
AHR Forum

Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory

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*it came in a language
Untouched by pity, in lines, lavish and dark,
Where death is reborn and sent into the world as a gift,
So the future, with no voice of its own, nor hope
Of ever becoming more than it will be, might mourn.*

Mark Strand, from "Orpheus Alone."¹

PERHAPS THE MOST BANAL THING that could be said about history, in general, is that "it happened," or something happened. But of course, history is not only the past or pasts that "happened" or continue to happen, it is also what is written or produced about those pasts both then and now. And so whenever we think about history, we are thinking in terms of commémoration, or, in Mark Strand's words, the "gift" sent into the world so that the future might mourn. This "present" (the gift of/from the now) to the coming generations encapsulates a historical consciousness that attempts to transmit memory and identity as corporate, corporeal entities.² That the future might mourn is the projection of nostalgia; it is also the supposition of historical thinking, which charges itself with the preservation of what would otherwise be lost both mentally and materially. Practitioners of history have tended to distinguish history and memory by their distinct functions and modes of operation. But what has prompted one of the most significant, ongoing debates about the nature and practice of history in the twentieth century is a proposition that came from outside the historical profession, and that has stimulated the creation of divisions between types of memory: the suggestion that another venue of memory and identity transmission has operated simultaneously and competitively with history, namely "collective memory."³

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¹ Mark Strand, "Orpheus Alone," in Strand, *The Continuous Life: Poems* (New York, 1990), 9.

² See John R. Gillis's introductory essay to *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, N.J., 1994).

³ For recent discussions of the theory of collective memory by and for historians, see Keith Michael Baker, "Memory and Practice," *Representations* 11 (Summer 1985): 134–59; Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn, eds., "Memory and Counter Memory," special issue of *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989); James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford, 1992); Amos Funkenstein,

If history is both the past(s) and the narratives that represent pasts as historical memory in relation to presents/presence, collective memory is a conceptualization that expresses a sense of the continual presence of the past. Both forms are, of course, authored or represented in particular ways—although discussions of collective memory rarely address the simple fallacy that memory, which the most recent research posits as operating from multiple locations within the brain, is here metaphorically understood to operate without requiring anything like a single biological entity, much less an individual providing its expression. But assuming this basic, representational similarity, it seems to me that the difference between collective memory and historical memory marks the separation between lived experience (in Henri Bergson's sense) and the preservation of lived experience, its objectification—rather than marking the absolutely separate functioning of the two forms of historical consciousness.⁴ Historical memory, always appearing in the form of historical narrative, is one form for the content of collective memory, but collective memory is also the framework in which historical remembering occurs. The difference between form and framework has come to be understood as one created by the professionalization of history. The redefinition I will be presenting here, however, suggests that the debates about the differences and relative values of historical and collective memory may have eclipsed a historical consciousness that yet remains available within both memory frameworks. I follow the late scholar of Jewish thought, Amos Funkenstein, in defining historical consciousness as a useful and neglected middle term in this debate. However, Funkenstein argued that “Western historical consciousness doesn't contradict collective memory, but rather is a developed and organized form of it,” which apparently equates historical consciousness with historical memory.⁵ As a middle term, historical consciousness should designate the desire for experiences to be understood historically. The

“Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness,” *History and Memory* 1 (Spring/Summer 1989): 5–26; Paula Hamilton, “The Knife Edge: Debates about Memory and History,” and Chris Healy, “Histories and Collecting: Museums, Objects and Memories,” in Hamilton and Kate Darian-Smith, eds., *Memory and History in Twentieth-Century Australia* (Oxford, 1994); Patrick H. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover, N.H., 1993); Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1994), is designed to serve as a textbook and includes a useful annotated bibliography. Substantial catalogs of American, French, and British collective memory practices, respectively, include Michael Kammen, *The Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York, 1991); Pierre Nora, ed., *Les lieux de mémoire*, 7 vols. (Paris, 1984–92); David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985); and Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (London, 1994). Oral history's peculiar relationship to collective memory and anthropological approaches are presented in Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*; Thomas Butler, ed., *Memory: History, Culture and the Mind* (Oxford, 1989); Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge, 1989); and the special issue “Memory and History,” *History and Anthropology* 2, no. 2 (1986). See also David William Cohen, *The Combing of History* (Chicago, 1994).

⁴ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (Paris, 1896; English transl., New York, 1911). Bergson's conception of memory as an action occurring in the present, rather than as an element of archival material located in one spot in the brain, emphasized the lived experience of recalling and remembering the past in the living, active present. He foreshadowed current psychological and neurological research that focuses on the multiple functions of memories, the interacting brain components that produce them, and the nature of the experiences in which memories are created and recalled: see Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain* (New York, 1994); Daniel L. Schacter, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind and the Past* (New York, 1996). See also the discussion of the bodily aspects of Bergson's theory in Matt K. Matsuda, *The Memory of the Modern* (New York, 1996).

