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FINDING MEANING IN MEMORY: A METHODOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY STUDIES¹

WULF KANSTEINER

ABSTRACT

The memory wave in the humanities has contributed to the impressive revival of cultural history, but the success of memory studies has not been accompanied by significant conceptual and methodological advances in the research of collective memory processes. Most studies on memory focus on the representation of specific events within particular chronological, geographical, and media settings without reflecting on the audiences of the representations in question. As a result, the wealth of new insights into past and present historical cultures cannot be linked conclusively to specific social collectives and their historical consciousness. This methodological problem is even enhanced by the metaphorical use of psychological and neurological terminology, which misrepresents the social dynamics of collective memory as an effect and extension of individual, autobiographical memory. Some of these shortcomings can be addressed through the extensive contextualization of specific strategies of representation, which links facts of representation with facts of reception. As a result, the history of collective memory would be recast as a complex process of cultural production and consumption that acknowledges the persistence of cultural traditions as well as the ingenuity of memory makers and the subversive interests of memory consumers. The negotiations among these three different historical agents create the rules of engagement in the competitive arena of memory politics, and the reconstruction of these negotiations helps us distinguish among the abundance of failed collective memory initiatives on the one hand and the few cases of successful collective memory construction on the other. For this purpose, collective memory studies should adopt the methods of communication and media studies, especially with regard to media reception, and continue to use a wide range of interpretive tools from traditional historiography to poststructural approaches. From the perspective of collective memory studies, these two traditions are closely related and mutually beneficial, rather than mutually exclusive, ways of analyzing historical cultures.

Collective memory studies bring together two seemingly contradictory interests. On the one hand, the study of memory turns academics into concerned citizens who share the burdens of contemporary memory crises. As “memory experts” we can explore the social impact of rapidly evolving communication technologies, the uncertainties of collective belonging after the end of the Cold War, and the challenges of coming to terms with war and genocide.² On the other hand, the

1. I appreciate the helpful comments received on earlier versions of this essay by Nina Caputo, Claudio Fogu, Saul Friedlander, Mitch Hart, Michael Kammen, Jonathan Karp, Kerwin Klein, Dominick LaCapra, and Ned Lebow. The project was generously supported by the Mershon Center at Ohio State University.

2. These connections are emphasized in Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Munich: Beck, 1999); and James Young, *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

study of memory is a bona fide intellectual exercise, one that allows academics to respond to the most interesting philosophical legacies of the last century. In particular, through the concept of memory, we can demonstrate to the few remaining postmodern critics how representations really work and how the power of representations can be explained.³

The rare combination of social relevance and intellectual challenge explains the popularity of the field. But while memory has clearly become a central concept in the humanities and the social sciences, it remains unclear to what extent this convergence reflects actual common intellectual and methodological interests.⁴ This essay lays out the state of the art in collective memory studies by analyzing its terminology and especially its conceptual underpinnings. This exploration of a complex interdisciplinary space forms the basis of three conclusions: 1) Collective memory studies have not yet sufficiently conceptualized collective memories as distinct from individual memory. As a result, the nature and dynamics of collective memories are frequently misrepresented through facile use of psychoanalytical and psychological methods. 2) Collective memory studies have also not yet paid enough attention to the problem of reception both in terms of methods and sources. Therefore, works on specific collective memories often cannot illuminate the sociological base of historical representations. 3) Some of these problems can be addressed by adopting and further developing the methods of media and communication studies, especially regarding questions of reception. For this purpose we should conceptualize collective memory as the result of the interaction among three types of historical factors: the intellectual and cultural traditions that frame all our representations of the past, the memory makers who selectively adopt and manipulate these traditions, and the memory consumers who use, ignore, or transform such artifacts according to their own interests.

Students of collective memory are indeed pursuing a slippery phenomenon. Collective memory is not history, though it is sometimes made from similar material. It is a collective phenomenon but it only manifests itself in the actions and statements of individuals. It can take hold of historically and socially remote events but it often privileges the interests of the contemporary. It is as much a result of conscious manipulation as unconscious absorption and it is always mediated. And it can only be observed in roundabout ways, more through its effects than its characteristics. In essence, collective memory studies represent a new approach to “that most elusive of phenomena, ‘popular consciousness.’”⁵

3. See especially Kerwin Lee Klein, “On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse,” *Representations* 69 (2000), 127-150.

4. Susannah Radstone, “Working with Memory: An Introduction,” in *Memory and Methodology*, ed. Radstone (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 1-22; see also Patrick Geary, “The Historical Material of Memory,” in *Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence*, ed. Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Lee Rubin (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 17-25 and compare to Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume*, 17.

5. John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: Norton, 1999), 25.

I. TERMINOLOGICAL PROFUSION

Most historians who study collective memories take the work of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs as their primary theoretical reference point.⁶ Following Halbwachs, a student of Durkheim, they understand collective memories as collectively shared representations of the past. Halbwachs's emphasis on the function of everyday communication for the development of collective memories, and his interest in the imagery of social discourse, resonate very well with recent historiographical themes, especially regarding questions of historical representation. However, many historians remain uncomfortable with Halbwachs's determined anti-individualism. They object that "Durkheimians held tenaciously that individual memory was entirely socially determined" and thus wrote the individual out of a role in the history of collective memory.⁷ As a result, though Halbwachs is frequently cited, historians simultaneously seek distance from their role model in order to return to one of their favorite subjects, the objectives and actions of individuals in history.

