Remembering Auschwitz
after the end of history.

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Abstract

In the 1980s ‘memory’ emerged from the historiographical wilderness as a topic of renewed interest and serious inquiry. The literature of remembrance then exploded in the 1990s and continues to expand in the 2000s. Yet much of the writing of the ‘memory boom’ lacks sustained critical reflection, although there exists an abundance of self-contemplation. This thesis contextualises the phenomenon of memory studies theoretically and historically. The origins and ongoing utility of memory can be understood by exploring how memory has provided an alternative to ‘myth’ and ‘history’ in a discipline confronting the challenge of postmodernism. In the broader historical and political context, ‘memory’ denotes a different relation to the past, particularly the recent past and the Second World War. Memory expresses the collapse of the post-war ideological, historiographical and political systems in the last two decades of the twentieth century. As the meaning of the Second World War, embodied in those ideologies and systems, unravelled, the incoherence of the past and its uncertain relevance in present-day society made memory the most potent and allusive term in the historiographical market. Auschwitz, the most extreme manifestation of the war, has inevitably been the archetypal site of the politics of memory. The two terms, Holocaust and memory, have achieved a ubiquity matched only by the uncertainty of their repeated invocation. Yet while the emergence of memory clearly reflects the new configuration of world politics (and identity politics) since 1989, its uses and abuses must also be understood in the context of what traditionally has governed historical writing: the politics of the nation-state.
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Introduction: History *in memoriam*.

The end of history witnessed the rise of memory. If history could no longer be created, its remains could but be remembered. In the wake of the crumbling of communist states in Eastern Europe in 1989 and the self-proclaimed triumph, however shallow and self-assured, of liberal capitalism, memory flourished in both the public realm and historiography.\(^1\) History's vitality was not in doubt, at least for those who could look beyond the banalities of politics in Western societies. Yet if 1990 did not signify the end of the argument, the 1990s was indeed a decade of endings, in particular of the Second World War and its various legacies. Opening with the reunification of Germany, the decade closed with the German military engaged in Kosovo, active for the first time since the Second World War. The first event consigned to memory one of the most visible manifestations of the postwar settlement; the second demonstrated that future echoes of the past would have a different tone to those previously resonant in Europe. The Soviet Union which emerged from the 'great patriotic war' as (in its eyes the main) victor self-destructed. Russia and its other successor states have been temporarily relegated to a less imposing position in world affairs, the chaotic and catastrophic embodiment of post-Marxism. In the West, whatever settlement emerged from the 'people's war' has long been revised in favour of the 'logic' of economic rationalism and the present unmoored to a place with no past, or a choice of any pasts equally shallow.

The revolutions of 1989 and 1991 may mark a rupture, but the waning of the Second World War is of much greater duration than this final denouement. The attrition of its history must be traced at least as far back as 1968. Memory has, after all, been a
quintessential concern of postmodernism, which often functions as the intellectual's third way between an old-fashioned objectivity and a now embarrassing Marxism. While memory occupied the final decade of the twentieth century most successfully, the 1980s also furnishes a crucial context, especially in view of the prominence of French intellectuals in theorizing remembrance, and the answers those theorization provided to questions posed by the bicentennial celebration of a nation and a revolution in 1989. The French case demonstrates that questions about nation and identity, and their answers, are inseparable from the Second World War. However dead, however past that history might be, some memory of it retains a force in public discourse. If memory since Proust speaks to a sense of loss, its continuing emergence as a phenomenon is small wonder when the Second World War is increasingly vague and valueless, and when such categories as the nation, which have often provided the alternative to critical history, seem equally inconsequential in a consumer age.

The Holocaust, the most extreme expression of the war, is, in the 2000s, equally evocative of memory and equally shadowed by loss. Now the defining and most visible feature of the event, the last survivors are nevertheless disappearing and in the wake of multiple genocides the memory of the industrialized murder of European Jewry appears caught between the moral value that should stem from such an event and the apparent inability to draw anything enduringly meaningful from it. The very presence of the past testifies to both the urgency and the failure to invest memory with more meaning than cliché. The 'politics of memory' has indeed become a common theme in memory

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1 For the original and most self assured, see Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', National Interest, 16, Summer 1989, pp.3-18.
2 Of the theorists, Maurice Halbwachs, Roger Bastide and Pierre Nora, but also Henry Rousso.
studies⁴, and it is equally clear that there is a politics to the memory-writing. What role memory may have in salvaging some portion of the past is uncertain, on what terms it will do so is equally unclear. Least limpid of all is memory’s meaning. Invoked with increasing pomp (or pomposity) and repetition, the term retains an inviting vagueness, which demands the question why this word more than another. What, in fact, is memory? What is its use as a concept? What questions does it raise and what sort of answers does it provide? What is its relation to history? What accounts for its emergence, what function has it had in the present and what does it offer for the future? Of what value are those adjectives which agglomerate around memory, shaping a historiographical landscape: collective, popular, repressed, authentic, traumatic, official, obsessed? And what does the study of memory-study reveal to us about the state of history at the beginning of the twenty-first century? In the presence of memory, what is being forgotten?

⁴ In fact, it is a cliché. See Kerwin Lee Klein, ‘On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse’, 
I. The Terms of Memory: History, Memory, Myth and Meaning.

How has memory managed to carve out a position for itself within the vocabulary of historians? Vague and shapeless, if evocative, memory may derive more meaning from its associations than any substance it has as a concept. ‘Remembrance’ connects to a constellation of terms, from oral history to folk memory, film and commemoration. The generic quality is reminiscent of myth, a rival term which was once sufficient for, and might yet prove the more durable in, the encompassment of such diverse phenomena. Most of all, however, and most particularly for those who have made the study of the past their profession, ‘memory’ is contiguous to ‘history’, the two bound together as body and shadow, and the question as to which is in fact the more substantial the crux of the matter. For the first context of memory’s recent, rapid rise is a reevaluation of history. In the 1970s, memory was historiographically moribund, the much maligned, despised and derogate alter ego of professional history. Only with the advance of oral history, the first and probably still most logical application of the term, did memory’s fortunes improve and open the path to its swift popular and academic ascent.

Two currents of oral history flow through to memory’s revival. The first is its naïve, early claim to speak for the silenced. Although hardly unique to oral history and part of a much wider movement in social history which sought to rescue the oppressed and historically neglected (those the theoretically self-conscious would call the ‘subaltern classes’) from posterity’s condescension, the recovery of alternative ‘voices’, each with their own validity, has had particular resonance. The identification of silences, their recognition and rectification, has been transferred into other forms of

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5 See Klein, ‘On the Emergence of Memory’, p.128.
memory, particularly narratives which deal with group, and often national, memory of an event such as the Second World War. Unfortunately, a corresponding theoretical and conceptual rigour has not always accompanied the transposition of oral history’s idealistic project.

A refounded emphasis on subjectivity in response to abstracted and impersonalized ‘grand narratives’ is the second feature of oral history with implications for memory. While personal memories are undeniably subjective, the argument could run, they are no less authoritative for being so. The elevation of memory from a subject of study to an organizing concept reflects a postmodern (or modern, but in either case, anti-positivist and anti-empirical) ethos in which all pasts are utterly subjective, but all the more ‘authentic’. Such an argument is fraught with contradictions, limiting as it does the grounds for critique. The ability of memory to ground an ‘authentic’ past in opposition to a ‘historical’ past is amply demonstrated in film, which in its populism, its blurring of historical distinctions and its commodification of the past may represent the quintessence of memory. The best recent example is probably Roberto Benigni’s film La vita è bella which mobilizes fascism, the Holocaust, and the Italian past in a mawkishly sentimental melange appropriate to the end of history and the end of the Second World War. Thus the extent of distortion present in the film, with its erasure of fascism and the Soviet Union, is relativized on the basis that the film is not history but a memory. Such specious rationalizations rarely contain any real conceptualization of what memory is. Vindication by memory at the expense of history further requires an analytical leap from the specifics of oral history to an interpretative level which

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appropriates the aura of authenticity without including an effort to reconceive subjectivity present in the work of the best oral historians.10

The shift in scale and nature from an oral history grounded in personal memories to a suprahistorical category covering commemoration and all forms of historical consciousness is the equivocal characteristic of memory. Remembrance may be the apposite term for the recalled experience of participants in an event or time, but why should the term thrive and teem in other categories? Indeed, when its theorists speak of memory, oral history is sadly neglected, a silenced influence, and the genealogies of memory give it little shrift. Yet whatever form of memory is invented, a familiar combination is present in the themes of the individual and the authentic, subjectivity and silences. In respect to oral history, memory is at best an accumulation of associations, drained of most method, analysis and critique.

The theorization of memory has been inevitably and intricately tied to the theorization of history in an often bewildering array of positions which shed more light on historians' understanding of history, than doing anything to shape the generally insubstantial and shadowy meanings of memory. Memory has been used as a synonym for history, as its antonym, and, for those unable to choose between the two, as its complement. As a synonym or substitute, memory has nonetheless continued to intimate some undefinable 'closeness' to the past lacking in academic writing11, or alternatively a populism (addressing an alternative isolation, not from the past, but from the 'people') not unwelcome in a profession groping for status and income in the relative absence of ideologies at the end of the twentieth century. As history's antonym, memory has managed to help delineate some equally undefinable objectivity in historical discourse.

9 See, for example, Inga Clendinnen in one of her dubious forays into modern European history, Reading the Holocaust, Text Publishing Company, Melbourne, 1998.
10 The need to conceptualise subjectivity and consciousness without reducing either to reflections of material conditions is one of the main conclusions of Luisa Passerini. See Luisa Passerini, Fascism in Popular Memory.
Those who use memory as a mere complement seemingly drop the term into their texts as if to leave it out would simply not do justice to the totality of interpretations of the past.

As the synonym or complement of history, memory is little more than the mobilization of a sloppily construed theoretical system which privileges evocativeness over analytical utility. Only the polarization of history and memory as opposites makes a distinction grounded in their nature or in their functioning as processes. Thus the French mediaeval historian Jacques Le Goff writes of memory as the ‘raw material of history. Whether mental, oral, or written, it is the living source from which historians draw.’ Such a definition has the virtue of recognizing the role of the historian in shaping, ordering or cooking his or her raw material. However Le Goff’s preferred metaphor may be the grave-digger. The designation of memory as ‘raw material’ is not to draw attention to historians’ constructions, but rather to denigrate the ‘unconscious’ workings of memory, ‘dangerously subject to manipulation by time and by societies given to reflection’. The virtue of the historian is to anatomize and neutralize something so frighteningly live. Le Goff must surely be aware that history has its fair share of manipulations, conscious and unconsciousness, but his definition of memory as raw, undeveloped and unconscious does little more than to reaffirm a self-assured chimera of a ‘scientific’ history. Le Goff is aware of the conceptual contradictions of ‘objective history’, but remains dedicated to limiting the ‘deforming influence of the present’ upon the past. There is a circularity in these arguments that hints at memory’s role as the new spoke in the reinvented wheel of objectivity. The answer to the danger of the

11 See Klein, ‘On the Emergence of Memory’, p.129.
13 Ibid.
14 Le Goff, History and Memory, p.112. He is particularly concerned with ‘recent, naive trends’ which give preference to memory on the basis of being more ‘authentic’. See p.xi.
present, its ‘pernicious impact’ on the scientific rigour of the historical profession, is itself contained within objectivity.\textsuperscript{15}

Le Goff is not the only theorist to see memory as something to be mastered. The desire to do away with any unmasterable past, or, less explicitly, to reconstruct the image of history as an objective, professional and disinterested activity, underpins a number of the more bland and banal statements which populate the literature of remembrance. Transferred to a chronological schema, the result is a tale of scientific progress, the triumphant passage of the past from memory into history.\textsuperscript{16} This narrative in turn provides an explanatory framework for interpreting the public controversies which history can occasionally still engender. One example here is the debate surrounding the publication and theses of the most unoriginal and egregious book in Holocaust studies in 1990s, Daniel Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*. The ‘fervent and emotional responses’ wrote one author, anticipating the coming of ‘post-memory’, ‘reveals … the Holocaust still resides in a liminal zone between history and memory - that is, between the past as object of dispassionate study and the past as an affective part of personal and collective consciousness.’\textsuperscript{17} The image serves either those who lament the loss of memory, or those who attend the time when genocide is the domain of the dispassionate. It does nothing to reevaluate the relation, the significance or the relevance of history and memory, let alone point to the social, political and historical significance of the Holocaust in Western societies at the end of the twentieth century.

The partition of the past between history and memory has necessitated a delineation of the dividing line, its location and its meaning. The possibility of

\textsuperscript{15} Le Goff is right to note the importance of the public debate among historians as a form of quality control, yet such a group is not necessarily far from some conceptions of collective memory based in particular groups. See below.

\textsuperscript{16} Le Goff might not be one to participate in this, seeing memory is constantly alive.
breaching this wall was the starting point for the special issue on history and memory of the journal _Representations_ in 1989. The introduction by the early modern historians Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn suggested that ‘if there is a gap between memory and history there are also ways of negotiating it. One way is through the historical study of memory itself’. An already flourishing literature was thereby vindicated, and no doubt a number of postgraduate theses. The opposition of history and memory is traditional, but most recent writers have been concerned to overcome the binarism. Thus numerous studies endorse at the outset the insight that history and memory are not, in fact, opposites. Nonetheless, the polarity seems to retain some value, if only as a point of departure. When _Representations_ returned to the theme of memory in 2000, the Berkeley historian Kerwin Lee Klein commented that ‘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.’ A residual ambiguity of memory literature is the general theoretical consensus (to which there are nevertheless notable exceptions) that memory and history cannot be rigidly contraposed and yet the inability to move beyond such a generality. Indeed, once the assertion of non-opposition is removed, it is unclear what more the literature of memory has to say about its concepts.

The contradiction between the premise and the practice of memory-study probably reflects the attempted articulation of the utterly unremarkable theses that history is not entirely objective, nor collective memory entirely authentic, for neither is incompatible with the continued and comfortable assumption of an undefined but residual differentiation. A further irony is preserved in the attempt to bridge an

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19 There are notable exceptions, such as Pierre Nora, who will be dealt with below.
20 Klein, ‘On the Emergence of Memory’, p. 128.
opposition through a historical method based in that very antagonism. For all Davis and Starn's optimism, the historical study of memory may perpetuate the divisions it seeks to overcome. Certainly the grounding of the floating concepts of history and memory in their practice and context is necessary, nor must the repudiation of an opposition between the two terms imply their identity. Yet all too often the concepts remain abstractions and antipodes. The history/memory dyad has been conceived as the two extremes of a continuum and the Jewish historian Amos Funkenstein has even gone so far as to invent a middle term, 'historical consciousness', to serve between 'collective memory' and 'historiographical creation': three different expressions of the same 'collective mentality'.\textsuperscript{21} A continuum may be an improvement on opposition, yet again it is a formulation which serves more to ensure the distinctions between history and memory are maintained rather than to facilitate any analysis of either. 'Historical consciousness' is a concept of doubtful duration, unable to match the evocative power of memory, and not nearly as adaptable to book titles.

The real theoretical value of history and memory does not lie in the concepts themselves, but in a third term often absent from the discussion. If the best efforts of the theoretically sophisticated have failed to negotiate the gap between history and memory, the resurrection of remembrance has nevertheless bridged another: that of history and myth. The implicit revaluation of myth does more to illuminate the vigour of memory than a multitude of models. The reinvention of memory has been the achieved through the impoverishment of myth and few use myth extensively in the new literature. George Mosse's \textit{Fallen Soldiers} which equated the memory of the First World War with a 'myth of the war experience' is an early exception to prove the rule.\textsuperscript{22} Published in


1990, and preceded only by the celebrated works of Pierre Nora and Luisa Passerini, Mosse’s book is situated on the cusp of the memory’s expansion. Much like the interconnections with oral history, the importance of myth has been subsequently downplayed. Another exception is Nicholas Doumanis’ study *Myth and Memory in the Mediterranean*, which, however, should be placed in the tradition closer to Luisa Passerini’s oral history, examining the remembrance of experience (and the experience of remembrance), rather than the amorphous variants of ‘collective memory’ which often take the nation as the subject who ‘remembers’.23

Myth is made most use of by memory’s critics. Jacques Le Goff collapses the distinction between memory and myth, thereby liberating history from their malign influence. A memory defined as ‘essentially mythic’ focusses the discussion on the methodology and features that, for Le Goff, separates it from history. Other critics are more direct and dismissive, arguing that ““collective memory” is but a misleading new name for the old familiar “myth” … Indeed, collective memory is but a myth.”24 Alternatively, the intellectual historian Dominick LaCapra has contended that the critique ‘incriminates not all concern for memory … but a certain kind of memory that may indeed be politically diversionary and self-indulgent’25 or, in other words, myth rather than memory. For LaCapra, the self indulgent and diversionary materializations are distinguished from more innocent incarnations of memory by trauma. He may have a point. Yet trauma is another evocative word difficult to pin down, nor is it immune to manipulation. A further ambiguity resides in what trauma might mean historically.

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24 Noa Gedi, and Yigal Elam, ‘Collective Memory - What is it?’, *History and Memory*, 8(1), Spring/Summer, 1996, p.47. It is not surprising that Gedi and Elam see the memory phase as reflecting ‘the historian’s perennial vacillation between two roles - the scientific one, that of reconstructing history “as it really was,” and the artistic one, that of telling an attractive story.’ (p.46)They ignore that this opposition may be part of the problem.
Nevertheless what LaCapra's argument indicates is that any rehabilitation of memory is based on its detachment from myth. Memory is a term for those who wish to avoid the antipodal ends of history and myth. In this respect, as with the various models of history and memory, the opposition and the concepts remain unchallenged and intact. 'Memory' is rehabilitated, or rejected, through the evaluation of its relative position between the two primary terms, *not* through their reworking. In the light of myth, memory stands revealed as a term for the historiography of public representations of the past, unwilling to disparage them as false. The topic gains validity through the invocation of memory, but the value of the term remains a negative one - as an alternative to myth - and the usage does little or nothing to develop its depth as an analytical tool.

The negative definition of memory is difficult to overcome, not myth, but not history either, nor yet entirely history's other; not simply oral history, yet not unrelated (if not often explicitly expressed), memory is neither here nor there. The literature of remembrance assumes from the beginning the logical existence of history and memory, nebulous in content, yet unquestioned as concepts. Indeed, the characteristic of memory is precisely its protean capacity to encompass *everything* from film to postcards. The only common denominator of the materializations of memory is the public domain, a gesture both to the supposedly academically confined nature of professional history and the widely accepted theorization of remembrance as a social process. Yet the property of being a social process does not render memory unique, hence the ambiguity which accompanies the variety of its substantiations. Seemingly able to refer to any manifestation of the past in the public sphere that is not professional historiography (although sometimes that too), film, literature, commemoration, cartoons, museums and monuments all fall under memory's rubric. The occasional exclusion of history can hint at its separate existence as an objective pursuit, but if memory is to be defined by the
materials covered by the concept the more obvious result is the attenuation of focus on the specifics of production of each particular representation of the past in favour of a grouping connected only through their public consumption.

The public, or more specifically social and political context, is important for any presentation of the past, populist or otherwise. As the organizing basis for the concept of memory, however, public consumption is inadequate. As critics of memory, historians are regularly to be found lamenting public ignorance of their work,26 and those who take up the subject of remembrance are drawn to the problematic of reception. Thus the German social historian Alf Lüdtke has ruminated on the ignorance of the television-watching public demonstrated in the wake of the broadcast of Holocaust in 1979, suggesting 'the showing of the film accomplished much more than the extensive educational activities in schools and in the media had achieved during the previous years.'27 The critical questions here, however, are less the public impact than the nature of the accomplishment, and how such achievement is to be measured. Memory is useless if merely the victor against history in a popularity contest. Indeed, the awareness of critical history in Germany has probably improved subsequently, despite the success of Daniel Goldhagen’s Hitler’s Willing Executioners, and not necessarily due to either Holocaust or the historians.

The ‘public’ likely remains equally and blissfully unaware of most theoreticians of memory. Nevertheless, in some instances, memory has become not only a word to conjure with in historiography, but produced a best-seller, not merely concerning itself with the popular past but becoming part of that very phenomenon. Pierre Nora’s collection Les Lieux de mémoire is one example, self-defined as a history at once ‘very learned and very popular’, concerned as it is with those subjects which are ‘very

26 For example, Henry Rousso and Peter Novick.
familiar, that everyone knows’. Of course, the ‘everyone’ can quietly elide the multiplicity of audiences for familiar objects. The focus on the familiar, however unusual in presentation, can also edit out subjects by definition unfamiliar or particular; nor does, nor could, Nora’s project contain all the subjects familiar to all. To classify the materials of remembrance on the basis of public consumption is ambiguous at best, particularly when detrimental to an analysis of memory’s production. The bottom-line that memory sells cannot suffice for the construction of the boundaries of intellectual inquiry.

The dangers present in the postulation of memory are particularly evident should film, literature or monuments be assumed to be mere materializations of a pre-existing ‘collective memory’, independent of their specific context of production. Nevertheless, most studies have been concerned with how ‘memory’ is constructed, although such an emphasis occasionally assumes reception to be passive. For the purposes of production and consumption, literature is easily seen as the product of an individual author working in a particular context, whereas monuments often have a special relation to the state. Film, due to the ambiguity of its author or authors, however much directors would like to assume the role, is less easily identified, accounting for the dubious extrapolations on film as a ‘collective unconscious’, a notion which easily neglects the contexts of both production and reception. Yet none of these subjects, whether literature, monuments, film or photographs need the concept of memory, nor does the literature on them gain in value from ‘memory’, other than for the purpose of marketability. In terms of content, memory has almost no meaning other than its vague generality.

The ambiguities of film are especially adaptable to vague and fuzzy conceptualizations. Indeed, film occupies a special position in the mythology of memory. The French journal *Cahiers du cinéma* furnished the stage for Michel Foucault to introduce the term ‘popular memory’:30 The deceptively simple assertion that ‘there’s a real fight going on ... over what we can roughly describe as *popular memory*’31 triggered a extended process of anticipatory conjecture among the ranks of aspiring Foucauldians, seeking to comprehend the concept. Foucault himself never elaborated the phrase and although his intentions are rarely easy to divine, he seems to have meant ‘accounts of the past produced in oral or written forms by those denied access to the production of published historical accounts.’32 Here again, memory is invoked in contrast to an ‘official’ past, historiography. No doubt numerous and probably innumerable histories exist outside professional historiography. Equally importantly, however, professional historiography is itself comprised of manifold histories and the boundaries between academic and public history are never clear, stable or certain. The vogue for memory avails itself of the romantic search for an ‘other’ history, supposedly more popular and less contaminated by the manipulative methodologies of traditional history. This romance has been indulged to the greatest extent in the study of film. Robert Rosenstone, for example, in a case which owes more to advocacy than analysis, has argued that film constitutes a completely different phenomenon to traditional history. Film ‘may be like the challenge of written history to the oral tradition, of Herodotus and Thucydides to the tellers of historical tales’.33

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32 See Robins, ‘Remembering the Future’, p.202. This definition has its own problems, since it leaves out how ‘official’ accounts are appropriated by those denied access to their production.
If the more grandiose and gawping claims for film are ignored, the conclusion, now becoming repetitive, appears to be that memory equates to history, but with a difference, the nature of which it is within the liberty of the writer to bestow. For film, as for commemoration, television, literature, or any other of the materials of remembrance, memory serves more as an attractive label than an indicator of content or process. The process of appropriation becomes the only legitimate focus of memory. The cultural historian Ruth Ben-Ghiat has argued that neo-realist films in Italy 'helped to create a shared archive of memories about the war for a country whose Northern and Southern populations had experienced the years from 1943 to 1945 in radically different ways.'³⁴ As a 'shared archive', as the elements which can be appropriated, mobilized and contested in forming public understandings of the past, monuments, literature and film can indeed exist as 'memory'. Ultimately their consumption rather than their production, or even their use, defines them as memories. Yet, in this respect, the various materials of memory are no different to the product of historiography, all open as they are to manipulation, contradiction, and the politics of power. Alternatively, as processes, they differ not only from historiography, but from each other and from oral history. Memory, then, less a process than an attribute, is valuable more for its connotations than the accuracy of its ascription or its utility in analysis. Only the aura of associations appears sufficient reason not to prefer the terms public or popular history.

The looseness of the term and the disparateness of materials suggest why, as Alan Confino has observed in the *American Historical Review*, the study of memory is 'largely defined now in terms of topics of inquiry. Repressed memory. Monuments. Films. Museums ... Memory of the American South. Of the Holocaust. The French

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Revolution. Memory of recent events. Of current events. And instant memory of yesterday’s news. This list conflates the modes of remembrance with subjects of remembrance, but the characteristics of fragmentation and variety hold true. Perhaps ‘memory’ indicates more than ‘history’ (which tends to retain universal pretensions) the piecemeal nature of the reassembled past. Yet the perpetuation of fragmentation through ‘memory’, without or instead of an analysis of the bases of division, remains uncritical and unreflexive. Memory as the inclusive term for a field of subjects loose in relation and with little in common is of limited value. How, after all, do the subjects apparently worthy of memorialization – the French Revolution, the Holocaust, and so on, achieve that status?

As diverse as the modes and subjects of memory is their temporal distance and duration, as Confino’s array of topics indicates. The conceptual latitude and lassitude of remembrance is most marked when comparing events as distant from the present as the French Revolution and the television news, two hundred years or twenty-four hours removed. Memory can be both an événement or a conjuncture, a substitute for the enduring and unchanging mind of the longue durée or an ever-recurring but always ephemeral instantiation of nothingness. In terms of time, as in subject, material and method, memory has neither consistency nor coherence. Both extremes, an immediate ‘memory’ of today and the long-term memory of past history (or short-term memory of a long-term history) owe their viability as memory to the stress on their construction and consumption. The ‘instant history’ of television news is memory insofar as it is an ‘artificial’ past produced for a non-participant public, processing the present for rapid consumption and forgetting. The focus on the structuring of remembrance and its production can be conducive to a critical history. Thus Omer Bartov has wondered

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whether 'the current mechanical reproduction of images of violence is progressively transforming reality into fiction and memory', reordering the present as 'a past that precludes all action'. Memory as a synthetic substitute for 'reality' may reveal something about the functioning of the past in the present, but cannot be counterbalanced by a simple notion of 'history', or by nostalgic cries for the 'actual past'. Indissolubly bound as it is to the prevalent definitions of history in the profession, memory is no panacea to the troubles of historical discourse, as sometimes claimed, nor, alternatively, a threat to 'history'. Any validity of the literature of remembrance must originate in its illumination of the poverty of the historical-memory in the present. The problem remains that such a critical stance is largely autonomous from any conceptual weight which 'memory' itself comprises. To analyse the television news as instant memory immediately focuses on the structure and process of memory's construction, yet if directed to an alternative subject that concentration on configuring of the past can dissolve immediately.

The French Revolution provides an effective contrast to the phenomenon of instant memory. Whereas in the latter the composition of 'memory' implies the creation of distance together with the tone of the utterly transitory, in the former the already distant and by definition more than transitory achieves memory's characteristic blend of qualified reality through an opposite process, drawn into the half-world of the not-quite present that is memory. Whether from immediate or distant history the appellation of memory appears to mark the evolution of the past into a jumbled and interchangeable series of reusable and disposable images, of alternately fuzzy and flashy colours, characterized by the blurring of past and present into a continuum of vague and increasingly meaningless pictures, immaterial and irrelevant. The history of the French Revolution and all the connotations of 1789 is after all another past presumed to have

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lost much of its value in the age of memory.\textsuperscript{37} In any case, whether the label memory befits the lingering residue of the Revolution remains unclear, distant as 1789 is from the ambiguous recall of experience that is the subject of oral history. Better alternatives exist in the notions of oral or invented tradition.