⁵ Funkenstein, “Collective Memory,” 19.

varieties of lived experience, discussed at the end of this essay, require both historical and collective memory for their articulation of historical consciousness.

Historians who may be skeptical about the relevance of this entire discussion to their own work should consider their reactions to the following questions: Do we create forms of historical representation because history is past, or do we create them because history is present? Do we write history because we have experienced it ourselves, or do we see ourselves as looking at something that is distant and virtually lost to us? Most imperative, who is this "us" or you or me that thinks historically? The answers to these questions—and they will be plural—can help historians think about how collective memory may in fact already constitute a fundamental aspect of their work. Historians also must address the same issues in establishing their field of inquiry and in their writing that students of and participants in collective memory do: Who has history and/or memory, who represents it, who experiences it, and how is it perpetuated? Are the collectives national, ethnic, religious, generational, or does the definition depend on the story being told? These questions relate to the task of representation, the inevitable "speaking for others" that historians write. What may at first seem like a confusing or hair-splitting fine line between two forms of collective historical consciousness is in fact a rich discussion of the responsibility for and participation in collective memory, in which historians will still play a part.

The differences between collective memory and historical memory only began to be discussed explicitly within European traditions of historiography during the nineteenth century.⁶ While many would argue that a "sense of the past" is a perpetual aspect of the human condition, it is clear that the era famous for the development of historicism also witnessed a decisive change in the ways in which the recording and record of the past were valued. In Germany, for instance, the beginnings of a "culture of preservation" were contemporary to the rise of historicism after 1815 and resulted in a ground swell of regional historical preservation movements. These began as amateur vocations but quickly became professionalized.⁷ The former curiosity cabinets and art galleries of Europe were gradually consolidated for collective, public presentation, along with newly valued

⁶ This is not to argue that historical consciousness did not exist before 1800 but, rather, that it took on significant new forms that deliberately spoke for collective memory. For a summary of the "arts of memory" and memory theaters drawn from Frances Yates's seminal study, see Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory*. On the antiquarianism and curiosity cabinets, as well as natural historical collecting, see Horst Bredekamp, *The Lure of Antiquity and the Cult of the Machine*, Allison Brown, trans. (Princeton, N.J., 1995); Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley, Calif., 1994); Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500–1800*, Elizabeth Wiles-Portier, trans. (Cambridge, 1990); Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London, 1992).

⁷ See Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clío: A Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France* (Cambridge, 1984); Susan Crane, "Collecting and Historical Consciousness: New Forms for Collective Memory in Early Nineteenth-Century Germany" (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1992). Still worth noting for its discussion of both the discipline of history and related collecting practices is G. P. Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* (1913; rpt. edn., New York, 1959). In the rapidly growing literature on museums, collecting, and preservation in Europe, see also Phillipa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838–1886* (Cambridge, 1986); Suzanne Marchand, *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750–1970* (Princeton, N.J., 1996); Daniel J. Sherman, *Worthy Monuments: Art Museums and the Politics of Culture in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, 1989); and Sherman and Irit Rogoff, eds., *Museum/Culture* (London, 1994).

medieval, European artifacts and contemporary, foreign ethnographic objects. Historical collecting and preservation was a group effort, locally coordinated and state-supported in Germany in *Vereine*, or associations. The results were supposed to express a group identity (particularly a national one), a sense of the past valid for the members of this preservationist culture and anyone who encountered their products—just as we continue to do in the public museums that began to be founded then and have been created since. In this culture, which is largely still our own, it became virtually inconceivable to speak of having one's own sense of historical consciousness except as mediated by the reception of the "history" created by historians and preservationists.

The new form of historical memory thus entered consciousness at the group level, and it was seen at the time to be recording and saving memories or experiences that would otherwise be lost—while simultaneously masking the role of the individual in this collective remembering. This is the culture of preservation we have inherited. The increasingly professionalized role of historians as those publicly entrusted with the duty of memory and commemoration apparently made it incumbent upon practicing historians to retract almost all vestiges of personal memories or personal involvement in the production of the history. The apparently simultaneous appearance of professional historians and disappearance of collective memory has led modern theorists of collective memory to posit the notion that historical memory has displaced collective memory and, further, to mourn its passing. Two of the most significant, and tendentious, discussions of this transition appear in the work of the French historian Pierre Nora and the historian of Jewish thought, Yosef Yerushalmi. They in turn refer, as do most scholars in this field, to work of the early twentieth-century French sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs, who crafted a programmatic outline of the frameworks of collective memory. But I will argue that Halbwachs' work contains an implicit possibility of a recombination of historical and collective memory. For if historical memory is only one form of collective memory, it may well be that collective memory has not been lost or supplanted but, in fact, has persisted in a way altogether unlike what has been proposed so far. In order to reconceptualize collective memory and show that it is not simply a historical artifact, I will suggest relocating the collective back in the individual who articulates it—the individual who disappeared in the occlusion of personal historical consciousness by the culture of preservation.

