paintings from the Northern and Southern Netherlands and Germany. The paintings gallery in the Louvre was arranged according to this principle. In the first years of its existence, paintings primarily from the French and Netherlandish Schools were on view. After the transfer of hundreds of paintings from Italy between 1797-1798, however, the balance between the schools on show within the museum made a remarkable shift, both in numbers and in quality: from then on the Italian masters filled more than half of the walls and the works of Raphael and Guido Reni were considered the highlights of the paintings gallery, as the Apollo Belvedere and the Laocoön were in the Galerie des Antiques.

Poulot thinks that the overall image of the art collections in the Louvre was dominated by the antique sculptures: ‘the antiques beat the paintings’. And in his final view of the paintings collections he chooses a broad, humanistic perspective: despite the arrangement according to different, more or less national schools of painting, says Poulot, the gallery as a whole, with its apparently endless number of world class paintings prompted the visitor to philosophically reflect on the succession of the ages, the rise and fall of Western civilization and the sublime in nature and art.
Although this idealistic tendency can be clearly pointed to in several written sources of the period, another point of view draws attention. Some observers remarked that the arrangement of the paintings was highly instructive from a historical perspective: the Louvre’s visitor was able to become better acquainted with the different historical periods and nations of Europe. Just like with the Musée des Monuments Français, the word ‘historical’ must be interpreted here in a cultural or, more precisely, an art historical sense. The provenance of many objects, from former contexts like the aristocratic art cabinet or the church, could easily be deduced from the form of their frames, the state of conservation as well as from the catalogues that proudly published these provenances. Despite this, it was the arrangement of all those works that were brought to Paris from diverse countries and backgrounds and placed in a new order which gave these works a new, art historical significance.

It is one of the ironies of history that it was precisely this revolutionary attempt to give new meaning to all those disengaged objects in a new museological setting that substantially contributed to the debate on the true meaning of the phrase ‘national school’ and, finally, to the disintegration of the collection in 1815. This process was preceded by a debate of a purely art historical nature. In the course of the eighteenth century, there was a desire among art dealers and art historians for finer distinctions between the three traditional schools of art. The Imperial paintings gallery in Vienna distinguished between the (North and South) Netherlandish school on the one hand and a German and Austrian on the other; the schools of Venice, Rome, Florence, Bologna, and Lombardy were differentiated within the Italian school. In the Uffizi Museum in Florence, the Tuscan school was presented as a separate category. These subtle distinctions were increasingly made in the art historical literature of the period as well. Both standard works on the Northern art of painting in the French language, J.B. Descamps’ *La vie des peintres flamands, allemands et hollandois* (1753) and J.B.P. Lebrun’s *Galerie des peintres flamands, hollandais et allemands* (1792-1796) worked this insight into their titles. An attempt to further systemize the different approaches was done by F.X. de Burtin in Brussels, who analysed the different principles that organized schools of painting in Europe in 1808. He denounced the traditional French division into three schools as too simplistic. Neither did he favour divisions into five or twelve schools, as some did. Burtin settled on eight schools: the Florentine or Tuscan, Roman, Venetian, Lombardian, Flemish, Dutch, French, and German.

Many a Dutch, Flemish, or German visitor to the gallery went specifically for the grouping of paintings in the Louvre into three schools,
in order to reflect on the peculiarity of their ‘own’ school and national characteristics in general. The Dutch poet Jan Frederik Helmers sang praise of the Dutch school while on a visit to the Louvre in 1802. This school, according to Helmers, enraptured the eye not so much by the grandiose style of historical painting, but by its true reflection, as in a mirror, of the natural form of every object. Looking at the Dutch paintings, Helmers fancied himself in Holland: he could smell the Dutch air, the meadows, and he realized how much he loved the Dutch soil. He saw resting cattle, a young bull, heard the bellowing of panting oxen. Now this was art elevated to life, to which the Italian school could do nothing but pay homage by reverently placing the most noble flowers of spring, plucked from the Netherlandish garden, around Rembrandt’s head.26

Art connoisseur and biographer Adriaan van der Willigen could not help but look upon ‘that number of excellent fruits of the brush from our so famous school of painting’ with ‘emotion and regret’ during each of his many visits to the Louvre. The landscapes reminded him, like Helmers, of several places in his fatherland: the beach, the city of Haarlem, the rivers. A painting of a shop interior evoked the sweet taste of candy he was given in his youth. The ultimate praise of Dutch art, however, came from two French peasants, who Van der Willigen observed as they lingered in front of Paulus Potter’s famous Young Bull. Time and again they returned to it and Van der Willigen overheard them saying that this painting was ‘completely true to nature’ and ‘the most beautiful in the entire gallery’.27

The painful fact that the highlights of Dutch painting could only be seen in Paris strengthened feelings of national pride with regard to the Dutch school.28 Cornelis Apostool – director from 1808 of the Royal Museum, the successor to the National Art Gallery in The Hague – attested to this after a visit to the Louvre at the beginning of 1808. According to Apostool, the Dutch paintings in that collection formed ‘the most lovely monument [...] to the excellence of the Dutch school’, whose painters ‘in their trade, correspond to and are equal to the best history painters of the Italian school’.29 It was precisely this opportunity to compare different national and regional schools in the Louvre at first hand that led with many foreign visitors to a growing awareness and a growing pride in the peculiarity of their own national school, an emotion that was fed by the growing criticism of the policy of artistic looting by the French.
Final curtain

It could well be that ‘the new ethic of the museum visit’ described by Poulot, determined as it was by the museological and organisational choice of a free tour through the Parisian museums, gave some visitors the opportunity to disengage from conventions as they reflected on the works of art on show. This tendency is most poignantly apparent among German visitors. In the years 1802-1813, they developed the most original and extreme visions on the museum as an institution, on the question of uprooted works of art and on the nature of cultural heritage in general. The dramatist Kotzebue, who in 1803 wrote one of the most original and remarkable travel journals of the period, begins his account of his visit to the Louvre by announcing that the reader should expect nothing more from him than descriptions of his feelings, no matter what those who adhere to the ‘philosophy-à-la-mode’, or those ‘so-called connoisseurs and ones who turn up their noses’ might think. This personal, principal attitude leads the author to express his dislike of scenes like Christ’s deposition from the cross and of scenes of Christian martyrdom, even when painted by the most famous Italian masters. Of all the antique statues, Kotzebue prefers representations of famous men, he finds the subject of the Laocoön group ugly. The character of the Musée des Monuments Français appeals more to him than the Louvre: ‘Heart, mind, love of art, imagination, everything is stirred here the moment one enters this shrine’. Here too, Kotzebue expresses his personal predilections and reaches the conclusion that the commemoration of memorable men in the Elysée of the museum is of much greater value to him than the whole statue of the Apollo Belvedere, which, by the way, is one of the very few antique sculptures in the Louvre Kotzebue thinks highly of. The remembrance of certain persons from the past (especially poets and philosophers who inspire him) has far greater meaning to Kotzebue than the position these portraits take in art historical periodization or within this or that school of painting. In this sense, the design of both the Musée des Monuments Français and the Louvre was wasted on him.

The exhibition of paintings in the Louvre had a completely different affect on Friedrich Schlegel, whose romantic ideas on art were forged in a dialectical discourse with what he saw in that museum. His constant study of the paintings in the museum brought Schlegel to the insight that the art of Italy, which was generally considered the pinnacle in art, was already in decline during Raphael’s life. Therefore, the early art of Raphael and his
predecessors, and thus the art of the German school, is far more important to Schlegel. He and his followers talk about the art of Altdorfer and Dürer in terms of a national heritage that deserves to be shown in its own national museum.34

In 1807, the German pedagogue Niemeyer, to conclude, explicitly called upon the emotions. He enjoyed ‘the silent expression of admiration, the loving glance upon statues and images, the staying, the lingering, the looking back upon the excellent’, much more than ‘the superficial utterance of art terms’ or ‘the feigned countenance of a connoisseur’. Niemeyer prefers the untouched, warm, colourful paintings on the first floor to the white, cold, often damaged statues on the ground floor of the Louvre. Classical antiquity, according to Niemeyer, ‘is so far removed from us’ that most visitors pass by these statues in haste. In the picture galley, however, one finds life itself, even universal nature. Thanks to the arrangement of the works according to period and school, the visitor can unite ‘historical interest’ to ‘the appreciation of its treasures’. In this connection, Niemeyer reaches the remarkable and utterly original observation that the objects in a museum ‘have their own history’. They have often been wandering, from Greece or Italy, going east to west and back again. Ipso facto they have become alienated from their former context and meaning: the only thing that remains of these disengaged objects is their image and the delight they give for posterity.35 With this idea, and all it implies in terms of history and heritage, the French museological revolution had reached its full completion.

Notes


28. While visiting the Muséum d’histoire naturelle in Paris, with its many objects from the collection of the former stadholder of the Dutch Republic, the Dutch politician Willem Frederik Röell realised how ‘utterly annoying it was to see monuments of subjection having been handed over to strangers’ [‘hoe ten hoogsten hinderlijk het was gedenkteekenen van onderwerping in vreemde handen te zien overgebragt’].
29. The Hague, Museum Meermanno-Westreenianum, Archives, S. 87, Cornelis Apostool to Johan Meerman, 10 February 1808.
CHAPTER 14

Restitution as a means of remembrance. Evocations of the recent past in the Czech Republic and Poland after 1989

STANISLAW TYSZKA

After the fall of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe, new democratic governments had to confront the issue of what to do with the perpetrators of repression and human rights violations, and to what extent and how to compensate the victims. Among the various instruments of post-Communist transitional justice implemented in the countries of the region, we can distinguish between retributive and reparatory measures. Decommunization and lustration were meant to exclude certain categories of functionaries of the Communist regime from holding important positions in the democratic state, and thus named the perpetrators. Other instruments, such as the rehabilitation of political prisoners and restitution of nationalized property, were meant to redress injustices committed by the Communist regime, and named its victims. These legal and administrative measures have taken a different shape in each country of the region, reflecting different historical legacies brought into the democratic transformation by each society.

The demise of Communism created something of an ideological vacuum and the values fundamental for the organization of every society were redefined in the processes of political and economic transformation. The historical narratives promoted by Communist propaganda and official historiography suddenly lost their legitimacy. In the context of the adoption of the policies of transitional justice, the recent past of East Central European
societies has become a subject of contentious and emotional debates. These debates involved many of the historical issues that had been previously censored or effaced and could not be publicly discussed. In these processes of coming to terms with the Communist past, a very important role was played by the law, which, on the one hand, served the state as a powerful instrument for (re)shaping collective memories, and on the other hand, has become a battleground for different visions of the past promoted by various individuals, groups, and institutions of the nascent civic society. These different functions of law in post-Communist societies are clearly visible in the issue of property restitution.

The problem of property restitution was a direct result of the large-scale nationalizations and confiscations of property of various social and ethnic groups carried out by the Communist regimes. These property seizures, however, frequently amounted to confiscations of properties previously confiscated during the war. Thus, the issue of the property of the Jews and of other groups expropriated by the Nazis and the Soviets quickly appeared in the discussions on restitution. The far-reaching changes in the structure of property rights were also connected to the post-war border changes and population transfers, which constituted yet another subject of discussion. As a result, in these debates various historical narratives of victimization appeared, constructed around memories of different historical injustices, and justifying claims to restitution or compensation for the lost property. Presented by different groups of former owners, but also by the opponents of restitution, these narratives expressed different concepts of historical justice and as such collided with each other, sometimes leading to dynamic rivalry in victimization.

The purpose of this article is to analyse the cultural and symbolic aspects of post-Communist restitution of property and, more precisely, of the interconnections between restitution and practices of collective remembrance. Dan Diner notices this relationship in an insightful essay on the restitution of Jewish property in Europe, where he puts forward the thesis that the Holocaust is emerging as a foundational event for a common European collective memory. Diner observes that after 1989 the land register turns out increasingly to become an arsenal of a memory-complex extending further back, beyond the post-war socializations, as these layers are peeled off to reveal so called Aryanisations of property executed only few years earlier, lying right beneath. Such an archaeology of legal claims reflects the layer by layer succession of violence and political coercion applied in the past. Again: Anthropologically property and memory are in a manner of relation that is indeed epistemic.¹
Importantly, the author claims that memory and restitution were interconnected. Therefore, on the one hand, restitution of property led to the evocation of past memories, and, on the other hand, restitution was the result of recovered memory. The central idea of Diner’s essay is that in the context of the wave of restitutions that swept through the continent in the 1990s the restitution of Jewish property became one of the most important means of the Holocaust remembrance.

I want to take Diner’s observations on the relationship between memory and restitution as a point of departure, and to analyse restitution in the context of two nationally specific restitution programmes and discourses – the Czech and the Polish. However, when applied to the case of post-Communist societies, Diner’s ideas on the general direction of restitution need to be reconsidered. Restitution programmes in all of Central and Eastern Europe were reactions to the legacy of the Communist nationalizations in the first place, and I shall argue that their shape was to a large extent determined by the memories of Communism. The way in which the problems related to the memory of World War II and the Holocaust appeared in the restitution debates was determined to a great degree by the nature of coming to terms with the Communist past. Therefore, the singling out of the restitution of Jewish property from the general picture of the post-Communist restitution discourses involves a risk of missing their main characteristic that lies in the fact that they involved a number of conflicting claims to property and victimhood. While Diner views the problem of restitution as ultimately leading to the universalization of the Holocaust memory, I shall argue that the post-Communist restitutions should be interpreted more in terms of competing memories of historical injustices. Moreover, the importance of the national differences in the shape of restitution discourses should not be overlooked.

What makes the comparison of the Polish and the Czech cases interesting is the fact that these countries, both examples of a successful post-Communist transformation, represent two extremes with regard to the processes of coming to terms with the past by legal means. As far as restitution is concerned, the Czech Republic has implemented the largest restitution programme in Central and Eastern Europe, returning property both to individuals and to some legal entities. Contrast this with Poland, which, despite numerous legislative attempts, has not adopted a general law on restitution to individual owners so far, and thus occupies the opposite pole of the spectrum in post-Communist countries of the region, which all have, in one way or another, compensated the individual former owners.²
My intention is to examine the relations between restitution and memory considering restitution debates in the Czech Republic and in Poland in their entirety, and thus bearing in mind that various groups demanded restitution or compensation for nationalized property, including, among others, the aristocracy, the former middle class, ‘kulaks’, émigrés, Jews, expelled Germans, and the Catholic Church. I shall argue that in order to capture the character of both national restitution discourses it is crucial to understand the relations between the claims of different groups in these societies, because restitution was precisely about who becomes the beneficiary of the post-Communist redistribution of property and who does not.

