



On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse

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On the Emergence of *Memory* in Historical Discourse

WELCOME TO THE MEMORY INDUSTRY. In the grand scheme of things, the memory industry ranges from the museum trade to the legal battles over repressed memory and on to the market for academic books and articles that invoke *memory* as key word. Our scholarly fascination with things memorable is quite new. As Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins have noted, “collective memory” emerged as an object of scholarly inquiry only in the early twentieth century, contemporaneous with the so-called crisis of historicism. Hugo von Hofmannsthal used the phrase “collective memory” in 1902, and in 1925 Maurice Halbwachs’s *The Social Frameworks of Memory* argued, against Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud, that memory is a specifically social phenomenon. But outside of experimental psychology and clinical psychoanalysis, few academics paid much attention to memory until the great swell of popular interest in autobiographical literature, family genealogy, and museums that marked the seventies.¹

The scholarly boom began in the 1980s with two literary events: Yosef Yerushalmi’s *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (1982) and Pierre Nora’s “Between Memory and History,” the introduction to an anthology, *Lieux de mémoire* (1984). Each of these texts identified memory as a primitive or sacred form opposed to modern historical consciousness. For Yerushalmi, the Jews were the archetypal people of memory who had adopted history only recently and then only in part, for “modern Jewish historiography can never replace an eroded group memory.” For Nora, memory was an archaic mode of being that had been devastated by rationalization: “We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left.” Despite or perhaps because of their elegiac tone and accounts of memory as antihistorical discourse, these works found an amazing popularity and were quickly joined by others. In 1989 the translation of Nora’s influential essay in a special issue of this journal and the founding of *History and Memory*, based in Tel Aviv and Los Angeles, showed the crystallization of a self-conscious memory discourse. A decade later the scholarly literature brims with such titles as “Sites of Memory” or “Cultural Memory” or “The Politics of Memory.”²

The emergence of memory as a key word marks a dramatic change in linguistic practice. We might be tempted to imagine the increasing use of *memory* as the natural result of an increased scholarly interest in the ways that popular and folk cultures

construct history and the past. Such a reading would be too hasty. For years, specialists have dealt with such well-known phenomena as oral history, autobiography, and commemorative rituals without ever pasting them together into something called *memory*. Where we once spoke of folk history or popular history or oral history or public history or even myth we now employ memory as a metahistorical category that subsumes all these various terms. Indeed, one of the salient features of our new memory talk is the tendency to make fairly sweeping philosophical claims for memory, or even to imagine memory discourse as part of what is vaguely hailed as the rise of theory in departments of literature, history, and anthropology.

Recent works on memory often tie the rise of the word to the waves of theory that had washed over American human sciences by the 1980s. In its most popular (if simplistic) understandings, theory talk—variously figured through high “structuralism,” “poststructuralism,” “postmodernism,” “deconstruction,” “*posthistoire*,” and a host of other often confused labels—was imagined as a devastating critique of the totalizing aspects of historical discourse. And yet by the end of the eighties, we were awash in new historicisms that took memory as a key word. These seemingly antithetical trends, the discourse of memory and the antihistoricist vocabularies of postmodernity, converged in the “new cultural history” as historians began borrowing from semiotics and scholars in traditionally formalist fields—literature, art, and anthropology—began venturing into historicism.³ I am not much interested in trying to define “new cultural history,” let alone “postmodernism.” Many of the scholars popularly associated with postmodernism do not even use the word. Nor am I interested, here, in trying to separate out the ways in which certain poststructural texts may radicalize rather than escape historicism. But I am very interested in the common sense that “memory” is the new critical conjunction of history and theory or, as Alon Confino and Allan Megill put it, that *memory* has become the leading term in our new cultural history.⁴

Memory is replacing old favorites—*nature*, *culture*, *language*—as the word most commonly paired with history, and that shift is remaking historical imagination. It is not as if *History* or *history* or *historicity* or *historical discourse* denoted unproblematic realms of experience that now face an alien memorial invasion.⁵ *History*, as with other key words, finds its meanings in large part through its counter-concepts and synonyms, and so the emergence of *memory* promises to rework *history*'s boundaries. Those borders should attract our interest, for much current historiography pits memory against history even though few authors openly claim to be engaged in building a world in which memory can serve as an alternative to history. Indeed, the declaration that history and memory are not really opposites has become one of the clichés of our new memory discourse. In preface after preface, an author declares that it would be simplistic to imagine memory and history as antitheses and then proceeds to use the words in antithetical ways in the body of the monograph. Such disclaimers have little effect on the ways in which the words work. Where history is concerned, memory increasingly functions as antonym rather

than synonym; contrary rather than complement and replacement rather than supplement.⁶

We need to reconsider the relationship between historical imagination and the new memorial consciousness, and we may begin by mapping the contours of the new structures of *memory*. The appearances of the word are so numerous, and its apparent meanings so legion, that it would take the work of a lifetime to begin disentangling them. Here I wish to do something different, namely, explore what these multifarious uses share. And I am interested in the word as a word, not in the various referents (from acts of recollection to funerary practices) at which it is aimed.

How does a term popularized as an antihistorical concept become an identifying feature of new historicisms? How does a word associated with the sacred become part of a critique of metaphysics? And what are the effects of our new linguistic practice?

I

A brief semantic history of *memory* shows a revolution in progress. A full reckoning is far beyond our range here, since the new memory discourse circles the globe, and a thorough account would require a gift for speaking in tongues. But a glance at English language histories of memory reveals some surprises. Our new memory is both very new and very old, for it marries hip new linguistic practices with some of the oldest senses of memory as a union of divine presence and material object.

Although current usage conventionally joins “history and memory” in a single phrase, that proximity creates distance. We may get a sense of that distance even in the vernacular employment of the words as synonyms, an old rhetorical practice that has grown infinitely more popular in the last fifteen years. Instead of simply saying “history” (perhaps for the thousandth time in the lecture or the monograph), we may substitute “public memory” or “collective memory” with no theoretical aim other than improving our prose through varying word choice. That sort of substitution commonly figures a tonal shift, however. We sometimes use *memory* as a synonym for *history* to soften our prose, to humanize it, and to make it more accessible. *Memory* simply sounds less distant, and perhaps for that reason, it often serves to help draw general readers into a sense of the relevance of history for their own lives.⁷

Memory appeals to us partly because it projects an immediacy we feel has been lost from history. At a time when other such categories—Man, History, Spirit—have lost much of their shine, memory is ideally suited for elevation. One of the reasons that memory promises auratic returns is that its traditional association with religious contexts and meanings is so much older and heavier than the comparatively recent effort of the early professional historians to define memorial practice

as a vestigial prehistory. When historians began professionalizing in the nineteenth century, they commonly identified memories as a dubious source for the verification of historical facts. Written documents seemed less amenable to distortion and thus preferable to memories. We can also imagine their suspicions of memory as part of a painful effort by academics to separate history as a secular practice from a background of cultural religiosity. But as Friedrich Nietzsche contended, that separation was never complete, and the return of memory discourse suggests that at least some of us have lost interest in maintaining the separation.

In academic and popular discourse alike, *memory* and its associated key words continue to invoke a range of theological concepts as well as vague connotations of spirituality and authenticity. Authors writing in secular academic contexts necessarily trade upon these associations but seldom make them explicit. Part of that trade stands upon the place of remembrance in Judeo-Christian tradition—“*Zakhor*,” (remember) in the Old Testament, and “Do this in remembrance of me,” in the New. And it is a commonplace that memorial practice anchors religious rituals in a wide variety of communities of belief. We could bracket memory’s theological connotations, though, and not nearly be done with essentialism. Explicit religiosity aside, from elite to popular culture, memory serves as a critical site for the generation and inflection of affective bonds—Remember the Alamo; Remember me when the candlelight is gleaming; You must remember this, a kiss is just a kiss; I Remember Mama. The “mystic chords of memory” are, as Abraham Lincoln appreciated, essentially mystic, their notes swelling to the touch of the “angels of our nature.”⁸ If history is objective in the coldest, hardest sense of the word, memory is subjective in the warmest, most inviting senses of that word. In contrast with history, memory fairly vibrates with the fullness of Being. We all know these associations, and yet we like to pretend that they have no effect upon our new uses of memory.