A revised notion of collective memory may provide a theoretical basis for imagining a different kind of historical memory, which would focus on the way individuals experience themselves as historical entities. It would thus avoid the pitfalls that the concept of collective memory suggests to those who fear its nationalist, revisionist temptations, as exemplified recently in the American controversy over the Enola Gay exhibit at the Smithsonian in 1994–1995. The difference between collective memory and historical memory was marked by the creation of a distinction between a lived experience and the preservation of that experience: between one's own sense of having an experience and an external representation of that sense which is presumed to be valid for others as well as yourself. By relocating collective *and* historical memory in the individual thinking historically, and avoiding "speaking for others," I am trying to imagine a new form

for historical consciousness that takes its inspiration from, but is not necessarily limited to, the forms created in the nineteenth century.

DESPITE WORK DONE UNDER THE RUBRIC of Freudian or Jungian psychology, we owe the theorization of collective memory primarily to the early twentieth-century French sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs. A recalcitrant student of Henri Bergson who switched professional allegiances to Emile Durkheim, Halbwachs brought insights into the nature of individual memory to the sociological study of group dynamics and particularly emphasized the social contextualization of all individual memories. In addition to major texts on suicide and social morphology, he produced two works on memory, *The Social Frameworks of Memory* (1925) and a collection of posthumously published fragments, *The Collective Memory*, which survived Halbwachs' internment and death at Buchenwald and appeared in English in 1950.⁸ In these two texts, Halbwachs develops a partly experiential, partly literary-critical basis (Stendahl and Marcel Proust account for much of his evidence) for his idea that individual memory can only be recalled in the social framework within which it is constructed.⁹ Individuals, he argues, belong to many social groups, and a collective memory inheres in each. He discusses the frameworks of family, religion, and nation, showing how each conditions the ways in which memory is activated.

In the essay entitled "Historical Memory and Collective Memory," Halbwachs is explicit about the distinctions between two types of memory:

Every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time. The totality of past events can be put together in a single record only by separating them from the memory of the groups who preserved them and by severing the bonds that held them close to the psychological life of the social milieu where they occurred, while retaining only the group's chronological and spatial outline of them.

Collective memory exists and is perpetuated in specific groups that exist in discrete times and places. These groups maintain a living relation to collective memory, and it is only within such groups that any individual can remember and express personal memories. "The groups to which I belong vary at different periods of my life," Halbwachs wrote. "But it is from their viewpoint that I consider the past."¹⁰ This suggests that "the past" is in fact multiple pasts. Collective memory is flexible with

⁸ Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, Francis J. Ditter, Jr., and Vida Yazdi Ditter, trans. (New York, 1980), contains the crucial essay, "Historical Memory and Collective Memory" (50-87); see also Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, Lewis A. Coser, ed. (Chicago, 1992), which contains selections from "The Social Frameworks of Memory" and other essays.

⁹ Compare Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam, "Collective Memory—What Is It?" *History and Memory* 8 (Spring/Summer 1996): 30-50. Gedi and Elam argue that Halbwachs rejected Durkheim's "fine distinction . . . between individual and collective representations" by completely obliterating individual memory and its representative status (36). They see Halbwachs as presenting the old idea of social "myth" in new clothes. It should be noted, however, that their argument is based on a reading of "The Social Frameworks" essays rather than the later work collected in *The Collective Memory*, where Halbwachs indeed articulates the potential (and limits) of individual memory in collective memory. Further, in the later essays, Halbwachs stresses the plurality of social frameworks and each individual's multiple memberships, in which a single totalizing "myth" could not function.

¹⁰ Halbwachs, "Historical Memory and Collective Memory," 84, 72.

regard to the events of the past and the individual memories of them. It must allow for lapses of memory, the passing of generations, and the personal development that characterizes maturity.