This perspective does not exclude the fact that, to some extent, restitution in these countries can be seen as part of a wider European, or even global, trend of amending past injustices through restitution and compensation, a trend that for a major part is rooted in the post-war West German response to the Holocaust through the politics of what was known as the *Wiedergutmachung*. Since the 1990s, with the growing importance of the human rights discourse, this tendency to deal with past injustices by legal means has been growing stronger, with new groups asking for recognition of their past suffering and for financial compensation. In this context, many groups treat the Jewish restitution claims as a model for their particular claims, which can be also observed in the post-Communist restitution discourses.

An important assumption I make throughout the following discussion is that the relations between restitution and memory can only be examined if we are precise about how we conceive of collective memory. In the first part of the essay, I present a short outline of the interference with private property rights in both countries in the twentieth century as a source of the problem of restitution. In the next part, I analyse restitution legislation as a part of the post-Communist politics of history, which I understand as a construction of historical narratives by the state and its agencies in order to gain political legitimacy. To that end, I discuss the basic dilemmas faced by the democratic governments after 1989 with regard to restitution. Following this, I compare the general shape of the restitution legislation in both countries and explain the differences in the context of an overall character of coming to terms with the Communist past. In the final part of the essay, I want to propose a perspective on restitution in its connection to memory that focuses on the activity of former owners and stresses their role in shaping restitution discourses, and then to discuss briefly some aspects of both national restitution discourses from that perspective.
Property revolutions

It should be stressed that the issue of property restitution in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of Communism is historically exceptional in its scale. The problem of restitution as such is not a completely novel phenomenon, with important precedents in the post-World War Two restitutions or the restitutions after the French Revolution, but only the Communist regimes aimed at a total eradication of private ownership of the means of production, and to a high degree they succeeded in this. As a result of the scale of the Communist nationalization, the amount of property claimed by former owners after the collapse of Communism was incomparably higher than in the cases mentioned above. The problem of post-Communist restitution was complicated even more by the fact that the history of property expropriations in the region was multi-layered.

With regard to the large-scale changes in property relations in the Polish and Czech territories in the twentieth century, three waves of the expropriations, or of ‘property revolutions’, to use Gotz Aly’s term, can be distinguished. The first wave of expropriations took place during World War Two, under Nazi and Soviet occupation, and was related to population transfers, economic exploitation, and genocide. In both countries, all property belonging to the Jews was expropriated, while in Poland, material persecution also concerned a considerable part of the non-Jewish population. The second wave took place in the immediate post-war period as a result of the population transfers and of the radical socio-economic reforms (land reforms and the nationalization of large industry). Importantly, these measures overlapped to a significant degree. For example, during the land reforms the property of expelled Germans was redistributed. The expropriations in that period were motivated by Communist as well as by nationalist considerations. Following the establishment of an absolute Communist domination in both countries in 1948, state ownership was extended through the collectivization of agriculture and the nationalization of all remaining sectors of the economy, in which property confiscations were often used as an instrument of class struggle. These expropriations went further in Czechoslovakia, where very little was left in private hands. In Poland, due to the unsuccessful policy of collectivization, agriculture remained mostly in private hands. Although the major revolutionary changes in property relations in both countries occurred within a relatively short period of ten years (1939-1949), over the next forty years the Communists continued to
nationalize what had been left in private hands and violated property rights on an everyday basis. During the Communist era, large-scale emigration from both countries also had an important impact on the distribution of property rights.

It should be stressed that the interference with property rights discussed above was often an integral part of, or a prelude to, general policies of persecution or discrimination, motivated by various political, ideological or economic considerations. With regard to the situation of the Jewish population under Nazi occupation, the violation of property rights represented only one aspect of a general process of abusive and discriminatory treatment and, ultimately, genocide. A common denominator of these various policies was that they were usually aimed at depriving people not only of property rights but also of their personal identity and dignity and were meant as instruments to exclude certain categories of people from society.

Regarding the level of the public discourse after 1989, it is noteworthy that the variety of historical policies of expropriation (and of the different motivation behind them) sometimes disappeared as the specificity of the restitution debate to some extent required that these various historical injustices were categorized together. With regard to the politics of remembrance, this could involve the risk of relativization and, sometimes, the blurring of important moral differences. While on the individual level the experience of expropriation and expulsion in all the different historical circumstances might have been comparable, on the level of historical narratives such associations often turned out problematic. As we shall see, this problem was especially striking when the Jewish and the German claims appeared simultaneously.

As far as the legal consequences of the past property rights violations are concerned, it is important that all the nationalizations and confiscations of properties belonging to various ethnic and social groups and carried out by successive oppressive regimes resulted, after 1989, in a very complex situation with regard to ownership rights, including overlapping rights, and this significantly complicated the problem of restitution. We can imagine, for instance, that a particular property in Bohemia belonged to a Jew until the war, then it was taken over by a German who was deported after the war when a Czech owner appeared who, in turn, was evicted by the Communist state. In such cases it was often difficult to establish the legal owner.
Restitution legislation and the politics of history

The question of how to deal with the claims of the former owners appeared right after the transition of 1989 in the context of necessary denationalization of the economy and of the re-introduction of private property rights. The basic question of whether to return property to its former owners at all turned out to be a very complex problem, involving difficult economic, legal, political, and moral dilemmas, which all provoked similar debates in every country of the region.

From the economic point of view, the return of property to its former owners was only one of the possible means of privatization in the broad sense, i.e. of the transfer of state-owned assets into private hands. Therefore, the problem of defining the relation between restitution (re-privatization) and other methods of privatization of property appeared. Which of these policies would be given priority was an important issue because fast privatization would necessarily limit the extent of possible natural restitution (restitution in kind). With regard to the economic aspects of restitution, its opponents argued that it would involve numerous legal disputes and as such would mean a prolonged legal uncertainty, while priority given to privatization would mean a faster transformation of property relations, which would increase the capacity of the economy to attract foreign investments. The advocates of restitution replied that a return of property to the original owners was the easiest and economically most effective form of privatization as it would enable the fast resurgence of an entrepreneurial class, and as an expression of a commitment to the inviolability of property rights it would also encourage foreign investments. Thus, with regard to the economic rationale of restitution, both sides had their arguments.

From the beginning, however, these issues were linked to questions about justice. To what extent was the new democratic state responsible for injustices committed by the former regime? Was it right to ask current generations to pay for injustices inflicted forty years earlier? It was argued that restitution would benefit only a small minority of the population and, therefore, it would constitute an unjustified preferential treatment of a particular group of victims of past injustices, while under Communism ‘everybody suffered’. According to this point of view, a fast privatization process would lead to rapid economic development, which would benefit all citizens victimized by the Communist regime. These arguments were probably most persuasive with regard to the policies of the so-called mass
privatization, in which every citizen was given a share in the privatized state companies.

While the opponents of restitution often invoked the social justice arguments, its advocates stressed the necessity of respecting individual rights, referring to the sanctity of ownership, and repeating the popular slogan, ‘What was stolen must be returned’. As far as privatization was concerned, it was also argued that it usually led to embourgeoisement of the members of the former Communist nomenklatura who were the only ones who could afford to buy the privatized companies. Such privatization was regarded as deeply unjust for not only was it denying compensation to the victims but it was rewarding the perpetrators.

The question of how to compensate the former owners involved further problems. The choice was essentially between natural restitution and some kind of financial compensation. The first one of these, usually preferred by the former owners, was in many cases impossible, as the claimed properties had already been transferred to third parties. Another issue concerned the kind of assets that were to be returned. The restitution programmes concerned mostly fixed property as, because of the difficulties in establishing the ownership titles, it was usually considered impossible to adopt general legislation providing for restitution of movables (with some exceptions, e.g. artworks). Some assets, however, such as forests or national heritage sites, were often excluded from restitution. Finally, there were many technical difficulties regarding the ways of establishing the value of the returned assets or dealing with the questions of investments and repairs, on the one hand, and of lost profits, on the other hand.

As far as the legal dilemmas of restitution are concerned, they were part of a broader problem of continuity with the legal order of Communist regimes. As a complete rejection of the previous legal order seemed rather impractical or even utopian for it would probably result in complete legal chaos, the democratic governments adopted various concepts of legal continuity. This meant that an existing corpus of laws and regulations inherited from the Communist regimes has been gradually changed in view of new democratic principles. With regard to restitution, it meant that in order to return the nationalized property to its former owners, new laws that would nullify the Communist nationalization acts had to be adopted. Restitution legislation represented therefore a certain discontinuity with the previous system. At the same time, the concept of legal continuity itself has created in some cases possibilities for claiming restitution directly in the courts.

All these economic, legal, and moral dilemmas were solved in both countries in quite different ways. The Czech Republic has implemented the
largest and most comprehensive restitution programme in the region. The basic restitution laws were adopted in 1990-1991, therefore before the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic split into two countries in 1993. The restitution rights were given to Czech citizens with permanent residence in the country and concerned the private property that was nationalized between 28 February 1948 (the date of the Communist takeover) and 1 January 1990, either under the nationalization laws or in any other way. The Czech programme gave preference to restitution in kind, as opposed to compensation, which was subsidiary. Restitution was also given priority over privatization, thus an asset could be privatized only if there were no restitution demands from former owners. Under the restitution laws, restitution claims were to be settled out of the courts and this was even expressed in the title of the basic restitution law: *Law on Extra-Judicial Rehabilitation*. The courts were to intervene only when the different sides of the conflict could not reach an agreement.

In Poland, despite numerous legislative attempts, a general law on restitution to individual owners has not been adopted so far. Due to the lack of this law, privatization was given priority and the objects claimed by the former owners have often been transferred to third persons. A part of the shares in privatized companies is transferred to a special Reprivatization Fund from which compensation would be paid, but these are relatively small sums. As far as restitution legislation is concerned, Poland returned only the property that prior to the Second World War had belonged to the churches and other religious communities. This was done with a series of laws adopted during the 1990s and by regulating the relations between the state and the churches. It should be mentioned that the first of these laws provided for the return of property to the Catholic Church and was passed in 1989, while the law returning property to the Jewish communities was passed in 1997 among the last laws of the series. In 2005, a law was adopted to provide compensation to those who had left their property beyond the eastern Polish border after the war.

The lack of a general restitution programme is, however, only part of an overall picture of restitution in Poland as there are some possibilities of claiming restitution of unlawfully nationalized private property on the basis of administrative law and procedures. These possibilities result from the fact that the Communist regime violated not only human rights but also its own nationalization laws. Therefore, if a former owner can prove that the seizures were made in violation of the nationalization laws, he or she can demand a nullification of the expropriation, the return of the property or, when it is not possible, financial compensation. This legal framework
for restitution is thus based on the presumption of legality of the existing legal order.

The differences between the shapes of restitution programmes in both countries were directly related to the situation on the political scene and especially to a different status of the former Communists, who were traditionally hostile to property restitution. In the Czech Republic, at the beginning of the 1990s, when the revolutionary impetus was still strong, the parties originating from the anti-Communist democratic opposition had the political will and a sufficient parliamentary majority to pass a general restitution law. The Czech Communists, who did not go through any process of purification, have been politically marginalized, even though they regularly won around 15 per cent of the vote. In Poland, on the other hand, those forces on the political scene that were willing to pass a restitution law in the early 1990s were very divided and had problems with building a majority in parliament, while the former Communists quickly built a social democratic party and already won the elections in 1993, a major setback for all restitution initiatives.

The differences with regard to restitution should therefore be related to the overall character of coming to terms with the Communist past in both countries, which was determined by the victory in the Czech Republic and the defeat in Poland of political anti-Communism. Not only restitution but also retribution went much further in the Czech Republic – a law proclaiming the Communist party a criminal organization was adopted, and many categories of functionary of the previous regime were banned from holding public offices. In Poland, a lustration law was adopted much later and its provisions were limited to the obligation of those holding public offices to sign a statement regarding their possible collaboration or otherwise with the Communist secret police.

The different popularity of political anti-Communism in the two countries can be explained by the following factors: the character of the Communist regime in its final years – harsher in Czechoslovakia and milder in Poland; the nature of the 1989 transition – a radical break in the case of the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia and a negotiated compromise resulting from the Round Table talks in Poland; and, finally, the phenomenon of a certain psychological compensation – limited opposition to the regime in Czechoslovakia, as opposed to the widespread opposition in Poland, might paradoxically lead to a greater propensity to radical condemnation of Communism by Czechs. These factors, which in the analysed cases account for the outright rejection of the pre-1989 period in democratic Czechoslovakia and a more ambiguous attitude towards the
recent past in post-Communist Poland, are usually invoked to explain the different paths taken by post-Communist countries with regard to lustration and decommunization, but I would argue that to some extent they can also be applied to restitution. Reparation and retribution should be viewed as two inseparable sides of transitional justice, and thus more extensive retribution explains a more comprehensive regulation of restitution.

What different visions of the recent past and of national history result from these two radically different patterns of dealing with the legacy of Communism by legal means? We can observe that whereas decommunization and lustration mark a discontinuity with the former regime and give legitimacy to the democratic government, restitution of property can be perceived as an attempt at a symbolic erasure of the Communist era and the establishment of continuity with the order that had existed before a certain ‘natural’ flow of national history was broken. By reconstruction of property rights, restitution attempts a return to the *status quo ante*, which is especially visible when priority is given to restitution in kind. The question is when this natural continuity was broken. This issue was directly related to who became a beneficiary of restitution.

In the Czech Republic, the policies of retribution clearly marked a discontinuity with the former regime. The condemnation of Communism was, moreover, understood as entailing the necessity of providing justice to its victims through the policies of rehabilitation and restitution. In Poland, on the other hand, a radically opposite approach can be identified on the basis of the analysis of restitution regulations, a repudiation of the past and a forward-looking orientation. This institutionalized forgetting came to be symbolized in the Polish political discourse by the ‘We draw a thick line under the past’ of Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki, and President Aleksander Kwasniewski’s campaign slogan ‘Let’s choose the future’. This approach also entailed a rejection of the necessity to provide compensation to the victims of Communist and previous expropriations.