Much recent work in the human sciences contrasts the rigor of its use of memory with the squishy meanings of memory in everyday use. In *Watergate in American Memory* (1992), sociologist Michael Schudson observes that most people understand memory as “a property of individual minds.” To those not trained as social scientists, memory appears to be a psychic event associated with a specific person. But the public has gotten memory wrong, and the “social-scientific tribe” has gotten it right, says Schudson. Not only is memory “essentially social,” it is located in “rules, laws, standardized procedures, and records . . . books, holidays, statues, souvenirs.” Memory may also “characterize groups” by revealing a “debt to the past” and expressing “moral continuity.”⁹ Memory is not a property of individual minds, but a diverse and shifting collection of material artifacts and social practices.

We should pause briefly to examine Schudson’s definition, for it is a fair picture of academic practice. To begin with, we should note that the definition not only goes well beyond “general usage,” it also reaches far past the truism that social environment shapes how and what we remember, which is an idea that most folks

outside the social-scientific tribe would probably accept. Memory here becomes “structural,” provided we use that word with sufficient flexibility to invoke both the notion of “social structure” typical of recent social history and the notion of systems of difference common in the high structuralism descended from Saussurean linguistics. As Schudson notes, in current academic usage memory bridges a wide array of physical objects, on the one hand, and the psychic acts of individuals on the other. The definition makes memory a structural rather than individual phenomenon, and it makes a seemingly endless array of physical objects part of memory. A monograph on the history of tombstones may advertise itself as a history of memory; a statue of Lenin is not just a mnemonic device to help individuals remember, but memory itself. Such an expansion of *memory* is indeed foreign to general usage. And while Schudson’s account makes it seem a natural part of social science discourse, that broadly structural sense of memory was unthinkable until very recently.

A glance at reference works for the social sciences shows that the “tribal” roots of structural memory are quite shallow. Social science handbooks published in the first half of the twentieth century defined memory in the same squishy ways as did ordinary folk, as a “conscious recurrence” of some aspect of the past, but also listed the changing usage in experimental psychology beginning with Herman Ebbinghaus. Increasingly, these sources began to subordinate memory to other terms: *remembering*, *learning*, *forgetting*, and *retention*. The publication of Frederick Bartlett’s 1932 study *Remembering* marked a turning point. Memory grew increasingly marginal, and in 1964 *The Dictionary of the Social Sciences* claimed that the word verged on extinction: “It is one of those substantive terms which have come to be used less frequently in modern psychology. Today it is more usual to speak of remembering or retention, with the sub-types of recall or recognition.”¹⁰

Memory’s association with old-fashioned varieties of psychologism had placed it on the endangered species list. The 1968 edition of *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* declined to define memory at all, despite the luxury of stretching its contents out for seven volumes. Nor did cognates and related terms—remembering, retention—make even a token appearance. Instead, the source referred the curious to entries for “forgetting” and “learning.” By 1976 the story had grown grimmer yet, and Raymond Williams’s classic study, *Keywords*, found space for “history,” “myth,” and “ideology” but ignored memory altogether. Yet in 1993 Michael Schudson could speak of the structural usage of memory as if it were a natural feature of the landscape. Little more than two decades separate memory’s virtual disappearance and triumphal return.¹¹

The new structural memory is part of a dramatic semantic shift, and we may broaden our sense of its novelty by consulting the *OED*. That source tells us that Schudson’s account of general usage is on the money, for definition 1a reads: “The faculty by which things are remembered; the capacity for retaining, perpetuating, or reviving the thought of things past.” Material objects appear in 1b, but only as

supplements to memory: “mnemonics; a system of mnemonic devices.” One must scan far down the list to find anything resembling our current usage: numbers seven through ten include “a commemoration,” “a memorial writing,” “an object serving as a memorial; a memento,” and “a memorial tomb, shrine, chapel or the like; a monument.” These meanings begin to sound more contemporary. But the *OED* lists them as obsolete. The most recent example dates from 1730 and the rest date from earlier periods as in the 1624 example from Bedell, “It is a memorie and representation of the true Sacrifice . . . made on the Altar of the Crosse.”¹²

The convergence of archaic and contemporary meanings suggests a narrative in which memory found its early meaning in the union of material objects and divine presence, a meaning that was displaced by the rise of the modern self and the secularization and privatization of memory. That is, roughly, the story told in most recent accounts of memorial practice. But what do we make of the return of these archaic forms in the academic avant-garde? The most popular genealogies of our current memory discourse begin in the nineteenth century and piece together a lineage descending through Freud and Halbwachs and into our current texts. The new memory is commonly rendered as a growing awareness of the constructedness of subjectivity or even described as a deconstruction of the modern self. Recent books by Richard Terdiman, Ian Hacking, and Matt Matsuda take this general tack, but as semantic histories, these works are virtually Whiggish.¹³

A closer look at Matsuda’s wonderful book, *The Memory of the Modern* (1996), suggests how such works naturalize our current usage. Matsuda argues that memory discourse emerged from fin de siècle Europe as one of the characteristic concerns of modernism as a response to the acceleration of history. Of Matsuda’s nine chapters, only three focus on topics (neuroscience, mnemonics, and Henri Bergson’s theories of memory) that period discourse described in terms of “memory.” In the other chapters—on film, dance, politics—Matsuda projects our current structural uses of memory onto his subjects. Few of the period sources that appear in these chapters use the actual term or its cognates. And even the chapters treating period usage of memory show a creative flair. Bergson would never have said, as Matsuda does, that “archives remember,” nor can we imagine a fin de siècle neuroscientist saying that the endless repetition of “mnemonic traces” has displaced “history as a positive or liberatory narrative” or contending that “the fragmentary, disputatious, self-reflexive nature of such a past makes a series of ‘memories’—ever imperfect, imprecise, and charged with personal questions—the appropriate means for rendering the ‘history’ of the present.”¹⁴

Matsuda’s gloss employs a very recent language studded with key words of post-modernity, but we cannot blame that fact on some perfidious French influence, for similar anachronisms appear in more conventional histories of ideas. Patrick H. Hutton’s *History as an Art of Memory* (1993) narrates the evolution of memorial consciousness. Memory, says Hutton, consists of two moments, repetition and recollection. Repetition involves the “presence of the past,” while recollection involves pres-

ent representations of the past. The world has evolved (or devolved) from a place dominated by the presence of pure memory in premodern oral cultures to the ironic historical representations of postmodernity. Hutton traces memory from Giambattista Vico to Michel Foucault but, like Matsuda, regularly projects “memory” onto texts that seldom employ the term. Memory does not appear as a key word until Freud and Halbwachs and even then, Hutton admits, historians largely ignored the Halbwachsian notion of “collective memory.” Not until the 1960s could the great Philippe Ariès employ Halbwachsian theory as a framework for a historical monograph, *L’homme devant la mort*, which Hutton reads as the first of our new works on history and memory. But even Ariès’s study of death, mourning, and memorial practices did not employ the discourse of “history and memory” as we know it now and as Hutton himself uses it. *Memory* did not appear in the book’s index, and readers searching for *Halbwachs* will scan the book in vain.¹⁵

The most self-conscious attempt to connect the archaic sense of memory with our new structural equations appeared in Amos Funkenstein’s *Perceptions of Jewish History* (1993). For Funkenstein, German historicism linked old and new, and he quoted G. W. F. Hegel’s *Philosophy of History*: “History combines in our language the objective as well as the subjective side. . . . It means both *res gestae* (the things that happened) and *historia rerum gestarum* (the narration of things that happened).” In Funkenstein’s gloss, “Collective awareness presumes collective memory.” Funkenstein cautioned that we must use “collective memory” carefully, since “only individuals are capable of remembering,” but concluded that collective memory has important uses, reminding us that all remembering occurs within social contexts of environment and discourse. The implication is that Nora and Yerushalmi had been mistaken in opposing memory and history—the old sense of memory as material object and divine presence had been taken up in Hegel’s historicism, and so “historical consciousness” married history and memory.¹⁶

Perceptions of Jewish History provides us with perhaps the most lucid and succinct account of memory as a system of differences. Funkenstein employed analogy to show a continuous dualistic structure linking archaic usage of memory with Hegelian historicism and our current usage as represented by Ferdinand de Saussure’s famous distinction between *langue* and *parole*.