By contrast, Halbwachs sees historical memory as a marker of the moment and condition in which memory is loosed from its social moorings and becomes anchored instead in the abstract frameworks of chronology and factual detail, "severing the bonds" from its "social milieu": "General history starts only when tradition ends and the social memory is fading or breaking up . . . The need to write the history of a period, a society, or even a person is only aroused when the subject is already too distant in the past to allow for the testimony of those who preserve some remembrance of it."¹¹ This is the key insight of Halbwachs' multifaceted study: that historical memory is the representation of a *lost* past, and its only recollection. The past no longer exists as collective memory. How, then, has it been remembered? "History is neither the whole nor even all that remains of the past. In addition to written history, there is a living history that perpetuates and renews itself through time and permits the recovery of many old currents that have seemingly disappeared. If this were not so, what right would we have to speak of a 'collective memory'?"¹²

Lived experience and collective memory "interpenetrate" each other through autobiography, the self-conscious memory of individual members of a group.¹³ But this is different from historical memory in two crucial ways. First, lived or personal history and collective memory are continuous in their interpenetration; "collective memory . . . is a current of continuous thought whose continuity is not at all artificial, for it retains from the past only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive."¹⁴ There is no break between awareness of the past and its presence in the present, and nothing can be lost in this continuum. Historical memory, by contrast, begins when social traditions are broken and living contact with the past has been lost; all that remains are fragments as artifacts.

Second, collective memory is by definition multiple, with as many memories as there are groups within which to remember, but history, Halbwachs argues, is by definition "unitary" and single. He believes that the historian aims to include in history all of the information available, on the assumption that the resulting totality will be the closest possible approximation to the lost, lived reality. "Now the historian can make such judgements," Halbwachs states, "because he is not located within the viewpoint of any genuine and living groups of the past or present."¹⁵ Halbwachs' conception of what historians produce as history may sound terribly out of date now. It seems that, although individuals and collectives interact in their production of collective memory, the historian and historical memory are outside any group, because the memory they address is a distant correspondent, not a living, communicating member of an existing collective. Historical memory is seen to be seeking a solitary, unifying entity to inhere in, unlike the continuous, multiple

¹¹ Halbwachs, "Historical Memory and Collective Memory," 78.

¹² Halbwachs, "Historical Memory and Collective Memory," 64.

¹³ See Halbwachs, "Historical Memory and Collective Memory," 55.

¹⁴ Halbwachs, "Historical Memory and Collective Memory," 80.

¹⁵ Halbwachs, "Historical Memory and Collective Memory," 83.

collectives of the "Other" memory, but—and this is where his old-fashioned notion of history breaks out to potentially new territory—the only place Halbwachs envisions this unity coming together is in the individual historian: not "the history."

This brief introduction to Halbwachs' theory must suffice to provide a comparative framework in which to reconsider the potential of collective memory as a useful category of analysis for historians and as a mode of historical expression or representation. For, although Halbwachs left historians out of the framework of collective memory, and apparently signaled the death of collective memory in the rise of history, it may be that collective memory has indeed survived the onslaught of historical representation. In particular, it may provide a way to understand what is at stake in the current debates about memory and forgetting in relation to the Holocaust, to name only one example of the phenomenon in which individuals with a particular lived experience (survivors of the Holocaust, survivors of the war, and contemporaries) are brought into conflict with individuals who have another kind of lived experience (succeeding generations of all three groups, for whom the Holocaust is a "learned" historical experience). Individuals provide interpretations for other individuals, and these are dealt with as information to be assimilated, remembered, or archived. The criteria, however, of "what remains" has more to do with who is acting as a witness and who is remembering lived experience than it does with whether a narrative adequately sums up a historical event.

This is nowhere more apparent than in the recent discussions of postwar European collective memory.¹⁶ Fraught with a different calculus of guilt and responsibility than had entered the French debate until the 1980s (with the analysis of the "Vichy Syndrome"), the German debate about how to "come to terms with the past" is shaped by irreconcilable differences between lived experience and memories, repression, official historiography, and above all, the variety of generations who participate in the debate.¹⁷ The oldest generation includes surviving victims of the Holocaust and "survivors" of the Hitler regime. (Note that the word "survivor" is itself ambiguous: for Holocaust survivors, it implies an unending traumatic condition; for "survivors" of the Hitler regime, those remaining alive from that time, the term implies both culpability and retribution.) Younger generations vary in their distance to the key events, the Holocaust or the Third Reich, but both events are unarguably cores of their collective memories. They still have access to the lived experience of the remembering generation but are rapidly

¹⁶ See Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust and German National Identity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988); Eric L. Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1990); Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*, Arthur Goldhammer, trans. (Cambridge, 1991); Peter Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung: Gedächtnisorte im Streit um die Nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit* (Munich, 1995). On the monumentalization and preservation of conflicted collective memory, see James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, Conn., 1995); Sarah Farmer, "Symbols That Face Two Ways: Commemorating the Victims of Nazism and Stalinism at Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen," *Representations* 49 (Winter 1995); Rudy Koshar, "Building Pasts: Historic Preservation and Identity in Twentieth Century Germany," and Claudia Koonz, "Between Memory and Oblivion: Concentration Camps in German Memory" both in Gillis, *Commemorations*.