Memory, then, as much as anything, marks a particular relationship of the past to the present, the most basic common denominator of diverse subjects which can be grouped under the category. Few studies exist of 'memories' which have naturally fallen into abeyance; only those which can be classed as 'repressed' are recalled.\textsuperscript{38} The weakness of memory as a conceptual tool stands exposed in that 'memory' always requires a prior term, be it history or the nation or an event to provides the unity which it cannot possibly proffer in and of itself. 'History' can unify 'memory' into an apparently plausible alternative approach to the past. The nation can transform 'memory' into a unity measuring of the mind of that imagined community, or an event, such as the French Revolution, can impose coherence upon an otherwise inchoate sense of the past. If memory is defined in terms of its topics of inquiry, that process of definition lends an air of naturalness to the theme sought out. At the beginning of The Vichy Syndrome, his study of the remembrance of the Second World War in France since 1945, Henry Rousso wrote, reproducing this messy conglomeration of events and groups, that 'The history of memory can arise out of the memory of a particular group ... But it may also be associated with certain key events, whose memory survives long after the last flames have been extinguished and whose influence extends over the whole of society'.\textsuperscript{39} For Rousso, such events were exemplified by the French Revolution and the Second World War, which he suggested, not unreasonably, were


\textsuperscript{38} 'Repressed' is another term which requires explication. See chapter eight.
'associated with times of deep crisis for France's national unity and identity.'Yet in the concentration on the event, Rousso tends to naturalize the group, or rather the nation - France - within which that memory is assumed to be held, however much divisions lie at its origin. Memory no more has a natural locus than a clear meaning. Its choice of topics arbitrary, its analytical value salutatory, less appropriate than imposed, memory may indeed be best defined as some sort of compromise between history and myth. In definition, memory maintains its equivocal and characteristic vagueness, not the least reason for its attractiveness to present practice. Yet what of past practice? Where do the origins of the current mood for memory lie, and what do they have to say about memory's return?

40 Rousso, The Vichy Syndrome, p.3.
II. The Origins and Return of Memory.

Memory may be best defined through the reformation of myth, but few of the protagonists associate myth and memory in any serious sense. Nor, as we have seen, is great credence given to oral history as the progenitor of the field. Yet the various beginnings invoked for the purposes of memory are themselves usually demarcated through the relationship of science and the irrational, history and myth. The genealogies adopted by memory’s adepts reference two distinct, incongruous and, in may ways, incompatible figures of the early twentieth century: Sigmund Freud and Maurice Halbwachs. The latter is the logical figure for historians to appropriate, given his sociological background and emphasis on the social formation of memory. The inheritance and influence of Freud admits of far greater ambiguity. The application of Freudian concepts to history, and the historical meaning of the analysis of the formation of the psyche remain unclear and uncertain. Yet Freud’s influence is the most obvious, or at least the most visible, in the current literature. Freud furnishes the language of remembrance: trauma, obsession, transference, repression, psychosis.

The individual psyche has become equally usable, if not always credible, and sometimes too literal, as a metaphor for society. The nation-on-the-consultant’s-couch style of memory endows the repressed past with the power to imperil nation-states. Thus the historian of France Daniel Sherman has argued melodramatically that ‘the inability to confront or master certain kinds of memory can haunt nation-states, exposing the fragility of their construction, crippling their politics, even destroying them entirely’. This sort of superficially plausible and rhetorically inflated statement assumes both that memory is something to be mastered (as did Jacques le Goff, in a different context), and has almighty powers (although the source of memory’s power is not always
elaborated upon). Such sonorous statements certainly justify the present profusion of memory studies, but do little to explain the historical specificity of either the literature of memory or the subject itself. According to Sherman, ‘Freud’s notion of the unconscious as a repository of repressed memories, inaccessible to normal consciousness, but capable of disrupting our conscious lives, lies at the heart of the persistent belief that the past continues to inflect the present.’43 The flimsiness of the metaphor is a problem, and, of course, the effect of the past upon the present can be addressed by numerous theories of historical structures and causation. Even more simply, those looking for a future traditionally scour the past either to furnish or ratify it. Yet each of these approaches to the uses of the past in the present ignore ‘memory’ as such and eschews the vocabulary of repression. What happens to the question of historical causation in the literature of memory is a key to understanding its relevance, just as the causes of that literature itself, so often taken for granted, constitutes the crux for the historian.

Freud connects to the current preoccupation with memory in part through the emphasis on the ongoing construction of the self or the past (or both together). When placed within an evolutionary tradition which demonstrates the ‘growing awareness of the constructedness of subjectivity,’44 Freud naturally constitutes an important staging-post on the progression towards the modern-day use of memory, when theorists busily deconstruct not just the self but all society. Nevertheless, memory in Freud was not memory as it has emerged in the late 20th century, applicable to postcards and film, literature and monuments. The expansion from the individual has been accompanied by a simultaneous deconstruction of the self and yet the retention of the Freudian

42 See above.
44 Klein, ‘On the Emergence of Memory’, Representations, p.132.
vocabulary for the individual psyche. In addition to asking what has happened to causation in memory studies, the resting place of the individual must also be sought. While the importance of forgetting in Freud does indeed point to the processes of construction which provides the focus of memory studies, the prominence of the individual is at odds within a field dealing less with human subjects than objects, whether events or monuments.

Nevertheless, the individual as a topic lingers in memory studies, not least through the recurrent theme of identity and its crises. Yet what applied to the individual mind in Freud now takes a particular discourse, or a particular group, as the framework interpreted through remembrance. Where Freudian memories, 'bent to conform to the struggles within the unconscious psyche', were to be 'read as signs of these hidden conflicts rather than at face value'\textsuperscript{45}, societal 'memories' are also understood as manifestations of wider discursive conflict or social process of remembrance. In both examples, surface phenomena are reappropriated as an index to the hidden reality. Foucault may have wished to reduce psychoanalysis to just another discourse about the self\textsuperscript{46}, but the Freudian method of reading memories as signs of deeper struggles can be reproduced in a discursive field, replicating the position of psychoanalyst to patient in historian to discourse, and again duplicating within the analysis discourse what were the crises and conflicts of the psyche.

Yet while Freud provides much of the vocabulary, most of the metaphors and some of the intellectual structures in the literature of memory, his effect is rarely explicit. Rather, Maurice Halbwachs is the figure most compatible with the current enthusiasm for memory. Hence it is not without irony that his work was neglected and left largely forgotten for the greater part of the twentieth century. The rediscovery of

Halbwachs has been concomitant with the reaffirmation of memory. Far more than Freud in the psychoanalysis of the turn of the century, or Proust, in the literature of the turn of the century, Halbwachs is the point from which memory, as a historiographical study, takes root. The curiosities attendant upon his advent as progenitor go beyond his prolonged absence from the historiographical scene. Perhaps most peculiarly, Halbwachs is commonly accepted (although not always without criticism or revision) by the critics and the proponents of memory alike. The utility of Halbwachs, his apparent multi-dimensionality, reflects his contradictory characteristic of being both one of the first in the social sciences to take memory seriously and at the same time one of the foremost critics of its use for historical study. Equally curiously, while those theoretically engaged with memory invariably offer some adjustment or alteration to the equations laid out by Halbwachs in the 1920s and 1930s, few, if any, bother radically to revise his findings or rethink the interrelations of history, memory and society. If the Freudian inheritance of memory is marked by a superficiality and a metaphorical ubiquity, Halbwachs' legacy is no less characterized by an enviable utility together with an often uncritical appropriation, an only ostensible analysis. Why should there be little more either to say or revise about a theory of memory which has only been remembered after some sixty years of oblivion? The static quality of the theory of memory intimates a superficiality of memory's reinvention. In his appeal to those who stand both for and against, Halbwachs, as memory itself, tenders a slipperiness which will furnish whatever sort of intellectual heritage theorists require.

The ambiguity which envelops Halbwachs' heritage extends into the history of his life. Born into a Catholic-Alsatian family, Halbwachs met his end when he protested to the Vichy authorities against the murder of his Jewish parents-in-law and was transported to Buchenwald. The intertwining of his personal history with the narrative

\[46\] Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory*, p.114.
of the French nation-state has provided the opportunity for a number of contradictory perspectives on his career and thought. Carlo Ginzburg, picking up on the force of ‘France’ in Halbwachs’ work, places him in the context of a group of ‘assimilated Jewish intellectuals, deeply committed to the religion laïque of the Third Republic’, who wanted to ‘out-French the French’.\(^47\) Ginzburg’s Halbwachs dies at Auschwitz.\(^48\)

While both Halbwachs and his work are implicated in a certain idea of the French nation and the Third Republic, and while he may have died at ‘Auschwitz’ if not Auschwitz, neither statement is entirely correct. Nor was Halbwachs Jewish, although intimately connected to the assimilated Jewish milieu of Republican France. After all, when the Jewish sociologist Marcel Mauss was pressured to resign from the Collège de France to accommodate the new order of things, Maurice Halbwachs took up the vacant post. The intricacies of Halbwachs’ engagement with the idea and realities of La France are more complicated than the submerged identity of an assimilated Jewish intellectual.

Another version of the sociologist may be found in the memoriam written by Georges Friedmann, Inspecteur-Général de l’Enseignement Technique in Paris in 1946, translated and republished in the *American Journal of Sociology*. Friedmann’s Halbwachs does not, at least explicitly, die for race or religion. Instead, shortly after modernity and the nation-state, with the endorsement of the scientific and historical professions, had arrived at Auschwitz, Halbwachs is presented as dying partly because of the moral fibre of his profession:

> Scientists, who are certainly not by profession men of action, found themselves drawn into the resistance movement by their moral fiber, their sense of justice, and the valiant assistance which they rendered to the fighters and to their kin. Under such circumstances, Maurice Halbwachs … was arrested by the Gestapo in Paris in July, 1944, and died February, 1945, in the camp at Buchenwald.\(^49\)

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\(^47\) Carlo Ginzburg, ‘Shared Memories, Private Recollections’, *History and Memory*, 9(1-2), 1997, p.358-9

\(^48\) Ginzburg, ‘Shared Memories, Private Recollections’, p.353.
While this picture draws out a little further the reasons for Halbwachs’ arrest, his response to the murder of his parents-in-law, ‘aged eighty-four years ... assassinated by the Germans under particularly cruel circumstances’, Friedmann does not indicate that in these circumstances, their death was precisely because they were Jewish. It may have been unnecessary to stress the Jewish identity, and the murder as Jews, of Victor Basch and his wife. However, given collaboration with the Germans, rather than anti-Semitism, was perceived during the épuration as the greater crime - some would argue in their defence the purely French roots of their anti-Semitism - the explicit invocation of the context of anti-Semitism might have reflected moral fibre and a sense of justice. Further than the ambiguities of the unspoken and implicit assumptions of Friedmann’s account, one explicit error is equivocal, for it was not the Germans, but the French, who murdered Halbwachs’ parents-in-law. The mistake may likely have been due to lack of information in 1946, which, when remedied, has revealed that ‘according to several accounts, German officers who accompanied the Milice considered Basch and his wife too old to be bothered with and left them with their French colleagues, who executed them.’

These two images of Halbwachs, one stressing (inaccurately) his place in an assimilated Jewish context, the other eliding the most obvious fractures in national identity from the historical detail, demonstrate the dangers of a too simple contextualization of his thought. For the purposes of the literature of memory, Halbwachs is an even more evocative figure. His death at Buchenwald in response to the murder of his Jewish parents-in-law is already allusive to the crises of French

identity and history. Further, the pardon delivered in 1971 to one of the Milicien implicated in the killing, Paul Touvier, has come to define the desire of official France to forget the past.\textsuperscript{52} Touvier's subsequent trial in 1994 (although not for the murder of the Baschs) has been taken as the event which appears to manifest most clearly a French 'obsession' with the past. Thus the man who did much to delineate the features of memory is personally linked to the story of the French struggle over how to forget and face the past.

Who, then, was Maurice Halbwachs? What was his legacy, first neglected, then accepted as the common reference for an extraordinary variety of meanings? He was born at Reims in 1877 in a Catholic family which had retreated from Alsace after its annexation by Germany in 1871. From the age of two, Halbwachs lived in Paris with his family in a liberal milieu, pro-Dreyfusard and strongly committed to the young Third Republic\textsuperscript{53}, that nation-state so active in the 'invention of tradition'.\textsuperscript{54} At the prestigious Lycée Henri IV, he encountered Henri Bergson, the great philosopher of fin-de-siècle France, himself a theoretician of memory, and 'an indelible influence' on Halbwachs.\textsuperscript{55} Yet not the philosopher but the sociologist, Emile Durkheim, made the greatest impact. A loyal disciple during the pre-war heyday of sociology, following Durkheim's death in 1917 Halbwachs became a leading exponent of inter-war French sociology. Three major pieces constitute Halbwachs' corpus of memory, each with their own peculiar context. \textit{The Social Frameworks of Memory} (1925) was written during his time at the University of Strasbourg following the First World War. \textit{The Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land}, published during the Second World War, was one of the first

\textsuperscript{52} See Rousso, \textit{The Vichy Syndrome}, pp.116-125.
case studies of the politics of memory. *The Collective Memory* appeared posthumously in 1950.⁵⁶

The first and fundamental perception of Halbwachs, as the title of his 1925 book implies, is the social dimension of memory. 'No memory,' he declared, 'is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections.'⁵⁷ Pedestrian though the thesis is, Halbwachs was perhaps the first to articulate it, and originality can confer a degree of credit. The social framework of memory was postulated in direct opposition to Bergsonian philosophy, notions of racial memory and Freudian psychology.⁵⁸ For Bergson, an avowed enemy of materialism, science and reason, and an advocate of instinct, intuition and subjectivity, memory was entirely the domain of the individual's psyche.⁵⁹ *Everything* is remembered, and present to the unconscious, but only what is useful for action is admitted to the conscious mind (again placing the crucial issue of selection at the heart of memory's mystery). By locating memory entirely in the unconscious Bergson makes it difficult to study, not the least of the problems of his theory (yet an objection Bergson would probably dismiss as grounded in concepts such as thought and intellect and science, rather than a subjective affirmation of intuitive perception). When Halbwachs declared that 'a person remembers only by situating himself within the viewpoint of one or several groups and one or several currents of collective thought',⁶⁰ he was claiming memory for his

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⁵⁵ Unattributed quote in Friedmann, 'Maurice Halbwachs, 1877 - 1945', p.511.
⁵⁷ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, p.43.
⁵⁸ Patrick Hutton suggests Halbwachs 'directly challenged the teachings of Sigmund Freud'. This may be so, but there is very little mention of Freud in Halbwachs, however much his arguments contradict him. Typically, Halbwachs' main concern seems to have been to challenge not Freud, but Bergson. See Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory*, p.7.
discipline. Not psychology, not philosophy, not blood nor soil but sociology best explained the processes of remembrance. For Bergson, forgetting was best countered by an intuitive, 'subjective perception of inner time'. Halbwachs explained forgetting through the operations of the groups within which that memory was held. Only in society would the key to recovery of the past be found.

Halbwachs' social remembrance rejected any physical or psychological portion of the self as the locus of 'remembrance' and instead focussed attention on 'the group'. In *The Collective Memory* he responded to the charge of a crude sociological determinism levelled at *Social Frameworks of Memory* by insisting that no memory can exist outside society's frameworks. That scaffold, he emphasized nonetheless, did not remember for individuals. Rather, individuals remembered through them. Memories, defined in relation to 'currents of collective thought', were thus social, but were they, as the title of his book implied, collective? The meaning of 'collective', and the definition and functioning of the group, were the test of a social memory. The 'group' acted as the unit which grounded Halbwachs' collective memory; 'the memory of a society extends as far as the memory of the groups composing it.' The 'group' functions to explain the limits of memory, and also its nature, the difference between remembrances we evoke at will and remembrances we seem to command no longer ... The former are always at hand because they are preserved in groups that we enter at will and collective thoughts to which we remain closely related... 63

The group is the catalyst for memory. But what is 'the group'? Not merely, 'only, or even primarily, a collection of definite individuals ... what constitutes the essence of a group is an interest, a shared body of concerns and ideas.' Yet this is

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62 Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, p.82.
63 Ibid., p.47.
64 Ibid., p.118.
merely another way of saying that memory is the catalyst of the group, at which point, the group, so promising a grounding for ephemeral remembrance, dissolves. Both the key framework for memory and constituted by memory, the group is an illusion legitimating and legitimated by memory. The argument is circular; 'a shared body of concerns and ideas' define the group because it is to them that groups mould their memories. When shaped 'to accord with contemporary ideas and preoccupations', memories can then constitute the group, since they undoubtedly, inevitably conform to the shared body of concerns. Memory is both cause and effect.

The question of the group cannot be entirely discarded. There is no doubt that, if memory is socially conditioned and to be taken as an object of study, the context of 'groups' is crucial. The delineation of these groups, their structure and nature, is the key to theorizing a social memory. Halbwachs' identification of 'the group' is prescient, even if the detail of his portrayal lacks depth, leaving memory and groups as two mutually supporting abstractions. The study of memory becomes the study of 'group' identity. Two other characteristics of Halbwachs' picturing of memory and society are worth noting. Firstly, groups are multiple: 'there are several collective memories.' Secondly, the group does not have autonomy, is not a subject. Not the group, but only 'individuals as group members' remember. Thus 'each memory is a viewpoint on the collective memory.' These formulations reflect Halbwachs' attempt to strike a middle way between sociological determinism and the recognition of agency and multiplicity. Unfortunately, the compromise remains unsuccessful, characterized by the postulation of contradictions

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65 Ibid., p.83.
66 Ibid., p.76.
67 Ibid., p.48.
rather than the development of a genuinely credible conception of the relationship of
social structures, individuals and memories.

Thus the contradictions multiply and, in practice, Halbwachs finds great
difficulty in reconciling a sociological base with individual agency. Groups are defined
by common interests, more a notional entity than a definite body of people. Yet if
groups do not remember, memory is somehow ‘preserved in groups’, and Halbwachs
often writes as if the collective memory has a tangible existence. Groups are entered at
will, and yet they manipulate unconsciously; ‘the collective memory … is convinced
that the group remains the same’. Desiring to avoid a group based in the physical
individual, as in race-based models of memory, Halbwachs unintentionally creates a
governing Geist which permeates the enterprise. The return of a hypostasized,
overriding and assimilating collective memory undermines the image of individuals as
always members of innumerable groups. Halbwachs’ hypotheses end where they begin,
in the need to conceptualize adequately the figuration of social individuals and their
mental life within society without reducing one to the other.

Memory takes meaning for Halbwachs by its positioning in the sociological
domain. Yet the unresolved confusion over the constitution, operation and existence of
groups is debilitating. The definition of the group serves as assurance memory is social,
based in groups but not in blood lines, and that the collective memory is ultimately,
undeniably, biased and interest-based. The group emerges as a construct of memory, for
memory, inherently social and totally unreliable. This last characteristic may be the key
for Halbwachs. Despite their differences, Halbwachs’ image of memory is cast in the
same mould as Bergson’s. Each presents memory as a version of the past unconsciously
shaped for present use, either by the brain (Bergson) or by society (Halbwachs). Where
Bergson sought through inner intuition to escape the tyranny of an unconscious
manipulation, Halbwachs’ refuge was the rigour of sociological analysis. The study of
memory was empirical and scientific, the search for ‘some simple laws governing the memory of groups, whose operation we must try to observe in the facts themselves’.\(^\text{68}\) The belief in both laws and facts led Halbwachs to hypothesise that ‘if it is possible, in sociology, to find quantitative relations of causality, it is to them that we must first and foremost attach ourselves.’\(^\text{69}\) He later removed the if, to endorse the law of statistical analysis, ‘the only means of identifying social regularities’.\(^\text{70}\)

Halbwachs’ positivist predilection, which now appears the most archaic element of his formulations, should not be dismissed as a quaint, antiquated eccentricity, but rather undergirds his whole schema of remembrance. He is, of course, aware of the processes of writing history, whereby facts are ‘selected, combined, and evaluated in accord with necessities and rules’. However those ‘necessities and rules’ are taken for granted (and no doubt mandatory for history to qualify as a science). Most importantly, however, these laws were ‘not imposed on the groups that had through time guarded them [past events] as a living trust.’\(^\text{71}\) The historian ‘is not located within the viewpoint of any genuine and living groups of past or present ... the historian certainly means to be objective and impartial.’\(^\text{72}\)

Perhaps history is the profession of asocial amnesiacs, for if historians are not part of any group, they can presume not to have any (socially-framed) memory at all. More likely, Halbwachs’ intention was to argue that the individual as historian does not

\(^{68}\) Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, p.219. In this case, examining Christian memory, Halbwachs was seeking to understand ‘how the collective memories that are attached to a place coalesce, divide, become attached to one another, or scatter, as the case may be.’


\(^{71}\) Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, p.78.

exist as part of any group, if that body is to be defined by the maintenance of the memory of lived experience. Professional historians may constitute a group in one sense, but not in Halbwachsian terms, and certainly not in relation to their writing, for they do not share a memory of the events they write on. The obvious objection and exception is contemporary history, for which Halbwachs must rely on the feeble assertion that

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.73

The definition of memory has here begun to turn towards ‘tradition’. Professional historians may exist as a group in society, but they do not exist as a memory group for the preservation and recall of the events of which they write. Once again, the definition of a discipline is at stake. The group is defined through memory and thus both are compatible and incommensurate with history. This definition of ‘groups’, of history and the ingenuous belief in statistics allows Halbwachs to make the extraordinary claim, for one who lived through the First World War, that

in the total record of European history, the comparison of the various national viewpoints on the facts is never found; what is found, rather, is the sequence and totality of the facts such as they are, not for a certain country or a certain group but independent of any group judgment.74

Yet while history is independent of national bias, the nation is its natural subject. History, ‘a collection of the most notable facts in the memory of man’,75 is ‘the sequence of events remembered in national history’,76 an accumulation of great events and personages. Halbwachs’ conceptualization memory is resolutely sociological, established in opposition first to psychological and racial theorizations, and rendered as

73 Ibid., p.78.
74 Ibid., pp.83-84.
75 Ibid., p.78.
an effective contrast to the scientific application of history, itself by definition an
adjunct of the nation-state.

Halbwachs' low opinion of memory accounts for his appeal to the critics of
remembrance. His serious rather than dismissive approach benefits those both for and
against. Intrinsically critical of memory, yet nevertheless subjecting it to considerable
research, his writings serve as theoretical insurance for advocates and opponents alike.
In the debates where the value of the literature, and of memory as a whole, but not as a
concept, is in question, Halbwachs' writings may be used to dismiss memory yet carry
the sign of scientific research in doing so. The arguments of those such as Peter Novick
or Arno Mayer accurately mirror Halbwachs' own (not necessarily unjustified)
diminution of memory in favour of a (not always defensible) image of scientific and
professional history. Thus Peter Novick rejects 'dubious entities' such as 'social
unconscious' for the conceptual rigour of Halbwachs' 'collective memory'.

Arno Mayer is another beholden to Halbwachs for his conceptualization (and
disparagement) of memory:

Memory, unlike history, originates and develops within a distinct group, to which it
remains confined. Being "limited in space and time," memory also stresses the
resemblances of the in-group at the expense of its inherent dissimilarities. In sum, just
as there is no isolated and impermeable personal memory, so "there is no universal
memory".

This framing of memory within 'groups', characterized by the elision of differences,
displays the influence of Halbwachs. So does the lingering vagueness of definition of
the 'group', for how memory is 'confined' within a group, and, more crucially, how
groups are 'distinct' is never elaborated on or explained. As with Halbwachs, the
circular answer appears easiest: memory is confined in groups only if groups are distinct

76 Ibid., p.77.
and groups are only distinct because their memory is confined. The composition of groups and their relation to each other remains unreconciled and the model works only if society is constituted by a series of distinct, mutually exclusive groups, unconscious of their existence as groups or that of others. As Halbwachs put it, 'the collective memory is a record of resemblances, and, naturally, is convinced that the group remains the same because it focuses attention of the group, whereas what has changed are the group’s relations or contacts with other groups.'

With Mayer, as with Halbwachs, the distinction between history and memory remains the most crucial to be made and reinforced. Just as the latter thought that the ‘viewpoint of history is due to its examining groups from outside’\(^7^9\), so the former describes how

> Unlike the chroniclers of memory, who are parochial and beholden to the in-group, the chroniclers of history use universalizing concepts and languages to examine groups from outside, with close attention to their unexceptional dissemblances, tensions, and cleavages.\(^8^1\)

Mayer nevertheless admits that ‘both memory and history tend to be used and misused for political ends’,\(^8^2\) something Halbwachs never explicitly addressed. However Mayer does assume that there exists only ‘two major modes of access to the Judeocide: memory and history’,\(^8^3\) discrete and distinct. This superficial and dubious division reduces memory to a mere status, a ‘thing’, rather than a process. For the maligning of memory, such a dichotomy has its uses; for the purpose of analysis, the partition is unhelpful, inappropriate and ahistorical.

\(^7^8\) Arno J. Mayer, ‘Memory and History: On the Poverty of Remembering and Forgetting the Judeocide’, *Radical History Review*, 56(1-2), Spring 1993, p.9.

\(^7^9\) Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, p.86.

\(^8^1\) Ibid.

\(^8^2\) Mayer, ‘Memory and History’, p.12.

\(^8^3\) Ibid., p.13.
Where Mayer attacks the particularization of memory and the necessity of universalizing concepts, Peter Novick’s critiques Holocaust memory for its ahistorical universalization. Yet Novick, too, draws upon Maurice Halbwachs to make the fundamental point: ‘collective memory is in crucial senses ahistorical, even anti-historical.’ Novick may be a critic of collective memory, but his unfavourable appraisal nonetheless explicitly endorses ‘collective memory’ as a concept, which, as inherited from Halbwachs, is by definition anti-historical. As Novick puts it, memory ‘has no sense of the passage of time; it denies the “pastness” of its objects and insists on their continuing presence’. So defined, memory is easily dismissed as self-interested and simplistic. Similarly, when Novick makes the case that ‘the most significant collective memories … derive their power from their claim to express some permanent, enduring truth,’ he echoes Halbwachs’ depiction of a memory which ‘retains only those events that are of a pedagogic character … memory distorts facts … to show that each one has a significance beyond the event itself’. The pedagogical potential (of history as much as memory) underlies much of the reasoning behind the conceptualization of memory and explains the investment placed in a debate between the two apparently opposed modes of appreciating the past.

Neither Novick nor Mayer would be likely to argue for the objectivity so central to the sociology of Halbwachs. Yet to bolster their arguments both find it useful to employ Halbwachs’ characterization of memory, without explicit invoking the corresponding idealization of history. For both the distinction between history and memory is clear, as is their sympathy for the former. To dismiss their critique of specific instances of memory (or history) would be remiss, yet the validity and

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84 Novick, The Holocaust in American Life, p.3.
85 Ibid., p.4.
86 Ibid., p.170.
87 Halbwachs, On Collective Memory, p.223.
credibility of Novick and Mayer's arguments do not derive from their formulation of memory.

The residual power of Halbwachs' model, at first sight incongruous with his unoriginality and his initial ineffectual impact, can thus be explained in part by the ongoing rhetorical utility of the history-memory dichotomy, the continued importance of formulating a credible relation between social groupings and ideas and ideology, and the recasting of both questions within the context of the late twentieth century when cruder notions of history have been challenged by the diverse currents of postmodernism, as the great interpretive schema of the twentieth century collapsed with the Berlin Wall.

The social group, of course, provides only one component of Halbwachs' delineation of memory, and only one aspect which resonates in his successors. A second theme present for the sociologist, and pertinent for the practitioners of the postmodern age, lies in the continuing revaluation of continuity and discontinuity in history. Halbwachs' divorce of history from memory indeed rests on the position that 'we can grasp only the present.' The point does not have to be a postmodern one, and different positions can be made from the first observation of discontinuity. The primacy of the present does not necessarily mean the reduction of the past to a mere image. For Halbwachs the point was simple, if fundamental:

I cannot go beyond these words heard or read by me, ... these symbols passed down through time are all that comes to me from the past. The same is true for every historical fact I know. Proper names, dates, formulas summarizing a long sequence of details, occasional anecdotes or quotations, are the epitaphs to those bygone events, as brief, general, and scant of meaning as most tombstone inscriptions. History indeed resembles a crowded cemetery, where room must constantly be made for new tombstones.89

88 Ibid., p.79.
89 Ibid., p.52.
History is a *lost* past, an observation all very well but capable of multiple meanings. Memory, by contrast, is a living past, a more dubious ascription. Thus history and memory, the lost and living pasts, cannot co-exist. The implications are predictable. Had Halbwachs considered more what it means even to grasp the present, he might have been less impressed by the inability to grasp the past.