In order to find alternatives to the sociologically "occupied" conception of collective memory, scholars have coined terms such as "social memory,"⁸ "collective remembrance,"⁹ and "popular history making,"¹⁰ or altogether rejected the need for new terminology in favor of the old-fashioned concept of "myth."¹¹ The multitude of terms has further increased as scholars have sought to develop expressions that illuminate the social base or social function of the collective memories under consideration. Therefore the vocabulary of memory studies includes terms such as "national memory," "public memory," "vernacular memory," and "countermemory."¹²

6. Maurice Halbwachs, *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: Alcan, 1925); Halbwachs, *La Topographie légendaire des Évangiles en Terre Sainte: Étude de mémoire collective* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1941); Halbwachs, *La Mémoire collective*, published posthumously by Jeanne Alexandre (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1950); see also the discussion of Halbwachs's work in Patrick Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1993), 73-90; and for a general introduction and contextualization of social constructivism, see Nancy Nelson Spivey, *The Constructivist Metaphor: Reading, Writing and the Making of Meaning* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1997), chapter 1, especially 17-26.

7. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, "Setting the Framework," *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Winter and Sivan (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 23.

8. James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (London: Blackwell, 1992).

9. Winter and Sivan, "Setting the Framework."

10. Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 3.

11. Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam, "Collective Memory—What is it?," *History and Memory* 8 (1996), 30-50.

12. The term countermemory is derived from Foucault; see Hutton, *History as Art of Memory*, 106-123. Public memory vs. vernacular memory designates officially endorsed or produced memories as distinct from grassroots memories, for instance, in John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); see also John Gillis, "Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 6.

This terminological diversity obscures the fact that the majority of contributions to the field of memory studies continues research agendas that used to sail under separate colors. That applies to methodologically innovative work about the history of mentalities, oral history,¹³ the history of everyday life and popular culture, and historical consciousness,¹⁴ but is particularly pronounced in areas of research that have traditionally been called “cultural-intellectual history.” This large-scale editorial “relabeling” explains the astonishing quantitative dimension of the memory wave, and the fact that most newer studies on memory tend to reduce collective memory to an effect of human agency.

Many of the conceptually more interesting studies of memory gravitate towards the term “cultural memory” in order to maintain and further develop Halbwachs’s emphasis on the materiality of memory.¹⁵ In this context Jan Assmann’s juxtaposition of communicative and cultural memory is particularly useful. He designates the former as everyday communications about the meaning of the past characterized by instability, disorganization, and non-specialization. These everyday communications have a limited temporal horizon of eighty to one hundred years; they are by definition strongly influenced by contemporaries of the events in question. In contrast, the cultural memory “comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image.”¹⁶ Cultural memory consists of objectified culture, that is, the texts, rites, images, buildings, and monuments which are designed to recall fateful events in the history of the collective. As the officially sanctioned heritage of a society, they are intended for the *longue durée*.

Assmann also makes an important differentiation between potential and actual cultural memories. He argues that cultural memories occur in the mode of potentiality when representations of the past are stored in archives, libraries, and museums; they occur in the mode of actuality when these representations are adopted and given new meaning in new social and historical contexts. These distinctions suggest that specific representations of the past might traverse the whole spectrum, from the realm of communicative memory to the realm of actu-

13. In the case of oral history the connection to memory studies is aptly illustrated by Lutz Niethammer, *Lebenserfahrung und kollektives Gedächtnis: Die Praxis der “Oral History”* (Frankfurt: Syndikat Autoren- und Verlagsgesellschaft, 1980).

14. For recent works on historical consciousness that are very relevant to memory studies, see, for instance, *Erzählung, Identität und historisches Bewusstsein: Die psychologische Konstruktion von Zeit und Geschichte*, ed. Jürgen Straub (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1996); *Die dunkle Spur der Vergangenheit: Psychoanalytische Zugänge zum Geschichtsbewusstsein*, ed. Jörn Rüsen and Jürgen Straub (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998); and Felix Philipp Lutz, *Das Geschichtsbewusstsein der Deutschen: Grundlagen der politischen Kultur in Ost und West* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000).

15. See for example *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1999); *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos and Liliane Weissberg (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999); and especially Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the Aids Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

16. Jan Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” *New German Critique* 65 (1995), 132; see also Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in den frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: Beck, 1992).

al cultural memory and finally potential cultural memory (and vice versa). But in the process they change their intensity, social depth, and meaning.¹⁷ Jan Assmann's concepts remind us that despite their power to transmit concern for historical events to future generations, collective memories have a strong bias toward the present; they dedicate disproportionate amounts of time, space, and resources to communications about events that happened within the lifetimes of its producers and consumers. Or, to use Lutz Niethammer's words, collective memories are primarily located on this side of the "floating gap" between memory and history.¹⁸

Pierre Nora's work in the tradition of Halbwachs lacks the conceptual precision of Jan Assmann's contributions, but as one of the foremost practitioners in the field Nora has also advanced the most ambitious historicization of the memory phenomenon. In elegant prose he has proposed a three-stage model that is as Eurocentric as it is simple and seemingly compelling. He divides the history of memory into three periods, a premodern, modern, and postmodern condition. Premodern times are characterized by a natural, unself-conscious relation between people and their past. Their environments of memory sustain traditions and rituals that provide a stable sense of being in time for the members of local memory communities. For Nora, the fall from memory grace occurred in the nineteenth century with the acceleration of everyday life through industrial and social modernization. As old traditions and affiliations lost their meaning, the relation between people and their past was reconstructed through first-order simulations of natural memory. Elites produced sites of memory in language, monuments, and archives which had one common referent, the nation-state, and which strove to secure the future of the nation-state through compelling inventions of its traditions. With the collapse of the ideology and reality of the nation-state in the twentieth century, these first-order simulations have been replaced by second-order simulations of natural memory. The media culture of the late twentieth century spews out identities and representations of the past which have little relation to any shared traditions, life worlds, or political institutions other than the frantic pace of media consumption itself.¹⁹

17. See Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," 130.

18. Lutz Niethammer, "Diesseits des 'Floating Gap': Das kollektive Gedächtnis und die Konstruktion von Identität im wissenschaftlichen Diskurs," in Niethammer, *Deutschland danach: Postfaschistische Gesellschaft und nationales Gedächtnis* (Bonn: Dietz, 1999), 565-582. Concerning the vested interest of second-generation observers see the helpful concept of "postmemory" proposed by Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), especially 22.