¹⁷ The experiences of trauma and repression are aspects of collective memory that deserve particular attention; see Michael S. Roth's collected essays, *The Ironist's Cage: Memory, Trauma and the Construction of History* (New York, 1995); and Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore, Md., 1996). See also Paul Antze and Michael Lambek, eds., *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (New York, 1996).

approaching the time when that link will be severed. It may be paradigmatic for any definition of historical consciousness, what we want and need from “the past,” to understand how collective memory continues to function at the level of individual experience and how it can contest historical representation.

One of the most influential attempts to understand the function of collective memory in modernity has been the studies conducted as part of Pierre Nora’s *Lieux de mémoire* series. A project of encyclopedic scope, the *Lieux de mémoire* series has employed prominent French historians to locate and describe the “sites” of collective memory for conceptual entities as diverse as the Panthéon and Port-Royal, the Vendée and architect Viollet-le-Duc, gastronomy and gallantry—words and things that may or may not have archaeological status. Well-known as a publisher—an editor at Gallimard and for the critical journal *Le débat*—Nora also led a seminar on collective memory at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in the 1970s, which spawned the larger collection. Nora’s project situates itself squarely within a historical context that includes the legacy of the Annales school, the bicentennial of the French Revolution, and the impact of Foucauldian concepts of power/knowledge and counter-memory. A programmatic essay of Nora’s was translated into English for a specially dedicated issue of *Representations* in 1989, but since the multiple-volume publication began in 1984, the phrase *lieux de mémoire* has become common coin among Anglophone students of collective memory.¹⁸ Holding a mirror up to French historical consciousness, Nora saw a troubled visage and a disembodied nation. In treating a variety of objects, places, and concepts as “sites,” Nora argued that these sites have become the fixed, externalized locations of what was once an internalized, social collective memory. Nora characterizes a shift from *milieux de mémoire*, or naturalized collective memory, to *lieux de mémoire*, which represent self-conscious, deliberate attempts to preserve memory in historical ways. Archives, museums, memorials, anniversaries, and histories needed to be created by modernity because spontaneous collective memory has ceased to function. In his most striking and most frequently quoted statement, Nora writes, “We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left.”¹⁹ In fact, the artifact of lost collective memory is the practice and production of commemoration.

What is missing, for Nora, is spontaneous memory activity outside the direction of a modern preservationist culture. Halbwachs noted, “History indeed resembles a crowded cemetery, where room must be constantly made for new tombstones.”²⁰ Nora also addresses the problem of the surfeit of preserved memory, which apparently has all but destroyed any real, living connection to the past. History, Nora argues, “besieges memory, deforming and transforming it, penetrating and petrifying it.”²¹ In this view, history plays the role of invader and manipulator, a force from within collective memory that is self-destructive and that produces

¹⁸ Pierre Nora, “Between History and Memory: Les Lieux de Mémoire” *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7–25. See also Steven Englund, “The Ghost of Nation Past,” *Journal of Modern History* 64 (June 1992): 299–320; Hutton, *History as an Art*, 124–53; Nancy Wood, “Memory’s Remains: *Les lieux de mémoire*,” *History and Memory* 6 (Spring/Summer 1994): 123–49; *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, Vol. 1: *Conflicts and Divisions*, under the direction of Pierre Nora, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (New York, 1996–).

¹⁹ Nora, “Between History and Memory,” 7.

²⁰ Halbwachs, “Historical Memory and Collective Memory,” 52.

²¹ Nora, “Between History and Memory,” 12.

prosthetic artifacts to replace natural connections to reality. But the determination of what qualifies as a *lieu* is reserved to a subjective act: the will to remember, although Nora does not specify who wills, who will act out this desire. Without this (agentless) imaginative act, "we would quickly drift into admitting virtually everything as worthy of remembrance" or commit the historicalizing, preservationist error of assuming that anything might be worth saving.²²

This striking pessimism about historical memory and fears for the loss of a culturally unique collective memory is shared by a contemporary of Nora's, Yosef Yerushalmi. In his 1982 book *Zakhor* (Remember), Yerushalmi argued that "history" has supplanted the tradition of Jewish memory and ritual with a record of the past rather than a reinvocation and repetition of it in the present.²³ Disturbed by the secularization implicit in this shift in historical consciousness, Yerushalmi was concerned that a split had occurred between Jewish tradition and Jewish identity. Yerushalmi's provocative thesis was contested by several, albeit mostly admiring, scholars of Jewish thought, including Amos Funkenstein.²⁴ Yerushalmi appeared to have touched a nerve; while scholars have argued where and how forms of Jewish historical consciousness may have predated the modern break Yerushalmi postulates, his larger point remains significant within the framework of collective memory theory.²⁵ Like Nora, Yerushalmi sees the form of historical representation as destructive of lived experience, and both are skeptical of the value of the substitute form and the accompanying compulsion toward regarding this mediocre substitute as historically valuable. Yerushalmi reacts similarly to Nora in criticizing the impulse to regard any and everything as potentially "valuable" in a historical sense. Collective memory, he argues, is necessarily selective in what it preserves: "Certain memories live on; the rest are winnowed out, repressed, or simply discarded by a process of natural selection which the historian, uninvited, disturbs and reverses."²⁶ Clearly, the collective memory process is not a benign one; however, for Yerushalmi, the value in this "natural selection" is its preservation of a powerful guiding force, a "messianic faith" from the Jewish tradition, which provided the principle for coherence and continuity. Yerushalmi sees the production of history and the reification of preservation as a goal in and of itself, as markers of a historical era that professes no faiths and creates a value out of fragmentation and loss by preserving all fragments. He invokes Jorge Luis Borges' story of Funes the Memorious, the man who could not forget anything and consequently was an insomniac. This, Yerushalmi muses, could be the message that historical scholarship delivers to itself: in forgetting nothing, we lose ourselves.²⁷