Collective memory. . . . like “language,” can be characterized as a system of signs, symbols, and practices: memorial dates, names of places, monuments and victory arches, museums and texts, customs and manners, stereotype images (incorporated, for instance, in manners of expression), and even language itself (in de Saussure’s terms). The individual’s memory—that is, the act of remembering—is the instantiation of these symbols, analogous to “speech”; no act of remembering is like any other.

Here we find one of the most rigorous formulations of the new structural memory, one altogether foreign to Hegel or even to Halbwachs. And the placement of this equation in *Perceptions of Jewish History* guarantees its narrative impact, for it appears just after Funkenstein’s gloss of Hegel and just before a claim that memory

in the “infancy” of Hebrew and many other languages showed the same dualistic structure: memory as a mental act and memory as a synonym for *name* or *letter* as in Yahweh’s injunction, “This is my name forever, and this is my memorial unto all generations” (Exod. 17:14). Again we have an essential continuity of premodern and postmodern uses of memory. Structuralism allows us to imagine the old sacred meanings in more accessible, modern terms, and the old, sacred meanings breathe life into our new structural consciousness.¹⁷

Funkenstein had drifted closer to Yerushalmi and Nora than he had intended. His rather free appropriation of Hegel contrasts sharply with his scrupulous attention to Old Testament Hebrew. Funkenstein’s reading appears to turn upon an elision of the differences between *Erinnerung* and *Gedächtnis*. Each word may be translated as “memory,” and it is true that *Erinnerung* is important for Hegel’s dialectic. But in that context, *Erinnerung* is more often translated as “interiorization.” If we trace Funkenstein’s quotation from *Philosophy of History*, we find it in the midst of that section of the lectures wherein Hegel distinguished the “people without history” from the historical development of Spirit, and it is worth noting that memory (as either *Gedächtnis* or *Erinnerung*) does not appear in the passage. Memory does appear just after the passage, but only in opposition to history and consciousness; here memory belongs specifically to those peoples, mostly in Africa, Asia, and the Americas, who have not yet attained the self-consciousness essential to historicity: “Family memorials and patriarchal traditions have an interest only within the family or tribe itself,” and although the images of distinct deeds may be retained “within Mnemosyne,” such “activities of memory” and the events they commemorate “remain buried in a voiceless past.” Hegel’s *Erinnerung* is supposed to be the middle term that will historicize archaic and postmodern memory; instead, divine presence and structural memory converge upon the people without history.¹⁸

We should pause for a moment of methodological reflection, for I do not wish to suggest that we convict Matsuda, Hutton, and Funkenstein of presentism and consign their books to oblivion. They have engaged in a valuable variety of intellectual history, one that revitalizes old texts by redescribing them in language that is relevant to us and telling edifying stories about important precursors to our current projects. We should not, however, confuse their projects with the sort of conceptual history we find in Philip Gleason’s account of the rise of “Identity” or Reinhart Koselleck’s works on “Modernity” and “History.”¹⁹ And the tendency to conjoin preindustrial and postindustrial uses of memory offers us a guide to the currency of memory, for our new memorial consciousness synthesizes memory’s traditional, essentialist connotations with explicit appeals to postmodern vocabularies.

II

Memory seems an unlikely site of engagement with the antihumanist discourses associated with postmodernity. Few terms are more tightly bound up

with subjectivity; few are better positioned to take the place of the “soul” in shoring up humanist tradition. In the words of Michael Roth, “In modernity memory is the key to personal and collective identity. . . . the core of the psychological self.” That sense of *memory* emerges clearly in the recurring associated terms that follow *memory* in introductions to historical monographs on history and memory. Roth’s passage is suggestive: *identity*, *core*, *self*, and *subjectivity* have become virtually unavoidable tropes; thus we hear that “memory is the core of identity” or that “memory defines the core self” or that it is our “*amour propre*” or even that memory work is a “science of the soul.”²⁰

The identification of memory with the psychological self has become so strong that despite the constant invocation of “public memory” or “cultural memory” it is difficult to find a sustained scholarly argument for the old-fashioned notion of “collective memory” as a set of recollections attributable to some overarching group mind that could recall past events in the (admittedly poorly understood) ways in which we believe that individuals recall past events. We speak quite often of collective memory but seem not to mean what Maurice Halbwachs meant by that term. As Amos Funkenstein notes, Halbwachs often engaged in a “hypostatization of memory” in which collective memory seemed but a modernist synonym for the bad old Romantic notions of the “spirit” or the “inner character” of a race or a nation.²¹

Some of the more careful scholars make prefatory disclaimers to ward off charges that they might be indulging in mystical transpositions of individual psychological phenomena onto imaginary collectivities. For instance, in his important work on Holocaust memorials, *The Texture of Memory* (1993), James Young explained his reluctance to “apply individual psychoneurotic jargon to the memory of national groups” by pointing out that “individuals cannot share another’s memory any more than they can share another’s cortex.” Who could disagree with this reasonable proposition? And yet most historical studies of memory highlight the social or cultural aspects of memory or memorial practice to the point of projecting “psychoneurotic jargon” onto the memory of various national or (more often) ethnoracial groups. Strangely, although the new memory studies frequently invoke the ways in which memory is socially constructed, Freudian vocabularies are far more common than Halbwachsian or even Lacanian ones.²²

The most common strategy for justifying the analogical leap from individual memories to Memory—social, cultural, collective, public, or whatever—is to identify memory as a collection of practices or material artifacts. This is the new structural memory, a memory that threatens to become Memory with a capital *M*, and although Funkenstein’s account is unusual in its sophistication, the general sense has grown so popular that Michael Schudson could describe it as the generic social science understanding of the term. The items adduced as memory are potentially endless, but certain tropes appear time and again. The most obvious are archives and public monuments from statues to museums, but another, more picturesque body of objects qualifies as well, and any cultural practice or artifact that Hegel

might have excluded from History seems to qualify as Memory. Ideally, the memory will be a dramatically imperfect piece of material culture, and such fragments are best if imbued with pathos. Such memorial tropes have emerged as one of the common features of our new cultural history where in monograph after monograph, readers confront the abject object: photographs are torn, mementos faded, toys broken.

When defined in these terms, memory begins to look like a Foucauldian field of discourse, thoroughly material, empirical, and suitable for historical study. Individual memory thus becomes Memory and the subject of any number of potential generalizations. Freed from the constraints of individual psychic states, memory becomes a subject in its own right, free to range back and forth across time, and even the most rigorous scholar is free to speak of the memory of events that happened hundreds of years distant or to speak of the memory of an ethnic, religious, or racial group. The prosaic emancipation is tremendous, for an author can move freely from memories as individual psychic events to memories as a shared group consciousness to memories as a collection of material artifacts and employ the same psychoanalytic vocabularies throughout. The new “materialization” of memory thus grounds the elevation of memory to the status of a historical agent, and we enter a new age in which archives remember and statues forget.