The concrete solutions within the restitution programmes inform us in more detail about specific visions of the past. In this respect, restitution is a very interesting example of how legal categories can collide with the categories typical for the politics of history. Theoretically, restitution laws, as any regulations adopted with respect for the rule of law, should be determined by the principle of equality before the law or of non-discrimination. A distinction between claimants that, from a legal point of view, is certainly not discriminatory is the one between individual and
institutional (legal persons) former owners. Transitional justice, however, is not ordinary justice. Although the Czech restitution laws, as well as some Polish draft laws, were formulated using neutral language, in practice they favoured certain groups and excluded others from the restitution schemes. This was done mainly through the adoption of such provisions as the specific cut-off dates for restitution or the requirements of citizenship and residency. With regard to the first provision, 28 February 1948 as a cut-off date for restitution in the Czech Republic excluded the restitution of property nationalized on the basis of the so-called Benes decrees, thus excluding mostly the Sudeten Germans expelled from Czechoslovakia after the war. This date, however, also eliminated the possibility of restitution of property that was confiscated during the war and was not returned until 1948, and this concerned, above all, the Jews. The citizenship and residency requirements made impossible the return of property confiscated from the émigrés who left Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1989. Apart from that, the restitution laws left open the problem of church property, which was to be regulated in further legislation.

In the Polish case, from a strictly legal point of view, we cannot speak of any discrimination against particular individual former owners because they are all harmed by the lack of a restitution law. However, the one restitution draft law that passed through parliament provided that only those former owners who were registered as Polish citizens both at the time when their property was seized and on 31 December 1999, would be eligible to make restitution claims. The bill excluded, therefore, many émigrés who left Communist Poland after the war and lost Polish citizenship, among them many Polish Jews. This draft did not become law because the president vetoed it in 2001. As far as restitution to religious organizations is concerned, there is now legislation providing restitution to all of them. However, considering the timing of the adoption of appropriate laws, it is clear that priority was given to the claims of the Catholic Church, while a law governing the restitution of Jewish communal property entered into force only in 1997.

The fact that the restitution laws favoured certain groups and excluded others from the restitution schemes led some political scientists to interpretations that depicted the restitution programmes in East Central Europe as a means of establishing a new post-socialist national identity. Elazar Barkan in *The Guilt of Nations* observed that ‘by selecting deserving victims and undeserving victims, legislators and governments rewrote the national identity and favored one national story over another’. In his view, the privileging of particular groups of victims ‘amounted to pursuing a
specific policy of national identity that excluded other groups in order to create homogenous nations that did not recognize minorities. In a similar way, Shlomo Avineri noted that most of the former socialist countries chose cut off dates for restitution that coincided with the most ethnically pure moment in the country’s history.

These interpretations of post-Communist restitution are justified only to some extent and, as far as our comparison is concerned, rather with regard to the Czech restitution programme. Since they are mainly substantiated by the examples of exclusion of German and Jewish past minorities from restitution, the new post-Communist national identities, allegedly constructed through restitution, appear as essentially nationalistic. These interpretations seem to be rooted in a popular but rather simplistic model of the post-Communist transformation in which nationalism as an ideology has filled up the ideological vacuum created by the demise of communism. I shall argue that this approach oversimplifies the complex problem of the post-Communist restitutions. Even if we concentrate only on the restitution legislation, as opposed to restitution discourses, we should remember that it was the outcome of the interplay of many factors. As I attempted to demonstrate above, the shape of the restitution legislation was, above all, closely related to the general character of coming to terms with the Communist past in each country, but it was also influenced by various economic and legal considerations. Moreover, we should consider the fact that restitution was a dynamic process, and that the legal framework of restitution has, to some extent, changed since the early 1990s, often, and importantly, as a result of the initiatives undertaken by the claimants themselves.

The analysis of legal regulations gives us only a fragmentary picture of the processes of coming to terms with the past through restitution in both societies. In order to construct a more comprehensive picture of public evocations of the recent past through restitution, it is necessary to consider not only the level of ‘hard’ institutions and laws but also the ‘soft’ media and discourses. In particular the issue of social mobilization, of the activity of former owners and of other actors involved in restitution debates, deserves more attention. When approached in this way, restitution discourse appears as a space not necessarily dominated by a nationalistic message but as a space of interaction of many different visions of the past.

With regard to the relation between restitution and memory, such a change of perspective means giving up the concept of collective memory in which the state appears as the major player and constructor of national identity. In the public debates, in a quite obvious way, only the claims of the
excluded from the restitution schemes appeared, while those claims that were settled naturally disappeared from the national agenda. Among those excluded, some gained much public attention, while others were left almost unnoticed. These different reactions depended on the material and symbolic weight of particular claims but also on the activity of the former owners and their heirs.

**Collective remembrance as the activity of former owners and their opponents**

The general legal framework for restitution, defined in the Czech Republic by the restitution laws adopted at the beginning of the 1990s and in Poland determined by the ‘legislative silence’ and a resulting creeping restitution, has obviously had a crucial influence on the shape and the character of restitution discourses in both countries. In the Czech Republic, certain categories of former owners were excluded from the restitution scheme and have fought for changes in the law. On the other hand, there were those who opposed particular legislative provisions or criticized court verdicts favourable to the claimants. In Poland, no former owners, with the exception of religious organizations, were compensated, and many of them have been lobbying for a general restitution law or, when possible, have tried to obtain compensation under existing administrative procedures. At the same time, some people have continued to argue against the very idea of restitution.

As a result of certain initiatives undertaken by the former owners and their representatives, restitution regulations have evolved in both countries towards including certain categories of the expropriated. In the Czech Republic, the major changes regarded the restitution of Jewish property, both individual and communal. The restrictions limiting the restitution of Jewish property have been gradually removed since 1994, when, on the one hand, the government began to transfer the property to the Jewish communities through administrative channels, and, on the other, the general restitution laws were amended to provide restitution of some property confiscated for racial reasons during the war. These changes were influenced, to some extent, by the pressure of international public opinion. However, the main role in the process was played by a small Jewish religious community in the Czech Republic, which began difficult negotiations with the Czech government at the beginning of the 1990s and finished with them participating in the work of the Joint Working
Committee on Mitigation of Some Property Crimes against Holocaust Victims, which in 2000 proposed legislation that satisfied all remaining property claims and closed the issue of Jewish restitution.\textsuperscript{15}

In Poland, the most important legislative change regarding restitution to individual owners concerned the enactment in 2005 of a law providing compensation for the property left in Poland’s former eastern borderlands, the so-called ‘mienie zabużańskie’ (property left beyond the Bug River). Under the international treaties between Poland and the Soviet Republics (the so-called ‘Republican Agreements’) from 1944, the Communist government took upon itself the obligation to compensate repatriated persons for their property left behind after the war on the territories seized by the USSR, and this obligation was later incorporated into domestic law. Most of the repatriated received apartments and farms on the territories formerly belonging to Germany (the so-called ‘Recovered Territories’). But for many there were no houses or grounds left, and they have been waiting for compensation for fifty years. After 1989, the democratic State attempted to close this problem providing these people with a specific right to offset the value of the lost property against the price of immovable property purchased from the State. In practice, however, they encountered many legal and administrative obstacles in the realization of this right.

The eventual adoption of the law in 2005 was the result of a judgment of the European Court of Human Rights from 2004 in the case Jerzy Broniowski vs. Poland. Broniowski, who inherited a right to compensation for a house with a garden in Lwów (Lviv, now in Ukraine) from his grandmother, argued before the court that his rights were infringed by the amount of compensation he had obtained, as it was only 2 per cent of the value of the lost property. In the judgment, the Court stressed that the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms requires the amount of compensation to be ‘reasonably related’ to the value of the lost property and obliged the Polish state not only to reach a settlement with Broniowski but, indirectly, to regulate the problem of ‘mienie zabużańskie’ in general. As a result, the Polish Parliament passed the relevant legislation, which set the ceiling of compensation at 20 per cent of the value of the property.

As we can see from the above examples, the legal changes were mainly a result of the efforts of the former owners, either individual or institutional. In what follows, I shall focus on those aspects of restitution that are linked to the activity of former owners. This activity interests me, however, not only to the extent that it was effective, i.e. resulting in a change of regulations or positive court decisions, but also as to how it
affected the dynamics of the restitution discourse as a discourse about various historical injustices.

Focusing on the particular activities of individual and group owners enables us to capture important aspects of the overall character of national restitution discourses and to propose a perspective of analysis in which the relationship between restitution and memories can be defined at the grassroots level, the level at which people engaged with questions of history. Both in the Czech Republic and in Poland, former owners and their heirs, their various representatives and associations, as well as some non-governmental institutions, justified restitution demands with particular narratives of historical injustices. Acting to influence the shape of the restitution legislation or to achieve a positive decision in a restitution case, they have used various strategies, ranging from legal instruments through political lobbying to various cultural activities. They have: filed individual and class-action suits in national and international courts to challenge particular decisions, the existing laws, the draft laws, or the lack of restitution; participated in the legislation processes by drafting and proposing their own versions of restitution laws; negotiated with the government or a local administration; petitioned national and European parliaments, and lobbied their members; and held numerous demonstrations. There were even cases of resorting to private justice when an owner got tired of waiting for a decision in a restitution case.

The activities that are particularly interesting are those involving the use of non-legal and non-political instruments. Restitution demands were usually accompanied by the stories of particular historical injustices, suffered by an individual, his or her family, or by a group of people. Some organizations representing the former owners, alongside offering legal assistance, have conducted a broader cultural activity which involved, for example, organizing exhibitions, publishing memoirs, biographies and other publications, written by more or less professional historians, and dealing with the material aspects of the Nazi and the Communist persecutions of various groups and individuals. On the Internet, there are many websites run by amateur historians that document individual cases of expropriations, tell family stories, and display copies of historical documents and photographs.

It should be mentioned, however, that the former owners and their heirs are not the only ones who participate in the restitution debates. There are also other groups of actors, who in different ways engage in the restitution issues, such as those who resist restitution, either because they are the beneficiaries of nationalizations or because they are motivated by idealistic
concerns. Jon Elster’s categorization of the agents involved in transitional justice is helpful here. In the context of restitution debates, we should mention the following categories: victims; beneficiaries of the wrongdoing; promoters - organizers and advocates of transitional justice; and wreckers - those individuals who try to oppose, obstruct, or delay the process of transitional justice.\textsuperscript{16}

Focusing on the activity – and the strategies adopted by the actors of restitution discourse – allows us to capture the relations between restitution and memory. I would like to refer at this point to the ideas of Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, who instead of the term ‘collective memory’ use the term ‘collective remembrance’, and understand the latter as ‘the outcome of agency’. Importantly, collective remembrance is here the product of individuals and groups ‘who come together, not at the behest of the state or any of its subsidiary organizations, but because they have to speak out’.\textsuperscript{17} Thus, what matters in collective remembrance is activity – ‘someone carries a message, a memory, and needs to find a way to transmit it to others’.\textsuperscript{18} Adopting this perspective, I want to view restitution claims not as motivated by economic interest only but as carriers of particular memories of historical injustices, and as a way of transmitting a story to the others.

As far as the effectiveness of the activity of the former owners is concerned, the shape of restitution is of course an important measure for distinguishing between ‘successful’ and ‘unsuccessful’ memories, but it is not the sole measure. What also seems important is that certain claims have caused long and emotional debates while others have failed to gain much public attention. Thus, whether or not particular voices have been audible in the restitution discourse is another important measure of their success. The various actors did not operate in a symbolic vacuum but in a specific socio-political and cultural context. It is important that they wanted to convince others, not only governments but also public opinion, to recognize their victimization. With regard to this issue, Wulf Kastainer observed that the groups whose members had experienced some traumatic events ‘only have a chance to shape the national memory if they command the means to express their visions, and if their vision meets with compatible social or political objectives and inclinations among other important social groups, for instance, political elites or parties’ and that ‘past events can only be recalled in a collective setting if they fit within a framework of contemporary interests’.\textsuperscript{19}

In what follows I shall discuss some important issues in both national restitution discourses referring to a few examples of restitution cases.
A common feature of both national restitution debates was the problem of the demands of the expelled Germans’ organizations. In both countries these demands were rejected tout court by public opinion and by all political forces. The German claims played, however, an important role in Czech-German and Polish-German post-1989 relations, especially during the negotiations before entering the EU. It is not my aim here to discuss the issues of high politics and the international dimension of the German claims, but I want to draw attention to the activity of various non-governmental organizations involved in the issue. The demands against the Czech state come from a powerful Sudeten German Association (Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft) based in Munich, Bavaria, which, since 1989, has demanded the revocation of the so-called Benes decrees, under which about 2.5 million Sudeten Germans were expelled from Czechoslovakia after the war, and the right to a homeland and restitution of their property. In Poland, on the other hand, the whole debate was started, only in 2004, by the activity of Preussische Treuhand, a small and unknown private organization that represents the expelled Germans and files restitution claims on their behalf. From the legal point of view, their claims have no chance of being approved, but they are very efficient in the sense that they provoke emotional discussions in Poland. Interestingly, even the name of this organization is provocative as it calls itself in English the ‘Prussian Claims Conference’, which is a clear reference to the Jewish Claims Conference. Moreover, it models its strategy on the Jewish organization, using class action lawsuits. Finally, among the twenty-two lawsuits this organization filed in the European Court of Human Rights in December 2006, there was one filed on behalf of a German Jew, who claimed the return of his property in Wroclaw (Breslau). The references to Jewish suffering are therefore used by this organization as a means of legitimizing German claims in general.

As a reaction to the activity of the expelled German, both in the Czech Republic and in Poland, organizations appeared that attempted to counterbalance the German claims by juxtaposing them with the expulsions of Poles and Czechs during the Nazi occupation. The Circle of Czechs Expelled in 1938 from the Czech-German Borderland was founded in 1993 and associates people who were expelled from Czechoslovakia’s borderland after it had been ceded to the Third Reich under the Munich Agreement. They engage in various cultural activities, such as publishing the memoirs of its members, organizing exhibitions about Czech-German historical relations, or organizing meetings about the history of expulsions. However, they also organized a petition asking the Czech government to
demand war reparations from Germany. Interestingly, in Poland there is a similar organization, the Association of Displaced Gdynia Inhabitants, which represents the people expelled from the Gdynia region under the Nazi occupation. The appearance and activity of these organizations is a good example of the so-called ‘rivalry in victimization’, which can be identified here at the level of the activity of the victims of Nazi expulsions, undertaken in reaction to the claims of the expelled Germans.