Unsurprisingly for someone obsessed with statistics and science, and their narrative of progress, Halbwachs' past and present are distinctly linear, dramatized by the discontinuity that distances present from past. Memory is characterized by continuity; ‘the remembering subject, individual or group, *feels* it goes back to its remembrances in a continuous movement’.90 However, leaving undeveloped the subjective perceptions of history and memory as practices, Halbwachs presses on to ensure the safe and complete separation of history and memory: ‘how could history ever be a memory, since there is a break in continuity between the society reading this history and the group in the past who acted in or witnessed the events?’91 From this position, Halbwachs extends the logic to argue that ‘history starts only when tradition ends and the social memory is fading or breaking up’.92

To see history as the undertaker of memory is dramatic, but hardly an adequate understanding of the relation of present and past. The example of Halbwachs' colleague at the University of Strasbourg, Marc Bloch, whose account of the fall of France was written before the end of the war, suggests that history, too, begins with the experience of the events themselves. Superficially plausible, yet lacking real depth, the adjectives 'lost' and 'living' say at least as much about the interests of those using them than about the realities of 'history' and 'memory'. The shallowness does not impede the effectiveness of the description, nor the afterlife of the division of history and memory.

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The rather trite narrative of a history which emerges only at end point of memory has been mobilized, in a different language but for similar purposes. Martin Broszat's calls in the 1980s for the 'historicisation' of the German past, the desire to finally draw the line between memory and a scientific history is merely one example of the recurrence of Halbwachs' antinomies (which were never restricted to him anyway). The belief that the 'need to write the history of a period, a society, or even a person is only aroused' when memory falls short, 'when the subject is already too distant in the past to allow for the testimony of those who preserve some remembrance of it', is not far removed from the argument that history must separate itself from memory to be properly balanced. Such arguments, however, inevitably owe more to the interest of the protagonists in rejecting an unwanted dimension of the past than to the analytical value inherent in the distinction.

A definition of history lies at the heart of every construction of memory. Halbwachs, characteristically combining an idealization of objectivity with a national focus, perceives history as an outside imposition, 'situated external to and above groups.' Hence an event gains the adjective historical 'only some time after its occurrence. Thus we can link the various phases of our life to national events only after the fact. This timid and attenuated understanding limits history largely to great events, facts and dates, unimaginatively organized, but bringing a satisfying order to the chaos of reality, visiting on the 'stream of facts simple demarcations fixed once and for all.' History, trapped through discontinuity, distance and exteriority, contrasts with memory's continuity, more authentic, natural and inside the limits of the ruptured past: 'a current of continuous thought whose continuity is not at all artificial, for it retains

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92 Ibid., p.78.
93 Ibid., pp.78-79.
94 Ibid., p.80.
95 Ibid., p.54.
96 Ibid., p.80.
from the past only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the
groups keeping the memory alive.'

The dichotomization of memory and history helps explain once again how
Halbwachs, while no partisan of memory as a valuable approach to the past, can furnish
the theoretical framework for the present-day appropriators of memory. Further, the
close link in his conceptualization between history and memory suggests that at least
one component of the present vogue for memory is a disillusion with history, in the very
form that Halbwachs idealizes. Yet a memory (as a historiographical practice or tool)
based in Halbwachs’ opposites will remain unwieldy and, at best, of rhetorical or
polemical utility. Without any real revaluation, accommodated only by an inversion and
not a revision of the equation between history and memory, the study of remembrance is
grounded in shaky foundations. Through the inflexible division of inside and outside,
the overstated assumption of an absolute rupture between past and present, history and
memory are completely cut asunder. The result is not a subtle understanding of either
historical or historiographical processes and practices. Rather, the individual is left to
choose between history and memory. For all Halbwachs’ arguments to the contrary,
which of the two is favoured appears merely a matter of preference.

Few among Halbwachs’ successors would subscribe to the almost naïve belief
he maintains in history’s scientific method. More are prepared to maintain the rigid
distinction between history and memory, and some do so on the basis of memory being
more ‘natural’. Part of the popularity of memory for those who have authored the
literature, if not necessarily its audiences, is memory’s ability to simultaneously
circumvent and mobilize the postmodern critique of history. The context of
postmodernism (in all its varieties) is indeed a curious one, given Halbwachs’ certainty
in the scientific nature of his inquiries. Yet there are deep affinities, as well as blatant

97 Ibid.
contradictions, between Halbwachsian memory and postmodernism, which can help
explain not merely the return to memory in the 1980s and thereafter, but suggest that
postmodernism, too, could be profitably understood as a reconfiguration of long-term
and ongoing concerns in the definition and practice of history.

Certainly, in an age where almost everything has been deconstructed to reveal
the discursive structures of domination, power and oppression, the return to memory,
traditionally associated with the ‘authentic’ and ‘natural’, should provoke immediate
suspicion. Memory can still summon up the sense of closeness which facts can no more,
when history is indeed recognized as a lost past, and serves primarily to emphasize (in
Halbwachs words) ‘how distant we are from those who are doing the writing and being
described’.\textsuperscript{98} In this evocation of empathy and hindsight, continuity and rupture,
otherness and the recognition of distance lies another of the elements of
memory’s appeal.

The acknowledgement of ‘otherness’ and difference, so stressed in
postmodernist critiques of history, is as much if not more so for Halbwachs the mark of
all historiography. Remembrance, by contrast, contains no such dissonance,
characterized best as ‘a record of resemblances’.\textsuperscript{99} Memory and history are both
reconstructions, but recognition accompanies the former, unfamiliarity the latter:

Collective frameworks of memory do not amount to so many names, dates, and
formulas, but truly represent currents of thought and experience within which we
recover our past only because we have lived it.\textsuperscript{100}

Based in lived experience, memory is more a process of recovery than of construction.

While adamant memory cannot simply be recaptured, Halbwachs insists remembrance

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., p.79.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., p.86.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., p.64.
starts from 'shared data or conceptions ... continually being passed back and forth.' Continuity with the experience of the event ensures the connection is 'not at all artificial', a telling adjective. Of course, Halbwachs was not promoting memory over history, for the recognition inherent in the act of remembrance bespeaks the necessarily unrecognized processes governing the group. Memory is a more 'natural' category precisely because the person remembering remains unconscious of the deeper structures. Halbwachs' analysis is akin in more ways than one to interpretations of society which understand human realities as the external manifestations of a series of processes, whether discursive, economic or structural, which control human action unchallenged.

Another variation on the distinctions which attempt to delineate the characteristic features of memory for Halbwachs is his division of history into two types, lived and learned. The latter may 'clarify from outside this first period of my life' but 'my memory scarcely grows richer in its personal aspect'. Learned history, the writings of historians and sociologists, offers nothing for memory. Lived history, however, 'not a chronological sequence of events and dates, but whatever distinguishes one period from all others, something of which books and narratives generally give us only a very schematic and incomplete picture,' 'possesses everything needed to constitute a living and natural framework upon which our thought can base itself to preserve and recover the image of its past.' Memory answers to experience, not the facts of history books nor the schema of sociologists; events understood historically are perceived from the outside. The distinction once again stresses the difference between memory, which is internally constituted through societal processes, and history,

101 Ibid., p.31.
102 Ibid., p.80.
103 Ibid., p.55.
104 Ibid., p.56.
105 Ibid., p.68.
externally imposed by science upon the past to understand it. An alternative formulation might be the division between empathy and hindsight, although, as usual with Halbwachs, the distinction is less interesting than the way he goes on to characterize memory.

Halbwachs’ definition of remembrance as ‘an image entangled among other images’ bears striking similarities to more recent formulations of history, as a reconstruction of the past achieved with data borrowed from the present, a reconstruction prepared, furthermore, by reconstructions of earlier periods wherein past images had already been altered.

However, instead of embracing relativism or analyzing the discursive or social construction of remembrance, Halbwachs merely laments ‘how many of the remembrances that we believe genuine, with an identity beyond doubt, are almost entirely forged from false recognitions, in accordance with others’ testimony and stories!’ Memory may be a contiguous past, but it is not statistical analysis.

Yet beyond the dismissiveness displayed towards remembrance and the (as yet) only slightly troublesome acknowledgment of the subjectivity of the past, Halbwachs’ formulation of memory invokes the history of the everyday and of society which the *Annales* school and others were contemporaneously rescuing from the condescension of the ivory tower. History’s ‘overly abstract conceptions’ is not the stuff that memories are made of. Rather ‘images and impressions’ materialized in the ‘paintings, portraits, and engravings of the time or … the books that appeared, the plays presented, the style of the period, the jokes and humor in vogue.’ In other words, memory mirrors the *mentalité* of a time and place, the *Zeitgeist*. Memories recall not the past as it was or as it actually happened but reflect the *mentalité* which served to frame them. Another

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106 Ibid., p.69.
107 Ibid., p.71.
parallel distinction to Halbwachs’ history and memory is the contrast between political or diplomatic history and the cultural history or the history of everyday life. The links between the recent trend for memory and the study of mentalités, similarly a term often ill-defined, reliant on notions of collectivity and often depicting a particular moment than explaining change, should also be noted.109

As ever, Halbwachs’ particular exposition has its limitations. His memory is certainly a cultural and highly literary artifact. The mentalité which ‘permeated everything and showed itself in multifarious ways, is locked up as it were in the magazines and “family literature” of the time’.110 Indeed, Halbwachs’ own sources for his study of memory are predominantly French writers, particularly Stendhal and Proust (both analysts of lived experience recalled). The discussion of memory appears tied to a specifically delimited, and particularly literate, sector of (French) society.111 Halbwachs’ abstract examples have a curious quality of being quite culturally specific. On the memory of ‘a child’, for instance, we are told the infant comes in contact with ‘a class of adults whose level of thought approximates his own - servants ... [who] often communicate in a childlike manner’.112 The archetypal (boy) child will eventually leave his servants to enter ‘serious adult conversation’113 and read (French) writers and (French) newspapers. Maybe one milieu fits all, but there is a sense in which Halbwachs’ own has been expanded to encompass them each and every one.

There are numerous better theorists of mentalités and experience than Halbwachs, yet the association of memory is crucial. To realize the distinction between experience and explanation, empathy and hindsight, mentalité and narrative as the difference between history and memory is to give greater credence to the division than

108 Ibid., p.56.
111 See also where the child learns to read (in French, we presume), ibid., p.62
is desirable. Halbwachs’ obsessive bisectioning of history and memory and continual rejection of the latter does not serve much analytical purpose. Yet his conceptual operations, their nature and bias provide an illuminating reflection in which to view the recent literature on memory. What has become of the questions of experience and explanation when we look at memory today suggests a great deal about its appeal, its assumptions and its ongoing silences.

\[113\] Ibid.
III. Experience and the Cause of Truth.

The interplay of the alternative historiographies emphasizing experience and causation provides a field in which memory can be read profitably. Charles Maier, for one, has argued that memory's allure is indeed the experience which it furnishes: 'memory has become not just a glass through which the past is viewed perhaps darkly, but, so to speak, a viscous experience. It serves less as a mental faculty for recovering the past than as an exercise pleasurable in its own right.'\(^{114}\) Historical inquiry, presumably, is unlikely to be pleasurable in itself. Maier's argument is useful as a rebuttal of the more naïve claims for memory - the calls to 'never forget', which so often neglect any real consideration of the processes of forgetting or remembering and which elevate memory to a kind of shield, a thing to be grasped and brandished in defence against ignorance and yet which ignores whether the past can be captured, preserved and maintained, or what real value that would have anyway. The weakness of such injunctions is their feeble and rudimentary understanding of memory.

Yet Maier's characterization, while more critical, also has its limitations. Certainly Halbwachs' formulations of memory (where the subject 'feels it goes back to its remembrances in a continuous movement')\(^{115}\) are discernible beneath Maier's analysis: explanation is the preference, if not the preserve of history. Historians 'must reconstruct causal sequences ... but the retriever of memory does not have the same responsibility to establish causal sequencing. ... Memories are to be retrieved and relived, not explained.'\(^{116}\) While well aware that historians do not always bother with causal analysis, Maier argues that such neglect presupposes an atrophy of historiography, when 'first social classes and then individuals have been decentered and


\(^{115}\) Halbwachs, \textit{The Collective Memory}, p.79. My italics.

\(^{116}\) Maier, 'A Surfeit of Memory?', p.143.
dissolved in this causal opaqueness. Agency thus dissipates in a sea of discourse'. This recognition of the characteristic features of memory in history should indicate that in fact Maier's rough and ready division of history from memory, one an explanatory enquiry, the other an experience, is inadequate. The question remains: how does memory or experience relate to (causal) narratives of history? Memories do not emerge, are not recalled in a vacuum and should not be presumed to be retrieved in a causal void. Indeed, the characteristic of a 'memory' which holds forth obvious 'lessons' necessarily partakes of a causal overdetermination.

The critics are not alone in aligning memory with the dismantling of causal narratives. For some, memory's virtue lies in its very fragmentary and ephemeral nature, thereby evading determinism and acting heroically to 'disrupt master narratives of American imperialism, technology, science and masculinity.' Memory is essentially postmodern and on the side of the oppressed. Again, whether memory has an essentially fragmentary nature should be questioned rather than assumed. Similarly, memory's relationship with various historical narratives demands sustained interrogation (and capitalism is of course absent from the list above of evil masters). Nor should the beneficence of fragmentation be taken for granted. Omer Bartov has noted how the preference for atomization in Alexander Kluge's film The Patriot, 'whereby disjointed images, haphazard flashes, seeming lack of control, disorder, and unpredictability replace narrative, persuades us even more effectively than its verbal rhetoric of the complete lack of human agency in the affairs of humanity.' In this case, an absence of causes advances an impression of inevitability. Memory does not so

117 Ibid., p.141.
118 Marita Sturken, Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic and the Politics of Remembering, Berkeley, 1997, pp.3-5, as quoted in Klein, 'On the Emergence of Memory', p.138.
119 Bartov, Murder in Our Midst, p.145.
much disrupt grand narratives (although no doubt does that too), as function as an alternative form of explanation, of causation without analysis or agency.

Memory fragments are as subject to manipulation as any grand narrative. As with Halbwachs and Maier, the necessity to conceive history and memory less as things with a particular inherent quality or status than as processes, used by people in a historical and political context, must again be stressed. Pointing to just such a context, Arno Mayer has attacked what he has labelled the ‘disremembering’ of Nazism’s anti-Bolshevism, ‘in tune with the primitive anti-Marxism, leavened by fashionable modernist postmodernism, which feeds the shift from causality, diachrony, facticity, and configuration, to indeterminacy, representation, deconstruction, and fragmentation.’

The literal acceptance of memories which pass lightly over the question of causes (either of the events remembered or of the memory itself) cannot be anything but deficient, as is the appellation of memory to justify that incapacity to be critical. Yet memory as a whole should not be so swiftly dismissed. Rather, what is required is a critical memory and the delineation of what that might mean and how it would complement or challenge historiography.

For Mayer, as for Maier, the counterpart to the neglect of causes is an unwelcome and unhelpful focus on experience: the ‘memory of Auschwitz has become overly static, inflexible, and undialectical, with the accent almost exclusively on the unfathomable barbarity of the Nazis and the monstrous degradation and suffering of the victims’. Precisely through the emphasis on experience, the ‘social, economic, and cultural mainsprings of the horrors of Auschwitz have been lost from sight.’ Mayer, like Maier, too easily equates the stress on experience with the disregard of social causes. Certainly, both features are to be found in the historiography of the Holocaust,

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120 Mayer, ‘Memory and History’, p.8.
121 Ibid., p.7.
yet the two cannot be assumed to be natural complements which can then be abstracted as the defining character of 'Holocaust memory'.

There is no doubt, however, that a relationship exists between the experience of suffering, its remembrance, victimhood status and the explanation of the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{122} The dubious purposes this configuration can serve is most explicit in memories of Nazism. Thus ‘all the memories and tales of the ordinary German population, the air raids, destruction, and deaths represent a wartime hell that dominates everything else’ which ‘reduce individual participation in the National Socialist community and polity to a collectively shared suffering - without asking about its causes.’\textsuperscript{123} This twofold obfuscation mobilizes a complex relation of suffering and understanding of experience, eliding the reasons behind Allied bombing (and thus participation in a dictatorship bent on the domination and destruction of Europe) and marginalizing the suffering of those victims of Nazism which could compete as victims, (thereby forgetting the reasons behind those persecutions, of an entirely different nature to the causes behind the suffering under Allied bombing). That the bombing had little to do with racial persecution should also be remembered. Thus the nature of suffering or experience is not irrelevant to either explanation or the complication of individual memories and identities. Given the full gamut of experiences in the Second World War, a memory based around the experience of suffering (and its explanation) might be expected to proffer a complicated appreciation of the past.

The creation of a memory which can function to contain the past operates through the curtailment of context and causes. As Robert Moeller has argued, in the postwar years a ‘focusing on German suffering also made it possible to talk about the


end of the Third Reich without assessing responsibility for its origins, to tell an abbreviated story of National Socialism in which all Germans were ultimately victims of a war that Hitler started but everyone lost. Without assessing the origins actually means substituting the simplest justification as a catch-all: Hitler. The appreciation of suffering is not inherently flawed; the key question is how experience is remembered and recalled (and in what context). Chris Clark has suggested the acceptance of suffering in German identity in the immediate postwar years can be read as a definite, if oblique, recognition of complicity in what had gone before:

beyond the circles of the expellees themselves, the citizens of the Federal Republic responded to the loss of the centuries-old regions of German settlement in central Europe with an astonishing sang-froid ... It seems that the violent and permanent amputation of the historical terrain of German settlement in central and eastern Europe since the high Middle Ages was a ‘price’ most Germans in the west were prepared to pay.125

To pay for what, the question remains, whether for war and expansion, for the murder of Jews, Soviets, Gypsies, or for not asking such questions? No explanation or memory is innocent or entire of itself, but emerges from and in a context, and their limits lie in the ignorance, willful or otherwise of the varieties of memory and the tension between them.

Even those willing to admit complicity in Nazism, and proffer a considered opinion on causes, usually found the cause they wanted. Industrial leaders recognized the mistake of passivity in Nazi Germany, and decided on the necessity of a politically aggressive policy. The churches argued for a return to traditional family values which

had been distorted during the Nazi era. Nazism was certainly off the agenda for the postwar Federal Republic, but what Nazism was, apart from its most visible and extreme manifestations, remained vague and shifting enough to allow each and every group or individual to draw the lessons they preferred. Historiography is not exempt from this common endeavour of pacifying the past. Yet whether in the form of history or memory, the past was important in the postwar Federal Republic. In the common agreement that Nazism was no longer possible and wrong (however much some continued to believe the latter only because of the indisputibility of the former), the present had to be envisaged as different from the Nazi years. The interpretation of the Hitlerzeit mattered. Both memory and history were explicitly relevant, with political, social and cultural freight. Causal simplification is indeed a common approach to the past, but it is not exclusive to ‘memory’. To continue artificially dividing history and memory into ‘good’ and ‘bad’, the former analysis and the latter an unsubtle emphasis on suffering does not do justice to the complexity of the function and nature of understandings of the past in the present.

The rhetorical division of history and memory preexists Halbwachs and that plays a part in the West German ‘coming to terms’ with the past: until 1947 accounts of the concentration camps constituted the largest body of literature on the Third Reich. Thereafter the artificial distinction between history and memory was imposed and survivor literature was displaced, recast as personal, subjective and lacking historical distance. A similar, but not identical, position is portrayed in Peter Novick’s assessment of survivors’ memory, ‘not a reliable historical source’ but which can nonetheless be ‘important in evoking the Holocaust experience.’

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128 See Lüdtke, ‘Coming to Terms with the Past’, p.550.
survivor literature was not unique to Germany. In Italy, Primo Levi’s memoir, *If This Is A Man*, was turned down a number of times before being accepted by a small publishing house which printed a few thousand copies before folding.\(^{130}\) In France, too, an abundance of testimonies in the immediate postwar years found a small and dwindling audience.\(^{131}\) A number of reasons can account for this failed communication, the demands of postwar politics in particular, but also an issue of enduring relevance, and one again centred around the crucial question of experience: how, or if, the memory of a minority can be communicated to and embraced by the majority.

Omer Bartov has indicated the existence of a similar problem of experience within survivor literature:

> it is this that Primo Levi, Paul Celan, and Jean Amery understood with ever greater urgency in the years following their personal survival: that the stories told by the saved distort the past, not because they are not authentic, but because they exclude the stories of the majority, who drowned not for lack of will to survive, but due to a combination of circumstances in which individual will and skills rarely played an important role, and chance was paramount.\(^{132}\)

The argument that all versions of the past are distorted, or at least partial, is here a true but meaningless statement. Authenticity is an inadequate concept from which to assess such literature, and hence completely insufficient to serve as the framework for delineating the differences of ‘history’ and ‘memory’. Bartov demonstrates the importance of issues of context and relation, once the rather trite issue of memory as the individual’s subjective recall of experience is passed over. Levi and the other authors are exemplars of a literature dedicated to ‘bearing witness’, to passing on the experience of the Holocaust. For all the talk about the subjectivity of memory, it is (at least here) a discourse insistently concerned with the question of truth. Nicholas Doumanis has also

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noted the relevance of both doubt and truth to the maintenance of a popular memory, if it is to have some worth.\textsuperscript{133} As a practice, rather than merely an abstracted opposition to history, the operations of memory are no less complex than history, and impossible to dismiss. Rather than providing confirmation of the opposites which so often both critics and advocates of memory endorse, the field of remembrance is one where clear distinctions between history and memory, subjective and objective, authentic and artificial, experience and explanation do not hold.

Memory needs both a closely detailed study of it as a practice and a more deeply contextualized understanding of its use in historiography. At present two images function as substitutes. One pictures remembrance as a continually and seamlessly updated reflection of present concerns; another conceives it as the uncritical recall and sentient act of reliving experience. Memory can be both; the two images are not always distinguished. Both are opposed to historiography, and both have a mirror image which reverses the usually negative connotations associated with them, redistributing virtue by way of making memory more ‘authentic’, ‘natural’ or somehow ‘closer’ than its opposite. Further, while the distinction is far from clear at the level of practice, both images of memory often imply that memory and history are discrete. What is absent from these formulations of history and memory is a credible conception of their relationship.

As there are two images of the nature of memory, two models exist to account for a relationship between historiography and remembrance. Memory can be perceived as an overarching term applicable to all forms of engagement with the past, including historiography, or as a term specifically applied to oral history (while nevertheless aware that oral history is not the isolated and self-contained ‘other’ of professional

\textsuperscript{133} Nicholas Doumanis, ‘The Italian Empire and \textit{brava gente}: Oral History and the Dodecanese Islands’, in Bosworth and Dogliani, \textit{Italian Fascism}, p.172.
historiography). To reconsider the rather-too distinct boundaries between history and memory is not to abolish them altogether. Memory and history are no more synonymous than they are opposites. While the characterization of memory as the intoxication a past made seemingly tangible, an experience in itself, or the empathic innervation of the past as experienced is too crude, remembrance (of whichever variety) is indeed best explained through its grounding in experience. Jeffrey Herf has pointed out how ‘understanding the experience of German exiles in Moscow, New York, and Mexico City is indispensable for explaining the subsequent history of memory of the Nazi era in the two Germanys.’\(^{134}\) In this sense, memory is often as much a legacy of the past it remembers as a present viewpoint on history.

One of the subtlest delineations of memory, which provides a sophisticated understanding of the practice of memory is Nicholas Doumanis’ depiction of the memory of the Italian occupation of the Dodecanesen islands. Here is a version of remembering the past where neither the memory nor the experience being recalled is simple. Doumanis argues that while Dodecanesen memory was definitely nostalgic, to dismiss it as such, and presume the only function of memory is its present services, would be simplistic: ‘Dodecanesen nostalgia for Italian rule was mainly acquired from experience, from impressions gained during the occupation period itself’.\(^{135}\) Popular memory functions as a critique of official historiography, a clearly present-centred practice, but it does so and can do so because ‘the official picture ... cannot accommodate their own experiences.’\(^{136}\) Yet that experience is also a complicated process, imbricated in ‘Italian efforts to present themselves as *brava gente*.’\(^{137}\) Memory is neither wholly present-centred nor an utterly authentic rendition of the past, but exists


\(^{135}\) Doumanis, *Myth and Memory in the Mediterranean*, p.10.

\(^{136}\) Doumanis, ‘The Italian Empire’, p.162.

\(^{137}\) Doumanis, ‘The Italian Empire’, p.172.
in a relationship between historiography and an experience of the past itself never free from the operations of ideology or power. One more insight should perhaps be drawn from Doumanis’ study of memory in the Mediterranean: that the strength of popular memory is, in part, due to the failure of official memory and historiography. Memory might be nostalgic, and barely resistant to analysis on the basis of accuracy, but in certain contexts it may be more appropriate than a history which fails to encompass all experiences. The value and function of memory in the Dodecanesens should serve as a reminder to those who would criticize an obsession with memory that the prevalence and prominence of remembrance is probably a failure of history.\textsuperscript{138}

The uses of the concept memory in historical and public discourse too often function as rhetorical claims rather than as genuinely valuable distinctions which illuminate the present understanding of the past. Yet many of the criticisms which accumulate under the rubric of the critique or defense of memory remain valuable. A simplification, neglect or generalization of historical causation cannot be justified through appeal to the allusion to ‘memory’. A lack of context is equally detrimental to any tangible understanding of the past and the silences which memory fills and creates are certainly significant. However, all these points are fairly unoriginal and are in any case hardly exclusive to ‘memory’, often characteristic of history. The deficiencies of some instances or studies of remembrance does not invalidate all ‘memory’. Memory cannot be dismissed, but nor can it be taken at face value, nor at the word of its adherents. Memory can embody a critical function, illuminating the inadequacies of official historiography, as in the Dodecanesens islands. Yet memory can also validate

\textsuperscript{138} Of course, it is important to distinguish between a possible obsession with memory as a concept in historiography, as a cultural phenomenon and at the level at which Doumanis is examining memory, in the tradition of oral history. To oppose each of these different levels of the term memory to history is not helpful.
the inadequacies of public history. The authenticity of television recreations of the Second World War are best provided not by historians but those who experienced it.  

Doubtless, memory will only ever provide the equivalent of what is demanded of it and its invocation to serve as the stamp of authentication will likely provide little in the way of complexity. Conflict, contradiction, and ambiguity constitute the crucial essence of any constructive confrontation with the past. A memory invoked for the aura of authenticity serves solely to ward off contention and contestation. By contrast, 'doubt was ... an intrinsic feature of this contest in social remembering' among the Dodecanesens. Memory is not a measure of truth. Like history, it serves its users. Thus if the various images of remembrance have little analytical value, they have often furnished or snugly fit the fabrication of the historian's identity. The most familiar by now must be that of the correctors of memory, exemplified in Jacques Le Goff, who avouch that 'it is desirable that historical information ... correct this false traditional history. History must illuminate memory and help it rectify its errors.' Yet that position is no longer devoid of the tremors and terrors of doubt:

But is the historian himself immune to an illness that proceeds, if not from the past, at least from the present, or perhaps from an unconscious image of a dreamt-of future?

The medical metaphor (like history, another Enlightenment discourse) is revealing, and Le Goff's is not the only instance of its use. Such assailing doubts undoubtedly contribute to a sickly history and are best set aside to concentrate on the correction of wayward memory.