19. See especially Pierre Nora, "General Introduction: Between Memory and History," in *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, vol. 1, ed. Lawrence Kritzman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); and Pierre Nora, "The Era of Commemoration," in *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, vol. 3, ed. Lawrence Kritzman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); for lucid discussions of Nora's project and methodology see also Nancy Wood, "Memory's Remains: Les lieux de mémoire," *History and Memory* 6 (1994), 123-149, republished in Nancy Wood, *Vectors of Memory: Legacies of Trauma in Postwar Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 1999); and Peter Carrier, "Places, Politics and the Archiving of Contemporary Memory in Pierre Nora's *Les Lieux de mémoire*," in Radstone, *Memory and Methodology*, 37-57.

Attempts at historicizing memory such as Nora's indicate that our crises of memory are concomitant with crises of identity. In particular, the concern with memory in non-academic contexts—for instance, therapeutic circles, the judicial system, and post-Cold War ethnic conflicts—shows that memory is valorized where identity is problematized.²⁰ Despite this relatively obvious link, the connection between memory and identity has as yet been rarely discussed in memory studies.²¹ It is not possible to fill that gap here, but it should be emphasized that rethinking memory studies from the perspective of identity construction raises two important questions. First, the focus on identity highlights the political and psychological use-value of collective memories. As we have seen above, representations of the past without such use-values should be more appropriately designated as discarded traditions and/or future potential collective memories, but not as collective memories per se. In addition to this crucial differentiation, the focus on identity suggests that our modern crises of memory might not be as exceptional as we tend to assume. All our efforts at historicization notwithstanding, the history of memory cannot be contained by our histories of modernity. Incidentally, this conclusion is supported by the wide range of research on collective memories in antiquity and the Middle Ages.²²

Even historians have been forced to rethink their scholarly identities as a result of the rise of memory studies. While most academics still maintain that “in its demand for proof, history stands in sharp opposition to memory,” there are good reasons to question such a clear epistemological divide between academic and non-academic representations of the past.²³ Perhaps history should be more appropriately defined as a particular type of cultural memory because, as Peter Burke already remarked in 1989, “neither memories nor histories seem objective any longer. In both cases we are learning to take account of conscious or unconscious selection, interpretation and distortion. In both cases this selection, interpretation and distortion is socially conditioned.”²⁴ Memory's relation to history remains one of the interesting theoretical challenges in the field.

20. Allan Megill, “History, Memory, Identity,” *History of the Human Sciences* 11/3 (1998), 40.

21. Jeffrey Olick and Joyce Robbins, “Social Memory Studies: From ‘Collective Memory’ to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices,” *American Review of Sociology* 24 (1998), 105-140 and the interesting reflections about collective identity from the perspective of international relations theory by Rodney Gruce Hall, *National Collective Identity: Social Constructs and International Systems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

22. Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); *Memory and the Medieval Tomb*, ed. Elisabeth Valdez del Alamo and Carol Stamatis Pendergast (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); and Charles Hedrick, *History and Silence: Purge and Rehabilitation of Memory in Late Antiquity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

23. Megill, “History, Memory, Identity,” 56; see also David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 214; and the nuanced assessment of Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), 19-21.

24. Peter Burke, “History as Social Memory,” in *History, Culture, and the Mind*, ed. Thomas Butler (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 98.

II. BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE

Another unsettled area of collective memory studies is the precise relation of the individual and the collective. At first sight, recent psychological and neurological studies give ample reason for the conflation of individual and collective memory because such research has time and again emphasized the social nature of individual remembering and forgetting. Even on a neurological level our ability to store, recall, and reconfigure verbal and nonverbal experiences and information cannot be separated from patterns of perception which we have learned from our immediate and wider social environments.²⁵ The very language and narrative patterns that we use to express memories, even autobiographical memories, are inseparable from the social standards of plausibility and authenticity that they embody.²⁶ In this sense "there is no such thing as individual memory."²⁷

The impressive unanimity among psychological, sociological, historical, and artistic perspectives on human memory seems to confirm Halbwachs, who had already argued in 1925 that "the idea of an individual memory, absolutely separate from social memory, is an abstraction almost devoid of meaning."²⁸ But the fact that individual memory cannot be conceptualized and studied without recourse to its social context does not necessarily imply the reverse, that is, that collective memory can only be imagined and accessed through its manifestation in individuals. At the very least, we have to differentiate between different types of "social" memory, autobiographical memory on the one hand and collective memory on the other. For lack of such differentiation, many inquiries into collective memories commit a tempting yet potentially grave methodological error: they perceive and conceptualize collective memory exclusively in terms of the psychological and emotional dynamics of individual remembering.

Since the threshold between the individual and the collective is often crossed without any adjustments in method, collectives are said to remember, to forget, and to repress the past; but this is done without any awareness that such language is at best metaphorical and at worst misleading about the phenomenon under

25. That is one of the many interesting results of neuropsychological research on memory distortion; see for example recent research by Daniel Schacter *et al.* in *The Cognitive Neuropsychology of False Memory*, ed. Schacter (Hove, Eng.: Psychology Press, 1999); and Schacter, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the Past* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

26. For psychological research on autobiographical memory see for instance *Remembering our Past: Studies in Autobiographical Memory*, ed. David Rubin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); *Theoretical Perspectives on Autobiographical Memory*, ed. Martin Conway *et al.* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1992); and, more generally, *Theories of Memory II*, ed. Martin Conway *et al.* (Hove, Eng.: Psychology Press, 1998).

27. Michael Schudson, "Dynamics of Distortion in Collective Memory," in *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past*, ed. Daniel Schacter (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 346.

28. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 37; see also the discussion of neurological and psychological research for purposes of cultural history in *Eine offene Geschichte: Zur kommunikativen Tradierung der nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit*, ed. Elisabeth Domansky and Harald Welzer (Tübingen: Edition Diskord, 1999), 11-23; Winter and Sivan, "Setting the Framework," 10-19; and Schacter, *Memory Distortion*.

study. Historians rationalize this conflation and sidestep the theoretical and methodological challenge of thinking in terms of collectives as distinct from individuals by emphasizing the role of human agency in the construction of collective memories. They focus on acts of memorialization, for instance in museum design, assuming the realized object and its meaning is prescribed by its maker's conscious or unconscious objectives.²⁹

These category mistakes stem from a subtle but decisive confusion of the difference between "collected memory" and "collective memory."³⁰ A collected memory is an aggregate of individual memories which behaves and develops just like its individual composites, and which can therefore be studied with the whole inventory of neurological, psychological, and psychoanalytical methods and insights concerning the memories of individuals. Unfortunately, collective memories do not behave according to such rules, but have their own dynamics for which we have to find appropriate methods of analysis.

For instance, it might make sense to argue with Freud that an individual's failure to work through his or her past results in unwanted symptoms of psychological unhealth, that the self relies on a sense of continuity that makes it impossible to repress the past without having to pay a psychological price for this repression. But on a collective scale, especially on the scale of larger collectives, such assumptions are misleading.³¹ Nations *can* repress with psychological impunity; their collective memories can be changed without a "return of the repressed." Therefore, "when speaking of social forgetting, we are best advised to keep psychological or psychoanalytical categories at bay and to focus, rather, on the social, political, and cultural factors at work."³²

Reservations about the use of psychoanalytical methods in collective memory studies extend to the concept of trauma, which has particular relevance for our understanding of the legacy of collective catastrophes. However, unlike the concepts of the unconscious and repression that inappropriately individualize and psychologize collective memory processes, the use of the concept of trauma has had an opposite yet equally misleading effect. Some recent works in trauma theory invoke the example of the Holocaust as illustration of a more general post-

29. Susan Crane, "Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory," *American Historical Review* 102 (1997), 1372-1385; and Winter and Sivan, "Setting the Framework."

30. See Jeffrey Olick's excellent discussion in Olick, "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures," in *Memory and Power in Post-war Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*, ed. Jan-Werner Müller (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

31. This misleading assumption is nicely spelled out in Paul Edwards, *To Acknowledge a War: The Korean War in American Memory* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2000), 18: "When nations, like individuals, try to rewrite the past in such a way as to ignore its impact, they are likely to become sick, and their affirmations to become obsessions."

32. Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 116. This also explains why a number of scholars have strongly objected to using methods of individual psychology and psychoanalysis for the study of collective memories, including Marc Bloch as early as 1925 (Marc Bloch, "Mémoire collective, tradition, et coutume," *Revue de Synthèse Historique* 40 [1925], 73-83, cited in Burke, "History as Social Memory") and why some classics of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*-literature in Germany are methodologically (but not morally) problematic; see especially Margaret and Alexander Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn* (New York: Grove, 1975).

modern claim about the undecidability of the nature of our historical experience and our representations of it. The very specific and unusual experiences and memory challenges of survivors—who find that their memories of the “Final Solution” form a volatile, independent realm of memory that remains painfully irreconcilable with subsequent experiences³³—are offered as proof of the general traumatic characteristics of the postmodern condition. In this vein Cathy Caruth has argued with regard to the Holocaust that such “a crisis of truth extends beyond the question of individual cure and asks how we in this era can have access to our own historical experience, to a history that is in its immediacy a crisis to whose truth there is no simple access.”³⁴ Not surprisingly, such obliteration of historical specificity has met with determined criticism, even from theorists who are very sympathetic to the use of psychoanalytical methods in memory studies. Dominick LaCapra, who has systematically and extensively worked on trauma and memory, has pointed out that “there is a great temptation to trope away from specificity and to generalize hyperbolically, for example, through an extremely abstract mode of discourse that may at times serve as a surrogate for a certain form of deconstruction, elaborate an undifferentiated notion of all history (or at least all modernity) as trauma, and overextend the concept of victim and survivor.”³⁵

I would go even further in my criticism to suggest that though specific visions of the past might originate in traumatic experiences they do not retain that quality if they become successful collective memories. The concept of trauma, as well as the concept of repression, neither captures nor illuminates the forces that contribute to the making and unmaking of collective memories. Even in cases of so-called delayed collective memory (as in the case of the Holocaust or Vietnam), the delayed onset of public debates about the meaning of negative pasts has more to do with political interest and opportunities than the persistence of trauma or with any “leakage” in the collective unconscious. Small groups whose members have directly experienced such traumatic events (veterans’ or survivors’ groups) 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

33. See, for example, Gillian Banner, *Holocaust Literature: Schulz, Levi, Spiegelman and the Memory of the Offense* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2000); and especially Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

34. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 6; see also Caruth, “Introduction,” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 3-12; and compare to *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, ed. Paul Antze and Michael Lambek (New York: Routledge, 1996)

35. LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, 23; see also Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), 18, note 10.

36. Liliane Weissberg, “Introduction,” in Ben-Amos and Weisberg, *Cultural Memory*, 15; see also Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) who argues: “Collective memory continuously negotiates between available historical records and current social and political agendas” (5).

groups, for instance, political elites or parties. Past events can only be recalled in a collective setting “if they fit within a framework of contemporary interests.”³⁶

Undue emphasis on the individual in psychoanalytically informed approaches to collective memory, as well as the frustration with postmodern disregard for historical specificity, have led to attempts to rethink intentionality and agency in ways that are perhaps best described as post-postmodern methodological reflections. Nancy Wood has delineated such an approach in her account of collective memory, the unconscious, and intentionality:

[W]hile the emanation of individual memory is primarily subject to the laws of the unconscious, public memory—whatever its unconscious vicissitudes—testifies to a will or desire on the part of some social group or disposition of power to select and organize representations of the past so that these will be embraced by individuals as their own. If particular representations of the past have permeated the public domain, it is because they embody an intentionality—social, political, institutional and so on—that promotes or authorizes their entry.³⁷

Wood addresses a number of possible sources that “purposefully” shape public memory, ranging from social groups to institutions and dispositions of power. In this way she has politely and diplomatically summarized the different notions of intentionality and power that have informed collective memory studies and that run the gamut from conventional historical accounts of human agency to theoretically informed inquiries into the limits of memorial culture as they are reflected in specific traditions and practices of historical representation. As Wood illustrates, the most interesting interventions in collective memory studies seek to profit from poststructural insights into cultural systems of representation, but hope to reconcile these insights with conventional methods of historical studies that emphasize agency and intentionality without returning to simplistic notions of them (including those of Freudian origins).