The other major issues that appeared in the Czech restitution discourse, apart from the claims of the Sudeten Germans, were the restitution of Jewish property, of the aristocracy, of the Catholic Church, and of the Czech émigrés. It should be stressed that the problem of the so-called Benes decrees has influenced the restitution debate with regard to the Jewish and aristocratic claims. Czech politicians were careful not to set a precedent that would challenge the cut-off date of 1948 and open the way for the claims made by the Sudeten Germans. However, as mentioned above, the Jewish claims, after initial exclusion from restitution, were eventually recognized and settled. As far as the popular perception of the Jewish restitution in Czech society is concerned, it is worth mentioning that the issue did not raise strong emotions on either the national or the local level. This situation can be partly explained by the relatively low value of assets claimed by the Jews and by rather modest and self-limiting demands on the part of the local Jewish religious communities which, for example, decided to leave many synagogues in the hands of other churches. It seems, however, that it was also the fact that Jewish claims were of secondary importance for the Czech debates on the past and on national identity that made possible the eventual solution of the problem of Jewish restitution.20

An issue that has attracted much more public attention was the claims of the descendants of aristocratic families. The estates that had been confiscated from the Czech aristocracy after 1948 were mostly returned to them under the general restitution laws. However, there are many ongoing disputes regarding the aristocratic estates confiscated under the Benes decrees. Most of them hinge on whether a certain aristocrat was entitled, after the war, to keep Czechoslovak citizenship or was legally stripped of citizenship and property because he had collaborated with the Nazis or had applied for German citizenship. The case of the Salm family, the members of which claim the Rajec Chateau and extensive farmland in the Southern Moravia, may serve as an example here. The crucial question in this case, which lasted for several years, was whether Hugo Salm, who died in 1946, had the right to Czechoslovak citizenship or not. Interestingly, a few more-or-less professional historians engaged in this case and searched
the archives trying to find proof of Salm’s membership in Nazi organizations. When one of the activists placed information suggesting Salm’s collaboration on a memorial plaque, which commemorated an event completely unrelated to Salm, his daughters sued for libel and won. Eventually, the Constitutional Court decided that Hugo Salm, because of his anti-Nazi activity during the war, had retained Czechoslovak citizenship, which opened the path for his heirs to claim the return of property.

More such restitution activists as in the case mentioned above are engaged in various restitution cases. They are usually either amateur historians or heritage conservationists. Some of them have formed an organization named The Line of Truth and Justice, the aim of which is to fight against the return of property to those who had it confiscated on the basis of the Benes decrees. During the presentation of a recently published book entitled ‘Cui bono restituce?’ (Restitution – to whose benefit?), Eva Necasova, its editor and the director of the museum at the Blansko Chateau, a former property of the Salm family, explained the authors’ engagement in the restitution cases by the need to defend the ‘rightfully confiscated’ property against the restitution claims. She also juxtaposed the claims of the aristocracy with the uncompensated suffering of people who under the Communist regime lost their jobs, were banned from universities or had to work in uranium mines. In this case, therefore, we meet again the argument against restitution according to which it is an arbitrary compensation for only one of a broad spectrum of injustices suffered by people under the Communist regime.

Another big issue in the Czech restitution debates concerned the claims of the émigrés, many of whom were excluded from restitution by the citizenship and residency requirements. During the Communist period, Czechoslovakia lost more than 550,000 people to emigration. Anytime someone managed to escape to the West, the Communist justice system convicted him or her in absentia to imprisonment of up to five years, and his or her property was confiscated. Some of the émigrés were forced to give up Czechoslovak citizenship because of the laws of countries they emigrated to, while others gave it up to protect their families still in Czechoslovakia. After 1989, the convictions were erased, but most of the émigrés did not get their properties back.

Some restrictions placed on the émigrés by the restitution laws were removed after a long-drawn-out process of lobbying. The residency requirement was annulled by a judgment of the Constitutional Court in 1994, which also established a new time frame for the submission of
restitution claims. Still, the requirement of citizenship remained. In 1999, a law allowing emigrants to re-acquire their Czech citizenship was adopted, but at the same time parliament rejected extending restitution.

Czech émigrés are involved in many organizations all over the world, which stage demonstrations and file petitions concerning restitution. One of the common initiatives undertaken by these organizations was the ‘Proclamation of Czechs living abroad’ of 1998, addressed to the Czech government, in which the Czech émigrés expressed their deep disillusionment with the restitution procedures. 24 This text is especially interesting in the way it links the problems with restitution to the lack of retribution. The signatories wrote: ‘It is common knowledge that properties confiscated in the course of the Communist regime’s criminal activities of politically motivated jailings, executions and forced collectivization of farmland are often left in the hands of criminals and collaborators of the former regime. (…) Not a single case exists in which a former high ranking Communist official was forced to return an unlawfully confiscated home or farm that he purchased with preference and below the fair price. This problem is common to the victims living abroad and in the Republic regardless of their present citizenship status.’

In the Czech press, we can often read letters in which the émigrés describe the injustices they have suffered. One such example is a letter from a daughter of a Czech émigré, who was a pilot in the RAF during World War Two, written in the form of an impassioned j’accuse against the Czech government, or indeed against the whole Czech nation, and prompted by the fact that her father did not regain a small plot of land confiscated under Communism. She wrote: ‘Now you have elevated him to hero status. The exile has been welcomed home. He wears hearing aids and has had a hip replaced but his indomitable spirit is still as lively as ever, and you make the most of this for propaganda purposes. Don’t you think then that now it is time that you returned to him the land that you confiscated in 1948 as punishment for “escaping illegally”? ’ 25

A very contentious issue in the Czech restitution debate is the re-privatization of the property of the Catholic Church. The restitution laws did not regulate the return of confiscated church property although two laws from the early 1990s partially addressed the issue of church restitutions by enumerating specific property to be returned. In the land restitution law there are provisions blocking the privatization of church property, but the negotiations between the church and the government have been going on for several years without much success. It should be mentioned in this context that Czech society is among the most atheistic
societies in Europe and the conviction that the Church should be poor and simple is a vital part of the Czech national consciousness. This can be traced back to the legacy of Habsburg dominion over the Czechs, when Catholicism was forced upon them, and it has been strengthened even more by the forty years of Communist propaganda.

The most symbolic case is the fight over the ownership of the Saint Vitus’s Cathedral in Prague. The cathedral, a burial place of the Czech kings and of many saints, is the most important church in the country, but at the same time an icon of Czech national identity. In 1954, the Communist regime placed the cathedral under the jurisdiction of the President’s Office and declared it the property of ‘all the Czechoslovak people’. After the fall of the Communism, the Church demanded to be registered as the cathedral’s owner and in this way started a legal dispute with the state that has continued until today and has involved many twists and turns, as different courts ruled once in favour and then against the return of the cathedral to the Church.

The case of the cathedral shows some interesting features of the Czech restitution debates with regard to restitution of the Church property. On the one hand, there is the Czech Catholic Church, which was severely persecuted under Communism and considers the return of the cathedral an issue of ‘historical justice’. On the other hand, there is strong opposition to church property claims demonstrated not only by populist politicians but also by ordinary Czech citizens, who have organized, for instance, a successful petition demanding that President Václav Havel appeal against the decision. Interestingly, Czech public opinion on this issue seems to be to a large extent influenced by a very popular, although not quite historically accurate, documentary on the history of the cathedral and a book about it written by Zdenchek Mahler, a well-known Czech writer, who engaged in a quest against the claims of the Church and has been proving that the cathedral belonged, from its very foundation in the fourteenth century, to ‘the whole Czech nation’.26

There are also some smaller groups of restitution claimants which are much less visible in the media, such as those expelled from Subcarpathian Ruthenia which was seized from Czechoslovakia, first in 1938 by Hungary, and then in 1945 by the Soviet Union. They are associated with the Society of Friends of Subcarpathian Ruthenia, which has been publishing works on the history of the region and an interesting magazine.27 They have been also fighting for compensation for property left in Ruthenia. From a legal point of view, this situation is similar to that of the Polish ‘transferees’ from the East, because Czechoslovakia was obliged to pay compensation to these
people on the basis of a treaty with the USSR, and in practice compensation was paid to a very limited circle of former owners. Since 1989 those expelled from Ruthenia have been unable to convince governments to settle their claims, so they recently decided to file lawsuits in the European Court of Human Rights in Strasburg.

In Poland, restitution issues in general have attracted less public attention than in the Czech Republic. On the one hand, there have been discussions about new drafts of a general restitution law and, on the other hand, there have been debates around the claims of particular individuals or groups. With regard to the first issue, there still appear to be opinions against the very idea of restitution, often expressed by influential figures. Among the most interesting are those by the former owners or their heirs who declare that they would not claim restitution of the properties to which they are entitled because society should not be burdened with the enormous financial cost of compensation.

A good example of this position is an article written in reaction to the claims of the World Jewish Congress in 2007, by the former foreign affairs minister, Adam Rotfeld, himself of Jewish origin, and entitled: ‘It has not occurred to me to claim compensation’. Rotfeld’s argument amounted to the claim that because of the enormity of suffering and destruction caused by the Second World War it was impossible to think about those times in terms of material compensation. He wrote: ‘It was probably the view of a destroyed Warsaw and of thousands of burned villages that meant it never came into my mind to claim compensation for the apartment buildings my family had owned in Warsaw and the property they had left beyond the Bug River’.28

Drafts of restitution laws have been proposed both by political parties, as well as by the groups of the former owners or their heirs, and have been vividly debated both in the parliament and in the media. As mentioned above, only one draft law, which provided for a compensation of 50 per cent of the value of lost property, passed through parliament in 2001 but was vetoed by the post-Communist president. Further drafts have provided for compensation of only fifteen per cent of the value. With regard to public opinion, we observe a diminishing support for restitution.29

In Poland, there are many organizations representing the expropriated owners. Some of these organizations limit their activity mostly to lobbying for restitution and assisting their members legally in restitution cases (e.g. the Polish Union of Real Estate Owners, Association of Expropriated Warsaw Inhabitants, Association of Polish Industrialists, Association of the Owners of Expropriated Farm and Pasture Land in the Tatra Mountains,
Association of the Resettled Creditors of the State Treasury, Association of Former Owners of Pharmacies and Their Families), while the others combine the fight for restitution with extensive cultural or religious activities (Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland, Union of Lemkos, Polish Association of the Landed Gentry, Confederation of the Polish Nobility). Some of these organizations participated in the parliamentary proceedings concerning drafted restitution laws, but because they were essentially unsuccessful in obtaining restitution in 2000 they decided to join forces and established the National Coalition of Revendication Organizations. The Coalition groups the representatives of all major claimant groups, including the Polish émigrés’ organizations and the Holocaust Restitution Committee from the US, but with the exception of the expelled Germans’ organizations from the efforts of which the Coalition openly distances itself.

An important characteristic of the Polish restitution discourse, and at the same time a significant difference to the Czech debate, is that Jewish property claims have generated much public attention. One of the prominent examples of heated discussions is the case from 1999, when eleven claimants, Polish Jews or their heirs, filed a class action lawsuit against Poland in a court in New York. Next to the stories of the claimants, the lawsuit contained an overview of the claims based on a radical, almost revisionist, historical narrative of Polish-Jewish relations in the immediate post-war period. It was this justification that caused the main controversies. It stated that in post-war Poland ‘a scheme of ethnic and racial cleansing designed to remove the remaining surviving ten per cent of Polish Jews from Poland’ was implemented both by the Polish state and by ordinary Poles, who, thus, perpetuated the Nazi extermination of Jews in order to seize their property. The whole lawsuit was published by Gazeta Wyborcza, a leading Polish newspaper, together with the response of Adam Michnik, its editor-in-chief and at the same time one of the most important participants in the Polish-Jewish dialogue. In his article, under the expressive title, ‘A lie in the shadow of Shoah’, Michnik criticized the ideas expressed in the lawsuit as clearly anti-Polish, and that is how this case was generally commented upon.

What is interesting, however, is that only the controversial overview of the claims was referred to, while the stories of the claimants were hardly noticed.

This case shows an important characteristic of the Polish restitution discourse with regard to Jewish restitution claims. Essentially, after 1989, there has been no serious and open discussion on the restitution of Jewish property. The issue was also avoided in the debates about Polish-Jewish
past relations in general. What captures the attention of the national media are aggressive statements and property claims, usually made by international, rather than local, Jewish organizations, as well as anti-Semitic reactions to them, and, finally, the condemnation of such voices by Polish intellectuals and authorities. Apart from that, when the issue of Jewish property is brought up, it is usually dismissed on the grounds that the Jewish claims will be dealt with together with the claims of all other expropriated owners in a general restitution law.

The level of the public discourse should be distinguished from the restitution of Jewish property in local practice. As mentioned above, former owners can regain their properties proving that the confiscation decisions were illegal even under Communist law. Although it is difficult to measure the scale of this creeping restitution, there are many cases of Jewish owners regaining their property. The national media notice few of these cases. Interestingly, it seems that the Jewish claims evoke much less controversy on the local than on the national level. One such case, however, has become much discussed as it concerned the restitution of the house in which Pope John Paul II was born.

The house in question is in Wadowice, in southern Poland, and before the war it belonged to a Jewish merchant, Jechiel Balamuth, from whom the Wojtyla family rented two rooms. Karol Wojtyla was born in the house in 1920 and lived there until 1938. During the war, the owner of the house, together with his wife and three daughters, died in the Nazi camp at Belzec. Their son Chaim escaped and managed to reach the Soviet border, where he was arrested and sent to a Soviet labour camp. After the war, Chaim emigrated to Israel where his son Ron was born. The house was taken over by the local municipality. In 1984, the building became a museum documenting Karol Wojtyla’s life and activity before becoming pope, and since then it has become a great tourist attraction, even a place of pilgrimage for many Catholics. In 1999, the Pope visited Wadowice and, during a meeting with local people on the town’s main square, reminisced about his childhood and mentioned that his family had rented a room from the Balamuths. When Ron Balamuth heard about the Pope’s remarks, he came to Poland and demanded the return of the property. The case became immediately famous and all national media reported Balamuth’s family story. From a legal point of view, the case turned out to be quite simple as in the land register the Balamuths still figured as owners. Ron Balamuth decided to sell the house and after some negotiation a Polish millionaire bought it and donated it to the Catholic Church. The symbolic outcome of the story is that, in accordance with the wish of Ron Balamuth, next to the
Pope’s museum, one room in the house was to be devoted to an exhibition commemorating the Jews of Wadowice killed by the Nazis.