Peter Novick's chosen identity is not far removed from that of remembrance's rectifiers, although he takes his model from medieval England:

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140 Doumanis, 'The Italian Empire', p.172.
141 Le Goff, History and Memory, p.111.
"There was an office called the Remembrancer," he says. "What the Remembrancer was supposed to do was remember things everybody else had forgotten." Mr Novick thinks historians should be Remembrancers, "telling people things they've forgotten, or didn't want to know, or didn't want to look at."  

Novick's mirror-image indulges a seemingly common-sensical position, which does not quite do justice even to his historical parallel. As Peter Burke has noted, remembrancer was 'actually a euphemism for debt-collector'. Left unanswered are the difficult issues of whether identifying what is forgotten, what is unknown and unwanted is as simple as Novick makes it sound. Peter Burke's invocation of the role of remembrance, in an early reconsideration of memory, largely aligns it with myth, but myth 'not in the positivist sense of 'inaccurate history' but in the richer, more positive sense of a story with a symbolic meaning, made up of stereotyped incidents and involving characters who are larger than life, whether they are heroes or villains.' The proximity of myth to Novick's self-identity marks it as not too distant from or incompatible with the more orthodox task of correction. What happens after errors are corrected and forgettings identified is not always clear. Perhaps history can then perform its benevolent purpose or perhaps correction or identification of forgetful errors is beneficial in itself. The metaphor should probably not be pushed too far.

Le Goff feared the susceptibility of history to the contamination of time and its attendant horrors (politics, inaccuracy and all else that is unscientific). Henry Rousso takes the medical image one step further. The Vichy past Rousso encountered was too alive for the mundane morbidity of the historian: 'It was too soon for the pathologist to begin an autopsy; what the case called for was a doctor qualified to treat the living, not

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144 Burke's piece predates much of the literature: 'myth' virtually disappears in later writing on memory.
145 Burke, 'History as Social Memory', p.103.
the dead - perhaps even a psychoanalyst. Here is another imagining of memory and
the historians, redolent with its ramifications regarding what might constitute a cure. However, the most ambiguous, most fascinating and probably most frightening figure of
the historian fashioned in the literature of memory is that by Pierre Nora when he
stridently declares:

Nothing equals the national responsibility of the historian, half priest, half soldier.

The depiction is ambiguous, for it is not quite clear if Nora means only the historians of
the past or of present as well; fascinating, for whatever the critical awareness of the
position of the historian here, it is countered by an ardent reverence for the role;
frightening, for historians both correctors of memory and crusaders for the nation will
doubtless craft the history they desire. Or, in the 1990s, when illness is imputed not only
to history, but the nation, memory’s minders may turn its uneasy minions. Memory’s
possession of historical discourse may best be explained in the minds and the mentalité
of that decade.

146 Rousso, The Vichy Syndrome, p.1.
The American edition renders it thus: ‘Historians, speaking half as soldiers, half as priests, bore the
burden of responsibility on behalf of the nation’. Lawrence D. Kritzman (ed.) Realms of Memory: the
Construction of the French Past, under the direction of Pierre Nora, vol I, Conflicts and Divisions, trans.
responsabilité nationale de l’historien, moitié prêtre, moitié soldat.’
IV. Memory, Modernity and the Nation-State.

Professional history has been a product of the nation, and the modern idea of memory cannot be separated from the questions of nationalism. The point is important, for the abstract theoretical discussion of the alternatives of 'history' and 'memory' rarely includes a historical portrayal of the terms. The blithe avowal of scientific history implicit in many formulations of memory is best accompanied by the reassertion of the truth-value, not the historicisation, of professional historiography. Nevertheless, while both history and memory have existed in various incarnations for centuries, the invention of history as a discipline, a domain of scientific inquiry, took place in the late nineteenth century, the great age of nation building and the same period in which the literature of memory finds its origins.

One way of postulating a historical relation between history and memory is to credit, in the manner of Pierre Nora (whose project *Les Lieux de mémoire* is considered in detail below), the advent of history with the death of memory. In Nora's narrative, modernity introduces a professionalized, systematized, self-aware, 'modern' history, usurping 'traditional' memory.¹⁴⁸ Peasant society, the 'quintessential repository of collective memory,'¹⁴⁹ provides the classical locus of this memory. Unchanging and harmonious, uncorrupted and unsullied by the ravages of the modern, the rural world lent memory a rich and nourishing humus in which to flourish. Like most representations of memory, this narrative of memory's emergence can be read in at least two ways, either as the triumph of a scientific discipline over mythical misuses, or the withering of memory's more palpable past under the heartless, pitiless and hollow construction of history. Characteristically, Nora himself indulges in both meanings,

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lamenting memory’s loss, yet never relenting in the ‘scientific’ design. The ability to blur the bifurcation omnipresent in the literature of history and memory is part of both the power and the allure of Nora’s formulation. Nora does not overcome the binarism; he mobilizes it.

Nora’s attempt to historicize the emergence of modern understandings of history and memory, while laudable, fails to recognize that not only do the terms have their historical context, but so does the historicisation. This observation is the key to understanding why, for Nora, the privileging of a pre-national peasant society swept aside in the passage to modernity is not in fact a critique of the modern nation-state which evolved in the late nineteenth-century and the history profession which emerged to inscribe its past and future glory. For the late nineteenth century marks less the advent of a clinical, cold-hearted professional history which superimposes itself upon and extinguishes memory, but rather the inception of that very dichotomy, mobilized then, as now, in a productive tension. The division of approaches to the past into professional and personal, academic and authentic, and (in narrative format) the increasing displacement of memory by history, is a product of the nineteenth century. Nora has confused a self-understanding of the period with historical reality.

Taking the emergence of memory at face value leaves in shadows the politics of its production. The simultaneous emergence of memory and a ‘romanticization of peasant culture and oral literature’, which still lingers in Nora, should not obscure the fact that, in the attempts to establish ‘an ‘authentic’ historical memory for a given people’, ‘the visions of the past that they produced, however populist, were ... almost always those of a national bourgeoisie’. Similarly, Eric Hobsbawm has noted how the ‘traditionalism of peasants ... was constantly praised by nineteenth-century

conservatives as the ideal model of the subject’s political comportment.\footnote{151} In this context, the picture of peasant society as memory’s Garden of Eden seems naive at best. The abiding power of peasants in the modern French Republic (or for that matter French history since 1789) also belies the apparent simplicity and serenity of locating memory’s natural being in Arcadia.

When Pierre Nora speaks of the ‘end of the last century, when rural society collapsed and age-old social equilibria were disrupted’\footnote{152}, his romanticization has its own tradition. He notes that peasant society’s ‘vogue as an object of historical study coincided with the heyday of industrial expansion’\footnote{153} but fails utterly to rethink the idyllic image of a real memory, possessed by peasants, mangled in modernity. While there are definite distinctions to be made between traditional and modern societies, the alignment of memory in one epoch and history the other is simplistic and serves that most characteristic product of modernity, the nation-state. Furthermore, the creation of myths (often of national primordiality, most easily located in a pastoral continuity) constituted as much an element of nation-state construction as the positivistic sciences that historical inquiry perceived itself to be. Both the history and the memory of the nineteenth century could play their part in the nation. Thus Nora, endorsing uncritically the image of a lost past of tangible memories, idealizes the Third Republic, the nation-state which nevertheless ‘seemed to draw together and crystallize ... one tradition of French memory’ creating a period in which ‘history, memory, and the nation enjoyed an unusually intimate communion’.\footnote{154} It is no coincidence that the theorist of memory from whom Nora’s position is evolved is that exemplar of the Third Republic, Maurice Halbwachs.

\footnote{152}{Nora, ‘Between Memory and History’, p.11.}
\footnote{153}{Ibid., p.1.}
\footnote{154}{Ibid., p.5.}
The nation, more particularly the French nation and specifically the Third Republic, is an underlying, almost unifying, motif to Halbwachs’ work and life. Born just a few years after the birth of the new republic, his life is coterminous with it. The French experience of the Second World War intricately intersects the personal history of Halbwachs’ death, just as, born into a family of Alsatian origin, his beginnings bear more than passing reference to the Franco-Prussian War. Between the falls of France, Halbwachs was situated at the centre of the imagining of the nation. Although a product of the periphery, he grew up in Paris at the very heart of France, was educated at elite schools and reared in a liberal, pro-Dreyfusard milieu ardently committed to the Third Republic. In family, as in geography and education, Halbwachs was positioned at the hub of the construction of a particular conception of France.

Halbwachs’ intellectual influences, too, imbricate the practices of national imagination. He was taught by the philosopher Henri Bergson at the prestigious Lycée Henri IV before becoming a disciple of the sociologist Emile Durkheim and Halbwachs’ work takes meaning from the tensions between (and commonalities of) these two intellectual traditions. Bergson’s philosophy, emphasizing intuition and subjectivity, was resolutely opposed in methodology and content by Durkheim’s sociology, but both sought ‘to prove the value of French culture, its uniqueness and independence.’ The intellectual endeavours of Bergson and Durkheim were a continuation of the Franco-Prussian war by other means, the delineation of a republican tradition for the often unconvincing state of the Third Republic. Unsurprisingly, then, Halbwachs’ work takes the nation as a given, study as a scientific activity and props up itself with flabby and dubious generalizations such as ‘French culture’.

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155 For exact details see chapter 2 above.
Imagining a French nation was no less important after the First World War than before. Too myopic to fight in the war, Halbwachs instead participated in the intellectual front which emerged at Strasbourg upon the return of Alsace-Lorraine. A ‘new’ university, its staff comparatively young, Strasbourg operated partly in rebellion against the traditional French university system. The intellectuals who converged at France’s north-eastern edge were those who ‘before the war, wanted to modernize and “Germanize” the French university’, and invest it with a greater research culture.158 Built by the Germans, the university was indeed modern and well equipped. Yet, if the contrast to Paris was one attraction for the affiliates of Strasbourg, the university fitted the structures of the nation equally well. The endeavour to ‘Germanize’ did not extend to inviting German exchange professors to the university (although Halbwachs was here a dissenter),159 nor was the German university system a faultless paradigm (too ‘fragmented’ for one thing). Strasbourg would strive instead for ‘synthesis’; to compare advantageously to Germany was at least as important as improving on Paris. Halbwachs’ own position as professor of sociology and pedagogy was possibly due to the prior presence of a sociologist in the German Strasbourg.160 For all the apparent opposition to Paris, it was clear that, as one of its intellectual avant-garde wrote, ‘at Strasbourg, France must do better than Germany; the national honour is engaged there’.161

Boundary disputes and other constraints similarly marked the interdisciplinarity of the intellectuals in Alsace, as advocates of each discipline sought to ensure synthesis

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159 See Ibid., p.274.
160 Although university politics may also have had a hand. See Ibid., p.274.
occurred under their aegis. Halbwachs, naturally, claimed 'sociology is superior to history', but the *Annales* school would win out over sociology in the *longue* (or perhaps only the *moyenne*) durée. Halbwachs, a member of the editorial board of the *Annales*, contributed an occasional article and numerous book reviews, but the journal would not act as forum for sociologists. These competing imperialisms of the periphery petered out in the 1930s, as both the *Annales* and Halbwachs shifted, or advanced, to Paris, the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Études and the Sorbonne. The new decade revealed that the Strasbourg intellectuals 'after having been almost indifferent ... to a return to Paris, ... desired it shamelessly'. National (and personal) interests thus intertwine in the history of the reimaging of memory in the interwar period, although Halbwachs' portrayal of history so neatly fitted the purposes of the nation, and that collective project was so well served by scientific empiricism, that collective memory remained largely ignored within the academic domain. Ironically for Halbwachs' recent recuperation, and Pierre Nora's presentation of the Third Republic as an almost magical moment of synthesis for history, memory and the nation, the historiography of that moment expressed a broad, if not always total, belief in 'scientific' empiricism.

Thus both in the late nineteenth century, at the moment of its inception for the purposes of historians, and in the early twentieth century, when Maurice Halbwachs did more than anyone previously to stake out memory as a serious field of academic enquiry, the nation-state provided a crucial background and framework for the development and disclosure of the many possible meanings of history and memory. By

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163 Halbwachs was Professor of Sociology at the Sorbonne from 1935 to 1943 and Professor of Social Psychology at the Collège de France from 1943 until his death. The *Annales* became associated with the sixth section for economic and social sciences at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Études.
the late twentieth century, however, history could no longer cleave so innocently to the
nation, at least if was to retain credibility in the eyes of the theoretically sophisticated.

Enduring a third wave of relativism to follow those groundswells that characterized the
aftermath of the First World War and the 1960s, the theorists of history no longer
subscribe so unreservedly to objectivity. The nation is another concept now beset by
uncertainties, although, for some conservatives, this destabilization of past intellectual
foundations generates more anxiety than analysis, expressed in alarmed arguments that
‘history is memory, inspiration and commonality and a nation without memory is every
bit as adrift as an amnesiac wandering the streets.’165 Whatever critical function history
might have submits here to the overriding necessity of identification with the nation.
The context of nationalism needs to be invoked for the present, as for the past,
preoccupations with memory.

The critical function of history and the historian, and their relation to the nation,
figure prominently in Pierre Nora’s project Les Lieux de mémoire, perhaps the most
influential, certainly the most ambitious, and probably the most significant variant of
memory to date. Halbwachs’ Third Republic represents for Nora the golden age of the
nation, when France was one with its memory. With ‘the Third Republican synthesis
evaporated’166 all that remains (for the historian?) is to bemoan this lost unity of being.
Nora assumes too quickly the existence (at any time) of such a synthesis, just as other
arguments about modern nations ‘adrift’ of their memory rely on an unfounded certainty
that history was or is a unifying force. With such assumptions, the fragmentation of the
national community can be blamed on anything and everything from social history to

164 Jean Pommier à Gustave Cohen, Strasbourg, 29 octobre 1931, Papiers de Gustave Cohen, (59 AP 6),
165 J.L. Grantastein, Who Killed Canadian History?, Toronto, 1998, p.xviii as quoted in Chris Lorenz,
166 Pierre Nora, Conflicts and Divisions’, in Nora, Realms of Memory, I, p.21.
feminism (or, unstated but often implied, the racial ‘degeneration’ occasioned by immigration).

The current crisis of national identity and memory is to be contrasted not just with the Third Republic, but its idyllic predecessor, the romanticized milieu of peasant society, before history’s advent rudely ruptured the equilibria of tradition; ‘Lieux de mémoire exist because there are no longer any milieux de mémoire, settings in which memory is a real part of everyday experience’.167 The lieu is the offal of memory. The heritage of this imaginary has already been noted above, and, as David Harvey has noted, two common responses to the postmodern condition are to ‘regret the passing of the old order and to call for the restoration of past values (religious, cultural, national solidarities, or whatever) ... [or] to pursue the utopian vision of some kind of communitarianism.’168 Les Lieux de mémoire takes up both elements. Once upon a time, memory was real; now, ‘it no longer exists’.169 The quintessence of peasant society and the possession of pre-colonial (but not immigrant) peoples, ‘real memory’ was the ‘inviolate social memory that primitive and archaic societies embodied, and whose secret died with them’.170 However, the distinctions between the culture of modernity and ‘traditional’ societies are caricatured rather than characterized by the shorthand of with or without history.171 Similarly, the validity of the very notion of societies ‘without history’, or with a totally ‘internalized’ memory, must be challenged. The heritage of such ideas in colonial politics, justifying imperialism through the relative ‘primitiveness’ of indigenous populations, perceived as unhistorical and thus condemned by history behoves caution. The return of colonial populations to the

168 David Harvey, Spaces of Hope, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2000, p.85.
169 Nora, ‘Between Memory and History’, p.1
170 Ibid., p.2.
171 The with/without history dichotomy is often based on the question of literacy, itself a rather vague indicator of variations of historical consciousness. See Fentress and Wickham, Social Memory, chapter three.
colonizing nations in the second half of the twentieth century suggests another context in which nation and memory take shape as highly charged political readings of national history.

The work of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger provides an alternative reading of the relations between the nation, memory and modernity. The concept of tradition (unlike 'custom', largely invented) here describes the product of the process which contrives 'some parts of social life within ... as unchanging and invariant' amid the 'constant change and innovation of the modern world'.172 'Invented tradition' is doubly advantageous, not only enabling a more subtle understanding of the uses of the past in the late nineteenth century, but also, through emphasizing the political and historical contexts of 'memory', allows a critical re-reading of projects such as Les Lieux de mémoire. For Nora's project, haunted by a sense of the 'acceleration of history ... things tumble with increasing rapidity into an irretrievable past', contains uncanny echoes of the past it studies; the feeling that all that is solid (the nation) has melted into air, all that is sacred (France) is profaned.173

Yet the divergence from rather than accordance to the model of 'invented tradition', indicates the truly innovative in the self-perception of Les Lieux de mémoire. For the unchanging, invented, static space exist no more; 'tradition' is not part of society, but lost forever. The idealization of the Third Republic hints at a possible compromise, and Les Lieux de mémoire itself constitutes something of an attempt to introduce a canon of accepted, and thus relatively stable, indices of national identity. For the greater part, however, 'true' memory lingers only a little in the present, in 'gestures and habits, unspoken craft traditions, intimate physical knowledge, ingrained

reminiscences, and spontaneous reflexes', another supposition based upon an illusory
and unlikely prelapsarian vision. The image of peasant or 'primitive' society
adumbrated in this context of an uncertain national identity not only lacks credibility,
but has had a traditional application in modern society to which Nora is seemingly
oblivious. The continuities (and discontinuities) in the intellectualized imagining of the
nation need to be invoked to understand the present functioning of memory in
historiography and society.

In addition to political and historical uses, the idealization of memory has
historiographical ramifications. With the simplicity which accompanies the appellations
'true' and 'real', Nora's representation of memory comprises a false and artificial:
history. The cancer of memory is criticism. History contains at heart 'a criticism
destructive of spontaneous memory. Memory is always suspect in the eyes of history,
whose true mission is to demolish it, to repress it.' Where Halbwachs favoured the
'scientific' side to the history/memory dyad, Nora inverts the values without
challenging the division. The former elevated professional history (or rather sociology)
over an unreliable and socially tainted memory; the latter rephrases the same qualities as
artificial versus natural. History is 'reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete',
individual, psychological and indirect, whereas 'memory is life ... in permanent
evolution', concrete, spontaneous, collective and immediate: 'memory is an absolute,
while history is always relative'. Halbwachs has been turned upside down: the
question is why.

The answer can be purely historiographical. After all, the most intriguing aspect
of Nora's imagery, apart from its unoriginality, is that the qualities ascribed to memory

174 Ibid., p.8.
175 Michael Lambek and Paul Antze, 'Introduction: Forecasting Memory', in Paul Antze and Michael
176 Nora, 'Between Memory and History', p.3.
177 Ibid., p.3.
are all those rendered deeply problematic by critical history: the spontaneous, the real, the authentic, the natural, the collective and the absolute. Such adjectives nowadays usually reside solely within the safety of quotation marks. In Nora’s work, by contrast, contested attributes, thoroughly suspect, are presented as realities destroyed. As such, they underpin a particular view of professional history, all the while avoiding the imputation of such archaic qualities (real, authentic etc.) to the historiography of which *Les Lieux de mémoire* is a part. History is indeed all that postmodernism might impute to it, because in memory it has killed what *was* authentic. Nora appears caught between an ardent desire for an authentic past and its critical impossibility.

Yet the postmodern recasting of history provides just one context within which to understand the rearticulation of history and memory. The reason for the inversion of Halbwachs cannot be sought simply within the methodological niceties of historiography, particularly since the only previously successful resolution to the ‘problem’ of the conflict between history and memory was provided (according to Nora) by the nation-state. The Third Republic emerges as the only third way between a critical history and authentic memory. The failure of the nation-state to maintain this balance must be the first context for the reprise of memory at the end of the twentieth century. *Les Lieux de mémoire* is a diagnosis of the present as much as of the past. All memory is contemporary memory.
Les Lieux de mémoire offers an unparalleled opportunity for a case-study of memory in late twentieth century historiography. The seven volume project, expanded from an originally intended three, was published between 1984 to 1992, but in conception, translation and imitation spans more than two decades between 1978 and the present. Beyond the actual multitude of articles by numerous authors, based around the three themes of La Republique, La Nation, and Les France, the project has established the concept of a lieu de mémoire, asserted the validity of memory as a field of study, and demonstrated its profitability and popularity both in- and outside academia.

Pierre Nora should not be credited with sole authorship, yet he nevertheless occupies a significant place in Les Lieux de mémoire’s production, publicity and promotion. The enterprise, evolved from a seminar run by Nora at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales between 1978 and 1981 and published under his aegis in his position as an editor at Gallimard, has little of the apparent peripherality within French intellectual life which graced the work of Maurice Halbwachs and the Annales while both were based in Strasbourg. Born in 1931, Nora himself has followed remarkably similar path to Halbwachs, attending, as did the sociologist, the lycée Henri IV and the École normale supérieure, and also the Sorbonne. Raised amid the intellectual elites of the grande bourgeoisie, in 1948 Nora had already participated in establishing the review Impudence, along with the historian of ancient Greece and Holocaust negationism Pierre Vidal-Naquet. After a two year stint teaching in Algeria between 1958 and 1960, which produced his essay Les Français d’Algérie (1961), Nora

took on a role as political and cultural commentator, often in *France-Observateur* or later *Le Nouvel Observateur*, and, since 1965, as an editor at Gallimard, where in 1971 he launched the ‘bibliothèque des histoires’ of which *Les Lieux de mémoire* is a part.

Overseeing the publication of such luminaries as Georges Duby, Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, and as an organizer and editor of collective works, such as *Essais d’ego histoire*\(^{179}\) and (with Jacques le Goff) *Faire de l’histoire*\(^{180}\), Nora has participated constantly in the ongoing revisioning of French historiography. His direction of the fashionable journal *Le Débat*, founded in 1980 (again under the auspices of Gallimard), further complements and reaffirms this position. Nor is Nora merely an editor, but also an educator, elected to the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in 1976, and now Directeur d’Études, he occupies a prestigious position in the French university system. The Académie française inducted him to its elect in June 2001. Thus through education, through publication and public debate, and perhaps as well through birth, as a ‘scion of the grande bourgeoisie’\(^{181}\), Nora is situated at the nexus of the production of a collective image of France even as he analyses it.

If, as argued above, the nation has always functioned as the crucial framework for ‘memory’ (as a historiographical phenomenon), the taking of the, or rather one, nation as the subject of a study of memory carries special resonance. The decisive context for understanding the reinvention of memory is the diagnosis of the French condition, as adumbrated in the pages of *Le Débat*, in the newspapers of Paris and through *Les Lieux de mémoire* itself. The appraisal of national memory maintains its coherence across these differing organs of expression. Thus the journal published by Gallimard under Nora’s direction adopts the language, the themes and concerns of the

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volumes published (by Gallimard) under Nora’s direction: *lieux de mémoire* are ‘so many exterior supports for a devitalized memory. As a consequence, the image of the nation, dependent on the collective memory, hardly constitutes anything any longer than a frame of dotted lines…’\(^{182}\) While the ‘collective memory’ should not be apotheosized as the primordial crutch of the nation-state, and can be viewed as created by the latter (that is posterior, not prior to national identity), the formula has proven catching.

A weak memory and a fractured nation loom as the two symptoms of the anaemic age. The causation of national evanescence often remains unexamined. The paramount assertion of the nation’s parlous state, and the injunction to focus on the aggravating absence of the nourishing humus of collective memory takes precedence. The simplistic conceptualization of the nation and collective memory as naturally, mutually, dependent does not bear much scrutiny. Why the present has proven particularly problematic and paranoiac for the nation-state’s apostles in what is after all a long and crisis-ridden history, lies equally unexplored. Memory and nation, it would seem, rise and fall together. Their intimacy assumed, their present status as victims obvious to all but the most oblivious, the elaboration of the memory-nation now lost need only be accompanied by the identification of the culprits.

The first of the usual suspects in the fall of nation and memory is mass culture, the insidious and invasive power of the media (and often, by implication, Hollywood and America). As *Les Lieux de mémoire* proclaims, ‘memory … has been supplanted by the thin film of current events’.\(^{183}\) The sad and present time must bend beneath the fearsome weight of the ‘unprecedented imperialism of the media’s sovereignty’.\(^{184}\) By no coincidence, the journal *Le Débat* self-consciously seeks a third way between ‘the


\(^{183}\) Nora, ‘Between Memory and History’, p.2.

ghetto of the university and against journalistic translation', its regular contributors maintaining a presence in the weekly press (Nouvel Observateur or L’Express), while often also holding posts at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales or being affiliated with the ex-Communist, but increasingly conservative, historian of the French Revolution, François Furet and the Fondation Saint-Simon.

Thus the criticism of ‘great thinkers’ has been a constant of the journal, deliberately set up outside the ‘historical tradition of the great French reviews [which] consisted in effect largely of bringing together around a personality of the first order a team to spread a doctrine, an esprit d’école, a philosophy, a political line.’ Closing the severed synapse between the ‘public’ and academia in the face of the modern media also characterizes Les Lieux de mémoire, self-proclaimedly seeking to create a history both ‘very scholarly and very ‘popular’ thus once again closing the circle in which the analysis of the nation’s ills and the production of that analysis happily converge.

The concerns of a frail and fragile nation, the thinning of memory and an overweening media converge in Nora’s lament at the fate of the intellectual, one of the most enduring themes of Le Débat:

It [the media] deprives intellectuals of their traditional magistrature as directors of the collective conscience, and assumes for the larger public the role which had been theirs in the past; it forces them to redefine themselves. For it is difficult to believe that it will be the stars of the media who will become the authentic heirs and the legitimate representatives of a place and a role which in spite of all which could reduce the weight of it, remains among the highest and most noble of history and national identity.

Nora has not renounced his understanding of the historian as ‘half priest, half soldier’. Thus the turn to memory must be placed in the frustrated directorship of the

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collective conscience; the *ordre médiatique*, ‘all-powerful’, has ‘carried out a redistribution of roles.’190 Whether intellectuals ever really guided the ‘collective conscience’, and whether such an entity ever existed, can be doubted. More likely the notion of ‘collective conscience’ was primary to the nation, and hence to intellectuals, willingly fulfilling the imagining of national identity through the illusion of the directorship, or dictatorship, of memory. More to the point, such a self-assured sinecure not only does not now exist, but the vision of the superintendency of national identity is felt and seen to be illusory. Between the homogenizing terror of the media, the flailing of the nation and its intellectuals and the waning of memory, the historical and political meaning of remembrance-study takes shape. So what is the nature of the nation imagined in *Les Lieux de mémoire* and *Le Débat*, rudderless and adrift without its intellectuals? And if the collective conscience were in secure hands once more, where would its leaders follow?

The question of memory (and the nation) should not be reduced to the pitiful plight of a few French intellectuals. Their bathetic fate may constitute the apex of the modern malaise for Nora, but nonetheless merely epitomizes a much deeper degeneration of French society. No less than the redeployment of intellectuals, the redefinition of France takes place from the late 1970s and reverberates through *Les Lieux de mémoire*; (and in any case, to Nora, France and its intellectuals are indissoluble). As Nora makes clear, these volumes furnish a history for a France dealing with ‘an influx of immigrants not easily adaptable to the traditional norms of “Frenchness”’.191 This acknowledgement, however, intimates that everyone had hitherto been happy with the norms of ‘Frenchness’, and that the ‘problem’ (and immigration) is recent. More value might be gained from explaining the belatedness of the recognition

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191 Nora, ‘From Lieux de Memoire to Realms of Memory’, p.xxiii.
of the contradictions in constructing nationhood, rather than merely marking shifts as Nora tends to do; why is the situation now undeniable?