We need not stray far to find an example of the hypostatization of memory. Despite its tough-minded empirical disclaimers and suspicion of the old-fashioned tropes of national memory, Young’s *Texture of Memory* makes memory an active agent if not a hero: “memory never stands still”; and “—the motives of memory are never pure”; and “memory” even “remembers.” The apparent inconsistency is not a lamentable lapse in scholarly rigor—as a study of memorial practice, Young’s monograph deserves the praise it has received—but a defining feature of much of the new memory scholarship, as in Matt Matsuda’s construction: “archives remember.” Scholars who might smile at corny Victorian constructions (try to imagine a hip young cultural historian writing, “History’s motives are never pure”) unselfconsciously repeat those clichés with a new subject, and less careful authors use memory to decorate their monographs with great splashes of anthropomorphic purple.²³

While a few such examples would seem innocent enough, some recent work goes to the edge, and sometimes over, of explicit religiosity. At the moment, there are two popular discursive modes of memory as re-enchantment. The first involves weak appropriations of Freudian language to valorize sentimental autobiography. In the past few years, such terms as *mourning* and *working through* have demonstrated a dangerous tendency to attach themselves to New Age discourses, and for each monograph attempting a careful, rigorous engagement with psychoanalytic tradition we suffer a host of self-help histories. A recent issue of *Time* touted the therapeutic power of memoir in both popular and scholarly discourse and guided readers to such texts as *Writing as a Way of Healing*.²⁴

A second mode of memory as re-enchantment represents itself as an engagement with postmodernism and appeals to the ineffable—the excess, the unsayable, the blank darkness, the sublime, or some other Absolute whose mysteries can be grasped only by those initiates armed with the secret code. In its most avant-garde roles, memory conjoins the poststructuralist tropes of *apocalypse* and *fragment*, manifested in our apparently insatiable appetite for pasting Walter Benjamin's more mystical aphorisms (“*Jetztzeit*,” “weak Messianic”) directly into ostensibly secular accounts of memory work. As James Berger has noted in a review of trauma theory and its fascination with “discourse of the unrepresentable,” certain postmodern rhetorics of catastrophe have recently begun to blur into “a traumatic-sacred-sublime alterity.”²⁵

These two modes, the therapeutic and the avant-garde, often run together. Consider, for instance, Michael M. J. Fischer's influential essay, “Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory” (1984), in which memory links certain postcolonial strands of postmodernism and Freudianism. For Fischer, memory unites two disparate investments: on the one hand, Jean-François Lyotard's conception of postmodernism as the skeptical moment of modernism and, on the other, a commitment to ethnicity as the emergence of “one's essential being.” Ethnicity lies buried beneath the surface of memory, an “id-like” force “welling up out of the mysterious depths” or, alternately, in an allusion to the Lurianic Kabbalah, “re-collections of disseminated identities and of the divine sparks from the breaking of vessels.” For Fischer, memory's aptitude for expressing primordial and anticolonial ethnic identities makes it a paradigmatically “postmodern art” that can answer ethnographer Stephen Tyler's call for the academic production of “occult documents.”²⁶

As Fischer's prose suggests, memory's claims to radical alterity may edge into the stereotypic identification of the savage and the sacred. That tendency is sometimes explicit, as in Pierre Nora's belief that “so-called archaic or primitive societies” provide the “model” for memory's installation of “remembrance within the sacred.” More often, memory's subaltern status turns upon its affinity to the Hegelian notion of people without history. One strain of Nora's reception has been the conclusion that Nora was largely correct in his account of the differences between memory and history, but incorrect in his belief that true memory had disappeared. Memory still survives as an authentic mode of discourse among people of color, and so constitutes a line of defense against what Ashis Nandy describes as the “satanism” of historical consciousness. In Werner Sollors's more measured words, “What is called ‘memory’ (and Nora's *lieux de mémoire*) may become a form of counterhistory that challenges the false generalizations in exclusionary ‘History.’” The implication is that the emergence of memory as a category of academic discourse is a healthy result of decolonization.²⁷

In such constructions, memory's notorious vagaries become its strengths, and the acknowledgment of what some historians have taken as evidence of memory's

inferiority to “real” history emerges as therapeutic if not revolutionary potential. As Marita Sturken puts it, “It is precisely the instability of memory that allows for renewal and redemption.” Memory is partial, allusive, fragmentary, transient, and for precisely these reasons it is better suited to our chaotic times. Sturken’s prizewinning *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (1997) exemplifies much of the better scholarship on memorial practice, and it takes the memory-as-fragment trope to its logical end, namely that memory is the mode of discourse typical of “the postmodern condition.” The moments that produce it are those that, as with the Vietnam War and the AIDS crisis, “disrupt master narratives of American imperialism, technology, science, and masculinity.” Memory thus differentiates itself from “traditional” and “formal historical discourse” that has been “sanctioned or valorized by institutional frameworks or publishing enterprises.” Despite Sturken’s careful disclaimers, history and memory break apart into an unstable chain of antinomies: History is modernism, the state, science, imperialism, androcentrism, a tool of oppression; memory is postmodernism, the “symbolically excluded,” “the body,” “a healing device and a tool for redemption.” A series of inversions provide drama: slave defeats master, female topples male, and the local resists the universal. The language enlists “postmodernism” in the service of transcendence, emplotted as a narrative process of “trauma,” “catharsis,” and “redemption.”²⁸

Not all usage of memory cleaves neatly to Hegelian divides or invokes the occult, and an entire body of work on memory focuses upon such conventionally “historical” or “white” subjects as national holidays, war memorials, and other state-certified forms of public history. And yet the affiliation of authentic memory with “others,” and the contrasting attribution of nostalgia, amnesia, or even worse, History, to the white male subjects of the state, may make its presence felt here as well. Michael Schudson has confessed that he had received “vigorous warnings” about the conception of his *Watergate in American Memory*, including the one from “a friend who said that as a Jew I should not write about collective memory without writing about Jewish collective memory.”²⁹ Schudson’s experience points us deeper into these debates, for although heroic narratives of emancipation through memory are common in the new memory work, other scholars worry about aligning memory with the rhetoric of healing and redemption.

For some scholars interested in memory as a metahistorical category, “trauma” is the key to authentic forms of memory, and memories shaped by trauma are the most likely to subvert totalizing varieties of historicism. If we follow this line of argument, we will find a different explanation for the recent emergence of *memory* as a key word, one that imagines memory as the return of the repressed: academics speak incessantly of memory because our epoch has been uniquely structured by trauma. To understand how such an account might work, we need to turn to one of the most productive sites of memory work, the theoretical debates involving the Holocaust.

III

In the 1980s, the *Shoah* emerged as a test case for critiques of historical discourse. The old appeals to historical objectivity had become hopelessly suspect, but the best-known criticisms threatened to descend directly into the abyss. Hayden White's notorious claim that there were no good evidentiary or epistemic grounds for emplotting an event as tragedy rather than comedy seemed especially suspect when applied to the Nazi murder of European Jews. And the revelations of Paul de Man's anti-Semitic wartime writings developed into a crisis in the academic reception of deconstruction. Memory appeared to answer to these problems, either by consuming history whole or by weaving into it so as to provide an authentic linkage with the past while still preventing the totalizing narrative closure that many historians believed marred the work of their predecessors.³⁰

Rather than attempting a survey of a rich field, we may sample three of the most rigorous explorations of the ways in which memory may come to history's aid: Saul Friedländer's *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe* (1993); Michael Roth's *The Ironist's Cage: Memory, Trauma, and the Construction of History* (1995); and Dominick LaCapra's *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (1998).³¹ Despite some important differences, these texts share a critical vocabulary and several overarching themes. First, the sudden appearance of memory in academic and popular discourse is to be understood in metahistorical terms as a return of the repressed: Memory is the belated response to the great trauma of modernity, the *Shoah*. Second, "trauma" provides a criterion of authenticity for both the Real and its postmodern negation. Since memories not defined by trauma are likely to slide into nostalgia, the Holocaust, the ultimate traumatic decentering of history and subjectivity, holds a privileged philosophical place.