Another important group of claimants, although much less visible in the national media, are those victimized by the Communist decree on land reform from 1944, mostly the landed gentry. This social group played a very important role in Polish history, most recently in the resistance during World War Two. After the war, however, as a result of the land reform and the following persecutions, they ceased to exist as a social group, while their reputation was destroyed by Communist propaganda. After 1989, they have generally not been successful either in regaining their estates or in winning public sympathy, which constitutes a major difference with the Czech case. At the beginning of the 1990s, however, there was a period when the Polish aristocracy enjoyed public attention. Some of this was generated by restitution cases.

One of the most notorious cases was when a former owner regained her palace by force, with the aid of a group of armed security guards. This small palace had been confiscated after the war and made into a government facility. After 1989, the owner filed a claim requesting the return of her property and, as the property was taken in a manner inconsistent with the Communist decree on land reform, the court ruled in her favor. Yet the government agency overseeing the palace refused to relinquish it, and this caused the owner to resort to self-enforcement. Although eventually forced to move out of the building, she continued to fight for her rights in the courts. Finally, the courts restored the property in January 2001, two months after she died.

The act of seizing the palace by force was much criticized by the media and, interestingly, often described as a foray (zajazd in Polish), a reference to a tradition among the old nobility. During the Polish Commonwealth the nobility used to enforce judicial decrees by gaining possession of the goods or lands under adjudication with the help of armed kinsmen, friends, and neighbours. The reference was a negative one and, as invoking certain stereotypical images of the nobility, an expression of the legacy of Communist propaganda. This propaganda had obviously shaped the language that is still used to talk about the recent past, including the issues that concern the descendants of the Polish nobility. Therefore, the nobility would, for example, refer to the postwar Communist policies as ‘the so-called land reform’ to distinguish it from those policies which were implemented before the war by democratic governments and which were based on some social consensus.

Such organizations of the Polish nobility as the Polish Association of the Landed Gentry are active in restitution issues but also conduct various
cultural activities. For instance, in 2004 they organized an exhibition in cooperation with the agency of the Institute of National Memory in Poznan entitled ‘Land reform decree after sixty years. Documents and testimonies from the time of expulsion’, which has been traveling around Poland and is shown in schools or small museums. It tells a story of reform as an instrument of class struggle, depicting the enforcement of the decree, the following persecutions and propaganda campaigns meant to destroy the nobility’s reputation in the eyes of the rest of the society. Finally, it juxtaposes the pre-war photographs of beautiful palaces, manors and parks, with photographs documenting the current state of the same places showing deteriorating buildings that were not returned to their former owners.\(^{31}\)

A case of restitution that is particularly relevant to the preservation of the identity of a small ethnic group is the case of the Lemkos, a small ethnic minority originally from the region now divided between Poland and Ukraine. In 1947, during the ‘Vistula Action’ (‘Akcja Wisła’), which uprooted the remaining Ukrainians from southeastern Poland and forcibly relocated them to the northern and western territories, some 30,000 Lemkos were also transferred and their property seized by the state. After 1989, they demanded the return of this property, mostly large areas of forest. There were some positive court decisions relating to their property rights, but also problems with their enforcement and, generally, the Lemkos are still fighting for restitution. In Poland, they are represented by the Lemko Association and the Union of Lemkos. The latter maintains an interesting bilingual (Polish-Ukrainian) website, which contains information about the history of the Lemkos, current cultural events, and where potential claimants can also learn about a legal procedure to fight for restitution and download an example of an application to the European Court of Human Rights.\(^{32}\)

**Conclusion**

In both countries, restitution debates on particular issues were framed by the existing legal schemes for restitution. In the Czech Republic, the post-1989 governments accepted the principle of restitution as a means for the alleviation of property injustices committed by the previous regimes. The adoption of this principle together with the simultaneous exclusion of certain categories of former owners from restitution opened a Pandora’s Box with demands for further restitution, which sometimes reach as far back as to the confiscations that had occurred after the First World War. In general, it should be observed that the original decision has had an
important impact on the character of the Czech restitution discourse, and meant that whenever restitution claims appeared they became the subject of public discussion or were at least noticed by public opinion. In Poland, on the other hand, the legislative silence with regard to restitution, which in practice constitutes a decision not to return property, on a symbolic level transferred a message that past property injustices do not need to be compensated for. Thus, the space for public debate on the past as determined by the state was symbolically closed for the stories of the expropriated. However, the former owners have continued to battle for their rights, using the existing legal possibilities, and trying to be heard in the public sphere. Importantly, their activities should also be viewed in the context of the reconstruction of civil society.

As far as public evocation of the recent past through restitution is concerned, my aim was to suggest a perspective of analysis that focuses not only on the restitution legislation but also includes the activity of former owners and their opponents as a factor important for the shaping of restitution discourses. It would be difficult, however, to construct any image of a systemic order of the public evocation of the past through restitution. What we can observe in restitution discourses is a multiplicity of voices and historical narratives, often dynamically competing with each other. With regard to this aspect, it can be seen that in both societies, the restitution debates, although to a different degree, have become a venue for a certain ‘return to diversity’. As a result of the Second World War and the Holocaust, the post-war population transfers and the Communist persecutions, both Czech and Polish society became to a large extent homogeneous. After 1989, restitution has become one of the discourses through which the pre-war multicultural and multiethnic past has returned to the collective consciousness.

It should be stressed that in spite of many political attempts to close the problem of restitution in both countries it remains open and it seems that it might not go away easily. In Closing the Books, Jon Elster mentions an interesting phenomenon regarding the issue of biens nationaux in France, the estates seized from the Church and noble émigrés during the Revolution and then only partly returned after the Restoration. It turns out that the heirs of the purchasers of these properties continued to be regarded by the local community as the illegitimate owners until well into the twentieth century. This example testifies to a surprisingly long persistence of memory in relation to property injustices, and might indicate that in the Czech Republic and in Poland property restitution disputes are also likely to continue for the foreseeable future.
Notes

4. According to public opinion surveys, in the Czech Republic 13 per cent of the population had restitution claims (Sofres Factum agency, 2000); while in Poland 9 per cent declared that their property was nationalized under Communism (OBOP agency, 1998). These surveys did not include expatriates.
5. Jon Elster formulated this argument as follows: ‘Whereas some lost their property, others - many others - had opportunities denied to them through the arbitrary or tyrannical behaviour of the authorities. Access to higher education, to good jobs, to travel abroad and other vehicles of self-realization was rationed on the basis of political reliability. Moreover, freedom of contract in the labour market was for all practical purposes abrogated, seriously limiting the opportunities of those who had nothing to sell but their labour-power’. Jon Elster (1992), ‘On doing what one can: An argument against restitution and retribution as a means of overcoming the Communist legacy’, *East European Constitutional Review* 1, p. 15.
6. This argument was even raised in the preamble of the Hungarian Law on Partial Compensation: ‘Former owners are not the only ones to have suffered under the former regime. It is true that we cannot remedy through restitution all the injustices that the population has suffered during communism, while rapid economic development can contribute on the other hand to the same population forgetting more quickly its former injuries. Foreign investments could facilitate the creation of new employment and the increase of incomes.’ Law No.XXV of 26 June 1991.
10. Law of 8 July 2005 on the realization of the right to compensation for property left beyond the present borders of the Polish State (Dz. U. No. 169, item 1418).
11. Law No. 198/1993 Coll. on the illegal nature of the Communist regime and on resistance against it.
15. Law No. 212/2000 Coll. to mitigate certain property-related injustices caused by the Holocaust.
24. The Proclamation was signed, among others, by the Alliance for the Citizens’ Self-defence, Prague; the International Association of Czechs for Dual Citizenship, Restitutions and Voting Rights, Los Angeles; the International Movement for Free Czechoslovakia, West Chicago, US; Sokol of San Francisco; the Association for the Defence of Exiles, Bad Kreuznach, Germany; Czechoslovak Ex-Servicemen’s Independent Association, NSW, Australia; the World Association of Former Czechoslovak Political Prisoners in Exile, Switzerland. See http://www.czechinfocenter.com/e.mag/czech_politics/hr2.html.
27. See www.podkarpatskarusz.cz
29. In 1991, 65 per cent of respondents supported restitution, while in 2004, only 42 per cent (CBOS agency, August 2004).
31. Dekret o reformie rolnej po 60. latach. Dokumenty i świadectwa z czasu wygnania, the exhibition was inaugurated in Poznan on 6 September 2004.
32. See www.lemkounion.republika.pl.
Many authors have noticed the symbolic deficit that affects the European institutions. European citizens do not feel attached to them. For some this is the inevitable result of a process of integration that is the spill-over effect of economic integration, while for others it is the consequence of the quasi-supranational character of the European Union. The current European context is a very interesting case for the study of memory building, both because it is characterized by a complex process of pooling and sharing of sovereignty between nation-states and supranational institutions and because it is a process *in fieri*. The European construction is more than very complex; ultimately, we do not know where it will lead us.

While some authors accept as a fact the symbolic deficit of European institutions, others seek to find a remedy for it, or at least a deeper understanding of its nature. According to some of them, given the bloody nature of its past, Europe could only build its symbolic reservoir in other dimensions. By looking at its present and its future, some have proposed a cultural policy focusing on symbols such as Europe’s flag or its anthem. In this view, those symbols represent the ideal medium for a process of identity building among citizens alien to each other such as the European citizens. By looking at the mythical time, others have pointed to figures such as Beethoven or Napoleon, or the eponymous Greek heroine ‘Europa’ who was raped by the bull, as possible symbolic sources for the European identity.

This also seems to be the road taken by the European institutions themselves. For instance, an analysis of the history of the website of the
European Union reveals that since 2002 there has been a clear intention to emphasize the importance of what are defined as the ‘symbols of the European Union’, namely the flag, the anthem, and 9 May, Europe Day. From 1997 until 2002, the website of the European Union was quite limited and contained no mention of the symbolic dimension of European integration. Even the history of the European institutions was presented by using only a minimal yearly chronology. Starting in 2002, a new link to the ‘symbols’ appeared on the first page of the Commission’s website, along with a link to the European institutions and treatises. This is a crucial year, as it marked the beginning of the work of the Convention in charge of preparing a draft constitution. The emphasis now put on flag, anthem, and Europe Day denotes a new awareness of the importance of the symbolic dimension of the European identity, an attempt to provide a meaning to the whole enterprise.

The starting hypothesis of this work is that all these attempts to overcome the alleged symbolic deficit of the EU, as well as the theories that have supported them, have failed because they were implicitly based on a model unsuited to a supranational polity such as the EU – that of the nation-state. They are based on what have been called ‘primordial’ and ‘traditional’ modes of collective learning which are incompatible with a sui generis polity such as the EU. The idea that Europeans could identify themselves as European citizens through the Ode to Joy of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony or through the Greek myth of Europa raped by the bull is problematic because it occults the variegated character of European cultures and risks excluding all those that are ‘in but not of Europe’. It is also misleading because the mechanisms of identification triggered by such cultural symbols do not possess the strength to uphold a specific European identity. The identification with homogenizing political myths and symbols has been possible in the case of nation-states thanks to a capillary propaganda and education system; both of these are currently lacking in the case of the European institutions.

The aim of this work is to explore the possibility that even a ‘divided memory’ such as the European one can be a much more powerful symbolic reservoir. In particular, this chapter aims to explore the role that memories from the Second World War plays in the construction of the European identity. After analysing the link between memory and political identity in general and the European one in particular (section 1), this chapter proposes to substitute the concept of collective memory with that of collective remembrance as a theoretical tool better equipped to capture the ongoing process of elaboration of a traumatic past such as the European
European identity and the politics of remembrance

one (section 2). This will enable us to look at a variety of sources, all of them sites for the elaboration of what I will call ‘the politics of remembrance’. In particular, the analysis of the acts of collective remembrance that take place at three levels (institutional, public, and pedagogical) (section 3) will show that a struggle for the definition of the past in the light of the construction of a political identity in the present is taking place (section 4).

I. An identity without memory?

The topic of European identity has been the object of a lively debate in the last decades. Whilst some advocated the need to consider political identity as one of the conditions of legitimacy of the European institutions, others have rejected the concept altogether as a vague and unclear notion invented to induce a sense of community that is missing. The critics of the concept are right in pointing out that the notion has been coined in order to problematize something that was perceived as missing, or at least as too weak. Indeed, the very notion of identity denotes more of a problem than a reality. It is in modern times, characterized by the transition from communities based on face-to-face interaction to bigger societies based on abstract relationships among individuals who are mutual strangers, that the notion started to emerge.

If this is the case, then we should agree with Eder that, for a supranational and complex polity such as the European one, we need more collective identity rather than less. As he observes, the notion of collective identity is helpful for analysing social forms no longer based on direct social interaction, but on cultural (and I would add political) techniques that establish sociality beyond direct social interaction. The more complex societies are – and the society emerging within the EU is certainly much more complex than the national societies of which it is composed – the more a collective identity that compensates for the lack of direct relationships among people is needed. In a society of monkeys, there is no need for collective identity because social interaction, and nothing but social interaction, is what creates the unity of this group. In the case of Europe, where there is not even a common language as medium within which social interaction can take place, a collective identity is needed even more.

Eder is mainly interested in collective identities in general. The focus of this work is on political identity in particular, as distinguished from cultural identity. However much the two can at times overlap (as it is the
case in the model of the nation-state), we should nevertheless keep the distinction at the analytical level. This is necessary in order to avoid the culturalist fallacy, the attempts to reduce the identity of the members of a polity to their cultural commonalities. Such a fallacy is not only misleading, because it can be the case that a group shares a feeling of attachment to a given polity notwithstanding their cultural radical differences, but is also problematic because it may suggest policies of cultural homogenization as a necessary condition for the pursuit of a collective identity. This, however, does not mean that the cultural and political identities are in reality separated. As we will see, it is rather the case that most of the times they are so intermingled as to make it impossible to say where one ends and the other begins.