Les Lieux de mémoire thus grapples with the issues of integration, assimilation and identity at a time when even the directors of the national conscience admit that 'whatever “France” may be, neither science nor conscience can today show it to be the culmination of a single, unitary pattern of development or even the product of a variety of clearly identifiable deterministic processes'. The today makes a crucial qualification. In the supposed synthesis of the Third Republic, presumably neither conscience nor science were troubled, and the disruption of this comfortable concurrence hurts most of all. In the technique that supplies the hallmark of Les Lieux de mémoire, critical insight is coopted in a requiem for lost certainties. France deconstructed does not mean that the nation has no unity, but that the national harmony is lost. In a France subject to an influx of ‘alien’ immigrants, the French have become aliens in their own country.

Nora’s sketchy depiction of France’s faltering nationhood can be fleshed out by returning to the pages of Le Débat and a volume published at Gallimard under Nora’s supervision, the sociologist Paul Yonnet’s Voyage au centre du malaise français. A regular contributor to Le Débat, Yonnet published his highly controversial sociological analysis of France in 1993, elaborating in the book on articles published in the journal earlier in the decade. Amid the furore created by the Voyage, Le Débat set aside several pages to the debate in which some of Yonnet’s critics, and Yonnet himself, were free to express themselves. The book, conceived as a response to the ‘profound crisis of the nation, and therefore of French civilization’, echoed the familiar themes of memory.

192 Ibid., p.xviii.
Such statements frequently accompany the more apocalyptic rhetoric of cultural conservatives, but Yonnet also explicitly denominated the causes of the disorder. The disarray of national identity resulted from the unchallenged cultural hegemony of the ‘antiracism’ constructed in the 1980s, an ideology which

pretends to struggle against French racism in destroying the principle of republican assimilation, which has equipped France ... with a remarkable mechanism of absorbing foreigners that it wanted to include or who wished to include themselves ... a country a champion of immigration and ... one of the least racist of the world.\textsuperscript{195}

The mining from within of the Republican tradition has produced a ‘\textit{France incertaine}’\textsuperscript{196} in the late twentieth century, exemplified by the besieged principle of assimilation.

As with \textit{Les Lieux de mémoire}, immigration since the 1970s acts as the primary context for this reassessment of France:

between the immigration of the beginning of the century and that of the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and that to come, there exist fundamental differences. The first was essentially an immigration of European man-power. The second has transformed itself ... notably with the standardisation of family regrouping, from immigration to populating, in origin increasingly less European.\textsuperscript{197}

Antiracism, rejecting assimilation, makes a ‘demand for the extinction of French identity’.\textsuperscript{198} The result would be to ‘dissolve France into the world and, without waiting, make of the hexagonal redoubt the chimerical laboratory of a new panethnic Cythera.’\textsuperscript{199} These febrile, impassioned and apocalyptic pronouncements index the beleaguered mentality of more than one milieu of the French intelligentsia and public life. Their importance stems not from the banal if burning rhetoric but the development of the diagnosis beyond declamations of crisis and demographic decline. The initial

\textsuperscript{195} \textit{Ibid.}, p.8.
\textsuperscript{196} \textit{Ibid.}, p.21.
\textsuperscript{197} \textit{Ibid.}, p.19.
\textsuperscript{198} \textit{Ibid.}, p.15.
‘problem’ - the presence of ‘non-European’ immigrants, in Nora’s phrase, ‘not easily adaptable to the traditional norms of “Frenchness”’ - expands in conjunction with an insidious attack from within, on assimilation and by extension, the French Republic as a whole. The redefinition of France in the context of a diverse and diversifying population carries implications and ramifications only hinted at in Les Lieux de mémoire. The survival of the Republican tradition and of assimilation is at stake, as is French history, for the roman national has also been ‘stigmatised by the new moral order’.

Le Débat, which maintains a consistent record in analysing with interest its own analysis of France, has summarised Yonnet’s argument (originally delineated in Le Débat) thus: ‘considering the French of today as harmless democrats freed from all tradition, he rebels ... against the taboos imposed by the ‘constant rearmament of memory’ of the black periods of national history.’ Not only does France float free of its tradition, but the wrong tradition, constantly invoked, cannot be dispelled. Thus the crisis of France has a context in the issues of immigration, an ‘ideology’ in the movement of antiracism, a weapon in recent French history and an attentive audience in the French today. This unhealthy obsession, traceable to the media, with the national history’s ‘black’ periods, eats away at the fabric of French society all the more easily because the French lack tradition. National tradition, then, in the vague sense of history and culture (but not all of either), both would act as inoculation against incursions upon the Republic and appears as their primary target. Les Lieux de mémoire thus sets out to delineate ‘France’ amid a multitude of insecurities and fears of national fragmentation.

The obsession with the problematic past, arm in arm with an abrasive antiracism thriving from the immigration-induced blurring of French character, feeds into the

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199 Ibid., p.309.
200 Nora, ‘From Lieux de Memoire to Realms of Memory’, p.xxiii.
201 Yonnet, Voyage, p.307. The term roman national is Yonnet’s.
faltering of the nation-state - the common central concern of Le Débat, Yonnet and Nora. That weakened state of being explains and is explained by the paucity of patrimony from which Les Lieux de mémoire takes its incentive. As Nora argued at the very beginning of the project, 'societies based on memory are no more: the institutions that once transmitted values from generation to generation – churches, schools, families, governments – have ceased to function as they once did.' In this vacuum, any identity might triumph. Le Débat, also, pointed to how the 'new individualism participates ... in the crisis of schools in their missions of integration and cultural formation.' The system no longer turns peasants, immigrants or anyone else into French men and women. To the compromised cultivation of national character in schools, families, government and church should no doubt be added the displacement of intellectuals from their certainty as culture's custodians. The failure of assimilation and integration provides the framework for Les Lieux de mémoire, which will construct a new history over the remains of the disintegrated scaffolding of the state. The 'type of history that Les Lieux secretes contributes spontaneously to the reconciliation of the scientific and critical with the pedagogic and civic role of the historian.' When the critical role of the historian is at odds with the contemporary condition of the nation, the history has to be changed.

The image of a persistent and continuing crisis of identity and nationhood, characterised by and cultivated with an undue emphasis on the années noires of the past, should be contrasted with alternative readings of the crises of the Republic. For France in the twentieth, and now twenty-first, century, Vichy represents the first, most obvious and divisive faultline in the façade of national history. Pierre Nora provides

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203 Nora, ‘Between Memory and History’, p.2.
through personal reminiscence one narrative of the recuperation of the racial and antisemitic politics of Vichy into the national narrative:

I remember that my father showed me in 1945, aged thirteen, photos of the camps that he had obtained from a communist journalist who had just died at the Rothschild Hospital. I was dumbfounded. But in quite a normal manner, in the tradition of the classic Franco-Jewish contract, French Jews themselves considered their sufferings or their persecutions as a contribution to the patriotic and national sacrifice. And it needed much time and many things, starting with the creation and the consolidation of the state of Israel, that a man like myself found myself on the morning of the 6th of May 1967 at the embassy of Israel and the 12th in Tel Aviv.206

Nora’s habitual generalizing from himself to a much larger community disguises that the reaffirmation of the ‘classic Franco-Jewish contract’ was just one option. Nevertheless, the idealized image of an unproblematic and smoothly functioning ‘classic Franco-Jewish contract’ constitutes an important contrast to the repetitious rhetoric of the futility and failure of assimilation since the 1960s. The narrative of a classical harmony rent asunder by recent history betrays more than a passing similarity to the proposed relationship between the Third Republic and the present (or, tracing the story back even further, peasant society and modernity). Critical history sits uneasily next to all these portraits of past society which emphasize their smooth functioning and concord. Similarly, Vichy, and its aggravating aftermath, cannot coexist easily alongside the simplicity of Nora’s 1961 summation of Franco-Jewish relations in Les Français d’Algérie: ‘the more they were integrated into the national community, the more the Jews of France were French Jews’.207

Algeria itself exists alongside Vichy as the most ugly, intransigent and intractable element in the roman national. Nora’s book Les Français d’Algérie, published in 1961 after his two-year sojourn in Oran as a teacher, provides a fascinating obverse to Les Lieux de mémoire. The first book explores the troubled presence of

206 Robert Solé, and Nicolas Weill, « Tout concourt aujourd’hui au souvenir obsédant de Vichy », Le Monde, Wednesday 1 October 1997, pVIII.
French in Algeria; the second takes at least one of its cues from the troubling presence of non-Europeans in France. The symmetry extends to the vocabulary. Just as contemporary France suffers a debilitating malaise, so in Africa twenty years prior: ‘French Algeria is sick’.208 The experience of French Algeria challenges everything later besieged in France, the indivisible trinity of assimilation, nation and history: ‘the history of French Algerians was the child of Jacobin nationalism ... they had only very recently renounced the great universal and assimilatory principles of 89.’209 If the universalist principles of 1789 had turned out to be ‘the most effective instruments in the destruction of the Muslim society’s equilibrium,’ the reason was because ‘the themes of assimilation passed from left to right in crossing the Mediterranean, like the French themselves.’210 French history and civilisation should not be indicted, however; ‘the whole of Algeria is not fascist, not all the French are ultras, the army is not all torturers. But fascism, the ultras and torture are France in Algeria.’211 Thus to compare the ‘French presence in Algeria to a foreign occupation is excessive’.212

However oppressive the colonial system was, it marked Algeria, for the better as for the worse, with an imprint whose disappearance it would be perfectly legitimate to regret. These 130 years of history were not solely full of sound and fury.213

The Algerian context explained how France could go so badly wrong and, when detached from Africa, France could cling comfortably once more to its history and traditions. As Nora hypothesises, ‘the most deeply threatened, thus the most fervent partisans, of the French Algerians are perhaps those who, isolated in the interior, have

208 Nora, Les Français d’Algerie, p.50.
209 Ibid., p.79.
210 Ibid., p.103.
211 Ibid., p.75.
212 Ibid., p.242.
213 Ibid., p.241.
fallen under the influence of the Arab milieu, and sharing in the same climate the same life, have finished by adopting the same *meurs*.²¹⁴

In phrases which unwittingly foreshadow the return of the problem from colony to coloniser, Nora affirmed that ‘integration is not a possible solution from the technical, financial, cultural or political point of view’.²¹⁵ Algeria had, through the provocation of the French colonisers, become ‘that which it had never been: a nation’.²¹⁶ Ominously, if the ‘political fight for national independence has given Muslim society, at least temporarily, a deep unity’, Europe had suffered the opposite: ‘incapable of incorporating itself into Muslim society, technically the minority but numerically the majority, it had shrunk into itself, changed, “atomized”.’²¹⁷ The description of the *Français d’Algérie* eerily foreshadows the dilemma which Nora will find afflicting France in the future.

The continuity of concerns - immigration and assimilation, French history and the fragmentation of the French nation - is remarkable. Yet, if the fundamental fissures in French identity remain the same, the solutions are diverse. In 1961, Nora’s ‘new deal algérien’ involved the renunciation of French sovereignty, ‘repatriation of a third of the French, development of original forms of socialism, the birth of a liberal nationalist movement’.²¹⁸ Such a deal would permit us, once more, to think national life in the political concepts which are dear to us, at the same moment when those outdated concepts prevent us from resolving the Algerian problem. We have exported our problems and clothed the French Algerians in the cast-offs of the home country. We need to install them at the game table, for a new deal: return them to history in order for us to return to ours.²¹⁹

²¹⁴ Ibid., p.51.
²¹⁵ Ibid.
²¹⁶ Ibid., p.131.
²¹⁷ Ibid., p.132.
²¹⁸ Ibid., p.249.
²¹⁹ Ibid., p.251.
The failure of this final wish, of the desire for ‘us’ to be able repossess ‘our history’, uncomplicated, untrammeled and unsullied by colonial conquest dictates the emergence of *Les Lieux de mémoire*. That project proffers an alternative path back to the beloved past, despite the constraints, now, as then, placed upon the freedom to think national life uncritically.

Assimilation and integration resonate further within the project of *Les Lieux de mémoire*. The charged alternatives of a France whole and undivided, or a multitude of disparate and dissonant Frances, also foreground the production of unity as central to the historical project. Through these themes *Les Lieux de mémoire* also consciously takes reference from previous incarnations of national history. The great 19th century romantic historian Jules Michelet, for one, sought to write a multi-volume biography of the nation in *Histoire de France*, an enterprise which aimed to ‘integrate all the material and spiritual facts in an organic whole, a living entity, to present France “as a soul and a person”’. As Nora notes, this assimilation of all history into a unified whole marks the point where ‘post-Revolutionary romanticism achieved its culmination’. Yet *Les Lieux de mémoire* can nevertheless be characterized by its conceivers as ‘the revival of history as it was practiced by Michelet’. Subject and project merge. The disintegrative capacity of critical history is contained and (through memory) reconstituted anew in the service of national identity. So how does *Les Lieux de mémoire* envisage France; what is its nature of its unity?

No longer plausible to be presented as a soul and person, no more credible as the continuing culmination of historical processes, France is instead ‘an entirely symbolic entity’. The nation cannot be considered as the product of a ‘single, unitary pattern of

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20 Nora, ‘From Lieux de Memoire to Realms of Memory’, p.xxiii.
21 Nora, ‘Between Memory and History’, p.20.
22 Nora, ‘From Lieux de Memoire to Realms of Memory’, p.xviii.
development', but retains nonetheless 'a symbolic unity' and a 'unifying logic'. The old-fashioned dimension of Les Lieux de mémoire, as merely another variant of national history (albeit updated), merits condonation, for it will deconstruct the unity previous histories imposed upon the past. The originality consists in the effort to decompose that unity, to dismantle its chronological and teleological continuity, and to scrutinize under the historian's microscope the very building blocks out of which traditional representations of France were constructed.

A 'symbolic' unity supplants the defunct chronological unity. The project relates the 'symbolic whole' to its 'symbolic fragments'. However many and diverse, the particulars of French identity form a coherent entity. Les Lieux de mémoire will demonstrate how 'each element reflects the whole and is involved in the entire national identity.' For all the talk about discontinuity and the rejection of obsolete teleological unities, the project reveals the 'unbroken path, the permanence of an identity even now in the throes of fundamental change.' In any case, the content of France's individual sites of memory is almost irrelevant; greater import lies in the structure (or, rather, the simple existence) of the whole. Les Lieux de mémoire's 'preliminary typology should not be construed as being either rigorous or comprehensive'. Rigour and depth can be dismissed, for 'all that matters is that it can be done':

It shows that an invisible thread links ostensibly unrelated objects .... All of these different identities belong to a complex network, an unconscious organization of collective memory that it is up to us to bring to consciousness. The lieux de mémoire constitute our moment in the history of France.

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223 Ibid., p.xviii.
224 Ibid., p.xix.
225 Ibid.
226 Ibid., p.xx.
227 Nora, 'Between Memory and History', p.23.
228 Ibid., p.19.
By the process of denominating and teasing out the *lieux de mémoire*, the history of France emerges, brought forth refulgent and unified from an apparently fragmented and fraught state of affairs, by the careful coaxing of those intellectuals who might otherwise miss their moment in history. Where Michelet once romanticized France into an individual biography, ‘our moment’ of historiography demands a complicated symbolic reconstruction of unity. The moment, and the historical method may change, but the enduring unity of France is demonstrated. The ‘history of France’ remains, whatever fluctuations in fashion and execution its custodians must surmount. *Les Lieux de mémoire*’s history is not nearly so novel as Nora occasionally claims. Here, too, the call of tradition prevails.

The content of the *lieux de mémoire* also has a certain familiarity, however much the aim is to show the ‘sites’ in their ‘original strangeness’. The predictability stems from the structure of the project. When ‘there are no *lieux de mémoire* outside the logic which produces them’, and that logic (be it nation, culture, tradition or identity) is not debatable, whatever sites of memory are sought will be found. Inversely, ‘memories’ at odd with the guiding logic are easily excised, for, in rationale of Pierre Nora,

> Do everything to root the work in the present, but do everything at the same time, not to be a prisoner to current events. It is this concern which explains the absence of certain themes which were expected or for which I was reproached: colonization, for example, which only appears in “The Colonial Exhibition of 1931”. Why? Well, because on reflection, this experience, so charged, so dramatic, so rich in history, appeared to me, strangely, at least today, to have left only a quite light weight on the collective memory.

Given the importance placed on the absence and loss of ‘memory’ in justifying the urgency and relevance of *Les Lieux de mémoire*, the decision to omit colonialism on the basis of its faint impression on the ever-vague measure of ‘collective memory’ smacks

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of hypocrisy. No doubt, the ‘history of France’ should not be too much associated with the messy histories of colonialism, Algeria or those immigrants who equally disrupt the tranquility of present-day history. Instead, the reader must be satisfied with the Eiffel Tower, one of the places ‘where the heart of France can truly be said to beat.’

The heritage industry hardly represents a new phenomenon, and, despite the apparently sophisticated theoretical melange of Foucault and Derrida which informs Les Lieux de mémoire, its sympathies lie more closely with a very old-fashioned and traditional mix of myth and nostalgia. Thus the explosion of discourse about memory occasions celebration, for, in it

France has been revitalized and its attachment to its national roots has been transformed. That attachment is no longer based solely on history: it now includes a deep consciousness of its threatened countryside, lost traditions, wrecked ways of life – its very “identity”. France has rediscovered its heritage.

Alarmingly absent is any interrogation of the concept of heritage or any consideration that something other than tradition and the countryside might constitute ‘French identity’. Greater concern attends the lamentation of the sorry state of the nation than the identification of causes. The means of recovery – memory – assumed and asserted, the origins of the endangered countryside, attenuated tradition and detached national roots are best left nebulous; the usual suspects may be inferred. His understanding of national heritage no doubt brought Nora his invitation from the Minister of Culture to assist in a project for the preservation of various lieux de mémoire. In this particular instance, Nora’s judgement that the ‘institutions that once transmitted values from generation to generation – churches, schools, families, governments – have ceased to

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231 Ibid., p.16.
233 Ibid., p.xxiii.
function as they once did' may not entirely apply. The French government continues
to spend more on museums than most.

*Les Lieux de mémoire* thus intricately and intimately imbricates a particular understanding of France, and, in the eyes of its creator, remains a peculiarly French phenomenon. Nora has generally been of the opinion that *Les Lieux de mémoire* was not a production with any potential for export, a judgement confirmed by the 'very mediocre' quality of Italian imitant, *I Luoghi della memoria: simboli e miti dell'Italia unita* and reaffirmed by Nora at the appearance of the first volume of *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*. The latter merits more respect than the Italian imitation, but Nora has stated typically that 'strictly and in its logic, I persist in believing that [the concept of *lieux de mémoire*] is only truly applicable to France.' Some instructive similarities nevertheless exist. Nora himself, transferring his vocabulary to the German project, has pinpointed the logic behind a German *Les Lieux* as the 'necessary and impossible integration of the Hitler period in the continuity of German history and reunification'. The endeavour of *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte* undoubtedly needs to be read in the context of Europe since 1989. Hagen Schulze, the historian of modern Germany and German nationalism, one of the defenders of Ernst Nolte in the *Historikerstreit* and one of the editors of *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, has already written one history for the new Germany in the new Europe (covering nomadic Nordic tribes to the fall of the Berlin Wall), *Kleine Deutsche Geschichte*. The *Erinnerungsorte* thus generates its meaning from the contexts of European integration, consumerism, globalization,
political fragmentation and the recasting of national identity which also characterized
the France of Mitterrand, in the throes of its long ‘end of history’.

A peculiarly national undertaking, so Les Lieux de mémoire reflects the national
peculiarity. French uniqueness, albeit fading, serves as a constant refrain. While the
taste for patrimony is not solely a French passion, yet ‘France retains a sort of
exceptionality.’241 The factors which have led to memory’s efflorescence, ‘however
worldwide, were particularly strong in France.’242 Similarly, Yonnet has argued that ‘it
is in France that the phenomenon of neo-antiracism has been the most marked.’243 Les
Lieux de mémoire might be imitated, unnaturally, in Germany, but no such study could
be made in the United States, of ‘the American tradition, because, in a sense, there is no
such thing’.244 Without doubt, a French specificity exists, but the claims to profound
exceptionality must be suspect. The evidence for an unusual singularity is often more
anecdotal than archival and the concept of ‘exceptionality’ of more emotive than
analytical value. Certainly in Yonnet’s case, the hint of special pleading is present, with
implications for the reception of his argument. More usefully, however, the issue of
‘exceptionality’ points to the fundamental concern behind memory: contemporary
history. For Nora, this nexus arises in the few years between 1975 and 1978:

It is in three or five years, in the middle of the Giscardien seven-year term, that the
balance tipped and the conscience of what the sociologist Henri Madras called ‘the
second French Revolution’ crystallized. That the end of the ‘French exceptionality’
was experienced by France in an exceptional manner. That gives cause for thought. It is
moreover, at that moment, not by chance, that the project of Lieux de mémoire
germinated.245

241 Pierre Nora as quoted in Emmanuel De Roux, ‘Un entretien avec Pierre Nora’, Le Monde, 29
242 Pierre Nora as quoted in Robert Solé, and Nicolas Weill, « Tout concourt aujourd’hui au souvenir
obsédant de Vichy », Le Monde, Wednesday 1 October 1997, pVIII.
243 Yonnet, Voyage, p.304.
244 Nora, ‘Between Memory and History’, p.4.
February 1993, p.28.
Behind *Les Lieux de mémoire*, and its intellectual, institutional, pedagogical and political attendants, lies an interpretation of the history of France, of the French Revolution, but perhaps most of all, the history of the short twentieth century.

*Les Lieux de mémoire* presents a past ‘better suited than traditional history to the civic as well as intellectual needs of our time’. Those civic and intellectual needs, the nature of ‘our time’, are best explored by returning to *Le Débat*, itself self-consciously set up as the journal best suited to modern times. In part, the demands of the present, and the uncoupling of France and uniqueness, mean the retooling of the role of intellectuals:

We wanted to propose a radically different mode of intervention in social life by intellectuals than that which operated until then. There was, on the one side, the political world, the world of power which was spiteful, mediocre and compromised; on the other side, that of pure philosophico-intellectual speculations. It seemed to me on the contrary that the decision-makers of all sorts were petitioners for intellectual clarification, that the intellectuals have to give opinions in a manner which is not that of the expert or specialist, but that, sometimes contradictorily, of a competent scout.

No more the *maître-penseurs*, in the new decade intellectuals would take on a role more akin to that of a civil servant. The arrangement is reciprocal. The ‘administrative elite ... always present in the revue, incarnates the rationality of the expert, and ideally, the independence vis-à-vis ideological considerations. This rationality, the courage of realism and independence of spirit determines the political engagement of *Débat*. The fundamental issue of political engagement functions as the framework for *Le Débat*. The first issue appeared the day of the death of Jean-Paul Sartre, whose philosophy and politics represented the opposite of the civil servant’s distaste for ideology. The original editorial of Pierre Nora presciently proclaimed the demise of

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246 Nora, 'From Lieux de Memoire to Realms of Memory', p.xviii.
Sartrien politics; 'it was in effect a profession of faith in anti-engagement, in the Sartrien sense of the word.'²⁴⁹

_Le Débat_ and _Les Lieux de mémoire_ exercise the new role of French intellectuals and express the new sense of politics after, and against, Sartre. Thus an alternative sense of what engagement means accompanies the newfound modesty of intellectuals. To demonstrate that to be against Sartrien engagement is not political disengagement, Nora has gestured to the case of the _Très Grande Bibliothèque:_

One can smile ... to see us fight for a library while some engaged themselves over Rwanda and Bosnia. But the engagement of intellectuals for Rwanda and Bosnia produced no effect, or even a perverse one. As to the TGB on the other hand, a minor object in appearance but the lay-out of which will determine research for dozens of years, we avoided the worst. Great causes are not necessarily humanitarian. The intellectual cause itself constitutes a great cause. I have the impression of being engaged, certainly, but in a type of engagement which dispenses with the easiness of radicalism, even if it suppresses the advantages with it.²⁵⁰

Perhaps a little uneasiness should attend a cause defined largely as one’s self (and status). The transition here from politics to culture mirrors the shift in _Les Lieux de mémoire_ from critical history to the symbols of identity. A similar politics underlies both intellectual reconfigurations. _Le Débat_ appeared at the death of Sartre. 1980 was also the ‘year of patrimony’, the moment when ‘the term left its primarily financial and notarial sense to become the shared possession of a community.’²⁵¹ Memory provides the unifying thread linking a new function for intellectuals, a particular understanding of national identity, and the redefinition of politics, history and historiography.

‘Culture’ provides the integrating thread to the rationale behind the engagement of Pierre Nora and _Le Débat_. Like tradition, nation and memory, culture seldom receives a comprehensive definition. Presumably its apostles know it when they see it, or, more likely, recognize the presence of its enemies, for culture, almost

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interchangeable with the other three terms, appears equally threatened. Dangers to a unique and traditional culture include ‘pedagogism or vague decentralizing impulses’ or the environmental movement and ‘its transfer of culture towards nature’. Le Débat proposes, in words equally suitable to Les Lieux de mémoire, ‘a fight for the defence of culture and an enterprise of historical criticism of contemporary society.’ The two ambitions – the preservation of culture and the critique of the present – logically conjoin. The lack of (or the ignorance of) culture constitutes one of the greatest follies (if not crimes) of contemporary society; the defence of culture presents itself as the obvious remedy.

The cultural vacuum proceeds from cancerous criticism and self-reflexivity; ‘in both cases, history and patrimony, the field has been subverted from the inside, penetrated by an internal reflection on its subject.’ Cliché rather than argument, the conviction that criticism operates as the enemy within, transforms far too easily into the dismissal and rejection of any critique which dares to address the construction of culture (or history) so desperately being defended. In a disturbing narrowing of the possibilities of intellectual engagement through the adoption of a dubious and arbitrary standard of legitimacy, Nora has delineated where he thinks the intellectual in these our times participates in the public domain:

It seems to us also that the intellectuals can intervene, in a legitimate manner, outside all official or partisan organizations on essential questions such as those of constitutional reform, immigration, teaching and the university, patrimony, on what television should be or the organization of the libraries, above all on that which concerns the conditions of cultural life.  

253 Pierre Nora in Les Lieux de mémoire as quoted in Ibid., p.23.  
254 Ibid., p.17.  
The defence of culture is not always undertaken in the reverent, if shrill, tones of Pierre Nora. Paul Yonnet, plucking out antiracism as the heart of the mystery, has critiqued the culture craze, when the ‘roman national’ become difficult, stigmatized by the new moral order – reconstitutes itself on a terrain apparently non-political, that of cultural identity. Yonnet has less respect for the niceties of culture than Pierre Nora, although they share much. Nevertheless, as he implies, a definite politics, even if only in the form of an apparent apoliticism, inheres in the turn to ‘culture’. The project of Le Débat, of ‘reinterrogating our society, like our democracy, with the de-ideologized regard of a new generation of intellectuals’ has an agenda, a politics, and an interpretation of history.

The evils of the age, humanitarianism, antiracism, environmentalism (all of which can be subsumed in Americanism) and, least evil of all, the National Front, issue from the same historical juncture which in its more magnanimous moments has allowed the growth of memory. As Paul Yonnet has phrased it in Le Débat, humanitarianism and antiracism, “the two teats of the new moral media order, appear as the substitute fuel for generational assertion of the youth of the 80s.” Not to be confined to a generational argument, Yonnet has further maintained that environmentalists (and antiracists) indulge in ‘Pétainism without Pétain ... except that nationalistic and xenophobic Pétainist communitarianism is displaced towards micro-identitary politics [differentialisme micro-identitaire] and ethnicity is substituted for racism.” The analysis lacks anything more than superficial validity, but the inflated rhetoric follows logically from the postulate that ‘a France which has self-destroyed its roman national

257 Yonnet, Voyage,p.307.
enters a Europe which is not near to having one of its own. That entry, according to Krzysztof Pomian, another regular contributor to Le Débat, holds within it the reawakening of another historical horror: nationalism. To the mélange of (neo-) nationalism, Vichy, and the tide of generations should be added the evocative if elusive issue of 1968.