Still, although collective memories have no organic basis and do not exist in any literal sense, and though they involve individual agency, the term “collective memory” is not simply a metaphorical expression. Collective memories originate from shared communications about the meaning of the past that are anchored in the life-worlds of individuals who partake in the communal life of the respective collective. As such, collective memories are based in a society and its inventory of signs and symbols: “[M]emory seems to reside not in perceiving consciousness but *in the material*: in the practices and institutions of social or psychic life, which function within us, but, strangely, do not seem to require either our participation or our explicit allegiance.”³⁸ Such collective memories exist on the level of families, professions, political generations, ethnic and regional groups,

37. Wood, *Vectors of Memory*, 2.

38. Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 34. See also Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume*, 132. Or, as Barbie Zelizer put it, “collective memories have texture, existing in the world rather than in a person’s head”; Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera’s Eye* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 4.

social classes, and nations. These examples indicate that we are always part of several mnemonic communities, and that collective remembering can be explored on very different scales; it takes place in very private settings as well as in the public sphere. On one side of the spectrum we might pursue collective memories of small groups such as families whose members weave a common vision of the family's origin and identity.³⁹ On the other side, we are beginning to consider supranational collective memories as in the case of the (still dubious) entity, a European collective memory.⁴⁰ On any level, however, "[c]ollective memory works by subsuming individual experiences under cultural schemes that make them comprehensible and, therefore, meaningful."⁴¹

Methodologically speaking, memories are at their most collective when they transcend the time and space of the events' original occurrence. As such, they take on a powerful life of their own, "unencumbered" by actual individual memory, and become the basis of all collective remembering as disembodied, omnipresent, low-intensity memory. This point has been reached, for instance, with regard to the memory of the Holocaust in American society. As a result, millions of people share a limited range of stories and images about the Holocaust although few of them have any personal link to the actual events. For many consumers the stories and images do not constitute particularly intense or overpowering experiences, but they nevertheless shape people's identities and world-views.⁴²

Concern with low-intensity collective memories shifts the focus from the politics of memory and its excess of scandal and intrigue to rituals and representa-

39. Angela Keppler, *Tischgespräche: Über Formen kommunikativer Vergemeinschaftung am Beispiel der Konversation in Familien* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994).

40. I am doubtful about the existence of a European collective memory because it is not as yet reproduced in a similar fashion in everyday lives across Europe. With the exception of intellectuals and bureaucrats who convene as colleagues and are paid to discuss and administer European concerns (among others, the question of a European collective memory), a common European collective memory does not yet exist. For discussions of this question see *The Question of European Identity: A Cultural Historical Approach*, ed. Luisa Passerini (Florence: European Historical Institute, 1998); *Approaches to European Historical Consciousness: Reflections and Provocations*, ed. Sharon Macdonald and Katja Fausser (Hamburg: Edition Körber-Stiftung, 2000); and Rudy Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory, 1870–1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 286–296. Regardless of the level on which collective memories are analyzed it is important to consider the interdependencies among different levels of collective identity. The larger the collective in question the more important it is that its memory is reflected and reproduced on a lower level of numeric complexity. For instance, national memories need to be reproduced on the level of families, professions, or in other locations where people form emotional attachments in their everyday lives; see for instance Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871–1918* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

41. Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), xi.

42. Media events like *Schindler's List* and Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* are just the tip of the iceberg. They differ from more routine and more prevalent representations of the Holocaust in that they have elicited more intense emotional reactions; for discussions of these media events see for example *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on "Schindler's List,"* ed. Yosefa Loshitzky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); and *Geschichtswissenschaft und Öffentlichkeit: Der Streit um Daniel J. Goldhagen*, ed. Johannes Heil and Rainer Erb (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1998).

tions of the past that are produced and consumed routinely without causing much disagreement. Most groups settle temporarily on such collective memories and reproduce them for years and decades until they are questioned and perhaps overturned, often in the wake of generational turn-over. These repetitive representations form the backbone of collective memories. They represent the common denominator in questions of historical taste that are widely and frequently-enough disseminated to create and maintain group identities.

The study of memory routines can certainly profit from psychological models that help explain their reproduction. However, in this context the work of Bergson might prove a better point of departure than the insights of Freud, especially Bergson's concept of "habit memory"; his understanding of "the physical being as incarnation of all the possibilities of acting out the past in the present" seems to be well-suited to bridge the methodological gap between individual and collective memory.⁴³ The concept has, for instance, significantly improved our understanding of rituals of commemoration as collective memory processes.⁴⁴

III. BETWEEN INDIFFERENCE AND OBSESSION: THE MEDIA OF MEMORY

Physical and social proximity to past events and their subsequent rationalization and memorialization do not have to coincide. There is no natural, direct connection between the real and the remembered. On the one hand, collective memories might exclude events that played an important role in the lives of members of the community (for instance, the memory of WWII in Japan). On the other hand, socially and geographical distant events might be adopted for identity purposes by groups that had no involvement in their unfolding (as in the case of Holocaust memory). Even if most groups do not embrace memories of events that occurred in unfamiliar or historically distant cultural contexts, their memories are always mediated phenomena. All memories, even the memories of eyewitnesses, only assume collective relevance when they are structured, represented, and used in a social setting. As a result, the means of representation that facilitate this process provide the best information about the evolution of collective memories, especially as we try to reconstruct them after the fact.