Freud has long been a familiar figure within culture criticism, but structural memory has opened a host of problems involving the application of psychoanalytic vocabularies to collectivities. Friedländer has acknowledged the difficulties and moved away from some of his earlier psychohistories of Nazi Germany. *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe* deploys psychoanalysis primarily on a historiographic level to those contemporary individuals (especially Holocaust survivors and historians) who, in the past few decades, have tried to engage the legacy of the *Shoah*. When Friedländer speaks of the reasons for academia's sudden fascination with memory, he seems to suggest that sometime in the sixties the repressed symptoms of trauma surfaced and that the rest of us have been drawn into memory discourse via transference, even though most of those engaged in memory discourse were not themselves victims. Friedländer's most careful discussions come in readings of texts composed by Jews and German Christians old enough to have lived through and remember the events. He is ambiguous on the question of how far we may generalize trauma and transference beyond these specific instances.³²

LaCapra is more ambitious. In his view, all historians are psychoanalysts of a

sort, and all stand in a transferential relation to the past. Freud was wrong to think that his method applied to individual psyches and needed some analogical ladder to reach the social level. Psychoanalysis deconstructs the bad old dichotomy of individual and collective, and so it is pointless to ask how clinical vocabularies developed for the analysis of individual psyches may apply to collectivities. Nor does LaCapra argue the point; he simply makes it his “premise.” If we follow his footnotes back into his 1989 work, *Soundings in Critical Theory*, we find him quoting Freud’s suggestion that transference “is a universal phenomenon of the human mind, it decides the success of all medical influence, and in fact dominates the whole of each person’s relations to his human environment.” In LaCapra’s view, “historiography is no exception to this bold generalization.” The generalization is more than bold, and in *History and Memory After Auschwitz*, transference emerges as a foundational principle: everyone has a transferential relation to everything—or more to the point, selves and society are abstractions from transference.³³

Transference allows LaCapra to offer two reasons for our recent “turn to memory.” First, “traumatic events” of recent history (that is, the Holocaust and the “increased awareness of the prevalence of child abuse”) have staged their belated return as memory discourse. Second, the “interest in *lieux de mémoire*” has also turned our attention toward memory. (Since LaCapra explains that memory sites are “generally sites of trauma,” this second cause appears to be a variation of the first.) In other words, the answer is the premise: trauma and transference. *History and Memory After Auschwitz* effectively naturalizes the sudden appearance of structural memory in academic discourse. The problem is not why or how did memory emerge as a key word in recent decades, but how best to define authentic and theoretically rigorous types of memory. Curiously, LaCapra views this sort of critique as a form of deconstruction; in *History and Memory After Auschwitz*, *memory* and its key words occupy the space held by *deconstruction* and *theory* in his earlier books. And the new vocabulary leads LaCapra to a provocative prescriptive suggestion, namely, that we should consider adding “ritual” to “aesthetic” and “scientific criteria” for the evaluation of historical scholarship.³⁴

Memory’s displacement of deconstruction circles around Friedländer and LaCapra’s reckoning of the *Shoah* as a “limit-event” that transgresses the bounds of historical discourse. That contention has an empirical aspect, namely, that the Final Solution is, in Friedländer’s words, “the most radical case of genocide in human history.” In support of this contention, he carefully invokes the staggering numbers of victims, the intensity of state investment, the industrialized sadism, and (though the fact remains unspoken) the location of the Holocaust in the modern West, the putative heart of History. It is a compelling empirical case, but there is an extra-empirical claim here as well, for Friedländer also imagines the Holocaust as “the” limit-event and thus somehow definitive of eventfulness.

Although the concept of “limit-event” is central to the sense of memory as a potential means of evading totalizing or “normalizing” forms of historical dis-

course, neither Friedländer nor LaCapra addresses it at length. LaCapra describes the *Shoah* as “a” limit-event, intimating that there may be others, but he does not name any nor does he explicate the concept other than to gloss Friedländer. And at precisely these points, Friedländer retreats to quotation: Jean Baudrillard on hallucination, Benjamin on the “weak Messianic,” or Lyotard on incommensurability.³⁵ In the last essay of his book, “Trauma and Transference,” Friedländer concludes that, since the Holocaust is paradigmatically postmodern in its inaccessibility to historical representation, “working through” will mean to “keep watch over absent meaning.” The quote comes from Maurice Blanchot’s *The Writing of the Disaster* (1980), and in that text the injunction is frankly mystical: “*The unknown name, alien to naming: The holocaust, the absolute event of history.*” *Limit-event*, then, is not a term that aims strictly at empirical or even conceptual investments. Friedländer does not mean to repeat the sort of sacralization of the Holocaust common in popular discourse, but the biblical proscriptions upon images of God, and the unknowability of Yahweh’s true name, threaten to return in postmodern form with the *Shoah* at the center of a murky negative theology.³⁶

Although Michael Roth’s *Ironist’s Cage* does not make a case for the Holocaust as a paradigmatic postmodern event, it too claims that memory can rescue history from the ironists while still deconstructing the master narratives that underwrote Fascism and Stalinism. Roth’s Freud plays “memory” to Hegel’s “History.” Where Hegel imagined history as a theodicy, where one achieved freedom by interiorizing and transcending trauma, Freud deployed memory to emancipate oneself by “acknowledging the scars of one’s history.” Memory thus aligns itself with the postmodernists against Hegel, but instead of denying history, it transforms it into the “quintessential talking cure.”³⁷

As the language suggests, the old key words of psychoanalysis have given way to a new preferred lexicon: *trauma*, *transference*, *melancholia*, *mourning*, and *working-through* recur time and again. We do not hear much about Oedipus or the primal scene (although the female genitalia do reveal themselves through occasional allusions to the uncanny) or Freud’s “second system.” The preferred terms come from those sections of the tradition most closely identified with Freud’s vision of psychoanalysis as an empirical science and a medical treatment of ill individuals. But Freud’s therapeutic discourse was also his most redemptive, and stressing the therapeutic Freud loads some of the weakest seams in psychoanalysis, for “talking cure” moves away from Freudian tradition as cultural hermeneutics toward psychiatry as a medical science, and clinical efficacy is not a place where psychoanalysis has covered itself with glory. And these new preferred clinical terms appear in close proximity to words with strong theological resonance: *witnessing*, *testimony*, *piety*, *ritual*, and so on.³⁸

The discursive shift deserves more attention than we can give it here, but we may observe that the new memory work displaces the old hermeneutics of suspicion with a therapeutic discourse whose quasi-religious gestures link it with memory’s

deep semantic past. Where LaCapra and Friedländer invoke the ineffable, *The Ironist's Cage* resurrects the archaic notion of memory as the union of divine presence and material object. In the book's final essay, "Shoah as Shiva," Roth suggests that viewing Claude Lanzmann's film is a "ritual" and an "act of piety." "Piety" is not a rhetorical flourish. Roth imagines *piety* as a new key word of philosophy of history that will answer to the vexed questions of historical representation: "Piety is the turning of oneself so as to be in relation to the past, to experience oneself as coming after. . . . This is the attempt at fidelity to (not correspondence with) the past." In his introduction, Roth says that in an age of irony, piety will be a "weak dimension," but things work out differently in the course of the book, for "piety" is almost literally Roth's last word. (His final word is "Jewishness.")³⁹