What are the possible routes for the creation of a political identity in the case of a sui generis polity such as the European one? Conceptually speaking, we can distinguish between two possibilities. The first is a political identity without a collective memory. It means sharing a feeling of belonging to a given polity without needing to share a narrative of the past. The emerging and widening range of European interests is provoked by and provokes institution building that, in turn, affects European citizens’ sense of belonging. The latter includes not only a sense of belonging based on a commonality of interests, but also a process of identifications with certain political values and principles. As Cerutti put it, political identity is a set of political values and principles in which the members of a polity recognize themselves as a ‘we’.

The second possibility is a political identity rooted in a collective memory, here understood, formally speaking, as an act occurring as soon as at least two people share a memory. Those who share this collective memory might range from those who have experienced the past personally to those who share a sense of relevance regarding this past for themselves. A core group can then try to impose this definition on others as well as exclude others from taking part in this memory, whilst other groups may contest it. In this case, the political identity is based on a (at least partially) shared narrative of the past.

At this stage of the argument, the question may arise as to whether the two above-mentioned models are really separated. In other words, is it really possible to have an identity without memory? Doubts may arise on two levels: conceptual and empirical. Conceptually speaking, it seems very difficult to define identity without considering the concept of narrative. If we define political identity as a set of political values and principles in which the members of a polity recognize themselves as a ‘we’, one may
always ask what constitutes the same (or *idem*) out of a set of otherwise dispersed acts of recognition. The most obvious answer is to say that political identity is the result of series of recognitions by relevant others as well as by ourselves. There must be a sort of act of recognition in a given narrative that unifies all the individual acts of recognition. As Pizzorno noticed, identity is a story of recognitions. Thus, the set of elements, values, principles, symbols, and so on, in which we recognize ourselves as a ‘we’ can only constitute a political identity on the basis of a given narrative, which is also the basis on which we are recognised by others.

This narrative can either be all turned towards the past or projected towards the future. This distinction obtains at the conceptual level, but in fact political identities are always in between the two. Not only the reconstruction of a relevant past is subordinated to the construction of an identity in the future, but also the vision of the future is dependent on a certain view of the past. There cannot be a narrative of the future which has the power to uphold a specific political identity which is not based on a certain view of the past. In other words, the answer to the question ‘where do we want to go?’ presupposes the question ‘where are we going to?’ which is based, in its turn, on a certain answer to the question ‘where are we from?’

Furthermore, on the empirical level, to keep the two models separated means overlooking the important fact that once people start interacting within a political space they are led to raise the question ‘who are we?’ and ‘who have we been?’ Even people interacting in a market space – let us admit for a moment that Europe can be reduced to this – are induced to raise such questions, in particular when facing people who do not speak the same language and that appear to be different. As we will see in more detail, it is in the most salient political moments of the European construction that Europeans are led to go back to their past and mobilize it in order to provide a meaning to their present.

If Europeans look at their past, how do they recognize themselves? Europeans cannot but recognize themselves as former enemies. The image of the European wars, and in particular of the Second World War, is extremely strong in the perception of the past by European citizens. The Europeans’ perception of the past cannot simply reproduce the national triumphal models of collective learning. The proportions of the catastrophe represented by the Second World War are such that the European collective memory cannot directly build on a triumph, but has to start from a catastrophe.
2 From collective memory to collective remembrance

Different authors have criticized the very idea of a collective memory as a spurious notion. For instance, the historian Reinhart Koselleck observed that only individual human beings can have memories, so that every use of the term ‘memory’ beyond the limits of the individual mind should be rejected as a misleading metaphor and replaced by more appropriate terms such as tradition or historical consciousness. The concept of collective memory is suspected of a primordialist connotation, of presupposing a sort of collective soul or spirit of a nation. Individuals, not nations or societies, remember.

Yet, the sustainers of the concept of collective memory, starting with Maurice Halbwachs, never meant ‘collective memory’ to be a metaphor or the reified memory of the collective – be it the nation or the race. With the term mémoire collective, Halbwachs wanted to point to something which phenomenologically happens when we remember, to the fact that when we remember we always recall the viewpoint of a given social group through whose eyes we see the event. By criticizing Bergson’s individualism, Halbwachs wanted to emphasize the fact that all individual memories are socially framed. Collective memory is not simply the sum of the individual memories, nor is it independent from them. Memory does not exist outside of individuals, but it is never completely ‘individual’ in its character. It encompasses the individual memories but remains at the same time distinct from them.

The critics of the concept of collective memory are right in reminding us that it is ultimately individual human beings who remember. We live in the epoch of a ‘memory boom’. Not only do we have days to celebrate events of the past, but we even have a day (27 January) to remind us to remember. The memory boom may have led to a variety of abuses of the concept, particularly as related to societies and collectives: social memory and collective memory are indeed said to be almost everywhere, from politics to food. Yet the use of the concept of collective memory can be defended on three levels: empirical, philosophical, and epistemological. From an empirical perspective, the critics of collective memory neglect the performative impact of the act of remembering. When someone remembers something and expresses it through language she has an impact on her audience which can in turn be the subject of other acts of remembering. This can be a person who shares the same experience of the past, or simply
agrees on its relevance, and is therefore willing to frame it in the same way. This is a sufficient condition, formally speaking, to talk about a collective memory. As a consequence, the term ‘collective’ does not presuppose any sort of collectivist or nationalist connotation, but simply indicates a collection of individuals.

Second, on the philosophical level, the concept can be defended by recovering Ludwig Wittgenstein’s famous argument against the possibility of a private language (see section 243 of his *Philosophical Investigations*). By ‘private language’, Wittgenstein meant a language that a person could use to give expression to his own immediate inner experience without it being possible for another person to understand it. Let us suppose, with Wittgenstein, that for example, I want to remember the recurrence of a certain sensation and I decide that I will write the sign ‘S’ each time this sensation recurs (section 258).

But how can I discern this sensation? Of course, Wittgenstein replies, I can give an ostensive definition of it: concentrate my attention and point to it inwardly. But what, he goes on to ask, can guarantee that I will recognize it in the future? This is not to say that I cannot have a memory of this sensation. It means that I can have no criteria for the correct association of that sign ‘S’ with this particular sensation, so that whatever association appears as right to me can be defined as ‘right’ (section 258). It is a situation similar to that of someone saying ‘I know how tall I am’, and, by putting his hand on top of his head, believes that he has proved it (section 279). The point is that a measure must be independent from that which measures it, and therefore it is impossible to control the association of ‘S’ with a certain object if it is not inserted in a (public) language.

By criticizing the idea of a private language, Wittgenstein did not mean to deny the possibility of individual memories or of their communication. Inasmuch as we are, have been, and will be engaged in language games in which the expressions of our inner experience and memories are at stake, we also learn how to express them. I can certainly have my own personal memory about a given event, based on the memory traces registered by my brain, but once these traces are encoded, that is, translated into a series of words, they are given a meaning, and meaning, to put it in Wittgenstein’s words, is always the result of a series of collective language games.

Third, on an epistemological level, there is another problem with the critics of collective memory. As Paul Ricoeur recently observed, the notion of collective memory can be placed under the category of metaphor or analogy only through a fallacious approach to the concept of memory that focuses on the question ‘who’ (‘qui’) instead of that of ‘what’ (‘quoi’). The
Western philosophical tradition has privileged the ‘egologic’ side (côté égologique) of the experience of remembering and, for this reason, has at best considered the concept of collective memory as an analogical notion. On the contrary, as he has shown in his work, a much more promising approach is that which focuses first of the questions of ‘what’ is remembered and only thereafter turns to the question ‘who’. The underlying assumption is the insight that Ricoeur derives from Husserl’s phenomenology, according to which a consciousness is always consciousness of something.

The question of ‘what’ is remembered is directly associated to that of ‘how’ we remember. A crucial result of Ricoeur’s inquiry is the distinction between an active and a passive act of remembering, that is, what Greeks used to call *anamnesi* and *mneme*, respectively. To remember something can be a completely passive act, as when we say that ‘something came to my mind’, but it can also be the result of an active act of research. To remember can be to ‘have’ memories or to look for memories. And, as we will see, it is this active side of memory that is important when it comes to the construction of a political identity in the present – and it is this active side that critics of collective memory overlook when they see in it a metaphysical hypostatisation.

As a way to avoid the misunderstandings generated by the concept of collective memory and to insist on this active side, I propose to follow Winter and Sivan and use the concept of collective remembrance. They focus on remembrance precisely to avoid the shortcomings of the concept of collective memory and to emphasize activity and agency in its place. They consider collective remembrance as the product of individuals and groups who come together not necessarily at the behest of the state or any of its subsidiary organizations, but because they have to speak out. In other words, whilst memory may be understood as denoting an object, remembrance always designates a process.

Within the contemporary European context, the concept has also the further advantage of not assuming as given any relationship between the acts of collective remembrance and the dominant forces of a given polity. Whilst the term collective memory can come to suggest the idea of an entity that is already given, be it the ideology of political institutions or the mental furniture of a given population (what the French would call *mentalités*), the term remembrance always denotes a process rather than an object. The question remains therefore open as to what role these acts of remembrance play within a given social and political context. And this is the question that I want to address by analysing what I will call ‘the politics of remembrance’.
With respect to a traumatic past event, as the Second World War certainly is, there can be either a need to remove it or to speak up about it. It is with the passage of time, when trauma is decoupled from its psychological foundations, that the events of a traumatic past can become an issue on the public agenda. This is the reason why, according to many, it is in subsequent generations (starting from that of grandchildren) that a traumatic past has more chances to be elaborated. This holds not only for the victims’ community, but also for its complement, the community of perpetrators from previous generations. There certainly is an ethical side to engaging in acts of remembrance of the victims of war. This is what Margalit tried to convey with his idea of an ‘ethics of memory’. However, what I want to emphasize in this work is the political role that these acts of remembrance play in the context of European integration, and, in particular, the role they play within the process of identity building.

3 Three levels of collective remembrance

What are the levels at which people can join together and remember? I propose to distinguish between three of them: institutional, public, and pedagogical. The first denotes the level of formal political bodies and authorities, the second is that which is generally understood as the common life, and the third is that of people who are in charge of teaching other people what and how to remember. Let us see how they operate.

Institutional remembrance is that which stems directly from the activity of institutions. Sites for collective remembrance can therefore be law texts, policies, official declarations, public rituals, and institutional places that echoes with particular historical significance – what Pierre Nora called lieux de mémoire. Even if European institutions have only a limited power in terms of cultural policies, acts of collective remembrance of the Second World War abound at the level of institutional memory, both below and above the level of the member states.

The first important reference to the role that the Second World War played in triggering the process of European integration is inscribed in the first of its treaties. In the preamble of the treaty constituting the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), signed on 18 April 1951 in Paris, we read that the six pioneering countries “[...] resolved to substitute for historic rivalries a fusion of their essential interests; to establish, by creating an economic community, the foundation of a broad and independent community among peoples long divided by bloody conflicts; and to lay the
bases of institutions capable of giving directions to their future destiny; have decided to create a European Coal and Steel Community’ (emphasis mine).

Law texts are important carriers of institutional memory given their codified and normative nature. They endure throughout time, and therefore have a crucial stabilizing effect. But moreover, they are normative sources which directly link a given vision of the past with the will to construct something in the present and in the future. An analogous reference to the Second World War indeed recurs in subsequent law texts. As it has been shown through an analysis of all the successive treatises until the draft for European constitution, the same narrative ‘Europe out of the war’ recurs continuously. According to Larat, there is a sort of ‘acquis historique communitaire’. In contrast to the total body of the EU law and legislation accumulated so far, which is referred to as the ‘acquis communitaire’, the guidelines of the ‘acquis historique’ have no juridical value of their own. Still they are inscribed in law texts and other crucial components of institutional remembrance, such as leaders’ official declarations, so that, like the ‘acquis communitaire’, they have a normative impact, as it is shown by the fact that they must be recognized by applicant countries when joining the EU.

Another important part of institutional collective remembrance are rituals. An explicit reference to the Second World War as the founding event of the European construction was present, for instance, in the famous Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950. This declaration, which is usually presented as the act of birth of the European project, explicitly referred to the desire to make war ‘not only unthinkable, but materially impossible’. In contrast to the ECSC treaty, which expired on 23 July 2002, fifty years after its formal entering into force, the Schuman declaration is remembered every year on 9 May, Europe Day. Even though Europe Day is not strongly felt by European citizens, ritual commemoration is an important part of the collective remembrance: through rituals, the memory of such events is re-enacted every year, contributing thus to create a sense of continuity. Ritual remembrance by repetition contributes to creating an air of timeless significance, at times even of sacredness.

Even sanctification can contribute to institutional remembrance. To the surprise of all those who consider the European Union as a crucially flawed human product, on 2 March 2004, Vatican officials confirmed that Robert Schuman was a candidate for beatification, the first step to sainthood. The Pope said that Schuman was an extraordinarily competent statesman who served the people of Europe as he rightly perceived that the main cause of
Europe’s centuries of endless bloodshed was the rivalry between European countries. He had also been a genuine Roman Catholic and an example to all those responsible for the construction of Europe. He was an example of modern saint, so the Pope concluded, one of those models that must be held up in an increasingly secular and materialist age.  

Ritual commemorations recalling the Second World War abound and have been an important site for interplay between national and European institutions, for instance in speeches and visits of prominent politicians and state officials. Institutional remembrance is particularly crucial because of its permanence in time and normative stabilizing effects. Yet its impact is fundamentally top-down, and focusing on institutions only can be misleading. Indeed, it may implicitly suggest that a homogenous impact on identity building necessarily follows from it. But this cannot be taken for granted. Treaties expire, as the history of the ECSC treaty shows, policies change, and official celebrations such as Europe Day may have only a very limited impact on citizens’ identity.