'May 1968' offers a thread which links the various fears articulated in Le Débat, although that 'event' is little illuminated by the analyses, but rather hovers about them like an unrepentant ghost. At the time that happening prompted Fernand Braudel, then emperor of the Annales – the most influential historical journal in France and perhaps the world - to quit lecturing in Chicago on the instant and fly to France to change the journal's editorial board. The Annales has since unravelled, its apparent coherence has evaporated, and French historiography sustains a diversity and multiplicity reflected in Nora's qualms about the role of the intellectual and national history. Thus May '68 plays a part in the intellectual context of the 1980s and 1990s even as those intellectuals invoke the revolution to explain a political and social context.

Thus Marcel Gauchet, editor of Le Débat, contributor to and collaborator on Les Lieux de mémoire, has evoked 1968 as an important piece of scaffolding for what he has labelled the new 'demagogic ultra-democratism'. For Yonnet, too, antiracism can be understood as the 'specifically French manner of the wasting away of the revolutionary utopias of 68' which has come to occupy a position of 'ideological dominance'. The 'historical revisionism' concerning the Vichy regime, equally ubiquitous and hegemonic, also denotes a generational reaction: the 'mauvais fils' of 1968 return the

260 Yonnet, Voyage, p.301.
261 Ibid., p.307.
262 See Delorme-Montini, 'L’engagement démocratique', p.28.
264 Marcel Gauchet, 'Sous l’amour de la nature, la haine des hommes', Le Débat, 60, as quoted by Delorme-Montini, 'L’engagement démocratique', p.23.
compliment: ‘mauvais pères’. Antiracism is the ‘field of refuge [champ de retraite] to bury the dead desire for social revolution.’

The great folly of 1968, revolutionary utopianism, can be perceived, only half concealed, in the ideology of the 1980s and 1990s: ‘antiracism is never content to struggle against prejudices or ill treatment suffered because of a racial or ethnic origin... but it has always written this struggle into ... social projects’. The sentiment echoes Nora’s pernicious primordial moment when ‘man accorded himself the right, the capacity and even the duty to change’269, thereby prising apart the close relationship between history and memory (and ultimately the nation). Much the same forces of change wrecked the sublime synthesis of the Third Republic: ‘its sacred character was undermined in the crisis of the 1930s, when the state was divorced from the nation and eventually the old couple was supplanted by a new one: state and society.’270

While the tendentious readings should be treated with caution, ‘1968’ does in fact have a central role in the growth of memory, as in identity politics, cultural studies, the fragmentation of the Annales and all that forms the broader context of the memory boom. The issue of ‘May 1968 for and against’ continues to define the identity of those intellectuals and radicals whose self-definition was tied to the events of that year, and suffuses the story of memory. The questioning of Vichy took encouragement from 1968, as demonstrated in Marcel Ophuls’ cinematic debunking of the myths of De Gaulle, France and even the Resistance, in Le Chagrin et la pitié.

The relationship between 1968 and Vichy cannot be simply equated (and derided) with generational rebellion. The interrogative approach all too easily appears as an unnatural and unreasonable obsession to those more concerned with ‘memory’ in the

265 Yonnet, Voyage, p.303.
266 Ibid., as quoted by Lucien Karpik, ‘Au centre du voyage’, Le Débat, 75, mai-aout, 1993, pp.120-121.
267 Yonnet, Voyage, p.303.
268 Ibid., p.8.
269 Nora, ‘Between Memory and History’, p.2.
context of the defence of culture, self-defined as having sloughed off any undesirable ideological politics of the sort which characterized 1968. *Le Débat*, after all, represented a ‘strong reaction against all the philosophies of engagement, all the more because, in the wake of 1968, they took on caricatural aspects.’ ‘Memory’ thus fuses beneath its broad rubric a variety of the reactions against ‘1968 and all that’. *Le Débat* and *Les Lieux de mémoire* belong to one prominent strand of that response: the complete rejection of ‘utopianism’, social revolution and radicalism by those stunned, alarmed and appalled by an event over which they had no control and yet which in its ideas and operation entangled the intellectual.

Beneath and between the rejection of Sartre, the politically engaged intellectual, ‘1968’ and the agenda of social revolution lies the fate of Marxism. Within the space once occupied by Marxism, Yonnet has asserted antiracism has taken hold, developed as ‘a substitute ideology to Marxist ideology and the ideologies derived from it.’ A multiracial and multiethnic France can be best understood as a Marxist ‘utopia where race and its ersatz are substituted for class.’ As Nora, too, has argued, *Le Débat* could be built only on the ruins of Marxism, the ‘end in the realm of ideas of the structural-Marxist coupling’. The emphasis on cultural deficiencies over social inequities also reflects an anti-Marxist variant of the post-1968 rise in the importance placed on words. Thus *Le Débat* reminds its readers, echoing Nora’s dictum that ‘memory is an absolute, while history is always relative’, that ‘the inequality of wealth is only ever relative, the inequality of words and of silence is absolute.’ The meaning of such statements is not always easily untangled, although both sentences obviously serve to denigrate

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272 Yonnet, *Voyage*, p.15.
275 Nora, ‘Between Memory and History’, p.3.
276 Introduction to *Le Débat*, 60...
history in favour of memory and subsume the issue of social equality under the more pressing matter of the alleged paucity of cultural capital. Undoubtedly, absolute has positive connotations; relative remains a more negative adjective, although memory and culture often seem absolute or relative only in a loaded comparison with the presumed inadequacies of history and society. Nor, despite the distaste for venal discussions of lucre, should money be excluded from memory’s maturation, leaving an undivided focus on the exchange and trade solely of words, symbols, and patrimony. The economic historian Alan Milward, for one, has argued that the fundamental precondition of memory’s success is the affluence of society to pay for it. The volumes of *Les Lieux de mémoire* themselves, so handsomely produced, suggest that words and monies are not always entirely separate.

The traditions of 1968 and Marxist heritage not only nourish the diverse political and ideological currents to which *Le Débat* and *Les Lieux de mémoire* oppose themselves, but thereby provide those projects with a unifying purpose. Thus the new engagement founds itself first and foremost in a vulgar anti-Marxism and a virulent critique of ‘the traditional French left which remains attached to its Jacobin fond’. The preferred attachment is ex-Communist François Furet’s vision of a ‘liberal political and intellectual history which raises itself on the ruins of Marxist history.’ Thus Furet’s desire that ‘the study of social movements is effaced by that of the movement of ideas’ gives academic weight to *Les Lieux de mémoire*, studying France through its symbols, desperate ‘to reject any definition that would reduce it to phenomena of another order’.

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277 Alan Milward, ‘Bad Memories’, *Times Literary Supplement*, April 14, 2000, p.8
281 Nora, ‘From Lieux de Memoire to Realms of Memory’, p.xxiv.
More broadly than anti-Marxism, the struggle is 'anti-totalitarian', the urgent problem being to 'follow the affiliation between Jacobinism and Bolshevism, twin tendencies, equally exalted by French historians.' Anti-totalitarianism must replace Marxism (and its anti-Fascism) as the fundamental basis for political activity in the postmodern age. In any case, as Yonnet has pointed out, Vichy was 'an authoritarian French state, made with the Nazis, but which is distinguished from a regime which properly speaking was fascist.' (Although such definitional exactness should be expected from someone who, invoking Fernand Braudel, rather carelessly speaks of the 'inscription of a national personality in the soil [terre], space and blood'. So Pierre Nora has wondered rhetorically whether 'it is chance that the late discovery of totalitarianism by the French intelligentsia and the diffuse but certain feeling of intellectual oppression which it [the intelligentsia] had itself exercised are exactly contemporaneous?' The preference for ideas and ideology over social movements and analysis (and the often vague understanding of their relation), closely tied to the 'antitotalitarian struggle' of a French intelligentsia whose blindfold has only recently let slip, provides base on which Les Lieux de mémoire reconstitutes the national history, rendering it palatable for the postmodern consensus.

Thus the understand of history has been transformed, and memory becomes the motivating force of both past and present. From the only possible perspective of a post-ideological age, Nora has elaborated how 'both Gaullism and Communism were, in themselves, phenomena of memory'. Nor do the political poles confine the element of

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283 Yonnet, Voyage, p.305.
285 Pierre Nora, editorial, Le Débat, 1, as quoted by Delorme-Montini, 'L’engagement démocratique', p.16.
memory. 1968 was ‘a symbolic rupture’; the Second World War ‘an operation of memory’. While memory may be only one way of reading all these events, yet it probably deserves primacy. Thus the very existence of Gaullism and Communism was constructed from their base in the national imagination, far more than from ‘the services that each rendered to France during the war’:

Both de Gaulle and the French Communist Party drew their appeal and power to mobilize not so much from their ideological coherence, the number of their supporters, or their relation to power as from the historical legitimacy they claimed to embody, from their ability to represent France, all France, the true France.290

Not power, not people, not history (and certainly not class struggle), but memory and imagination are the key categories for understanding France. Les Lieux de mémoire has discovered the means to look ‘beyond the historical reality to discover the symbolic reality and recover the memory that it sustained.’291

Indeed, escaping (or going beyond) history supplies the central theme of Les Lieux de mémoire – a breaking away from critical history to ‘memory’. The lieux themselves are escapees from reality:

Unlike historical objects, lieux de mémoire have no referents in reality; or, rather, they are their own referents – pure signs. This is not to say that they are without content, physical presence, or history - on the contrary. But what makes them lieux de mémoire is precisely that which allows them to escape from history.292

Thus, the historian can also escape from those ugly realities of the past, an apt reflection of an age when history has so clearly consigned so much to its dustbin. The ‘notion of

289 Ibid., p.234.
290 Ibid., p.208.
291 Nora, ‘From Lieux de Memoire to Realms of Memory’, p.xvii.
lieu de mémoire would cease to have any specific meaning if we included "events" and the most evocative events of French history – the French Revolution and Vichy – can be carefully extracted from reality. Unsurprisingly, the idealization of pre-Vichy France, the Third Republic, is complemented by the idolization of Charles de Gaulle, that figure who declared in 1944 that Vichy 'was always and remains null and void', and knew that France had liberated itself. The rest of us have entered the 'historiographic age', but the General, it seems, has not. Indeed, he 'may even have escaped it altogether'. Gaullism (unlike Communism) is 'part of every Frenchman's family album'.

Following François Furet, the French Revolution also recedes in the imagination of Les Lieux de mémoire, lest too dangerous a hold there lend it too much ideological power. So Nora has confirmed that 'it is time, after two centuries of ideological civil war, to affirm that the French Revolution is finished and to consider it finally as an object of science'. The past shall at last pass away, to be discussed, among those with the knowledge to contribute, to be consumed in the age of commemoration, but safely isolated from topicality and society, carefully scrutinized under the 'historian's microscope'. Of course, such scientific expertise could only be possible now, after the end of history, with the fall of Marxism in theory and actual existence, and the emergence of the antitotalitarian consensus:

The space was clear for something else: what we have called intellectual democracy, which appears to me today to have triumphed.

293 Ibid., p.18.
295 Nora, 'Gaullists and Communists', p.213.
296 Ibid., p.228.
297 Pierre Nora in Pierre Lepape, 'La Révolution française est terminée', Le Monde, 26 August 1988, p.9. See also Nora's piece in Les Lieux de mémoire, 'L'ère de commémoration'.
298 Nora, 'From Lieux de Memoire to Realms of Memory', p.xix.
That not democracy, but capitalism,\(^{300}\) triumphed in the last decade of the twentieth century could be counterposed, yet such niceties disrupt what makes a quite formidable combination of anti-Marxism, anti-totalitarianism (in many ways much the same thing), and ‘democratic engagement’ to complement it. \textit{Le Débat} and \textit{Les Lieux de mémoire} are the outward flourishes marking the (French) ‘end of history’, the collapse the political spectrum at the end of the twentieth century.

Yet neither Nora nor his accomplices quite achieve the blend of the bland and banal which marks Francis Fukuyama’s triumphalism. The sensation of having ‘emerged from the world of war, poverty, and revolution from which Gaullism and Communism derived their significance and influence’ may be certain. The belief that ‘a long period of conflict has come to a close\(^{301}\) and that now all ‘our consciousness is shaped by a sense that everything is over and done with, that something long since begun is now complete’,\(^{302}\) may be reiterated ad infinitum, but there is no comfort involved in victory. One irritation which remains includes those who unconscionably continue to carry on obsolescent and unhelpful divisions: ‘left versus right, sovereignty versus Europeanism, republic versus fascism.’\(^{303}\) Yet even here, the rejection of past oppositions is laced with a certain regret. The era of totalitarianism, whatever its dangers, was the belle époque of the intellectual when he (or perhaps even she) ‘struggled, for, against, in shame or glory, in the day or the night, heroism and cowardice, blindness or lucidity.’\(^{304}\) Thus a certain nostalgia invades and undermines the secure sense of antitotalitarian victory. A chastened triumphalism defines the democratic engagement built on the ruins of Marxism. However, modesty cannot be


\(^{302}\) Nora, ‘Between Memory and History’, p.1.

allowed to impede the second thrust of the proponents of ‘democratic engagement’, directed against those whose reading of history lacks the accuracy of the intellectuals now displaced from their previous potency.

Something disconcerting, then, inheres for Nora and his fellow intellectuals in the inability of some sections of the population to grasp their wisdom and to rally behind the nation. Despite the triumph, the postmodern era is marked by the ‘collapse of the type of culture which carried the belle époque of human sciences, the resurgence of a radical and protestatory ideology that one could have believed had disappeared and the unchecked imperialism of the mediatic sovereignty’.305 The blaming of the media for the sorry situation indicates the weakness of analysis behind the diagnosis of contemporary society, the baffled incomprehension of how ‘in an epoch where democracy ... has largely triumphed ... the media order ... has effected a redistribution of roles’ in society.306 The new order might be endorsed, but distinct doubts exist as to whether anything as impressive will replace the nation of yore. Hence, the passage ‘from one model of the nation to another ... is sought in grief.’307

Thus behind Les Lieux de mémoire and Le Débat, lies an lack of self-assurance in the new world order, the frightening possibility that the fall extended further than Marxism and the centre does not hold, leaving even those in the positions of power and influence with the potential fate of marginalization. Or, as Nora put it characteristically in Les Lieux de mémoire:

The change has brought joy to some people ... Yet it has also brought despair to others, for whom these ultimate forms of French grandeur, singularity, and universalism are survived by nothing but mourning and melancholia. For the French feel an emptiness, a sense of the void, born of the retrospective discovery that if Communism and Gaullism did not occupy the whole of the political sphere, they had at least achieved the miracle of occupying the whole of the political imagination, and perhaps also of a sense that the

305 Ibid., p.10.
306 Ibid., p.13.
day may not be far off when this sharing of the imagination even by two parasitic phenomena may well be looked back upon as a blessed time of tranquil democracy.\footnote{Nora, ‘Gaullists and Communists’, p.237.}

As often, when Nora writes of ‘the French’ he would seem to mean himself and/or those like minded men and women clustered around Le Débat. Given the relevance of the social position of the intellectual in this perspective, perhaps class and status still matter as much as symbols and words in France today (or at any rate are reflected in them). In spite of the intellectual assurance of having ‘won’ history, or at least the twentieth century (and probably history since 1789), the endings of 1989 have brought to these French intellectuals only a veil of tears.

A coda may be added in summation to the themes of intellectual democracy, antitotalitarianism, anti-Marxism, the ends of history, the fates of intellectuals and the agenda of democratic engagement. All these concerns converge in the case of Eric Hobsbawm, and the fate of his short twentieth century in the French Republic. It is a story of a silence, a repression, a telling omission. Quite simply, in the new age of intellectual openness, the Age of Extremes could not be published in France. First imprinted in 1994 in Great Britain, after varying intervals the book either appeared or a translation was embarked upon in German, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Russian, Polish, Czech, Hungarian, Rumanian, Slovene, Serbocroat and Albanian, but not French. Neither the publishing house which produced the three previous volumes of Hobsbawm’s tetralogy nor Gallimard, where Pierre Nora had overseen the French edition of Nations and Nationalisms, were interested in the short twentieth century. Nor indeed, were other publishers contacted in France. By 1997, Le Débat, as ever anxious to cogitate on the intellectual situation in France, devoted a dossier within the review to the (non-) event. Eric Hobsbawm was graciously allowed to
comment on the situation, as were critics of his history, and Pierre Nora was on hand to contemplate the strange fate of the _Age of Extremes_.

In cadences, by now familiar, Nora explained how Hobsbawm’s history must appear to the French publishers who rejected it. While ‘without doubt, no editor ... makes decisions on the basis of political or ideological orientation’, the simple fact was that they are ‘obliged to take into account the intellectual and ideological conjuncture in which their production is set.’ When judged on this basis, Hobsbawm’s book ‘appears in an unfavourable intellectual and historical environment’. Why?

Because France, having been the country the longest and most deeply Stalinised, the decompression, in the same way, has accentuated the hostility towards that which, closely or distantly, recalls the former age of philosovietism and procommunism.

While it is possible to argue pedantically that France may not really have been the most Stalinised country in history, a better contrast may be served by the reaction of _Le Débat_ to the controversy surrounding Paul Yonnet’s _Voyage au coeur du malaise française_. Then, when Yonnet’s arguments on the perniciousness of antiracism to the roman national were challenged, the journal’s editors insisted that

To the virtuous inconsistency of official sociology, we prefer the courage of a franc-tireur who dares to raise the questions which reality demands, even when institutional conformity forbids thinking them. We continue to believe that the task of intellectuals is not to comfort clear consciences ... but to call them to civic lucidity, even and above all when it demands the disturbance of apparently the best founded sentiments, and the certainties that one would want the most solidly established.

Pierre Nora, too, has ruminated portentously on similar issues in a preface to the journal of the virulent fascist, Drieu la Rochelle. In that case, of course, the question was merely rhetorical, as may have been the ‘general relief’ which Nora suggests

310 Ibid.
311 Ibid.
312 Note from the Editor, _Le Débat_, 75, mai-août, 1993, p.131.
greeted his decision to publish the Fascist in the series Témoins, where ‘the great problems of today appear under an unexpected angle’. This publication, no doubt, was a triumph against the new and invidious political correctness which Le Débat diagnosed in the response to Paul Yonnet’s book. In any case, The Age of Extremes was published in French, by a Belgian publishing company, in collaboration with Le Monde Diplomatique, and has sold very well, suggesting that the populations of France can think for themselves, even when some of their intellectuals cannot. Yet ‘democratic engagement’ may have its limits, for all the success with the Très Grande Bibliothèque.

The contextualization of ‘memory’, politically, historically and intellectually, reveals a number of limitations in the mind-set and method behind Les Lieux de mémoire. In its narrow conceptual confines and possibilities, Pierre Nora’s project does not differ so very much from its predecessors in national historiography. In rhetoric and style much has changed, but only to remain the same. When Nora notes how Les Lieux de mémoire has itself become a lieu, the definition of the lieu as designed ‘to stop time ... to fix a state of things’ but thriving only on the ‘capacity for change,’ is peculiarly apt. Thus Nora, writing of his predecessor as national historiographer Ernest Lavisse, remarked upon that man’s ‘respect for facts, ... rigour of method’, ‘virtues which the historian can and must seek to fulfill, not to deny’. However, as Stephen Englund has noted, in the version of the essay revised for Les Lieux de Mémoire, the second part of the sentence is simply dropped. This greatest project of memory cannot claim much novelty; in its design, it remains a barely updated shuffling of cliches. The content varies, but when shorn of its superficial theoretical sophistication, the isolation

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316 Nora, ‘Between Memory and History’, p.15.
of the lieu merely imitates unoriginally the hermeneutic tradition. *Les Lieux de mémoire*’s ambition and claims are greater as an enterprise than in the novelty of its methods, but there too, the results lack value. Nora has achieved a reactionary postmodernism, the harnessing of the most sophisticated of French historiographical thought in the service of the most nostalgic and traditional French nationalism. *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, according to its English volume editor, is ‘one of the great French intellectual achievements of the Mitterrand era’,318 but while, no doubt, something of an achievement, it may say more about the Mitterrand era than anyone’s intellect.

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VI. Modern Memory and Civil Society

While the context for Pierre Nora's work may be more illuminating than the content, to dismiss his work too quickly as very 'French' or overly shallow would be short-sighted. In the introduction to their recent volume *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan do indeed identify the parochialism of Nora's project. For them, the 'Frenchness of the position is its particular kind of cultural pessimism.' However, as suggested above, the self-proclaimed national particularity of *Les Lieux de mémoire* should not be taken at face value. The project reflects a much broader set of historical and political circumstances than those of France, whatever the national peculiarities. *Les Lieux de mémoire*, after all, exists as just one variant within a much larger boom in studies of memory. Taking issue with the 'pessimism' of the project, and replacing it, perhaps, with a certain optimism, Winter and Sivan obscure by their critique what they share with Nora: a series of concerns fundamental to an age when history is no longer made but remembered.

Jay Winter himself provides a fascinating case study of memory in the twentieth century. His book, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (1995) is already perceived as a classic of the genre and, like Nora, he has played a significant role as an editor promoting studies (and films) of memory and remembrance, and what he has termed comparative cultural history. How then do these endeavours reflect the period which so pervaded *Les Lieux de mémoire*, and for want of a better term is called postmodern? Winter began his career as a historian of British social history of the early twentieth century, and particularly the First World War. Hence his work embodies another variant of the shift from social to cultural history which accompanied the collapse of Marxism and the increasing distance from the use of quantitative social science techniques in
historiography. Nonetheless, Winter maintains considerable sympathy with the approaches of social history and his work has little of the ideological charge which imbues *Les Lieux de mémoire*.

*Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* seeks to engage in three distinct, although interrelated debates. The first intervention is methodological and theoretical. Approaching the issue of memory from the perspective of a social historian, Winter first recasts memory as a *social* act. Secondly, again in keeping with his past practice of social history, Winter engages the formula created by George Mosse in *Fallen Soldiers*, whereby the ‘myth of the war experience’ laid the foundations of fascism and the Second World War. Winter attempts instead to recover memory as a reflection of the *experience* of the First World War rather than the explanation for Second. The latter approach ‘leaves out what sadly was at the heart of the experience of the war for millions. Their war was imprinted with the wrenching experience of loss, the ‘meaning’ of which was sought at least as much in the existential as in the artistic or political spheres.’ While Winter certainly does not share Halbwachs’ rigid distinction between history and memory, he uses the two terms to attempt to broaden the historian’s field of inquiry beyond explanation to experience (a goal itself central to the new social history of the 1960s). Thirdly, the book engages the classic work in the genre, Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory*, which argued that the First World War created ‘modern’ memory:

If the war created ‘modern memory’ as Paul Fussell has claimed, it was a traditional, even archaic, kind of memory that came out of the conflict.\(^\text{321}\)

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\(^{321}\) *Ibid.*, p.73. To be fair to Fussell, he recognised the traditional technique and theme of the lesser talents who, unlike Joyce, Woolf, Pound, Eliot and Yeats could ‘recall in literary form a war they had actually
However ‘modern’ the Great War was, its immediate repercussion was to deepen and not transform older languages of loss and consolation.322

As much as Nora, then, Winter’s work on memory draws on (or perhaps blurs) the issues of modernity (postmodernity), tradition and the discipline of history.

Tradition, continuity, and their disruption also constituted key elements in Nora’s appropriation of the discourse of memory, including his historical narrative of the Third Republic. These enduring themes of the literature of remembrance are reconfigured for the English-language debate on the First World War. Winter argues for the continuity of ‘tradition’ across the war, contradicting Fussell to suggest that not the First but the Second World War represents the ‘real caesura in European cultural life’.323 But what is tradition? In Halbwachs’ formulation tradition was the inimical alternative to a scientific and professional history; in Nora, a vague and nostalgic definition held sway as the opposite of the historical post-mortem. Winter worries far less about inventing historiographical opposites to justify one approach or another, but he deals as much as the two Frenchmen with the period prior to the First World War when history was professionalized and memory idealized, when, as Eric Hobsbawm has noted, invented traditions pullulated and proliferated in unprecedented fashion.324 Winter invokes ‘tradition’ less as the living opposite to a dead history than as the alternative to modernity and modernism. Yet the interconnection of the issues of continuity, tradition and ‘the modern’ carry particular historical resonances from the pre-war period, as they do in the fall-out of post-1989 Europe.

Winter argues that ‘it is unacceptable to see the Great War as the moment when “modern memory” replaced something else, something timeworn and discredited, which

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322 Winter, Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning, p.76.
323 Ibid., p.228.
The critique has two elements, firstly stressing the inadequacy of the division between tradition and modern, and secondly alleging the ‘powerfully conservative effects of the Great War’. Thus Winter reevaluates modernism, aware that, for all their claims to originality and newness, modernists ‘didn’t obliterate traditions; they stretched, explored, and reconfigured them’ and there existed an ‘overlap of language and approaches between the old and the new, the “traditional” and the “modern.”’ However, his analysis would benefit from a similar reevaluation of ‘tradition’. Modernism can be redefined as far from antithetical to ‘tradition’, but tradition remains vague, incoherent and may neither be as long-established or as natural as its adherents and critics maintain. To follow contemporaries’ description of ‘something timeworn and discredited’ may not be the best way of understanding the impact of the First World War. Winter indulges in an optimistic image of tradition. The Great War might not be the end of tradition, but it was the beginning of the end, for, ‘even if old ways were restored, it was apparent that the war had consumed much of the decency and idealism of the societies that had waged it.’ Exactly what decency graced society prior to the First World War remains vague, but it was probably characterized by the illusion of tradition and continuity. Here, too, is a slightly idealized ‘liberal’ society, ravaged and then vanquished by modernity. Winter’s evocation of memory, as much as Nora’s, speaks to an uneasy coming to terms with change and rupture, entails an idealization of an ill-defined ‘tradition’ and presents a historical narrative ostensibly about the early twentieth century, but at least as much about the Second World War as the First.

325 Winter, Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning, p.5.
326 Ibid., p.76.
327 Ibid., p.3.
328 Ibid., p.201.
The secret of tradition's success in the wake of the Great War, according to Winter, lay precisely in its ability to address the experience of change and rupture. Unlike modernism, tradition could heal:

The cutting edge of 'modern memory', its multi-faceted sense of dislocation, paradox, and the ironic, could express anger and despair, and did so in enduring ways; it was melancholic, but it could not heal. Traditional modes of seeing the war ... provided a way of remembering which enabled the bereaved to live with their losses, and perhaps to leave them behind.329

The description here strongly echoes Nora's division between history and memory (centred around the meaning of loss), with the one defined as indirect, ironic, critical and individual, the other collective, immediate, sacred. Above all, though, grief was universal and the 'enduring appeal of many traditional motifs ... is directly related to the universality of bereavement in the Europe of the Great War and its aftermath.'330 Only 'tradition' could respond to grief in its universality. Yet the image of universal grief finding solace in tradition demands clarification. What, after all, does universal mean? It may indeed be no 'exaggeration to suggest that every family was in mourning.'331 Yet, if the 'history of bereavement was universal history during and immediately after the Great War in France, Britain, and Germany'332, does Winter mean to suggest it was also uniform? Is the difference between tradition and the modern that the former is characterized itself by universality? Should not the vague if evocative notion of 'tradition' be historicized properly, as should 'grief'? Such clarification might overcome contradictory assertions, such as when Winter maintains simultaneously that the divide between 'experimental art and popular culture' was 'more apparent than

329 Ibid., p.5.
330 Ibid.
331 Ibid., p.2.
332 Ibid., p.1.
real’, yet it was a gap bridged only by focusing on what were the ‘universal preoccupations of the postwar years’, bereavement and mourning.

While aware of regional differences, time and again Winter emphasizes the universal nature of bereavement, and identifies that universality as the reason for the success of ‘traditional’ discourses after the most ‘modern’ of wars (even if his war remains confined to the Western Front). After all, how was the universality of bereavement refracted through the differences of gender, race, nation and politics? The status of mourner was not necessarily unproblematic. Jews’ status as soldiers, mourners and victims of the war was highly ambiguous, from the outbreak of the war thenceforth, epitomized by the Judenzählung in Germany. Women were often unrepresented among the combatants, nor as mothers and wives did they have much of a role in the public remembrance of the event. Soldiers’ position in and towards civil society upon their return was often ambiguous, ‘torn between a desire to be reintegrated into society and a sense of being separated from those who had not been “there”’.