The media of memory that help us construct and transmit our knowledge and feelings about the past rely on various combinations of discursive, visual, and spatial elements. Therefore, collective memories are multimedia collages consisting in part of "a mixture of pictorial images and scenes, slogans, quips, and snatches of verse, abstractions, plot types and stretches of discourse, and even false etymologies."⁴⁵ They also include statues, memorial sites, and buildings.

43. Matt Matsuda, *The Memory of the Modern* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 8; see also Jeffrey Barash, "The Politics of Memory: Reflections on Practical Wisdom and Political Identity," in *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*, ed. Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley (London: Routledge, 1999), 33-43.

44. On habit memory and commemorative rituals, see especially Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 1 and 5.

45. Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 47.

Since we are not able to reconstruct these fluid constellations in their entirety we have to focus on one or two layers at a time. These efforts have created distinct subfields in collective memory studies. A number of early theorists of collective memory, including Halbwachs, studied mnemonic landscapes and cityscapes. Their pursuits have spawned a wave of scholarly inquiry into monuments and architectural landscapes as expressions of cultural memory.⁴⁶

Closely related to these concerns with spatial expressions of memory are attempts to record the images that make up our collective visions of the past. Scholars who focus on images as vehicles of memory contend that from antiquity to modern times the media of memory are characterized by “the primacy of the visual.”⁴⁷ In their assessment, one of the reasons for the privileged status of images in memory construction derives from their exceptional ability to close, and at times even obliterate, the gap between first-hand experience and secondary witnessing. As Daniel Sherman put it: “Sight is the only sense powerful enough to bridge the gap between those who hold a memory rooted in bodily experience and those who, lacking such ‘experience,’ nonetheless seek to share the memory.”⁴⁸ However, despite their evocative power, images depend on words to provide them with meaning because the relation between an image and its interpretation needs to be established. Once that connection is established and reliably reproduced, images “act as signposts, directing people who remember to preferred meaning by the fastest route.”⁴⁹ Because of this close relation between images and words in the making of collective memories, they can also be accessed and studied through their discursive and narrative foundations. As a

46. See especially Rudy Koshar, *Germany's Transient Pasts: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces*; and James Young, *The Texture of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

47. Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, Volume I: *Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994), viii; see also the classic Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory*, new ed. (London: Pimlico, 1999). When discussing images and collective memories commentators often refer to the work of Aby Warburg, the German art historian, who assembled a laboratory of visual memory studies dedicated to documenting the transmission of ancient motifs to European art during and after the Renaissance (see E. H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* [Oxford: Phaidon, 1970]). Warburg's concern with elite memory work illustrates the impressive continuity in style and technology which characterized the media of memory throughout the history of the West, but his work also makes us painfully aware of the fact that the technologies of memory have experienced a radical transformation in the course of the twentieth century. The transformation has been so swift that our scholarly concern for conventional media of memory (i.e., art and architecture) has assumed a quaint, anachronistic quality. We are only beginning to study the impact on memory caused by the first media revolution of the century, represented by film and television, while we are already in the middle of the second media revolution, which will force us to come to terms with internet-based collective memories and new visual and discursive codes.

48. Sherman, *The Construction of Memory in Interwar France*, 14. Naturally, images retain that suggestive power even if they are not linked to any authentic experience.

49. Zelitzer, *Remembering to Forget*, 6; Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 47-49.

50. On the narrative infrastructure of collective memory see *Methods for the Study of Literature as Cultural Memory*, ed. Raymond Vervliet and Annemarie Estor (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000); Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

result, the discursive elements of collective memories represent another specific focus in collective memory studies.⁵⁰

But our reliance on the media of memory in the pursuit of past collective identities causes two problems: an unself-conscious return to the central role of human agency in history (now as the maker of representations) paired with a troubling disregard for proof (who actually shares or identifies with these representations). The formal and semantic qualities of historical representations might have little in common with the intentions of their authors, and neither the object's characteristics nor the authors' objectives are good indicators for subsequent reception processes. In fact, it is particularly interesting to notice how often media representations are ignored or read against the grain of their intended or intrinsic messages: "Individuals are perfectly capable of ignoring even the best told stories, of injecting their own, subversive meanings into even the most rhetorically accomplished 'texts'—and of attending to only those ways of making sense of the past that fit their own."⁵¹ Indeed, there remains the distinct possibility that the monuments, books, and films whose history has been carefully reconstructed can quickly pass into oblivion without shaping the historical imagination of any individuals or social groups.⁵²

The epistemological sleight of hand from representation to memory could be easily avoided, although the results of our scholarly efforts might no longer speak to memory, let alone any collective memory. It is one objective to write the intellectual history of the coming into being of a number of cultural artifacts which share certain characteristics (topic, author, place, time). It is an altogether different endeavor to tie these representations to specific social groups and their understanding of the past. The second step entails knowledge about reception processes which is beyond the conventional purview of historical know-how; it is also objectively very difficult to establish.⁵³

Perhaps these methodological problems might stand out more clearly if we consider for a moment a "failed" collective memory, for instance, the memory of the Korean War in the U.S. Unlike the collective memories of the world wars, the Holocaust, and Vietnam that have been studied extensively, stories and images of the Korean War have never filled our media and have also never been the object of particular scholarly interest.⁵⁴ The Korean War has remained a "forgotten" war,

51. Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance*, 4.

52. It is more modest and accurate, although less satisfying, to assume that representations speak primarily to the collective memories of their producers, not their audiences. For an excellent example of this approach, which treats journalists as a specific interpretive community, see Barbie Zelizer, *Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

53. The problem of reception in memory studies has been emphasized by Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method," *American Historical Review* 102 (December 1997), 1386-1403; see also Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 8; and Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance*, 14.