Together with the institutional remembrance we should therefore also consider what I propose to call public remembrance. With this term, I mean the set of acts of remembrance that are done in public and for the public. Sites of public remembrance are, just to mention some of them, newspapers, the fine arts, museums, films, and television programmes. In particular, I have tried to assess the presence of memories from the Second World War in relation to the EU through the analysis of some major European newspapers. The analysis of these articles shows that the reference to the Second World War has been an important argument in the debate over the European integration. Certainly it is not the most important argument (economic and social issues certainly play a greater role), but it has been one of them, particularly when issues of political identity were at stake.

In the last years, there has been an increase in references to the Second World War as the founding narrative of Europe. In particular, it is at crucial political moments, such as the beginning of the Convention work on the drafting of the European Constitution and the referenda over its ratification, that this presence is more conspicuous. It is at times when people are called to express their opinion on the whole process that they go back to their past and try to mobilize it in order to legitimize their present and their future.

Yet, there remains a great difference among the various countries. Italian newspapers are much more reluctant to endorse the above-mentioned narrative when it is not linked to institutional acts of
remembrance; German newspapers, on the contrary, are quite prone to endorse it, due as well to their greater attention to the symbolic dimension of politics. Nevertheless, it is revealing that, for instance, even in a traditionally Eurosceptic country such as Britain, the overcoming of potential armed conflicts is at times presented as the founding narrative of European construction. A long article appeared in *The Guardian* on 19 July 2002 celebrating the funeral epitaph of the European Coal and Steel Community which both formally expired on 23 July and ‘founded on the same date back in 1952, when the ashes of the Second World War were still smouldering’. Ian Black, the author and leading columnist on foreign affairs for *The Guardian*, presents the ECSC as ‘visionary attempt to prevent war and forge the EU’, as a ‘body that set the pattern for the integration of a continent’, born out of the desire to make war ‘not only unthinkable, but also materially impossible’, according to Schuman’s famous words.41

Recalling the past is a powerful argument, perhaps even more powerful when it is done in an unmediated and palpable way. Unfortunately, the study of films as sites for the practices of remembrance is still underdeveloped. As Passerini observed, this seems nevertheless to be a promising research direction for the study of European identity. Already in Jean Renoir’s *La grande illusion* of 1937, the very idea that the war (in this case, the First World War) is as absurd as all the boundaries separating different European peoples was developed.42 To use a more recent example: in 2006, Dominique Antoine (producer) and Franck Appréderis (director) created a film for television (France 3) reconstructing the history of the foundation of Europe five years after the end of the Second World War. The celebration of this historical moment is told through the story of a young Frenchwoman named Marie and Jürgen, a German former soldier of the Wehrmacht who is now a reporter in Paris, where he is following the press conference given by Schuman. The producers declared that they would have liked the film to have been released before the French referendum on the draft European Constitution, because it could have contributed to showing the French people from where the EU originated.43

Sometimes public and institutional remembrance can also overlap more obviously. The levels that we have distinguished for analytical purposes are quite often intermingled with each other. An illuminating example is a long article that appeared on 6 May 2005 in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* entitled ‘Gedanken an den 8. Mai 1945’ (‘Thoughts on 8 May 1945’). The article was written by the then-Bundeskanzler Gerhard Schroeder and is a perfect example of a collective act of remembrance that combines the different levels we have distinguished so far. Here we also see how the European
and the national levels of collective remembrance are at times mixed together. The date of 8 May 1945 is defined both as the day of liberation from the horrors of the Nazi regime (at least for Western Europe) as well as the day that marked the end of the Second World War. Both are symbolized by the famous image of the red flag waving on the ruins of the Reichstag mentioned in Schroeder’s article. According to the former chancellor, it is because we feel the relevance of the European past and we have learnt from it that German institutions should ratify the draft of the European Constitution. The formula, ‘united in its diversity’, that appears in the preamble of the draft of European Constitution thus becomes the buzzword of a common European identity, which should promote a sense of community and of belonging among former enemies.

This analysis of the politics of remembrance as it takes place at the institutional level may suggest the image of a widely shared perception of the past. However, as we have seen, the debate that took place at the public level is much more complex. Furthermore, if we confront the image that we have reconstructed so far with that resulting from a brief analysis of the pedagogical level, we reach an even more complicated picture. By pedagogical remembrance I mean the work on the past that is done with the main objective of educating. This includes the work done by a variety of people involved in teaching at all levels: schools, universities, and cultural institutions in the broadest sense. School textbooks are an important source for the study of this work. They contain the bottom line of what a society knows about itself and therefore also of what it considers as worth remembering about its past.44

In a past study, I have compared history textbooks from three of the major European countries that were involved in its founding: Italy, Germany, and France.45 The results showed that, while Italian textbooks are very reluctant to endorse the view of Europe as having been born out of the Second World War, German textbooks are more inclined to do so, and French ones are clearly divided on this point. Let me briefly illustrate this point while also referring to a few images taken from these textbooks. Images are particularly effective sources for collective remembrance because of their capacity to convey messages in a immediate and emotionally powerful way.

In Italian secondary school history textbooks, Europe is perceived as a mere economical and geopolitical project. Out of 14 textbooks, only two – very recent ones – give a primary role to the experience of war as the engine of the whole integration process.46 The fact that they are all recent reflects, on the one hand, the impact of the memory boom in historiography and, on
the other hand, the political developments of the recent years. Yet in most Italian textbooks, Europe remains a geopolitical and economic project, so that it is even difficult to find images of it.\textsuperscript{48}

The situation of German textbooks is quite different. An analysis of 17 secondary education history textbooks for the same period reveals a much greater role accorded to the experience of war as an engine of the whole process.\textsuperscript{49} The proportions are in this case reversed: only 5 out of 17 textbooks grants a minor or no role to the experience of war.\textsuperscript{50} This is perhaps the consequence of the greater role that Germans accord to memories of the war. Symptomatically, the German language has many different words for the process of dealing with the past: \textit{Vergangenheitsbewältigung} (literally ‘coming to terms with the past’) but also \textit{Erinnerungsarbeit} (the ‘work on memory’) or \textit{Erinnerungskultur} (the ‘culture of memory’). But a student does not even need to read what is written in textbooks to perceive the narrative ‘Europe born out of the war’. This is very powerfully conveyed by images such as that reproduced in figure 13.1.

The image opens the chapter on European integration of a German history textbook under the heading ‘Wie alles angefangen hat’, or ‘how everything began’. The message is very clear: Europe began as a desolate war cemetery, together with other war atrocities represented in the collage. More nuanced is the case of French history textbooks for secondary
education. Half of the textbooks analysed present the European integration as a merely economic and geopolitical project, whilst the other half accords a greater role to the experience of war. This is clearly illustrated by comparing figures 15.2 and 15.3.

Fig. 15.2. ‘Europeans through the ages’. From C. Peltier, *Histoires du XXe siècle. 1ers et terminales agricoles* (first edition), Paris 2001, p. 265.

The image 15.2 reproduces a caricature by Plantu and tells the story of European countries in a very immediate and efficient way. European citizens are former enemies. They first met at the time of the Roman wars, then met again through the Napoleonic wars and finally found themselves unified by the fight against the Nazi’s army. Today they are fellow citizens that may still debate with one another, but live in peace and are unified by a common European ballot box.
Yet not all images that accompany Europe in French textbooks share the same idealistic view. As an example of a different view of Europe presented instead as a mere result of an economic project, consider figure 15.3. The idea that we should get on the ‘train to Europe’ as a train to prosperity and well-being has been very influential in public debate. Here what is relevant is not ‘how everything began’ as in figure 15.1, but rather ‘where it will lead us’.

To conclude on this point, the role of the World War II in the making of the EU changes dramatically according to the general image of the EU that one endorses: those who see the European construction as a purely economic and geopolitical process accord no (or very little) space to the experience of war. This holds true mostly for older texts: textbooks
published after 2000, and even more after 2004, tend to give more attention in general to the European construction and quite often also to the role of ideals such as the desire to ensure peace. This, again, reflects the political changes which Europe went through in those crucial years.

Even more explicit is the critical stance towards the narrative ‘Europe born out of the Second World War’ among academics. The scepticism here is twofold. Together with those who see Europe as a purely economic project, there are also those who emphasize the fact that other memories can be more relevant than that of the Second World War. A group of historians coming from different European countries joined together in Paris in 2006 to discuss the changing role of the memory of the Second World War and concluded that the latter cannot provide the founding narrative of a united Europe. All the participants at the conference agreed on the need for a Europeanisation of the memory of the war – thus confirming our earlier observation that, when people interact in the same social context, they are also led to remember together. However, the conference emphasized the radical national and regional differences in the collective reception of the war. European memory of the war is, and remains, too ‘divided’.

Similarly, in many parts of his work, the influential German historian Stefan Troebst discusses the possibility that memories of the dictatorships of the twentieth century unite the European peoples. His conclusion is that no common European memory is possible; the experiences of the Gulag and the Holocaust divide Europe too radically along a East/West line. Among these two spheres, Troebst distinguishes further spheres and concludes that in the foreseeable future nation-states will remain the primary space of reference for the collective memory. One could certainly object to this view that the Holocaust has indeed united both East and West as a traumatic past, but the fact is that the memory of the atrocities of the Soviet regime is both emotionally and temporally closer to people from the former Soviet block. The European memory of the war is a ‘divided memory’ not only because it tells the story of innumerable massacres, but also because it divides the East from the West. Eastern countries have other memories to process first, and to impose a Western agenda upon them means violating their autonomy – here understood as the capacity to choose the cognitive means for thinking about themselves.

What should we conclude? Does this mean that history is the pharmacon of collective remembrance as Ricoeur argues? I do not think that history, as a formalized activity which follows a method, is always a remedy for the inevitable distortion of the past operated by memory and remembrance. As
is well known, distortion occurs in professional history as well. Even narratives of the past promoted by professional historians can turn into full-fledged myths, some of which can be misleading, if not outright distorted. This happens when a narrative comes to respond to a need for significance and therefore acquires a particularly strong emotional connotation. Historians, too, contributed to spreading certain myths of Europe.  

On the contrary, it can well be the case that the work done by collective memory can be a remedy for the official account of the past provided by professional historians hired by dominant institutions. History may therefore be the pharmakon of memory in the ambivalent sense of the Greek term, denoting both a remedy but also a poison.  

4 Conclusions

The narrative ‘Europe born out of the War’ played an important role in debates about the European construction and has been used at times to define a political identity otherwise perceived as too loose. Yet this has not been done in a homogeneous way. Struggles over the divided past of Europe and over its relevance for contemporary European citizens take place both within and between the three levels of collective remembrance that we have distinguished in this work and also tend to separate Western from Eastern Europe. In the first place, there is a discrepancy between the institutional memory, which tends to present Europe as the land of democracy, rule of law, and protection of minorities that has been able to learn from its past, and the image of Europe that can be seen in pedagogical and public remembrance. Whilst many professional historians transmit the image of Europe as a pure economic and geopolitical project, the public debates that emerge from an analysis of European newspapers show an awareness of the role played by the experience of the war, while at the same time depicting the critical debate regarding its nature as a founding narrative of European identity.

If we consider the struggles that take place at all these levels, the institutional, at times triumphal, representation of the narrative ‘Europe born out of the war’ appears at best naive. An excess of triumphalism appears, for instance, in the proposal by then-Minister of European Affairs Emma Bonino (Italy) who, accompanying President Napolitano during a visit to Ventotene in 2006, suggested translating the Manifesto di Ventotene into Arabic in order to teach to all the nations of the Islamic world the route
to peace and democracy. This and similar celebrative acts of remembrance cannot but appear disproportionate to the human catastrophe represented by the Second World War.

At the same time, it can hardly be neglected that this narrative represented, and still represents, a powerful symbolic reservoir for the European identity (at least for Western Europe). As we have seen, this emerges with a particular emphasis in the critical moments of the European construction, such as at the beginning of the Convention’s work or during the referenda over the draft Constitution. It is at times when the sense of the European construction as a whole is at stake that people are induced to go back to their past. The latter does not automatically determine the present, but provides a series of arguments that can be used to legitimize it. The choice between all the potential arguments that history nominates ultimately depends on the values and principles that one decides to sustain.

To conclude, the German philosopher Friedrich Schlegel was right in pointing out that the historian is a ‘turned-back prophet’. The historian’s reconstruction of the past is done from the standpoint of a certain identity in the present. Yet Schlegel he was wrong in that he seemed to assume that only historians do this. Members of the civil society, teachers at all levels, lay people who simply need to speak up, not to mention professional politicians, all do the same. We are all ‘turned-back prophets’, because we all look at the past in search of answers for our present and our future.

**Appendix Research Corpus**

**Archives**

*Corriere della Sera*, Archivio storico online, since 2000  
http://archivio.corriere.it/archivio/form.jsp.

*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Archiv, since 2000  
http://fazarchiv.faz.net.

*La Repubblica*, Archivio online, since 2000  
http://www.repubblica.it/.

*Le Figaro* archives, since 2001 (through Lexis-Nexis database).

*Le Monde* archives online, since 2000  
http://www.lemonde.fr/cgi-bin/achats/archives.

*The Guardian* online archive, since 2000  
http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/.

*The Times* (including *Sunday Times*) archive, since 2001 (Lexis-Nexis database).
Sueddeutsche Zeitung, online archive, since 2001
http://sueddeutsche.de/deutschland/artikel.

Treaty constituting the European Coal and Steel Community

Web history of the European Institutions available at
http://vlib.iue.it/hist-eur-integration/WebHistory.html
(visited on 15 May 2006).

Secondary School Textbooks

French
Binoist, B. et al., 2004 a, Histoire Tes ES et L, Paris: Magnard
Binoist, B. et al., 2004 b, Histoire Tes S, Paris: Magnard
Marseille, J. 1995, Histoire Term, Paris, Nathan
Peltier, C. 2001 (ed.) Histoire du XXe siècle. 1 res et term. agricoles, Dijon: Educagri

German
Treml, M. 1994 (ed.) Oldenbourg Geschichte für Gymnasien 13, Munich: Oldenbourg

Italian
Camera, A. 1996, Storia contemporanea, Milan: Principato
Cartiglia, C. 2002, Il novecento, Turin: Loescher


Notes


4. Only since 2005 is there a link to a more detailed history of the EU (see www.europa.eu.int/abc/12lessons).


European identity and the politics of remembrance

12. Ibid. 197. In this sense it is not an illusion, as Eder argues later on (ibidem 204). It is certainly a product of imagination, in the sense of Anderson’s Imagined Communities (1983), but not, properly speaking an illusory one, at least as far as we do not dispose of experiments to falsify it.