Piety entails more than a secular reverence for the sufferings of victims and survivors, for it implies a corollary devotion to the discourse of memory, and that fact has implications for my argument. We may begin to sense those implications by noting that LaCapra, Friedländer, and Roth are joined as much by common exclusions as shared interests. For instance, each mentions only to dismiss the legal debacles that brought "repressed memories" of Satanic child abuse into American courtrooms and publicized the unflattering views of Freudianism common to experimental psychologists. Michael Roth claims that the resulting "backlash against memory" sounds like the "denial of bad news rather than thoughtful criticism," and suggests that "'false memory syndrome'" and "'political correctness'" "may only be nasty full-time employment programs for journalists." The suggestion belies the role of Christian fundamentalists in promoting criminal trials based on "recovered" memories, but his complaint is less an argument than a manifesto.⁴⁰

Where Roth dismisses potential critics, LaCapra describes inquiry into the rise of memory discourse as pathological. In his first chapter, hard on the heels of a chronicle of "historians" who deny that the Holocaust ever happened, he argues that an "important tendency" in recent historiography is "to dwell, at times obsessively, . . . on the danger of an obsession with, or fixation on, memory." Although LaCapra cites only Eric Rousso, an informal talk by Charles Maier, and an unpublished lecture by Peter Novick, he describes the tendency as a "meta-obsession" and concludes that "these critiques run the risk of both pathologizing a necessary concern with memory and normalizing limit-events that must continue to raise questions for collective memory and identity." It is a remarkable moment: the recent explosion of journals, museums, films, art pieces, and monographs on memory suggest at most a "preoccupation," but two French books, one essay, and an unpublished paper evince a pathological obsession and threaten to "normalize" the Nazi murder of the Jews. The defensiveness suggests the stakes, but it also suggests that the intense distillation of memorial vocabularies risks hermeticism. There are good reasons for not submitting survivors' memories of the *Shoah* to the sorts of suspicion we devote to the speeches of Ronald Reagan, but the demonization of potential

critics effectively underwrites speculative claims by implying that any critique—such as this one—is politically tainted.⁴¹

The idea that the emergence of Memory as a metahistorical concept in the eighties and nineties represents the return of the repressed is ultimately a speculative premise rather than a historical or critical argument. It is one thing to say that we should use the concepts of trauma and mourning when listening to survivors of Auschwitz. It is still another to apply clinical psychoanalysis to those contemporary European Jews who, like Saul Friedländer, were forced into hiding or exile, or lost friends and family, or even survived the horrors of the death camps. But it is a dubious method of accounting for the rise of memory talk among American Jews, especially for the baby boomers prominent in recent discussions. And it is hopeless as an empirical explanation for the valorization of Memory in the discourse of white Protestants and various other ethnic groups, a phenomenon in which Holocaust commemoration is inextricably embedded.

IV

We have, then, several alternative narratives of the origins of our new memory discourse. The first, following Pierre Nora, holds that we are obsessed with memory because we have destroyed it with historical consciousness. A second holds that memory is a new category of experience that grew out of the modernist crisis of the self in the nineteenth century and then gradually evolved into our current usage. A third sketches a tale in which Hegelian historicism took up premodern forms of memory that we have since modified through structural vocabularies. A fourth implies that memory is a mode of discourse natural to people without history, and so its emergence is a salutary feature of decolonization. And a fifth claims that memory talk is a belated response to the wounds of modernity. None of these stories seems fully credible.

A different way of reckoning with the rise of memory discourse is to place it within the cultural context of the postsixties United States and attribute it to identity politics. Charles Maier has warned of the “surfeit of memory” and the politics of victimization. In his view, memory appeals to us because it lends itself to the articulation of ethnoracial nationalisms that turn away from the cosmopolitan discourses of history. Allan Megill has gone further and offered a falsifiable proposition: if identity grows problematic, then will memory become more important. But as semantic history, that proposition is not very helpful. Identity is part of memory discourse; as Philip Gleason recounted back in 1980, *identity* was virtually unknown in the social sciences and humanities prior to the 1950s. Erik Erikson’s work in the sixties publicized the term, and it took off in the seventies, little more than a decade ahead of *memory*. The two words are typically yoked together; to mention the one

is to mention the other. Richard Handler, at a recent conference on history and memory, warned that the enthusiasm for *identity*—the key word of bourgeois subjectivity—undercut the claims of memory work to deconstruct the Western self. Since Handler's cautions seem to have gone unheeded, I doubt that retelling the story here will do much good, but I reference it as evidence of the circularity that marks so much of what we flatter ourselves is postmodern reflexiveness.⁴² I will go so far as to agree with this aspect of Maier's concern: we should be worried about the tendency to employ memory as the mode of discourse natural to the people without history.

If we limit ourselves to academia, another way of thinking of the rise of memory talk in the eighties is as a response to the challenges posed by poststructuralism. Viewed from a certain deconstructionist perspective, Memory looks like a reaction-formation. Faced with the threat of linguistic anarchism, the conservatism of the academy has asserted itself by assimilating a few empty slogans and offering up a "new" cultural history effectively purged of real intellectual radicalism. Here one might cite the litany of dangers of Memory: The reification of bourgeois subjectivity in the name of postmodernism; the revival of primordialism in the name of postcolonialism; the psychoanalytic slide from the hermeneutics of suspicion to therapeutic discourse; the privatization of history as global experiences splinter into isolate chunks of ethnoracial substance; the celebration of a new ritualism under the cover of historical skepticism.⁴³ I have some sympathy for such an account; certainly, one of the reasons for memory's sudden rise is that it promises to let us have our essentialism and deconstruct it, too. Even when advertised as a system of difference, memory gives us a signified whose signifiers appear to be so weighty, so tragic—so monumental—that they will never float free. But can we credibly imagine a "pure" postmodernism untainted by mystical tendencies? Can we even imagine a coherent narrative of postmodernism as a cultural movement? If the skeptical moments of Jacques Derrida belong to postmodernism, so do the mystical enthusiasms of Blanchot.

A fuller account of memory talk will need a detailed reckoning of the interweaving of popular and technical vocabularies, since our scholarly usage is so tightly bound up with the everyday. Memory serves so many different scholarly interests, and is applied to so many phenomena, that an inclusive history of its origins would indeed approach the universal. But having begun with the wider interpretive horizons of popular culture, we should conclude with them as well, for it is our position within broader publics that makes this genealogy of interest. Here, I am less interested in origins and more in effects. Were academic discourse as hermetically sealed as we like to believe, the benefits of memory talk might outweigh the risks. If it were a simple matter of a handful of progressive and predominantly secular academics reclaiming "piety" as an epistemic concept, we might, if only through appeals to strategic essentialism, make a case for sacralizing portions of the past out of respect to the worldviews and experiences of colonized peoples, or

victims of child abuse, or the survivors of the Holocaust. But that is hardly the case, and the insistent association of memory with semireligious language not only undercuts the claims of memory to critique metaphysics, it also opens troubling vistas.

Aura, Jetztzeit, Messianic, trauma, mourning, sublime, apocalypse, fragment, identity, redemption, healing, catharsis, cure, witnessing, testimony, ritual, piety, soul: This is not the vocabulary of a secular, critical practice. That such a vocabulary should emerge from the most theoretically engaged texts, and that it should advertise itself as a critique of metaphysics, is all the more remarkable. Were we to attend closely to the more numerous studies in which scholars simply appropriate such words without any careful discussion, the tendencies would appear far more pronounced. And we should remember that our scholarly language circulates within popular discourses saturated with religiosity. Many academics may live in enclaves of irony, but most Americans believe in angels. As I write this essay, the State of Kansas has just announced that it will eliminate all references to evolution in its standards for science education. Whatever its intentions, Memory will not deconstruct neoconservatism.