54. For the collective memory (or non-memory) of the Korean war in the U.S. and for notable exceptions to the relative lack of scholarly interest in the history of its memory, see Paul Edwards, *To Acknowledge a War: The Korean War in American Memory* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000); and especially James Kerin, *The Korean War and American Memory* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1994).

lost between the heroic fight against Hitler and the trauma of Vietnam. But the situation has temporarily changed in recent years. The fiftieth anniversary of the war, the first steps towards national reconciliation in Korea, and news about war crimes committed by U.S. troops during the campaign have raised interest in the history of the war with its legacy of national division.⁵⁵ For the first time, interested parties, for instance, U.S. veterans and their associations, had an opportunity to project their own collective memory of the war into the larger public sphere and help shape a national collective memory of the Korean war in the popular annals of U.S. military interventions. However, now that this moment has passed, the memory of the Korean war will most likely again disappear, despite all these efforts.⁵⁶

The example illustrates two important insights about the nature of historical representations. First, most stories about the past, even those designed for fame as future collective memories, never make it beyond the group of a few initiated. In “the field of cultural negotiation through which different stories vie for a place in history” failure is the rule.⁵⁷ In addition, the example also highlights one of the foundational myths of memory studies. Memory studies presuppose a rarely acknowledged but not particularly surprising desire for cultural homogeneity, consistency, and predictability. Often we simply assume that people who have some knowledge and perhaps even vested interest in past events like the Korean War or the Holocaust have substantially similar perceptions of the event in question and thus form a stable interpretive community.

As one leaves behind the relatively safe ground of eyewitness memories, agency in memory politics, and concern with powerful events like genocide and war, collective memory begins to escape one’s conceptual grasp. In fact, one faces a veritable paradox: the more “collective” the medium (that is, the larger its potential or actual audience), the less likely it is that its representation will reflect the collective memory of that audience. Often, the readers of specific book or the viewers of a particular television program do not form a cohesive interpretive community because they use the same media text for very different ends. At the same time, despite our problems in determining the precise effect of any media event on its audience, we cannot simply exclude from memory studies the vast majority of consumers who never take on the role of memory makers outside the confines of their own family or profession. All these problems and challenges are best illustrated by television, which was the most important medium of historical reflection in the twentieth century but which, in that capacity, influenced the historical identities of a wide range of mnemonic communities.⁵⁸

55. For the news stories about U.S. war crimes in Korea see Sang Hun Choe, Charles J. Hanley, and Martha Mendoza, “G.I.’s Tell of a U.S. Massacre in Korean War,” *New York Times* (September 30, 1999); and Michael Cobbs, “Shoot Them All: Half a century after the Korean War, members of the 7th Cavalry Regiment had hoped for recognition; instead they are having to account for what happened at No Gun Ri,” *Washington Post Magazine* (February 6, 2000).

56. The single most widely distributed fictitious images of the war in reruns of the TV series M.A.S.H. are frequently not even associated with any referent like “Korean War” in the minds of its viewers. See Kerin, *The Korean War*, 245.

57. Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 1.

58. Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance*, 155; Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 35; and Winter and Sivan, “Setting the Framework,” 18.

In addition, reception-conscious students of collective memories encounter another serious problem in their quest for reliable data. The media of representation tend to disappear from the consciousness of the audience in the process of consumption. Radio listeners, for instance, regularly forget the source of their memories of historical events; they can recall the stories but they have no conscious recollections of listening to them on the radio and often attach them to other sources, including television, textbooks, and relatives. As a result, consumers might subscribe wholeheartedly to certain historical interpretations, but they would not be able to identify their origins even if one undertakes the cumbersome task of asking them directly.⁵⁹

There are some ways out of this methodological impasse. The least ambitious and most widely practiced is what Margaret Archer has called the “downward conflation” of structuralism.⁶⁰ As pointed out above, many scholars of collective memory conflate properties of the cultural system with sociocultural activities. They assume that the structural characteristics of the dominant media correlate to some extent to the perspectives of its users. This approach acquires some validity if the representations in question are carefully contextualized, that is, if it can be shown that specific representations found large audiences and faced little competition from other media. More specifically, it might be permissible to conclude that consistent and persistent lacunae and gaps in coverage are difficult to overcome independently by the audience and might therefore find their way into their minds.

In addition, as a way around that problem, historians have created their own source material. Researchers in oral history, for example, have reconstructed media biographies as a way to find out how consumers respond to media representations, and how their role as viewers interacts with other events and activities in their lives in providing them with a historical worldview.⁶¹ In addition, historians have occasionally engaged in large-scale polling endeavors to shed light on the historical consciousness of specific collectives.⁶² Short of such laborious projects, historians can with great benefit exploit existing data collected by commercial and academic institutions in the past.⁶³ For instance, there exists a

59. *Radiozeiten: Herrschaft, Alltag, Gesellschaft (1924–1960)*, ed. Inge Marssolek and Adelheid von Saldern (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 1999). See also Inge Marssolek, “Vertraute Töne und Unerhörtes: Radio und Gedächtnis im Nachkriegsdeutschland,” in Domansky and Welzer, eds., *Eine offene Geschichte*.

60. Margaret Archer, *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1996); see also François Dosse, *The History of Structuralism*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

61. By conducting in-depth interviews, researchers have tried to reconstruct the evolution of attitudes and feelings about past events as a result of media consumption and personal interaction. See, for example, Michael Kohlstruck, “Der Bildungswert von Geschichtsmedien und Deutungskonflikten,” in Domansky and Welzer, eds., *Eine offene Geschichte*; and Hans-Dieter Kübler, “Medienbiographien,” in *Medien- und Kommunikationsgeschichte*, ed. Manfred Brobrowsky et al. (Vienna: Böhlau, 1997); and see in general *The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Science*, ed. Prue Chamberlayne et al. (London: Routledge, 2000).

62. See, for example, Lutz, *Das Geschichtsbewusstsein der Deutschen*; and Rosenzweig and Thelen, *The Presence of the Past*.