Like Halbwachs, Yerushalmi distinguishes (collective) memory from (historical) recollection: memory is continuous, unbroken, and perpetually available, whereas recollection is the act of recovering that which has been forgotten, and is the basis

²² Nora, "Between History and Memory," 19.

²³ Yosef Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (1982; rpt. edn., New York, 1989).

²⁴ See Funkenstein, "Historical Consciousness," 12–19; see also Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley, Calif., 1993).

²⁵ See David Meyer, "Remembering *Zakhor*: A Super-Commentary," *History and Memory* 4 (Fall/Winter 1992): 129–48; Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *The Jews: History, Memory and the Present*, David Ames Curtis, trans. and ed. (New York, 1996), 57–62.

²⁶ Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 95.

²⁷ Cited in Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 102.

of all knowledge and “true learning.”²⁸ While there is always a role for historical memory, it must not supplant the continuity of the collective, which is exactly what Yerushalmi fears has happened in Jewish tradition. Indeed, history must salvage something of its own “dignity” and fight against the abuse of memory:

For the world in which we live it is no longer merely a question of the decay of collective memory and the declining consciousness of the past, but of the aggressive rape of whatever memory remains, the deliberate distortion of the historical record, the invention of mythological pasts in the service of the powers of darkness.²⁹

Yerushalmi, Nora, and Halbwachs all acknowledge that historical memory is present in the present, that it shapes collective memory and is shaped by it. But they also see history as a destructive force, because the historian is neither strong enough to be the provider of the “law” or messianic faith that determines, for Yerushalmi, what may be forgotten, nor representative of any organic connection to a people or milieu, in Nora’s terms, and so cannot participate in a collective memory but merely provide yet another tombstone in Halbwachs’ cemetery of historical identity. For the two practicing historians, this realization presents a challenge and an opportunity. They imagine writing histories of forgetting and histories of the sites of collective memory. But they do not propose, as I am going to attempt here, to reopen the possibility that collective memory is itself an expression of historical consciousness that derives from individuals, and has only recently, in the last two hundred years, found one kind of expression in national or collective histories—this being only one possibility, not an exhaustive depletion of the concept.

Collective memory maintains the lived experience of individuals within groups, according to Halbwachs, because that individual experience is never remembered without reference to a shared context. But there is a body/body problem lurking in this theory of memory (as opposed to a mind/body problem) that is rarely alluded to: we all know that groups have no single brain in which to locate the memory function, but we persist in talking about memory as “collective,” as if this remembering activity could be physically located. We may speak, with Jacques Derrida, of “traces”; Nora identifies “sites,” and I have studied the origins of historical preservation in the nineteenth century, which, in seeking to give form to collective memory, created new “forms” for historical memory. None of this, however, addresses the fact that collective memory ultimately is located not in sites but in individuals. All narratives, all sites, all texts remain objects until they are “read” or referred to by individuals thinking historically. Individuals are responsible for Nora’s will to remember; individuals will respond to Yerushalmi’s call for a reaffirmation of the dignity of historical writing. These individuals may happen to be professional historians, but, more often, they may simply be people who are thinking historically.

For any individual, learning about history is a lived experience that becomes part of collective memory—a seemingly simple proposition that none of the theorists of collective memory discuss. Some individuals may be collectively recognized as

²⁸ Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 197–98.