The clustering of quasi-religious terms around *memory* suggests some conclusions about the effects of our new key word. I do not believe that our recycling of archaic usage is a simple matter of some primordial essence shimmering through a postmodern surface. Our use of memory as a supplement, or more frequently as a replacement, for history reflects both an increasing discontent with historical discourse and a desire to draw upon some of the oldest patterns of linguistic practice. Without that horizon of religious and Hegelian meanings, memory could not possibly do the work we wish it to do, namely, to re-enchant our relation with the world and pour presence back into the past. It is no accident that our sudden fascination with memory goes hand in hand with postmodern reckonings of history as the marching black boot and of historical consciousness as an oppressive fiction. Memory can come to the fore in an age of historiographic crisis precisely because it figures as a therapeutic alternative to historical discourse.

Notes

I would like to thank Claudio Fogu for his criticisms and Kim Vu-Dinh for her assistance.

1. Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, "Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices," *Annual Review of Sociology* 22 (1998): 105–40; Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925; reprint, Paris, 1952). See also his *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en terre saint: Etude de mémoire collective* (Paris, 1941); and *La mémoire collective* (Paris, 1950).
2. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (1982; reprint, Seat-

- tle, 1996), 94; Pierre Nora, "Entre mémoire et histoire," in *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris, 1984), 23–43. The translation of the essay appeared as "Between Memory and History: *Les lieux de mémoire*" in *Representations* 26 (special issue: "Memory and Counter-Memory," Spring 1989): 7–25. Compare Pierre Nora's earlier essay, "La mémoire collective," in *La nouvelle histoire*, ed. Jacques Le Goff (Paris, 1978), 398–401.
3. On theory and the "historicist" turn in the 1980s, compare the accounts in Michael Roth, *The Ironist's Cage: Memory, Trauma, and the Construction of History* (New York, 1995), 2; Michael J. Hogan, "Hiroshima in History and Memory: An Introduction," in *Hiroshima in History and Memory*, ed. Michael J. Hogan (Cambridge, 1996), 4; and Andreas Huyssens, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York, 1995), 5. The most thorough semantic history of *postmodernism* is Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London, 1998).
 4. Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method," *American Historical Review* 5 (December 1997): 1386; Allan Megill, "History, Memory, and Identity," *History and the Human Sciences* 11 (August 1998): 37–38. Memory did not become a defining feature of the "new cultural history" (which has replaced its earlier incarnation as new historicism a.k.a. cultural poetics) until very recently. It is not a key word in any of the essays gathered in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1989).
 5. We should not infer, as Martin Broszat does, that peoples obsessed with "mythic remembrance" are introducing bias into an "objective" or "rational" historiography; see Martin Broszat, "A Plea for the Historicization of National Socialism" (1985) translated in *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust, and the Historian's Controversy*, ed. Peter Baldwin (Boston, 1990), 77–87; Martin Broszat and Saul Friedländer, "A Controversy About the Historicization of National Socialism," in *ibid.*, 102–34; Saul Friedländer, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe* (Bloomington, 1993), 85–101; and Jörn Rüsen, "The Logic of Historicization: Metahistorical Reflections on the Debate between Friedländer and Broszat," *History and Memory* 9 (Fall 1997): 113–45.
 6. Consider the fate of Michel Foucault's usage: Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn's introduction to *Representations* 26 (special issue: "Memory and Counter-Memory") invoked Foucault's "counter-memory": "For Michel Foucault counter-memory designated the residual or resistant strains that withstand official versions of historical continuity" (2). But few writers today use "counter-memory"; it would be redundant; see Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, N.Y., 1977), 139–64. Predictably enough, however, "postmemory" is already appearing; see Marita Sturken, "Imaging Postmemory/Renegotiating History," *Afterimage* 26 (May–June 1999): 10–12.
 7. See, for instance, Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York, 1994), 258–59. I used the word in such ways in my first book, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination: Narrating the European Conquest of Native America, 1890–1990* (Berkeley, 1997), 293.
 8. Abraham Lincoln quoted in Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York, 1991).
 9. Michael Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory: How We Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past* (New York, 1992), 51. Compare Michael Schudson, "Dynamics of Distortion in Collective Memory," in *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past*, ed. Michael Schudson (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), 353–73.
 10. The quote is from D. R. Price-Williams, "Memory," in *A Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, ed. Julius Gould and William L. Kolb, (New York, 1964), 422, 423. See James Mark

- Baldwin, ed., *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* (New York, 1902), 2:65–67; Paul Monroe, *A Cyclopaedia of Education* (New York, 1911–13), 4:191–93; Foster Watson, ed., *The Encyclopaedia and Dictionary of Education* (London, 1921–22), 3:1070–71; Frederick C. Bartlett, *Remembering* (Cambridge, 1932); Paul Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York, 1967), 5:265–74; Bennett B. Murdock Jr., “Memory,” in *The Encyclopedia of Education*, ed. Lee C. Deighton (New York, 1971), 6:298–303. Edwin R. Seligman, ed., *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York, 1933), did not index the word. More recently, Martin A. Conway, “Memory,” in *The Social Science Encyclopedia*, ed. Adam Kuper and Jessica Kuper, 2d ed. (New York, 1996), 527–28, rehearses the usage associated with experimental psychology.
11. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford, 1976).
 12. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed. (Oxford, 1989), 9:596–98. In Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English Language* (London, 1786), memory as material object is listed fourth, and the example comes from *King Lear*: “Be better suited; / These weeds are memories of those worser hours.”
 13. Richard Terdman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca, 1993); Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton, 1995); Matt K. Matsuda, *The Memory of the Modern* (Oxford, 1996). Some of the best studies treat earlier periods; see Francis P. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago, 1966); Janet Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memories: Studies in the Reconstruction of the Past* (Cambridge, 1992); and Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1991).
 14. Matsuda, *Memory of the Modern*, 15, 17.
 15. Patrick H. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover, N. H., 1993). See also Patrick H. Hutton, “Mnemonic Schemes in the New History of Memory,” *History and Theory* 36 (October 1997): 378–91. On the philosophical history of memory, compare Jeffrey Andrew Barash, “The Sources of Memory,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58 (October 1997): 707–17. For a fuller Annales account, see Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, trans. Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman (1977; Eng. lang. ed., New York, 1992).
 16. Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley, 1993), 3, 6. See Saul Friedländer’s gloss of these passages in his *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, viii.
 17. Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*, 6.
 18. Georg W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction, Reason in History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge, 1975), 12, 135–37. The passage is one of the few that we have in Hegel’s own hand from his 1830 lectures. Compare the account of *Erinnerung* in the thought of Herbert Marcuse in Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley, 1984), 220–40.
 19. Philip Gleason, “Identifying Identity: A Semantic History,” *Journal of American History* 69 (March 1983): 910–31; Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (1979; Eng. lang. ed., Cambridge, Mass., 1985).
 20. Roth, *Ironist’s Cage*, 8–9; Starn and Davis, introduction to *Representations* 26, 2; Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History*, 258; Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul*, passim. Compare Randolph Starn, “Memory and Authenticity,” *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature* 23 (Winter 1999): 191–200.
 21. Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*, 7–9. Among the many recent discussions of Halbwachs, compare Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam, “Collective Memory—What Is It?” *History and Memory* (Fall 1996): 30–50; Susan Crane, “Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory,” *American Historical Review* 102 (December 1997): 1372–85; Con-