Winter certainly acknowledges some of these contradictions. Discussing shell-shock, he has noted that ‘in Britain a political discourse was unavailable for the expression of the soldiers’ point of view about the damage the war had caused to many of the men in uniform, whether or not they were physically disabled.’ Winter links this absence to the strength of the discourse of shell-shock in British cultural life. For the want of politics a metaphor is created. Yet the real question may be why, if a public discourse was lacking, soldiers were not thereby politicized. The nature of the political, as in Nora, is central to understanding memory.

333 Ibid., p.144.
334 In the Australian context, see Marilyn Lake, ‘At the going down of the son’, The Australian’s Review of Books, 9 June 1999, pp.3-4.
‘political’, a study of war memorials as

foci of the rituals, rhetoric, and ceremonies or bereavement. This aspect of their significance has not attracted particular attention from scholars in this field. Most have been drawn to war memorials as carriers of political ideas, from Republicanism to nationalism, imperialism, fascism, Stalinism, or the multiple justifications of the call to arms.338

Yet in emphasizing the functional value of war memorials, Winter seems to suggest that mourning was not a political act. On the phenomenon of shell-shock, he stresses that the position of ‘ex-soldiers and their families ... within postwar British society was by and large non-political.’339 When he turns to the war poets, it is with the understanding that ‘most poets who wrote about the dead were not politically active people ... What they try to offer is compassion in place of political commitment.’340 Elsewhere, Winter takes more care with his statements, recognizing that ‘commemoration was a political act; it could not be neutral, and war memorials carried political messages from the earliest days of the war.’341 Yet the implication remains that there was an option of politics or compassion, not a politics of compassion. The distinction allows Winter to see bereavement in its universality, rather than its divisions. Behind his awkward handling of the presence of ‘political ideas’ in commemoration, of course, lies the fundamental issue of the nation and the state.

Winter writes the history of the failure of the state to provide an opportunity for the community to mourn. As has been noted, no public discourse existed for soldiers (in Britain). The care for the disabled or wounded ‘went on unrewarded and in many cases unnoticed in millions of households after the war. All of these families needed material

337 In this case, noted a particularly British phenomenon, which contrasts strikingly with the stress on universality in Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning. See p.6.
338 Winter, Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning, pp.78-79.
assistance; rarely did they receive what they needed. The official patriotic discourse of glory and sacrifice was a language 'too unreal, too uplifting, too patriotic, and insufficiently sensitive to the desolation of loss.' In each case, the resilience of civil society balances the story of state indifference. What emerges is 'the strength of the bonds forged among the wounded and disabled themselves.' ‘Collective memory is a term that should never be collapsed into a set of stories formed by or about the state’. War memorials sponsored by the state rest in the final instance on 'a rich undergrowth of unofficial activity, which antedated these statues and carried on long after they were unveiled.' The thrust of Winter’s analysis is towards the concept of remembrance, 'not as reflections of current political authority or a general consensus - although some clearly are one or the other, but rather as a set of profound and evanescent expressions of the force of civil society itself.'

The redefinition of politics, the critique of the state, and the idealization of civil society as an apolitical sphere have, of course, their own political and historical context in the revolutions of 1989. Drawing on Václav Havel and his essay ‘The Power of the Powerless’, often nebulous notions of an ‘anti-political politics’ found a receptive audience in the West. Richard Wolin’s comments on the events of 1989 gives an unremarkable if typical example:

Civil society constitutes a remedy for the isolation in which democratic citizens otherwise find themselves – its associations are essential vehicles of communication,

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341 Ibid., p.82.
342 Ibid., p.45.
343 Ibid., p.85.
344 Ibid., p.45.
common action, solidarity. But they are also an essential bulwark against the
encroachments and trespasses of both big government and big capital.349

These associations also provide the focus of *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*. Winter
embodies the optimistic obverse of Pierre Nora. In the aftermath of 1989 a new third
way has become apparent; Winter is writing its history:

Most projects of commemoration have been created far from the center of political
power. Second- and third-order elites have done the original work of remembrance, but
frequently their work, originating within civil society, has been taken over by groups in
power who fell they have the right and the need to tell us through commemoration how
to remember the past.350

Yet similar problems beset Winter’s formulations as do Pierre Nora’s project.
Again, the ambiguities attend the *political* nature of the remembrance of civil society.
The conclusion seems to be that, as far as remembrance goes, politics refers to the state
and compassion to civil society, and the two are separate. What begins as a laudable
attempt to write the ‘people’ into commemoration, seeing it as more than just a series of
state-sponsored initiatives, ends with a people separate to politics and the state. The
political is not top-down alone. To be sure, Winter, as a careful historian, remembers to
stress at times the politics of commemoration. His most complete engagement is his
argument for an existential level beyond the political and aesthetic:

Anyone approaching the cultural history of the war who misses this third level leaves
out what sadly was at the heart of the experience of the war for millions. Their war was
imprinted with the wrenching experience of loss, the ‘meaning’ of which was sought at
least as much in the existential as in the artistic or political spheres. It is true that the
Great War introduced political issues to every dimension of social life, but some issues
in wartime were both political and more than political. The experience of mass
bereavement was one such issue.351

349 Richard Wolin, ‘What We Can Learn From the Revolutions of 1989: the New Unwritten
However, what it really means to go beyond ‘beyond the political’ (as Winter argues do the Cenotaph and Vietnam War Memorial) and service civil society with ‘existential truths’ remains unclear. It begs the question ‘whose existential truths’? If these memorials occasionally go ‘beyond the limitations of place and time’, should we need a historian to decipher them? Even Winter eventually realizes the distinctions ‘between and among the political and the existential fade, for the question as to how to remember the ‘Lost Generation’ all too often had disturbing personal, communal and political repercussions.’ And yet it would appear to be these distinctions upon which his analysis rests. ‘More than political’ seems merely another way of saying ‘less than political’.

Winter creates a European tradition based in the resilience of civil society, and as much as any narrative of the state, this history concerns the nation. For to record the story of bereavement in this manner is to disclose fully the European character of the war. This is a story with fewer national boundaries than is to be found in most histories of the period. To bring these diverse cultures together in the aftermath of this murderous war is to place less emphasis than others do on the facts of victory and defeat. They mattered; but all too often victory had a taste of ashes. ... Recalling this aspect of the war also helps to cast further doubt on the outmoded idea that Germany went through a special path, a Sonderweg in the nineteenth and twentieth century. ... all major combatants went through a ‘special’ path, the path of collective slaughter.

Here is a history for a European Union. Yet a fundamental faultline undermines this tradition: Germany and its role in the Holocaust.

As noted above, Winter stresses the discontinuity of the Second World War more than that of the First. Unlike what followed the Great War, ‘the rupture of language and imagery which followed the Second World War was profound and
The conflict which brought forth Auschwitz ‘helped to put an end to the rich set of traditional languages of commemoration and mourning which flourished after the Great War.’

After the Second World War, the same flaring up of older languages appropriate to a period of mass mourning did not take place. ... Other voices emerged, and other cultural forms appeared. Many of them were abstract, and thereby both more liberated from specific cultural and political reference and less accessible to a mass audience. Their austere simplicity is powerful and compelling, and points to 1945 as the real caesura in European cultural life. Whether or not these abstract images have the same power to heal as did older symbolic forms is a difficult question; the answer is probably not.

After Auschwitz there is no (traditional) poetry, no mourning, and no monuments either. Thus Winter has criticized the idea of a Holocaust memorial in the capital of the reunited Germany, for the ‘monument is unavoidably part of the story of Germany reborn. ... Placing the monument in the heart of the national capital, geographically and metaphorically, also draws attention away from many original and sensitive commemorative forms in Berlin and elsewhere in Germany.’

The task is, in any case, impossible:

None of these sites can “re-present” the Holocaust; nothing can do so in any conventional way. All they can accomplish – and it is a lot – is to suggest what is absent in European life because of the genocide and to leave the question of its “meaning” open. ... But absence is not meaning. My own view is that it is unwise to try to encapsulate the Holocaust within in any particular system of meaning. To paraphrase Primo Levi, a set of events about which one cannot pose the question of “why?” is also an event about which it is impossible in any straightforward sense to pose the questions of historical context or meaning within twentieth-century history.

Yet the famous line from Primo Levi; ‘Hier ist kein warum’ - here, there is no why, are the words of a camp guard, the attempt to enforce an absence of all possible meaning, and should not be taken as the final word on the matter. The introduction to

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356 Ibid., p.8.
357 Ibid., p.9.
358 Ibid., p.228.
360 Ibid., p.72.
We believe it is unacceptable simply to lump together the Holocaust and the experience of war in this century. For the history of the Death Camps is the history of industrial murder, remote from war of the kind we consider in chapters on Europe in 1914 - 1918, on Spain in 1936 to 1939, on Algeria in 1954 to 1962, in the Middle East and so on.

The choice here on how to remember the Holocaust, and its place in the history of warfare in the twentieth century is a curious one, firstly because the connection, at least between the First World War and the Holocaust, has been drawn convincingly by other historians. Yet the very collection of essays gathered together for the volume also includes chapters, not only on the use of the Holocaust as a comparative for remembrance, but on the event itself, although not in Germany, which, it seems, will follow a Sonderweg of remembrance. The universality of bereavement and the compassion of civil society are perhaps too strongly contradicted by Auschwitz, the 'arse-hole of the world', which, it must be remembered, evolved from the legacies of the Great War.

The short twentieth century, the issues of modernity, the nation-state and politics post-1989 provide the framework for the explosion of memory studies during the last decades. 'Memory', as a concept, probably ought to be understood as invented along with the delineation of a professionalized, scientific 'history', serving as its opposite and contrast, good or bad. The return to memory thus reflects the destabilization of ‘history’.
in its epistemology and cultural function, shifting the balance in the dual formulation back towards ‘memory’. Yet memory provides no alternative to history, but serves to construct, and is constructed by, notions of what ‘history’ is and should be. Nor does memory, in Nora, Winter or others, necessarily deal better than history with its role in producing national identities and narratives. Too often memory must be set off against the either ‘critical’ or the ‘political’, or both. However, the final assessment of a body of literature must be on the quality of the questions it raises, the depth of understanding which it generates. How has the study of memory aided the understanding of the period with which it is so crucially bound up, the Second World War?
VII. Memory, Morality and the Second World War.

Any account of the 'memory' of the Second World War is indelibly marked by being an expression of that very memory. The literature of memory, more than most bodies of work, takes itself as its subject. Narratives which attempt to delineate the course of memory must converge in the present moment in which those narratives are written. Depictions of an instance of 'memory', temporally limited, take their broader meaning as part of a structured chronology (such as repression, awakening, obsession) or in contrast to the present state of remembrance, whether preferred or deplored. Thus the understanding of today's 'memory' – vaguely defined as the meaning of the past, its representations and effects, in the present - becomes the axis around which previous memories can be understood and future memories drawn up. The questions of contemporary society explicitly frame the discussion of memory, foregrounding the issue of relevance. Of course, professional historiography operates within the same context, but usually leaves unspoken or understated the connections to contemporary politics and society, and rarely escapes academic debate into the public sphere. In content and audience, historiography too often remains a solely academic concern.

By contrast, the debates over 'memory', derive from its position at a particularly productive nexus where the past shapes the present and the present shapes understandings of the past, amid a multitude of previous interpretations lingering after their initial invention. Tangibly connected to the past under discussion, any history of memory holds implications for the present-day role of an ever-receding era. Conversely, the mutation of meaning in the decades following 1945, the ongoing reinvention of the past, provides the shifting ground on which the present beholder perceives the history of the war, and its memory. Neither past nor present stand still, yet out of this muddled, and often muddying, milieu the questions posed by 'memory' as a conceptual tool to
'memory' as a field of inquiry must clarify the tangled web of meanings history holds today, or also be relegated to the large rubbish heap of historiographical inventions.

Memory is, after all, a throwback; organizing a past which did not use the term in the same way. The processes of remembrance have existed since the end of the Second World War, but only in the last two decades of the twentieth century did they come to be seen as constituting the phenomenon of 'memory'. The emergence of the concept to apply to the processes marks a certain distance from both the war and from its influence. The emergence of that distance, and the consequent prominence of memory in historiography and public discourse, has required the invention of a history of the memory of the war, if only to develop an understanding of how it reached the current 'crisis'. Maybe memory achieved self-awareness in the last decades of the twentieth century. Yet it remains dubious, firstly, whether the amorphous term 'memory' can really be applied to a complex set of events such as the Second World War and the diversity of meanings it took on in its long afterlife and, secondly, whether the distinction between 'remembrance' and the understanding of it can be drawn too firmly. The age of memory indicates another, different, phase in the reappropriations of the history of the Second World War, rather than a higher, more self-conscious understanding. Distance, in this instance, does not presuppose a more critical understanding.

Perhaps the Owl of Minerva flies at dusk. Certainly memory has emerged all the more as the Second World War drifts further into history, a distance which those who maintain the crude division between history and memory would welcome for the sanctity and safety of a purely academic pursuit.366 Whether wisdom accompanied the flight of memory is another matter. The 1980s and 1990s brought not only the term

memory but a consistent and continuing commemoration of the war even as the most tangible results from the settlement of 1945 faded away. Certain visions of the past could be sloughed off more easily than ever before; other versions could take their place to be consumed more comfortably than their predecessors. The dusks in which memory has flown have brought as much shadow as enlightenment and the twilight of the century allows clarity only for those who would draw the curtain on the past.

How, then, does memory as a concept and as a field of study shape and aid our understanding of the legacies of the Second World War? The point at which best to begin grappling with memory, of course, must be the present. One example of many will suffice. Tony Judt, prefacing a recent collection of papers on the aftermath of the war, invoked the now familiar image of an amnesic relation to the past:

> From 1945 through the mid-1960s at least, the experience of the first half of the European twentieth century in general and the war years in particular was blurred: it suited almost everyone to forget what they or their parents did, to forget what was done to them, to forget what they saw and to forget what they knew. This psychologically and politically convenient amnesia was well reflected in the conventional histories of Europe after World War II and as recently as the 1990s.  

Forgetting meant, Judt suggests, that 'it used to be easy to write contemporary European history'. Yet the image of mass forgetting is itself an easy and somewhat simple characterization. When transferred to a national context, it bears more than passing resemblance to the charge of conservatives (or Pierre Nora) that populations without a proper sense of the past are destined to perish. Of course, the right has no monopoly on clichés. Nevertheless, the assumptions that history merely needs remembering and the content of the past is quite obvious operate here all too easily and uncritically. The smug self-assurance that arises from the certainty that we now remember what once was

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368 Ibid., p.vii.
forgotten must also trouble, oblivious to the crucial question of context which frames any understanding of the past.

The question Judt poses for researchers has little more than rhetorical value:

how far can we still give credit to the heroic if self-serving tales that came out of the war in much of Western Europe and served as the moral cement with which postwar democracies reconstructed themselves[?]

However obvious and unnecessary to state the answer to this question (for Judt), it points to an inherent ambiguity in all discussion of remembrance. An equally self-serving forgetting complements any self-interested remembering. So how stark can the choice between remembering and forgetting be? What value lies in self-congratulation on the overcoming of forgetfulness? Does such rhetoric merely serve to legitimize a new state of affairs, a new configuration of remembrance and forgetting? How hegemonic, after all, were the histories which emerged after the end of the war? Can they really be seen to have dominated unchallenged for decades, and what history or 'self-serving tale' will take their place?

Judit's exploration of forgetting and the reconstruction of nation, state and identity has, of course, a context, which needs to be remembered: the revolutions of 1989 and the reconfiguration of Europe (and hence its history and memory) which accompanied them. With the successor states of Eastern Europe in the process of coming to terms both with the Communist past and with the uncertain future, the last great reconstructions of nation and memory, following the Second World War, has particular resonance. And, with the replacement of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe regimes by some semblance of democracy (but also by myth and forgetting), Judt appears anxious to include Western Europe in the balance sheet:
We are familiar with the notion that from 1949 to 1989 Eastern Europe was “frozen” into place, forced to tell itself a story of fraternal relations, common and heroic resistance to fascism, and the successful overcoming of ethnic and other forms of interstate and intrastate division. What is perhaps less readily recognized is the degree to which Western Europe experienced an analogous glacis.  

Whether or not Eastern Europe ‘froze’ for the four decades between 1949 and 1989, the metaphor applies less assuredly to Western Europe. The latter date and all it signifies was hardly needed to openly question long-standing myths of the Second World War. Without doubt, ‘anti-fascism’ and ‘resistance’ furnished crucial components of the Western European memories of the Second World War, as they did for the Soviet bloc. Yet, while 1989 may mark a new phase in their understanding, or an old but reinvigorated interpretation, contestation over ‘anti-fascism’, ‘resistance’, their meaning and their residual value comprises no novelty, nor can their memory be characterized as frozen. A more variegated picture of remembrance is warranted.

As much as a newfound contestation of history, the increasing uncertainty that there are any ‘lessons’ to be drawn from Europe’s descent into the second great war of the twentieth century provides the backdrop to the arrival of memory. A moral equivalency may not yet reign, but certainly contends as the best way to represent the ferociously ideological war fought out in Europe between 1939 and 1945. Thus in France, the French intellectual of Bulgarian origins Tzvetan Todorov, has argued in his move from the structural analysis of literary texts to ethics and history, for the equivalence of the Milice (the French militia) and the Resistance.  

While Nazism (if perhaps only in its incarnation at Auschwitz) may retain a special place in the pantheon of evil, collaboration, resistance and attentisme all occupy a gray area of doubtful differentiation. Similarly, much Italian historiography has been engaged for some time

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369 Ibid., p.viii.
370 Ibid., p.x.
371 See Omer Bartov’s discussion in Mirrors of Destruction: War, genocide, and modern identity, Oxford University Press, 2000, p.31.
in delineating an ‘anti-anti-Fascist’ position on the war, where the Resistance and the Fascists have little to distinguished them, but are merely two ideologically-driven factions in a pointless and fundamentally ‘unpopular’ civil war.\textsuperscript{372} No doubt, the rather crude narratives of heroic resistance lacked subtlety and needed complication. However, the alternative appears to be a vague confusion, perpetuating the perspective of bystanders\textsuperscript{373}, and hence excluding the point of view of groups such as Jews or Communists to whom the different sides definitely did not appear as a choice of evils which if possible should be completely avoided. The lack of discernment reflects the present age, when any ideology, whether nazi-fascist or (communist or socialist) anti-fascist seems inexplicable in the eyes of a triumphant liberalism.\textsuperscript{374}

Nations occupied by Germany during the Second World War can debate the moral value and legacy of the alternative sides in their ‘civil wars’. The virtue of being invaded, albeit tarnished by defeat, allows a measure (German National Socialism) against which relativization can proceed. The same obfuscation is impossible in Germany itself. Nevertheless, ‘remembrance’ in Germany bears some similarity to the situation outlined above for France and Italy. Under Helmut Kohl in the 1980s, various attempts to recast national identity were pursued, a process naturalized by reunification. Germany, too, has ridden the wave of memory, from the commemorations of the mid-1980s to the debates about a Holocaust monument in the 1990s. A German variety of moral equivalency has also been assayed, and, as with France and Italy, the process is buttressed by an external, foreign, standard: the Soviet Union in its Stalinist incarnation.

The most notorious case of the troublesome intersection of German memory and national identity is the \textit{Historikerstreit} of the mid-1980s.


\textsuperscript{373} See again Omer Bartov, \textit{Mirrors}, p.31.

\textsuperscript{374} For the question of anti-Fascism and Britain see Geoff Eley, ‘Legacies of Antifascism: Constructing Democracy in Postwar Europe’, \textit{New German Critique}, no. 67, Winter 1996, pp.73-100.
The ‘historians’ debate’ occurred amidst the characteristic concerns of memory: the ongoing plan for a national museum under Helmut Kohl (proclaiming the blessing of his late birth), and the Bitburg affair when Ronald Reagan casually implied that SS troops, too, were victims of Nazism. The debate took off when the German liberal philosopher Jürgen Habermas, responding to an article by Ernst Nolte in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, grouped Nolte, Michael Stürmer, and Andreas Hillgruber as a conservative front poised to rewrite Germany national history with Nazism (or its most horrific acts) appropriately marginalized. While Habermas was probably a little hasty in his grouping, bringing together three quite distinct viewpoints on the German history and its present relevance, he had accurately perceived a significant shift in understanding the past which could be understood through the prism of ‘memory’.

Michael Stürmer, for one, demonstrated his ability as speech writer for Helmut Kohl to produce cliché and sound-bite rather than analysis in declaring melodramatically if unoriginally that ‘In a country without memory anything is possible’. The twofold implication, that not only had modern Germans forgotten their nation’s past, but the last time this happened the result was National Socialism, neatly conjoined the concerns of the present with a facile reading of the past. ‘Hitler’s rise’ was characterized by ‘a loss of orientation and a futile search for identity’:

From 1914 to 1945, the Germans were exposed to the cataracts of modernity to a degree that destroyed all tradition, making the unthinkable thinkable and barbarism a form of state. This is the reason Hitler was able to triumph; this is the reason he was able to capture and corrupt Prussia and patriotism, the state, and middle-class virtues.

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377 Ibid.
Stürmer merely articulated the latest version of a conservative vulgate, an attempted rehabilitation of ‘middle-class virtues’ and ‘patriotism’. The absence of those values (or their distortion through ideology or collaboration with the foreign entities of either Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union) presumably accounted also for the difficulty of choosing a moral victor in the civil wars of France and Italy. Stürmer understood memory as a national, middle-class virtue, a moral value equivalent to the heritage industry, comforting and insulating against modernity and the harshness of history. The definition holds more than passing resemblance to Pierre Nora’s contemporaneous writings.

Stürmer’s formulations held little intellectual or conceptual weight, being merely the fuzziest, garden variety of memory. Rather, the intellectual historian and student of Heidegger, Ernst Nolte, provided the most significant relativism in the *Historikerstreit* when he inveighed against the ‘past which will not pass away’. Like Stürmer, Nolte found it Germany’s peculiar tragedy to have succumbed to National Socialism. More importantly, he focused on the Soviet Union as the first context for genocide, leading to his notorious rhetorical question whether ‘the National Socialists or Hitler perhaps commit[ted] an “Asiatic” deed merely because they and their ilk considered themselves to be potential victims of an “Asiatic” deed ? Was the Gulag Archipelago not primary to Auschwitz?’

Nolte’s was not the first, and certainly not the last, attempt to relativize by means of shallow historical context. Indeed, the *Historikerstreit* drew part of its fire and power from its relation to two traditions in the German historical profession. The first connection was to the debate in the early 1960s which erupted when Fritz Fischer’s critique of German war aims in 1914 brought into question almost all the cherished

myths of German national identity. National history and identity was similarly in play in
the Historikerstreit, as evidenced by Stürmer's contribution, and the context of Kohl's
ambiguous position on the past. The second tradition was the study of totalitarianism,
which in the 1950s and into the 1960s had served the explicit purpose of grouping the
old enemy of Nazi Germany and the new enemy of the Soviet Union together as two
variants of the one system. While few if any major historians had stated Nolte's theses
with the same crudeness and crassness or with particular reference to Auschwitz, the
delineation of 'models' of totalitarianism provided grounds on which such comparisons
were certainly acceptable. Totalitarianism, too, while in remission during much of the
1970s for its Cold War credentials, returned in the 1980s and 1990s to some degree of
popularity, most lately being the subject of an exchange of letters between Nolte and
French historian François Furet.379

The Historikerstreit has been investigated at length elsewhere, if all too often to
be dismissed as bringing more heat than light and so not really worthy of serious
historians' attention.380 What, then, is the relevance of the debate to the phenomenon of
'memory'? To begin, the German dispute reverberates with the broader context, the
European-wide summation in the 1980s of four decades of history and memory since
the end of the Second World War and the attempt to reshape national identities
unconstrained by the burden of the past. After all, the broader significance of the moral
equivalency in the Italian and French contexts lies in their diminution of the relevance
of serious cracks in the façade of the nation. However, the connections between the
German case and its European analogues extend beyond the unifying theme of nation
and identity, as evidenced by the surfacing in the French context of Nolte's phrase 'the

379 François Furet and Ernst Nolte, Fascisme et communisme, Plon, 1998. The exchange first appeared in
the right-wing journal Commentaire (founded by Raymond Aron in 1978), issues no. 79 and 80. It is now
available in English, François Furet and Ernst Nolte, Fascism and Communism, University of Nebraska
past which will not pass away'. These interrelationships shall be explored below. Suffice it to say that any investigation of memory either leading up to or in the present reflects the concerns current in the 1980s and 1990s. Further, in contrast to Judt’s broad generalization about the Western European ‘freeze’ in an anti-fascist memory, the reevaluations that mark the last two decades of the twentieth century have their antecedents in earlier years. Just as ‘totalitarianism’ has strong traditions to draw upon, so present phenomena of memory do not emerge from a vacuum. The Historikerstreit also picked up unerringly the issues of ‘Judeocentrism’, ‘silence’ and ‘obsession’ which characterize the literature of memory. One of the reasons why ‘memory’ has found a historiographical home resides in the ability of the term ‘memory’ to provide a narrative structure to discuss the appropriation and appreciation of the Second World War.

VIII. The Narratives of Memory.

The classic case of the narrative of memory is Henry Rousso’s *The Vichy Syndrome*, a book which has provided the literature with a whole vocabulary with which to conjure. Rousso, born in 1954, and now employed at the Institut d’histoire du temps présent, has written of how he grew up in the shadow of 1968. Searching for a topic he was in part inspired to choose France’s Second World War by Robert Paxton’s *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order 1940-1944*.382 Paxton’s book is itself a fascinating example of the dynamics of ‘memory’. Written against the background of America’s war in Vietnam383, *Vichy France* is a perfect example of the complicated interaction of pasts and presents across national borders. Much has indeed been made of Paxton as an American, and so as someone who thus could not understand France and French identity or alternatively to underline that somehow only an ‘outsider’ could approach the problem of Vichy. For if, as Michel Foucault has argued, the purpose of philosophy (intellectuals and historians) since the Enlightenment had been the understanding of the present384, the first thirty years of historicizing the French Second World War was an abject failure. The ‘Paxtonian revolution’ pulled apart an official interpretation of Vichy, but that interpretation was never totally unchallenged. Initially rejected for publication at Gallimard (where rumour had it that Pierre Nora made the final negative decision)385, Paxton’s book encapsulated and gave focus to the revision of Vichy history already under way.

The publication of Robert Paxton’s book took part in what Henry Rousso has denominated the ‘breaking of the mirror’ in the Vichy syndrome. Rousso’s discussion

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of the memory of Vichy used the metaphor of neurosis, and went through stages of unfinished mourning, repression, awakening and obsession. Rousso may deprecatingly downplay the importance of the terms – 'What is borrowed from psychoanalysis is simply a metaphor, not an explanatory system'\textsuperscript{385} - but each word has implications and assumptions that need to be drawn out. The first and most remarkable aspect is the triumph of Freud. While historians usually prefer Maurice Halbwachs as the most reliable basis from which to investigate social memory, the lexicon of remembrance almost entirely derives from Freud. Mourning, melancholia, repression, loss and mania maintain a resonance and power in the literature beyond that of mere metaphor.\textsuperscript{387} The status of Freud befits extended exploration. Here it should be noted that Freud's context was the world of modernity, science and the modern nation-state (in its ambiguous Austro-Hungarian incarnation) that also forms the context for the invention of history as a discipline, and memory as its complement. Why does one discourse of modernism seem so appropriate to analyse the crisis of another? Nation, history and medicine (psychoanalysis) seem locked together in an unending cross-fertilization and interpretation.