²⁹ Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 116.

historical actors, but others will be readers and receivers of stories and will never consider themselves to have been either historians or historical actors, although the information and knowledge they have received and created has come from historical contexts in which historical knowledge is valued. The historian plays a socially confirmed role as rememberer, but, just as often, the historian does not see him/herself as remembering lived experience but rather as witnessing to the experience of others through their testimony—by working in archives or conducting interviews, reading texts, which are the voluntary or involuntary testimonies of others, and then speaking of this evidence.³⁰ The criteria of “what remains” as memory has more to do with when one is acting as a witness and when one is remembering lived experience, and how these two roles coalesce in one person, than it does with whether a narrative adequately sums up a historical event. Witnessing is a lived experience; it is an awareness of receiving another’s testimony, and of having the impact of that experience remain as part of one’s historical knowledge. The voice of the historian is generally veiled in historical narrative because this historian does not consider himself to be remembering—he is witnessing. As history enters its “epistemological phase” of self-awareness in the late twentieth century, as Nora puts it, the historian reemerges as an author.³¹ The study of history has returned to the sites of collective memory, made collective memory its object, and, according to Nora, this self-reflexivity is mirrored in the voice of the historian (though not in his own). Nora is skeptical of how the “new type of historian emerges who, unlike his precursors, is ready to confess the intimate relation he maintains to his subject.”³² Nora was already critical of this trend, and I suspect that he did not conceive of this historian as someone who had recognized that she was now ready to suggest not just an affinity for her topic but possession of it as memory as well.

The theorists of collective memory are skeptical about the new historical consciousness that is both self-aware and aware of its own constructedness, because they wonder how such reflexivity can speak for a *collective* memory. At stake is the role of the rememberer, the designated ritual role of interpreter, the one who speaks for others. But when, in fact, has collective memory ever been uttered if not individually? As even Yerushalmi notes ironically, “No symphony was ever written by committee.”³³ Individuals provide interpretations for other individuals, and these are dealt with as information to be assimilated, remembered, or archived, to create the multiple pasts Halbwachs described, and this is a lived experience. I am suggesting that historical research is a lived experience that the self-reflexive historian consciously integrates into collective memory. Historical representation is inadequate to this lived experience only so long as the author remains absent and the textual or site-artifact serves only the function of commemoration.

³⁰ “Testimony” implies both spiritual and evidentiary discourses, a moral or legal imperative to attest to memory. The potential richness of this vein of analysis for historians can be drawn from literary criticism and psychoanalytic theory: see Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York, 1992); and Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven, Conn., 1991).

³¹ Nora, “Between History and Memory,” 18.

³² Nora, “Between History and Memory,” 18.

³³ Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 95.

It follows from this that the real issue of historical representation is not only the question of how historical knowledge is represented linguistically, narratively, and in what objectifications, but how it is that all collective memory, the knowledge that supposedly fed and sustained the historical inquiry, is represented through a history written by one witness. Why isn't each individual experience of collective memory different? What if we consider the possibility that each self-expression of historical consciousness is an expression of collective memory, not because it is exactly shared by all of the other members of the collective but because that collective makes its articulation possible, because historical consciousness has itself become an element of collective memory? Is this the collective memory that eludes historical representation, by insisting on its subjectivity of lived experience rather than its representativeness?

The theoretical differences between collective memory and historical memory, between loss and preservation, have lain in the decision of what to "save." History can save what has been personally lost, by preserving a collective representation of memory. Collective memory can preserve the memory of lived experience, in living experience, and sustain the loss of other memories. But morally speaking, as Nora and Yerushalmi do, collective memory cannot sustain the loss of historical memory. Therefore, the terms of memory have to change, now that we are aware that collective memory's "sites" are heuristic devices designed to supplement the lack of a central remembering organ in the social body. We can think about collective memory as being expressed by historically conscious individuals claiming their historical knowledge as part of personal, lived experience, expressed autobiographically in terms of what has been learned. The "site" of collective memory is thus removed from an external representation of preservation and returned to the individual who remembers—but not, as Nora suggested, to the professional historian (who would become a selfsame *lieu de mémoire*).³⁴ Instead, each individual, as a member of many collectives, holds and expresses personal memories of historical significance as lived experience. They might produce histories in which they claim their historical subjects as part of their own memories. The resulting expansion of historical discourse will not overburden or incapacitate us with memory, as it did Funes the Memorious, but what it produces also may not look like what we have called history, because it will not speak as a representative collective.

Some may fear that this conclusion will doom us to be mired in something like the subjectivity-run-amuck of the current "memoir boom"—what Daphne Patai called the "nouveau solipsism" currently in vogue among scholars.³⁵ Genre-bending aside,

³⁴ Nora, "Between History and Memory," 18.