- fino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History"; Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, "Setting the Framework," in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (Cambridge, 1999), 6–38; and Iwona Irwin-Zarecki, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1994).
22. James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, 1993), xi. Little work on memory in cultural history engages experimental psychology or brain science. For exceptions, see Schudson, *Memory Distortion*, and the brief surveys in David Thelen, "Memory and American History," *Journal of American History* 75 (March 1989): 117–29, and Winter and Sivan, "Setting the Framework."
 23. Young, *Texture of Memory*, x, 1. Thus Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston, 1999), 3, 4, finds "social unconscious" too squishy for a cultural history of Holocaust commemoration in America, but imagines "collective memory" as a rigorous alternative.
 24. Emily Mitchell, "Thanks for the Memoirs," *Time*, 12 April 1999, 1–5. Mitchell referred readers to Louise DeSalvo, *Writing as a Way of Healing* (New York, 1999). I do not wish to venture any further into this territory; I find it depressing and readers might object that I am stacking the deck in favor of my argument by citing this sort of literature. We should note, though, that out of this corner of the discourse comes the quaint academic notion that introducing first-person and confessional mode into one's monographs is an important means of deconstructing bourgeois subjectivity. For discussions of the return of first-person, see H. Aram Veesser, ed., *Confessions of the Critics* (New York, 1996).
 25. James Berger, "Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma," *Contemporary Literature* 38 (Fall 1997): 569–83. In his *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse* (Minneapolis, 1999), 106–30, James Berger claims that the apocalyptic moments in Jacques Derrida's earlier writings represent the return of repressed memories of the Holocaust. More recently, Derrida took up memory and mourning as key words for his "spookology," *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (1993; Eng. lang. ed., New York, 1994).
 26. Michael M. J. Fischer, "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George Marcus (Berkeley, 1986), 196–98; Stephen A. Tyler, "Post-Modern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult to Occult Document," in *ibid.*, 122–40. Compare the usage in George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis, 1990).
 27. Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les lieux de mémoire*," 9; Ashis Nandy, "History's Forgotten Doubles," *History and Theory: World Historians and Their Critics* 34 (1995): 44; Werner Sollors quoted in Genevieve Fabre and Robert O'Meally, introduction to *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, ed. Genevieve Fabre and Robert O'Meally (Oxford, 1994), 7–8. See also most of the essays in this anthology, especially Vévé Clark, "Performing the Memory of Difference in Afro-Caribbean Dance: Katherine Dunham's Choreography, 1938–97," 188–204. The reception in the United States of Nora's sites of memory as a potential postcolonial discourse is more than a bit ironic since, as David A. Bell notes in "Realms of Memory," *New Republic*, 1 September 1997, 32–36, in its French context, Nora's essay is more nearly a conservative complaint about the fragmentation of French identity.
 28. Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley, 1997), 3–5, 15–17. Compare Lipsitz, *Time Passages*, and Norman M. Klein, *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory* (London, 1997). The language here owes much to Lyotard's contrast of "local" and "master"

- narrative. See my "In Search of Narrative Mastery: Postmodernism and the People Without History," *History and Theory* 34, no. 4 (1995): 275–98.
29. Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory*, 5.
 30. We should also mention the German *Historikerstreit*, which was well-publicized in the States, although it turned more upon confrontations with German conservatives than with epistemic "radicals." The *Historikerstreit* did frame the 1990 conference at UCLA featuring Hayden White and Jacques Derrida, and its proceedings are partially reprinted in Saul Friedländer, ed., *Probing the Limits of Historical Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992). Although Americans have been prominent in these debates, much of the language depends upon a specifically German resonance, as in the frequent invocation of a "rational historiography." As Michael Burleigh notes, in the German academy, the invocation of social-scientific objectivity has frequently served as a tacit critique of work that is "too emotive" or "too Jewish." See Michael Burleigh, "From the Great War to Auschwitz," *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 May 1996, 7.
 31. Friedländer, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*; Roth, *Ironist's Cage*; Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1998). LaCapra's book extended his work in *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994).
 32. See the discussion in Steven E. Ascheim, "On Saul Friedländer," *History and Memory* 9: *Passing into History: Nazism and the Holocaust Beyond Memory, In Honor of Saul Friedländer on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Fall 1997): 11–46. Compare the psychoanalytic language in Friedländer's earlier books: *History and Psychoanalysis: An Inquiry into the Possibilities and Limits of Psychohistory* (New York, 1978), and *L'antisémitisme nazi; histoire d'une psychose collective* (Paris, 1971).
 33. Dominick LaCapra, *Soundings in Critical Theory* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1989), 36. In *History and Memory After Auschwitz*, LaCapra cites chap. 2 of his *Representing the Holocaust*, where page 46, note 5 refers us to his essay in *Soundings*. There is no imaginable empirical test of the claim that the world is transference, since any test will be a transference product and so likely to suffer from denial. LaCapra even suggests that we might define both *historicism* and *positivism* as "denial of transference."
 34. LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz*, 8–10.
 35. Friedländer, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, x, 53, 58, 61, 102, 131, 134. LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz*, 6–7, 26–27, glosses Friedländer's argument as a claim that the *Shoah* is "incommensurable" with other events, but LaCapra is fuzzy on what that means. As a strong claim, it would be incoherent: One could not claim that the Holocaust was the most radical genocide in history and simultaneously claim that it was incommensurable with other events. To describe the Nazi murder of European Jews as a limit-event implies some common measure since it must exceed ("transgress" "go farther than") the others. LaCapra backs away from this position on pages 192–95. Part of what is at issue is that Friedländer is trying to appropriate postmodern poetics to finesse the frustrated question of the "exceptionality" versus the "normality" of the Holocaust. That issue is neatly parsed in Wulf Kansteiner, "From Exception to Exemplum: The New Approach to Nazism and the 'Final Solution,'" *History and Theory* 33 (May 1994): 145–70.
 36. Friedländer, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, 134; Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln, Nebr., 1995), 42, 47.
 37. Roth, *Ironist's Cage*, 65. See Stephen Bann, "Mourning, Identity, and the Uses of History," *History and Theory* 37, no. 1 (1998): 94–101.

38. Theodor W. Adorno, "The Meaning of Working Through the Past" (1959), in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York, 1998), 89–103, is sometimes cited as an early example of the new vocabulary, but Adorno's language seems less clinical than much of our current usage. Again, translation is a problem, since *aufarbeiten*, *durcharbeiten*, *verarbeiten*, and a host of related German terms tend to collapse into "working through" in English language discussions. Compare the very different semantics in Russell Jacoby, *Social Amnesia: A Critique of Contemporary Psychology from Adler to Laing* (Boston, 1975), a book written before the rise of memory talk in cultural history. For a sampling of the expanding literature that takes trauma and memory as key words, see Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, 1996); Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, 1995); Paul S. Applebaum, Lisa A. Uychara, and Mark R. Elin, *Trauma and Memory: Clinical and Legal Controversies* (New York, 1997).
39. Roth, *Ironist's Cage*, 16–17, 179, 211, 226.
40. *Ibid.*, 12.
41. LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz*, 12, 13 n. 4, 179. The demonization is the more surprising coming from LaCapra, since he has given us some of the best and most reflexive intellectual history of recent years and has been withering in his criticism of such tactics when practiced by social historians.
42. Charles Maier, "A Surfeit of Memory?" *History and Memory* 5, no. 2 (1993): 136–51; Gleason, "Identifying Identity"; Richard Handler, "Is 'Identity' a Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?" in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton, 1994), 27–40.
43. Sande Cohen, *Passive Nihilism: Cultural Historiography and the Rhetorics of Scholarship* (New York, 1998), points toward such a reading, except that Cohen seems to imagine memory as a continuation of Historicism writ large.