63. See, for example, Werner Bergmann, *Antisemitismus in öffentlichen Konflikten* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1997).

vast amount of polling and ratings data that commercial and public television systems have amassed in the last half century and that have not yet been considered as important historical sources.⁶⁴ Finally, historians of collective memory can profit from the sophisticated discussions about reception and audience behavior in media and cultural studies.⁶⁵

Since the consumption of history becomes more and more discontinuous and fragmented in time and space, communities of memory might only rarely be constituted on the basis of shared interpretations of specific events. Increasingly, consumers are only linked through the media that they access individually and very selectively. Consequently, the media, their structure, and the rituals of consumption they underwrite might represent the most important shared component of peoples' historical consciousness, although this non-confrontational, semi-conscious, non-referential, and decentralized process is extremely difficult to reconstruct after the fact.

Scholars in memory studies will have to continue to design innovative ways of understanding media reception in order to study past, contemporary, and future collective memories. We have to find out what stories about the past matter to whom and how they have been distributed. In particular, historians are called upon to identify new sources and put memory studies on a solid empirical basis as its practitioners leave behind the simplistic, tacit assumptions that collective memory work can be reduced to human agency, or that facts of representation coincide with facts of reception. In the process it is crucial to keep in mind that all media of memory, especially electronic media, neither simply reflect nor determine collective memory but are inextricably involved in its construction and evolution.⁶⁶

IV. CONCLUSION

Memory studies offer an opportunity to acknowledge that historical representations are negotiated, selective, present-oriented, and relative, while insisting that the experiences they reflect cannot be manipulated at will.⁶⁷ Or put differently, the best contributions to memory studies are informed by the conviction that "memory's imbrication with cultural narratives and unconscious processes is

64. See, for example, Elihu Katz, "Viewers Work," in *The Audience and its Landscape*, ed. James Hay et al. (Boulder: Westview, 1996), 9-21; see also *Ratings Analysis: The Theory and Practice of Audience Research*, ed. James Webster et al., 2nd ed. (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2000).

65. In this context psychological models again play an important role in understanding the everyday interaction between media and their audiences. See, for example, Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies*, ed. Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (London: BFI, 1999); Bob Mullan, *Consuming Television: Television and its Audience* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); *Media, Ritual, and Identity*, ed. Tamar Liebes and James Curran (London: Routledge, 1998); *Rezeptionsforschung: Theorien und Untersuchungen zum Umgang mit Massenmedien*, ed. Michael Carlton and Silvia Schneider (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1997).

66. Steve Anderson, "Loafing in the Garden of Knowledge: History TV and Popular Memory," *Film and History* 30 (2000), 16.

67. Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume*, 249-250.

held in tension with an understanding of memory's relation, however complex and mediated, with history, with happenings, or even and most problematically, perhaps from a postmodern perspective, with 'events.'⁶⁸ In this fashion, collective memory studies have evolved into an exceptionally productive meeting ground between different ways of conceptualizing society and social change. On the one hand, scholars of collective memory have successfully unraveled the semantic and narrative parameters of social remembrance that inform and limit the historical imagination of the members of any given collective and that are inscribed in the media of communication as well as our bodies and minds. These cultural formations might be variously defined as discursive formations, habitus, thought styles, archetypes, paradigms, or simply as traditions. However, in one way or another they all emphasize the importance of powerful impersonal factors that shape peoples' worldviews. These correlate well with constructivist and postmodern understandings of history. On the other hand, more conventional analyses of the lives and deeds of politicians, artists, and intellectuals reveal how individuals have negotiated and tested the limits of these inherited perceptions of the past. Almost by definition these approaches pay tribute to and respect the creative energy of specific individuals. Despite their differences, the approach that focuses on cultural formations and the approach that focuses on agency are not mutually exclusive in the academic subculture of memory studies.⁶⁹ In this respect the field seems to have squared the circle. As Kerwin Klein so aptly, yet perhaps overly ironically remarked, collective memory studies "promises to let us have our essentialism and deconstruct it, too."⁷⁰

Despite the need for varied methods, empirical investigations of collective memories are not *methodologically* advanced by detailed accounts about the makers of memory artifacts, although such inquiries into intellectual history are certainly important. Similarly, historical knowledge about collective memories is only marginally improved by concern with neurological insight into human memory. As impressive as such interdisciplinary efforts might be, they do not bring us closer to understanding the specific social and cultural dynamics of collective remembrance. Instead, interdisciplinary ambitions in the humanities and social sciences should be directed closer to home towards communication and cultural studies. The study of the methods in these disciplines is more likely to yield the tools to analyze the construction of collective memories in the process of media consumption.

In the end three important conceptual perspectives meet at the moment of reception when potential memories are turned into actual collective memories,

68. Radstone, "Working with Memory," 10.

69. In this respect collective memory studies also allow us to bring together approaches to culture that consider themselves resolutely scientific and those that prefer to think of themselves as interpretive, closer to the creative arts, and thus provide a perfect site for interdisciplinary explorations of culture; see *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, ed. Victoria Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 4-5; see also *The Practice of Cultural Analysis: Exposing Interdisciplinary Interpretation*, ed. Mieke Bal (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

70. Klein, "On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse," 144.

when a selection of the large stock of standard narratives and images about the past is produced and embraced: the moment of historical consciousness. We have to further collective memory studies by focusing on the communications among memory makers, memory users, and the visual and discursive objects and traditions of representations. This hermeneutical triangle “implies an open dialogue between the object, the maker, and the consumer in constructing meaning.”⁷¹ All three elements should be the actors and heroes of histories of collective memory. Such an approach might also provide clear and reliable guidelines to distinguish between the vast surplus of potential collective memories on the one hand and the relatively few instances of successful memory construction on the other.

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71. Marius Kwint, “Introduction: The Physical Past,” in *Material Memories*, ed. Kwint *et al.* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 3. This position has a number of supporters; see, for example, Nick Merriman, “Introduction,” in *Making Early Histories in Museums*, ed. Merriman (London: Leicester University Press, 1999), who suggests that “meaning is produced through the interaction between the display, the curatorial interpretation and what the visitor brings to the transaction” (6); see also Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces*, 10.

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