³⁵ Daphne Patai, "Sick and Tired of Scholars' Nouveau Solipsism," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (February 23, 1994): A52; see also the forum "Four Views on the Place of the Personal in Scholarship," *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 111 (October 1996). The problem of when to use the subjective, self-reflexive voice in historical writing was raised at the "Narrating Histories Workshop" in April 1994 at the California Institute of Technology, where "the debate over the 'I' in the text was, without a doubt, the most heated of the workshop," Robert Rosenstone, *et al.*, "Experiments in Narrating Histories: A Workshop," *Perspectives* (September 1994): 7–10, see 8. Historians at the meeting were in general more willing to consider experimenting with fictional writing in historical narratives than with using the first-person voice anywhere beyond the introduction or acknowledgments. Philippe Carrard, *Poetics of the New History: French Historical Discourse from Braudel to Chartier* (Baltimore, Md., 1992), 86–104, includes a discussion of the use of the first person in Annales school historical writing. I have also discussed the relationship between autobiography and historical writing

should we not be talking about the production of history as a personal endeavor of interpretation that refers as much to lived experience as it does to the preserved past? Is it not possible to expand historical discourse to include a conception of every one of us, as historical writers, writing as historical actors? One striking example of self-conscious historical writing is Luisa Passerini's *Autobiography of a Generation: Italy, 1968*. Passerini's historical memoir takes a recognizable historical moment, "Italy, 1968," and frames it in terms of her own life story.³⁶ Alternating chapters present her "condensed journal" of her psychoanalysis, conducted during her research in 1985–1988, and her scholarly oral history of participants in the student movement of the 1960s. While Passerini is clearly implicated in the history she tells, what makes this work so insightful, even brave, is the way she relates her own state of mind to the object of her historical study: she explores how she is and is not a member of this self-generated generation, as well as how her earlier work on fascism was equally motivated by her desire to understand where she came from. Historians are always "from" not only their own pasts but also the pasts that they write, insofar as they work on that past in their own lives. Therefore, it is not necessary to strictly segregate the genres of autobiography and history.³⁷ I am not suggesting that the inclusion of intimate personal information is essential to the honest production of history. But neither is it inappropriate, for it serves as a marker of the author's acceptance of subjective responsibility as well as a caution against assuming the authority to speak for others; it may also serve as a mode of access for nonprofessional historians.

In refusing to speak for others, what would historical discourse lose—nationalism, cultural imperialism, revisionism? As Raphael Samuel pointed out, "if history were thought of as an activity rather than a profession, then the number of its practitioners would be legion."³⁸ This is not to suggest a return to "everyman his own historian" nor what Jacques Le Goff calls for when he writes, "it is incumbent upon professional specialists in memory—anthropologists, historians, journalists, sociologists—to make of the struggle for the democratization of social memory one of the primary imperatives of their scientific imaginary."³⁹ Le Goff still limits the distribution of responsibility only to "professional specialists"—when those figures are actually only teachers, when, in fact, teachers and students alike have the learning experience that constitutes participation in historical consciousness. It should not be an exaggeration to tell students (or any audience) that they become historians the moment they begin to think about history—that part of their learning experience constitutes participation in the transmission of historical memory, which

in "(Not) Writing History: Rethinking the Intersections of Personal History and Collective Memory with Hans von Aufsess," *History and Memory* 8 (Spring/Summer 1996): 5–29.

³⁶ Luisa Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation: Italy, 1968*, Lisa Erdberg, trans. (Hanover, N.H., 1996).

³⁷ A panel called "Autobiography, Personal Identity, and History" at the American Historical Association Annual Meeting, January 3, 1997, discussed only autobiographies written by historians. See the articles previously published by two of the participants: Bonnie G. Smith, "History and Genius: The Narcotic, Erotic, and Baroque Life of Germaine de Stael," and Jeremy D. Popkin, "'Ego-histoire and Beyond': Contemporary French Historian-Autobiographers," in *French Historical Studies* 19 (Fall 1996): 1059–83 and 1139–67.

³⁸ Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 17.

³⁹ Le Goff, *History and Memory*, 99.

they translate into personal experience as soon as they speak or write of it. Perhaps the *practice* of history, redefined as the active participation in remembering and forgetting within collective memory by each member, can become characteristic of historical consciousness, rather than simply reference to the *knowledge* of history.⁴⁰

The third great poem, as Mark Strand wrote, came into the world in a lavish and dark language untouched by pity, and made a gift to the future: the representation of death as loss, so that the future, "with no voice of its own, nor hope of ever becoming more than it will be, might mourn." This is the poem of the *lieux de mémoire*. The fourth great poem will be written by each individual who is thinking historically: and it may or may not be "saved."

⁴⁰ The role of the archive, particularly in the newly expanded electronic sense, thus becomes one not simply of preservation but of infinite selection. Wolfgang Ernst has developed the most intriguing reconceptualization of the archive, stemming from a Foucauldian analysis; see "Reisen ins Innere des Archivs," in Ulrich Johannes Schneider, *et al.*, eds., *Philosophie und Reisen* (Leipzig, 1996), 160–77. On the new technologies of memory, see also Healy, "Histories and Collecting," 46–48; Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Making Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (Berkeley, Calif., 1995), 34–35; Le Goff, *History and Memory*, 90–94.

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