15. European citizenship is currently defined by Article 8 of the Treaty of Maastricht, which defines a European citizen as being a full citizen of one of its member states.


25. Ibid. 51.


27. On this point, see also Wittgenstein, ibid., 265.


29. Ibid. 6.


32. On the relationship between trauma and collective identity from a sociological perspective, see J. Alexander et al., Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity, Berkeley 2004.


37. Ibid. 288.


40. I analysed eight newspapers from four countries (France, Germany, Great Britain, and Italy) during 2000-2006. For a more detailed analysis, see C. Bottici, ‘Europe, War and Remembrance’, in: F. Cerutti and S. Lucarelli (eds.), The Search for a European Identity, London 2008. In my approach, I have been inspired by Rosenzweig and Thelen’s The Presence of the Past (1998), although I have used newspapers instead of interviews. For an overview of the newspapers, see the bibliography.

41. ‘Europe’s coal engine of integration retires. The European Coal and Steel Community – a visionary attempt to prevent war and forge the EU – is finally about to expire. But it leaves an extraordinary legacy’, says Ian Black in The Guardian 19 July 2002.

42. Passerini, Figures d’ Europe, 28.


45. I have researched textbooks produced in the last 15 years (see appendix for a whole sample, or Bottici, ‘Europe, War and Remembrance’ for a more detailed analysis of the results). For an analysis of the textbooks produced by the same countries but in a longue durée perspective, see B. Challand, ‘European Identity and its External Others in History Textbooks (1950-2005)’, The Journal of Educational Media, Memory and Society 1/2 (2009), special issue on Myths and Maps of Europe edited by C. Bottici and B. Challand, pp 60-96.

46. I.e. the textbook of Bravo, Scaraffia 2006 and Della Peruta (see the list of the textbooks analysed in the appendix).

47. See appendix for a list of the textbooks analysed. Given that Italian textbooks are national, the choice is representative of the most important publishers for secondary education.

48. For a detailed analysis of the time when the topic ‘European integration’ started to be inserted in German, Italian and French history textbooks, as well as of the heading under which it is treated, see Challand, The Journal of Educational Media.

49. See Appendix for a detailed list of textbooks analysed. The choice is representative of different Laender and different type of School (Gymnasien, Realschule, Hauptschule, Gesamtschule). This also justify the higher number of textbooks analysed. Where Land and type of school is not indicated this usually means that it is used in more than one Land and for different type of schools.


51. See Appendix. The choice is representative of the textbooks used in the teaching for history in secondary schools (Terminales, bacchalarurat). The different types of school Scientifique (S), Littéraire (L), and Economique sociale (ES) are only at times distinguished: most of the time, the textbook is the same for all of them. They are the same for the whole country so the selection tends to be representative of the different publishers.


About the Authors


Jan Assmann was professor of Egyptology in Heidelberg from 1976 to 2003, and is now at the University of Constance. In addition, he worked as a visiting professor in Paris (College de France, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Études, EHESS), Jerusalem (Hebrew University), and the US (Yale, Houston, Chicago). Since 1967 he has been conducting archaeological fieldwork in western Thebes. He is the author of numerous books and articles on Egyptian religion, history, literature, and art, including *Moses the Egyptian: the Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (1997), as well as on general cultural theory, including *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in Fruhen Hochkulturen* (1992), and on the history of religion *Of God and Gods* (2008). His book on Mozart’s *Zauberflöte* appeared in 2005.

Chiara Bottici is a guest professor in political philosophy at the Goethe Universität in Frankfurt. She is the author of *A Philosophy of Political Myth* (2007) and *Men and States* (2004, 2009). Together with Benoît Challand she has written *The Myth of the Clash of Civilisations* (forthcoming), edited a book collection on politics and imagination (also forthcoming), and a special issue on myths and maps of Europe for the *Journal of Educational Media, Memory and Society*. She has also contributed to various journals including the *Journal of Political Philosophy*, the *European Journal of Social Theory*, and the *European Journal of Political Theory*. 
Peter Burke is professor emeritus of cultural history and Fellow of Emmanuel College. He is celebrated as a historian not only of the early modern era, but one who emphasizes the relevance of social and cultural history to the present-day issues. Among his most important works are: The Italian Renaissance (1972); Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe (1978); The Renaissance (1987); History and Social Theory (1991); Varieties of cultural history (1997); New perspectives on historical writing (2001) (editor and contributor; The Fabrication of Louis XIV (1992); The Art of Conversation (1993); A Social History of Knowledge (2000); The European Renaissance: Centres and Peripheries (1998); Eyewitnessing (2000); What is Cultural History? (2004); and Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe (2004).

Jane Caplan is professor of history at the University of Oxford. She has worked mainly on the history of Nazi Germany and is currently researching the early history of Nazi concentration camps. She is equally interested in the documentation of individual identity in nineteenth-century Europe, especially the written and visual marks of identity on and off the body and their status in political and legal discourse. Among her many publications are Written on the Body. The Tattoo in European and American History (2000) and Documenting Individual Identity. The Development of State Practices in the Modern World (2001).

Frans Grijzenhout is professor of cultural heritage, conservation and restoration at the University of Amsterdam. He studied art history at the Free University of Amsterdam, where he defended his doctoral thesis Feesten voor het vaderland on patriotic and Batavian festivities and the iconography of its decorations (1780-1806) in 1989. He is a specialist on the subject of art and politics, especially in the Netherlands and France in the eighteenth century. He has edited a volume in the Dutch Series of Conceptual History on Heritage, Erfgoed (2007), and co-edited The Golden Age of Dutch Painting in Historical Perspective (1999).

Marianne Hirsch is the Willem Peterfield Trent Professor of English and comparative literature and co-director of the Center for the Critical Analysis of Social Difference at Columbia University. She has edited or co-edited a number of books and special journal issues on feminism, cultural memory, and the Holocaust. Her recent publications include Family Frames. Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory (1997), The Familial Gaze (1999), and Teaching the Representation of the Holocaust (2004). Her latest book co-authored with Leo Spitzer, Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in
Jewish Memory and History, is forthcoming, as is her book The Generation of Postmemory: Gender and Visuality After the Holocaust.

Reinhart Koselleck (1923-2006) was professor of theory of history at the University of Bielefeld. He has been one of the most important theorists of history, historiography, and historical culture of the last half century and is widely considered to be the most important German intellectual historian of the post-war period. He was the foremost exponent and practitioner of Begriffsgeschichte, a methodological approach focusing on the invention and development of fundamental concepts underlying and informing a distinctively historical manner of being in the world. Together with Conze and Brunner he founded the monumental multi-volume series, Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. From his innumerable publications just a few may be mentioned here: The Practice of Conceptual History. Timing History, Spacing Concepts (2002); Critique and Crisis. Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society (1988); Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time (1985); ‘Les monuments aux morts comme fondateurs de l’identité des survivants’, Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale (1999) 33-62, also available as ‘Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden’ in: Odo Marquard and Karlheinz Stierle (eds.), Identität (1979) 237-76. His contribution to this volume was one of his last pieces of work.

Joep Leerssen studied comparative literature and English at the University of Aachen and Anglo-Irish studies at University College Dublin; he took his PhD in 1986 at the University of Utrecht. He has held the chair of modern European literature at the University of Amsterdam since 1991. He served as director of the Huizinga Institute (Dutch National Research Institute for Cultural History) from 1995 until 2006, held the Erasmus Lecturership at Harvard University in 2003, the Parnell Fellowship at Magdalene College Cambridge in 2008-2009, and was awarded the Spinoza Prize in 2008. His main publications are in the fields of Irish identity history (Mere Irish and Fíor-Ghael, 1996; Remembrance and imagination, 1996), the history of cultural nationalism (De bronnen van het vaderland, 2006; National thought in Europe, 2006), and the literary and historical analysis of national stereotyping (Imagology, edited with Manfred Beller, 2007).

Chris Lorenz is professor of philosophy and methodology at the Free University of Amsterdam. In 1999 he was visiting professor at the University of Graz, Austria, and in 2000 at the University of Erfurt,

Alessandro Portelli is professor of languages and Anglo-American literature at the University La Sapienza in Rome. He has researched mainly on border territories, the meetings of and exchanges between cultures, and differences: the relation between literature, people’s cultures and mass cultures; written and verbal communication, and music; ‘hegemonic’ and ‘minority’ cultures. His many publications include: The text and the voice: writing, speaking, and democracy in American literature (1994) and The death of Luigi Trastulli and other stories: from and meaning in oral history (1991).

Ann Rigney is professor of comparative literature at Utrecht University. She has published widely on topics relating to narrative theory, historical representation, and cultural memory, including The Rhetoric of Historical Representation: Three Narrative Histories of the French Revolution (1990, 2002) and Imperfect Histories: The Elusive Past and the Legacy of Romantic Historicism (2001). She is co-editor (with Joep Leerssen) of Historians and Social Values (2000) and director of a research programme entitled The Dynamics of Cultural Remembrance: an Intermedial Perspective. She is currently completing a book on the cultural afterlife of Walter Scott.

Leo Spitzer is the Kathe Tappe Vernon Professor of History Emeritus at Dartmouth College. Trained as a comparatist, his interests range widely from questions concerning emancipation and reactions to exclusion and domination in Latin America, Africa, and Central Europe to issues of historical memory, refugeehood, and representations of trauma in photography, film, and video. His latest book, co-authored with Marianne Hirsch, is Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory and History (forthcoming). He is also the author of Hotel Bolivia: The Culture of Memory in a Refuge from Nazism (1998) and Lives in Between. The Experience of
Performing the past


Karin Tilmans is a fellow of the department of history and civilisation at the European University Institute, Florence, and academic coordinator of the Max Weber Programme for Post-Doctoral Studies of the EUI. She has published extensively on late-medieval and early modern historiography and humanism, as well as the Batavian myth in sixteenth-century historiography of the Netherlands. In 1992, a rare and unique manuscript originating from the private library of Baron Johan Huyssen van Kattendijke was brought to her attention; in 2005 she completed the publication of a colour edition of this manuscript. As a result of her fellowship of the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies in 1994-1995 she co-edited History of Concepts: Comparative Perspectives (1998); other publications include contributions to the book Vaderland (1999) and Burger (2002), which she co-edited with Joost Kloek. She is co-editor of the European Review of History/Revue Européenne d’Histoire.

Stanislaw Tyszka graduated in law from Warsaw University in 2004. Currently he is a PhD candidate in the department of history and civilisation at the European University Institute, Florence, where he is preparing his dissertation Property Restitution and Collective Memories in the Czech Republic and Poland after 1989. His research interests include legal history, transitional justice, and collective memory.

Frank van Vree is historian and currently full professor of journalism and culture at the University of Amsterdam as well as chair of the department of media studies. He works mainly in the fields of history and memory, cultural and intellectual history as well as media and journalism. His publications include a number of studies on the memory of the Second World War, including In de schaduw van Auschwitz. Herinneringen, beelden, geschiedenis (1995), books and articles on the history of Dutch media and journalism, as well as a number of essays and articles in the field of European historical culture and cultural history in scholarly journals as well as newspapers. Additionally he co-edited of a number of volumes including History of Concepts - Comparative Perspectives (1998), a collection on racial theory in the humanities and social sciences, Volkseigen. Ras, cultuur en wetenschap in Nederland 1900-1950 (2000), and a volume on media and journalism in the twentieth century, Journalistieke Cultuur in Nederland.
(2002). He is director of a research programme on the dynamics of war heritage, memory, and remembrance.

Jay M. Winter is the Charles J. Stille Professor of History at Yale and is a specialist on World War I and its impact on the twentieth century. His other interests include remembrance of war in the twentieth century such as memorial and mourning sites, European population decline, the causes and institutions of war, British popular culture in the era of the Great War, and the Armenian genocide of 1915. He is the author or co-author of a dozen books, including Socialism and the Challenge of War, Ideas and Politics in Britain, 1912-18, The Great War and the British People (1986); The Fear of Population Decline (with Michael S. Teitelbaum), The Experience of World War I, Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History, 1914-1918 (1995); The Great War and the Shaping of the 20th Century, Remembering War: The Great War between History and Memory in the 20th Century, and Dreams of Peace and Freedom: Utopian Moments in the 20th Century (2007).
List of Illustrations

4.1: The Promised Land at http://www.brockatkinson.net:
4.2: Public Domain Clipart Collection #39 Bible Cards 1907 at http://the biblerevival.com
4.3 & 4.4: © Private collection
4.5: http://static.flickr.com/
4.6: © J. Aarhus commons (March 2005)
4.7: © Private collection
4.8: © Sandemans New Europe GmbH
4.9: Image widely circulating via the Internet as ‘bathroom painted floor’; neither the original nor its maker can be tracked down
4.10: © Private collection
Cover and 5.2-5.3: © Andrew Dunn, Cambridge, UK
6.1-6.6, 6.13: © Vinnie Amessé
6.9: Reproduced by permission of the Museum für Hamburgische Geschichte
6.10-6.11: From Erhard Riecke, Das Tatuierungswesen im heutigen Europa, Jena: Gustav Fischer 1925
6.12. Copy of 1910 original, © author
7.2-7.4: Hirsch collection
7.5 a-d: Courtesy Miriam Taylor, David Kessler, Lillian Madfes, Hirsch collection
7.6-7: Courtesy David Glynn
7.8a): Courtesy Mark Fichman; b) privately owned, printed by permission
of Hoffman und Campe; c) from In der Sprache der Mörder: Eine Literatur aus Czernowitz, Bukowina, Literaturhaus Berlin, 1993
7.9 (a): Courtesy Ilana Shmueli; (b) Courtesy Silvio Geisinger
7.10 a-c – 7.14: Hirsch collection
7.15: Courtesy Yad Vashem
10.2: Reproduced courtesy of Birmingham (Alabama) Public Library Archives, Cat.# 1924.1.28
10.3: Reproduced here with kind permission of Thomas Allen, New Orleans
12.1: Anonymous engraving, private collection
13.1: Illustrated London News 24 April 1945
13.2: From KZ - Bildbericht aus fünf Konzentrationslagern, 1945
13.3: Still from Todesmühlen/Death Mills
13.4 a-d: Stills from Todesmühlen/Death Mills and Deutschland Erwache