The nation plays the crucial role in the evocative power of 'mourning', 'repression' and 'obsession'. The transfer of the language of psychoanalysis from the individual to a larger collective surreptitiously naturalizes the 'subject' (however neurotic). With the nation-state as the implied subject, national identity becomes the best lens through which to understand both Henry Rousso's analysis of the 'Vichy syndrome', and the terminology of memory with which it has furnished historiography.


Indeed, the most surprising feature of Rousso’s book (or logical, given their shared context) is the similarity of its assessment of France to Pierre Nora’s troubled vision. *The Vichy Syndrome* makes an eerie echo of the distinctions between history and memory to be found in *Les Lieux de mémoire*. Thus Rousso had noted how ‘now that history no longer has the purpose of forging a national identity … it often has the effect of perpetuating old divisions.’ The ‘old division’ of history and memory, of course, remains valid. But the uncertainty surrounding the role of the nation once again founds the very terms in which the analysis is conceived and written.

Nevertheless, the crisis of national identity was only one note among many in Rousso’s first book. By the mid-1990s, with the appearance of a sequel to *The Vichy Syndrome*, co-written by Rousso and journalist Eric Conan, the underlying motif of national identity had risen to the surface. Rousso and Conan declared in strident tones that ‘the memory of our nation indeed remains incapable of giving a unified historical account.’ Whether such unity was to be expected from so divisive an event as Vichy, or even if ‘unity’ should really be the goal of history is left unclear by such dramatic or melodramatic statements. Rather, analysis stops at the recognition of the painfully apparent ‘loss of direction in the memory of the French nation.’ A few years after the sequel, Rousso had redefined the role of the historian away from the pursuit of critical history. Rather, ‘the problem lies in integrating this past into the national narrative, and, even more, into the image we wish to fashion of our country’s history.’ Unity, more specifically, national unity, has returned to the centre of attention. Doubtless history should be more than a collection of unconnected and unrelated narratives. Yet, whether the nation offers the only or even the best basis for an integrated narrative cannot be

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388 Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, p.4.
taken for granted. More pertinently, the demands placed upon history by the construction of a national narrative need to be examined rather than simply repeated.

The themes of *Les Lieux de mémoire*, the integration of problematic pasts into a national narrative, the danger of critical history and the perilous situation of the nation, all resonate through Rousso’s reworking of Vichy. Unsurprisingly, Pierre Nora has taken the opportunity to comment on the sequel to *The Vichy Syndrome*. The second book, which shifted the emphasis on ‘repression’ of memories and affirmation of a neglected past into a critique of ‘obsession’, won endorsement from Nora, in that it ‘brings up to date [*The Vichy Syndrome*] in two senses of the word: it extends it and on many aspects, corrects it.392 However, the greatest ambiguity in the sequel to *The Vichy Syndrome* accompanies the title. While published in English as *Vichy: An Ever-Present Past*, the original French title *Vichy: Un passé qui ne passe pas*, borrowed, without qualifying comment, Ernst Nolte’s notorious characterization of Nazism and the Holocaust as a ‘past which will not pass away’. While both Rousso and Nolte would affirm the specifically national character of each recalcitrant past, the double invocation of an ‘obsession’ suggests again as much commonality as difference, and the international utility of the framework of ‘memory’ to deal with the presence of the past.

Rousso has downplayed any resemblance between the *Historikerstreit* and the Vichy syndrome: ‘‘The Vichy syndrome’ attempts to describe (with many imperfections) a movement of the *moyenne durée*, which concerns the whole of French society, and not a debate [the *Historikerstreit*], limited in its duration and forms, which concerned only an intellectual and political elite.’393 Despite the protestations, however, some similarities present themselves. To begin with, both debates take place within the

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391 Rousso, ‘The Historian, a Site of Memory’, p.300.
context of wider discussions of national identity and both are ultimately concerned with the reintegration of an unseemly part of the past within the continuity of a national narrative. Both take up the theme of 'obsession' to describe the unpacificed past. Nor does Rousso's distinction between the French and German cases, the one involving the whole of society and the other limited to the elites, necessarily hold. How deeply the discussion of Vichy has penetrated all levels of French society is a matter for debate\(^{394}\), and the *Historikerstreit* should be comprehended as part of a wider phenomenon not totally quarantined to the readers of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.

How then, should *The Vichy Syndrome* be understood, in the context of its sequel and their two different decades? Dominick LaCapra, the intellectual historian whose use of the language of psychoanalysis has been the most frequent, if not always the most illuminating, has argued that the problem of *Vichy: un passé qui ne passe pas* is its detachment from its predecessor:

> the mere mention, without sufficient elaboration, of the earlier book's treatment of incomplete mourning, repression and return of the repressed in post-Vichy France gives a somewhat unsituated and excessive prominence to the putative role of obsession in the more recent past and seems simply to oppose it to - rather than present it as intimately linked with - repression, denial, and "taboo".\(^{395}\)

However, this reading of *Vichy: un passé* as merely unsituated accepts without critique the language of psychoanalysis, which grounds the second book as well as the first, while also ignoring the explicitly national question within which the whole issue is framed. The sequel fulfills logically the analysis as formulated and started in *The Vichy Syndrome*. The description of obsession already existed in the first book. The most significant change between *The Vichy Syndrome* and *Vichy: un passé* is the context, as viewed by Henry Rousso.

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\(^{394}\) See the dissenting point of view to Rousso of Gorden Bertram in the same volume of the journal.
In *The Vichy Syndrome* Rousso could write that 'in the 1980s the historiography of Vichy entered a relatively calm and objective phase', indicating that, once again, the literature of memory bases itself on an understanding of history as professional, scientific and objective, bound to correct and pacify the unruly memories of society. As the omniscient Pierre Nora put it, *The Vichy Syndrome* marked an important moment: it was placed at the exact point of departure of the tremendous acceleration of the phenomenon which it meant to describe. Nora went on to wonder whether the second book might similarly mark the beginning of a balancing movement. The Vichy syndrome was, after all, a neurosis. While historians might behave in appropriately scientific manner, reducing the past to academic concern, the public had failed to respond. Thus, following the medical metaphor, Rousso outlined the most urgent task as being 'to seek remedies' for the syndrome. The therapeutic thrust, the crude division between history and memory, were all present in *The Vichy Syndrome*. Yet, whereas at the publication of the first book the syndrome appeared as if it might abate and fade away, the opposite occurred. Rousso has been left to predict repetitively the end of obsession, without yet being proved correct. As he put it plaintively in 1998,

> With the Touvier trial, in 1994, with the speech of Jacques Chirac, in 1995, I thought that we had almost exited from it [the syndrome], that we had reached what was required ... Today I have the impression that we have reached a summit. Will the Papon trial put an end to the 'Vichy Syndrome'? I hope so.

*The Vichy Syndrome* was in part a diagnosis of its times, and an attempt to bring the neurosis to the close by giving a full and balanced account of the past and its 'remembrance'. However, in his diagnostic operation, Rousso seems to have grasped

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396 Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, p.159
397 Nora, 'Le Syndrome, son passé, son avenir', p.442.
398 Rousso, 'Le Syndrome de l'historien', p.524.
the situation only partly. In the curative role, he has failed utterly, without comprehending why.

The transition made by Rousso from *The Vichy Syndrome* to *Vichy: un passé qui ne passe pas* correspond to a shift in emphasis from ‘repression’ to ‘obsession’. These two terms provide the meaning and framework by which each of the books create an understanding of ‘memory’. Both words have a tremendous evocative power and reecho throughout the literature on memory (repression for those who write in more respectful tones about the past and obsession for those who criticize the misuse of memory or prefer to draw a line between past and present). Yet, perhaps because of their polemical power, neither ‘repression’ nor ‘obsession’ has proven a particularly useful or subtle intellectual tool.

Repression, by definition, assumes a ‘return’. A period of silence by necessity ends with a moment of awakening; repression always exists as unnatural, followed by a ‘natural’ righting of memory. No author has written yet of an unreturned repression. Yet one of Halbwachs’ original points, that a multitude of memories simply slip unnoticed into oblivion, to remain unretrieved by historians and historical (and national) narratives, belies the imposed framework of repression and return. The invocation of trauma makes for the most common strategy to explain the psychologically-defined stages of memory. Trauma may have its conceptual uses, but the psychological framework, and its assumptions endure. A series of assumptions about the dynamics of memory and the nature of the past underlie the language of repression and return. Only if the past takes the form of something akin to a coherent whole, and the rememberer can be constituted through continuity rather than interruption, can elements which are suddenly stressed in the present day be labelled as the previously repressed. Neither assumption necessarily holds. Yet beyond the presuppositions, the designation of
repression most obviously endows a particular part of the past with psychological freighting. The 'return of the repressed' naturalizes and legitimates a particular version of the past and dictates an agenda of 'remembrance'. Via these terms, memory itself becomes a subject in history, as Michael Geyer and Miriam Hanson have remarked:

'It is said that the burden of that past [the Holocaust] continues to weigh heavily on Germany, due to the unspeakable nature of the crimes committed in Germany's name ... It is true inasmuch as the Nazi past has lost none of its significance for the living. It is utterly false in that it presumes that the past imposes itself upon the Germans, as if it were a natural or a metaphysical force. This presumption is self-serving for those who act as agents of that past in the present.  

Repression functions less as an analytical than a rhetorical tool which can dictate the logic and structure of 'memory'.

Without doubt, some memories or aspects of the past are erased or effaced from history, or merely lapse into obscurity. However, 'repression' has little utility either as either a label for the phenomenon or a tool for its analysis, adequate neither to the processes nor to the complexities of the past 'remembered'. Too many demands are place in this paradigm on the suppositions of the existence of a 'collective memory', the workings of which are unconscious. For these reasons Peter Novick, in his study of the 'collective memory' of the Holocaust in the United States, *The Holocaust in American Life*, rejected the language of repression in favour of 'choices albeit tacit and less-than-fully conscious choices'. Surprisingly, the literature of memory rarely if ever features the term 'suppression', which would certainly require a much-needed attention to the context and the actual processes of remembrance.

For these reasons, much recent research has avoided the use of the term 'repression'. Robert Moeller has demonstrated the falsity of 'the widely held opinion

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400 For example, LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, pp.15-16.
that, in the 1950s, the citizens of the Federal Republic largely avoided all memories of the years of Nazi rule.\textsuperscript{403} Rousso himself, whose research often undermines \textit{The Vichy Syndrome}'s metaphorically ordained structure if not the ultimate interpretive thrust, has noted that

Despite some repression of wartime memories in the 1960s, memories of the Resistance were thus widely discussed, but largely within the framework established by the Gaullist version of the past. Yet that epic vision did not establish its priority until rather late in the day and was never able to silence all doubt or eradicate all bitterness.\textsuperscript{404}

The detail of research indicates that 'remembrance' is best discussed not in terms of repression and obsession, but (as with Rousso here) in terms of the frameworks within which memories can be assimilated. 'Remembrance' is a complicated amalgam of themes and particular memories, a structuring of absences and presence at various levels of discourse. This multi-layered understanding of remembrance (not tied to imaginings of a national collective memory) also supplies the conclusion of Dagmar Herzog's consideration of the role of the Holocaust in the movements of 1968: 'while the Holocaust may indeed officially have been an “ancillary” concern for the 68ers, it was nonetheless potently and pervasively present, seeping into the most intimate aspects of their lives. Something more complicated than either repression or amnesia was at work.'\textsuperscript{405} So why should the processes of 'memory' and their labeling as repression or obsession have become so compelling an activity in the late twentieth century?

The appeal of 'repression' (and 'obsession') probably begins in their ability to clarify through simplification the residue of meaning left from the Second World War. The tension between the sense that clear and important lessons can and should be drawn

\textsuperscript{404} Rousso, \textit{The Vichy Syndrome}, p.97.
from the Second World War (and the Holocaust) and the increasing irrelevancy of the period or inefficacy of lessons hitherto furnished by it underlie the allegations of mania and repression. The discovery and championing of repressed memories or, alternatively, the designation of an obsessive relation to the past have a therapeutic freight, neatly rearranging the disordered past into an easily understood paradigm. Those who bewail repression have the added advantage of redressing the wrong by the act of locating the ‘repressed’. Similarly, the discourse of obsession locates a particular piece of the past which can thenceforth explain a variety of problems in the ongoing exchange between the present and history. Remedial action here, however, requires a more substantial basis than the identification of the mania, hence the tendency to retreat and fall back upon the nation.

Conan and Rousso reiterate the simplest understanding for ‘obsession’ in Vichy: *un passé*: ‘the depth of silence marking the 1950s and 1960s ... was too pronounced for us to avoid the backswing of the pendulum that has taken us too far in the opposite direction.’ Mundane metaphors aside (and the pendulum implies both a ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ position and a preferably imminent balancing movement), a simultaneous ubiquity and superficiality characterize ‘obsession’. Thus in 1992 the French journal *Esprit* ran a forum on Vichy which began with the paradox of obsession: ‘the evocations, affairs or recalls of French history during the occupation follow one another at a rhythm as sustained as the commentaries ritually explaining that this period is overshadowed, hidden, forgotten.’ No doubt sheer quantity offers a poor measure to counterbalance the previously hidden or forgotten, but similarly the considerable amount of quality work on Vichy similarly has not altered its representation as a

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forgotten past. The phase of ‘obsession’ mirrors that of ‘repression’. Their use lies most in their ability to articulate (if poorly) the relation between the amount of public discourse about the past and the levels in and modes by which it takes place. The disarticulation of the past in the present, whereby the pervasiveness of the concern with the recent or immediate past can be manifested either in public or private spheres, or both, but with no direct connection between the two or to professional historical inquiry, easily creates the impression of obsession or repression.

The critique of ‘obsession’ mobilizes the argument that the silences which existed have been filled and that for some decades professional historical research balanced prior neglect and corrected the most blatant myths. To an extent, obsession merely expresses the latest version of the professional historians’ classic lament that nobody reads their work, the plea for history over memory. So Henry Rousso and Eric Conan began the sequel to *The Vichy Syndrome* with the observation that ‘for twenty years, Vichy has thus been the object of nationwide dispute. Yet never has so much been made of “taboos” as it is today.’ However, the nature of obsession should not merely be reduced to the old stereotyped divide between history and memory together with an injunction to ‘read the historical writing, what the philosopher would call “the dissemination of the narrative,” on the subject.’ Albeit shallow and superficial, empirically unaware or historically anachronistic, the public literature which manifests the ‘obsession’ cannot be dismissed so summarily as the result of an unwillingness to read history books.

Rousso and Conan should not register such great surprise at memory’s apparently paradoxical combination of pervasiveness and elusiveness. Saul Friedländer has remarked in the German context on the combination of recurrence and superficiality

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408 Conan and Rousso, *Vichy: An Ever-Present Past*, p.11.
of remembrance; 'Regularly retrieved, then forgotten once more by the vast majority of
Germans, the Nazi past seems only partly confronted at the elite level.' Which Nazi
past is faced furnishes a further complication. Public opinion, in any case, cannot be
gauged easily. In contrast to Rousso and Conan, Bertram Gordon has suggested that 'the
French appear to be more interested in contemporary issues, such as the erosion of
socialism, the regeneration of capitalism, economic dislocations, relations with a newly
reunited Germany, and the place of France in Europe and the world.' None of these
issues are entirely separate from that of Vichy, but the appellation obsession clearly
derives from a particular perspective which often ignores the wider context.

Rather than rail against the inattention to historical research, then, an
understanding needs to be elaborated of why the same point needs to be made
repetitively in the public sphere. What troubles Rousso, and others, is that public
remembrance demands answers to questions which he as a historian thinks he already
knows. Yet, the cause of obsession, at least as much as the incapacity of the public to
develop consciousness of historical research, might be ascribed to the inability of
historians to convey adequate answers. Rousso’s desire (noted above) to reintegrate
Vichy into a national narrative suggests that there remains something anomalous about
Vichy, however much he thinks it could or should be overcome. Too many historical
interpretations desire to downplay the past rather than incorporate the fissures of
identity and history into a critical memory.

To dismiss public memory for its unoriginality, through the label of ‘obsession’,
is misguided. Novelty should not be the sole virtue of history. Misdirected though the
public literature on the Second World War may be, an ‘obsession’ at least contains an

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410 Saul Friedlander, *Memory, History and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, Indiana University
Fall 1995, p.515.
implicit recognition of the importance and relevance of the events. Rousso has ruefully noted how his ‘attempt to provide a scholarly analysis of the nation’s memory and of the uses of the past ... [became] an instrument used no longer to help understand a social phenomenon, but to denounce it in retrospect.’ Yet while history is not a matter merely for denunciation, neither is it solely an artificial, merely academic exercise in understanding. Instead, history, and particularly contemporary history, consist of the ambiguous activity of understanding a past in the context of the present, thereby evaluating its relevance for today, and tomorrow. Historians who would prefer the past to pass away into a carefully enclosed academic discussion are sadly engaged in a diminution of the discipline. History cannot be confined to the seeking out of new research, the ‘novelty’ absent from the public domain, but also the important task of developing an understanding of the relevance and meaning of the knowledge that exists.

_Vichy: un passé_ basically appeals for a moratorium on France’s Second World War. A deep ambiguity accompanies such a call, particularly since Rousso is well aware of a long tradition of the desire for silence on an uncomfortable subject. As one United States senator put it in discussion on the Armenian Genocide, ‘If it is counterproductive, let us forget it and go on to something else’. The statement hardly provides the model for history, yet does not lack imitations. As Jeffrey Herf has noted, by spring of 1946 Konrad Adenauer, ‘before he could possibly have known who had or had not committed crimes against humanity, ... urged that ordinary members of the Nazi Party “finally” be left in peace’. Nor does the French case lack those who feel history is a luxury for other times. Yet, despite Rousso’s insistence on the uniqueness of French

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412 Conan and Rousso, _Vichy: An Ever Present Past_, p.5.
'memory', Martin Broszat's appeals in the 1980s for the 'historisation' of National Socialist Germany resonate most deeply with *Vichy: un passé*:

As I see it, the danger of suppressing this period consists not only in the customary practice of forgetting, but rather, in this instance - almost in paradoxical fashion - likewise in the fact that one is too overtly 'concerned' for didactic reasons, about this chapter in history. As a result, what happens is that an arsenal of lessons and frozen 'statuary' are pieced together from the original authentic continuum of this era; these increasingly take on an independent existence. Particularly in the second and third generation, they then intrude to place themselves in front of the original history - and are finally, in naïve fashion, understood and misunderstood as being the actual history of the time.

The entreaties retain a remarkable commonality which crosses national boundaries: in each case the apparent prominence of one (particularly problematic) part of the past hinders the construction of a national narrative and disrupts the steady methodical process of historiographical research. The call for a moratorium cannot be made outside this context of previous attempts to put the past in its place.

The solution for French history proffered by Conan and Rousso is forgetting. So *Vichy: un passé* asks 'how can we reconcile the duty to remember with the right to forget, which, in spite of everything, does constitute a right inscribed in our legal principles (and which moreover is inherent in any construction of memory, both individual and collective).'

The rub lies in the definition, the detail and the process of forgetting. As perhaps the only attempt by critics to develop a coherent argument against 'obsessional' memory, the delineation of Rousso and Conan's argument deserves extended quotation:

The "duty to remember" has led to a total denial of the legitimacy of the "right to forget". In such a view of things, this right, which had been affirmed for more than forty years, has supposedly just been an extension of the ambivalences and ambiguities

stemming from the war, thus almost a self-declared collective amnesty. Present-day claims are thus coupled with the illusion that we can redo history and make up, albeit belatedly, for what today are felt to be the failings, gaps, and reductive mythologies that appeared after 1944. It is a process which is forgetting that the lapses of memory were serving useful purposes, and that not only collaborators on the run but also the great majority of the French, including some of the victims of the Nazis or of Vichy, were demanding such lapses of memory. It is a refusal to admit that, beyond morality, forgetting is an integral part of any construction of memory.418

Thus three reasons ground to the ‘right to forget’; that anachronism riddles the memory obsession; that forgetting has its uses and profits; that in any case, forgetting is natural.

The tripling of the argument does not, however, improve its cogency. Anachronism, doubtless, pervades the cruder manifestations of memory, yet it is not incumbent upon the historian to admit only contemporary positions upon a problem. Nor is any age so homogeneous as to preclude voices in opposition to prevailing trends – something Rousso and Conan have here overlooked (or forgotten), for, as Alain Finkielkraut has pointed out, ‘if there was a silence about the “racially deported” in the years following the war, it was not because they were unable to speak ... but because no one wanted to hear them.’419 A brief efflorescence of literature on deportation and genocide in the late 1940s rapidly evaporated in the post-war climate. Forgetting probably serves ‘useful purposes’, but that does not make every instance a positive one, and leaves to the side the more important issue of who has defined those purposes and who dissented to their imposition. Further, to argue that the great majority of the French were in favour of lapses in memory and myths about the past, hardly makes an unequivocally positive argument. The same population and the same majority had been similarly in favour of Philippe Pétain’s government. Finally, forgetting may be ‘natural’, yet the proclamation of the normality of forgetting dismisses the critical questions of how, when and why the selection of what will be forgotten and what will

418 Conan and Rousso, Vichy: An Ever-Present Past, p.4.
be remembered is made. As Rousso himself put it in the *Vichy Syndrome*, ‘memory is a structuring of forgetfulness’.\(^{420}\) How this structuring proceeds remains the key, not whether forgetfulness, inevitably present, is thus natural, forgivable and (in this case) in need of encouragement. Beyond these ambiguities, a curious linguistic disparity between the ‘duty to remember’ and the ‘right to forget’ should prompt caution. While ‘duty’ suggests a chore which must be undergone; a right denotes a principle to be fiercely defended. A duty can be a unique occurrence, a once off (like Vichy?); a right implies an eternal privilege (akin to the nation).

The invocation of the ‘right to forget’ merely offers yet another version of a selective remembrance to counter a similarly selective memory in ‘obsession’. Rousso’s expressed wish to find a way of ‘integrating this past into the national narrative’ indicates the basis on which memories should be selected. The narration of national history is the tool by which the integration (or assimilation) of the troublesome past is achieved. As Michael Roth has observed, ‘the most powerful form of forgetting is narrative memory itself, for it is narrative memory that assimilates (filters, reconfigures) the past into a form that can be “integrated” into the present.’\(^{421}\) Rousso wishes to stress the ‘naturalness’ of forgetting, but as ever the past on offer has a selective character. A general forgetting has no endorsement, but rather a substitution is on offer, an alternative memory to replace the masochistic obsession with Vichy. As the main feature of a renationalized, revitalized memory emerges the resistance.

The rejection of the myth in the 1970s caused people to forget the nation’s debt to General de Gaulle, who was accused by the youngest of having hijacked memory; as a result, they could see only the red ink left by Marshall Petain and thus discovered that the deficit was staggering. Since then, people have been constantly demanding that the nation balance its accounts and clear up the Vichy deficit. At the same time, they have underestimated the original debt contracted toward the resisters.\(^{422}\)

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\(^{420}\) Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, p.4.


A little uneasiness perhaps should accompany such statements. After all, nationalist myths have made much use of the resistance in the past. This new memory, like the others on offer in the recasting of Europe since 1989, has a history which cannot be forgotten. All too often the narrative has ignored the diversity of resisters, their minority status, and their ambiguous relation to the majority of French who preferred *attentisme* to *resistance* until the former became profitable.

The most apt remark on the resistance probably remains that mouthed by one (aristocratic) Resistant in the *Sorrow and the Pity*: ‘I think you could only have joined the resistance if you were maladjusted’ (or Jewish or Communist, of course, but presumably both were maladjusted anyway).\(^{423}\) In any case, to focus on Rousso’s latest metaphorical-historical invention, approaching history with a balance sheet serves poorly the complexity of the past. Yet the resistance can once again, it seems, serve ‘useful purposes’ and bolster a Republican national narrative. Rousso reached this conclusion early on, in *The Vichy Syndrome*:\(^{424}\)

\[\text{the deeper structures of French society did not disintegrate as a result of the Vichy crisis. After 1944, and despite all the postwar upheavals and divisions what Stanley Hoffman calls the “republican synthesis” was consolidated once more. For all that the resurgence of old memories may create an image of a country unable to pick up the threat of its own history, French society has little by little rediscovered areas of consensus. Was the Vichy syndrome the price to be paid for this progress? If memory was sick, perhaps it was because the body of society remained healthy.}\]

Elsewhere, Rousso has been more pithy and precise: ‘the first victim of Vichy was the Republic, or more exactly its essential values’:\(^{426}\)


\(^{425}\) Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, pp.305-6. He does add the rhetorical question ‘Or is the disease hereditary - and incurable?’

When speaking of victims in the context of the Second World War, and when Rousso talks of victimhood, the history of European Jewry during National Socialism inevitably shadows the discussion. Austrian apologists might continue to claim 'first victim' status of Nazism, and the former Soviet Union drew much upon its status as victim of (although more preferably eventually triumphant fighters against) fascism\textsuperscript{427}, but the mass murder of Jews has always maintained an crucial if not necessarily explicit function in the politics of victimhood. Thus, when in the immediate post-war period individual Germans acknowledged 'the suffering of the Jews at the hands of the Germans, it was most frequently in order to establish a measure of the horror of their own experience.'\textsuperscript{428} This employment of the Holocaust as a measuring rod has its exact inverse in Peter Novick portrayal of the present-day role of the Holocaust in the United States, where the genocide functions to take the 'gold medal in the Victimization Olympics'.\textsuperscript{429} Of course, Novick's concerns lie far more with the 'centrism' of the Holocaust in American Jewish identity than within the history of the Second World War. Yet his example provides another instance of the ambiguities and difficulties of fitting the Holocaust into any acceptable framework. The question of who or what holds the centre also defined Martin Broszat's attempts to historicize the Nazi period, the \textit{Historikerstreit} and Henry Rousso's exploration of the Vichy syndrome.

'Judeocentrism', then, should be listed as a key feature of obsession, an 'anachronistic ... temptation ... which seeks to reread the entire history of the Occupation through [sic] the prism of anti-Semitism'.\textsuperscript{430} In part Rousso aims simply to remember the distinctions between the Nazi and Vichy regimes:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{427} And also in the DDR. See Jeffrey Herf on the distinctions between the 'racially persecuted' and 'fighters of fascism', \textit{Divided Memory}, p.80.
\item \textsuperscript{428} Moeller, 'War Stories', p.1026.
\item \textsuperscript{429} Peter Novick, \textit{The Holocaust in American Life}, Houghton Mifflin, Boston and New York, 1999, p.195.
\item \textsuperscript{430} Conan and Rousso, \textit{Vichy: An Ever-Present Past}, p.198.
\end{itemize}
The question of Vichy and the Jews has become so central ... that many historians consider that there is a danger of no longer considering this period of our history except from the angle of antisemitism. The risk will be to give the impression to younger generations that antisemitism occupied the same place in Vichy as it could in the Nazi regime, which is completely false, and above all that the Jews were the main enemies of the regime and therefore its main victims.431

Certainly Vichy France was not Nazi Germany (nor the bulwark against Germany its makers and sympathizers made it out to be then and later). Equally, in an age more attuned to racism (or, rather, to anti-Semitism) than many of the other issues raised in the Second World War, Vichy’s role in the Holocaust and attitude towards the Jews can easily come to occupy the foreground of the historical imagination as the most obvious and still relevant part of the past. Yet while these distinctions between the different regimes implicated in the mass murder of European Jewry need to be made, care must be taken before dismissing the apparent ‘Judeocentrism’ of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Why, after all, is there ‘Judeocentrism’, and what does it mean, not least for those historians so concerned by it?

The ‘problem’ needs to be approached through its relations and alternatives. What, for instance, is proffered to replace a supposed “Judeocentrism” and how would anti-Semitic and genocidal policies then be integrated into an coherent understanding of the past? Does integration stand for diminution? For Rousso, of course, the simple remedy can be found in a refocusing on the Resistance:

the memory of the Resistance has suffered a bit from a polarization of the nation’s memory, which has resulted from an intense focus on the most hideous aspect of the Dark Years: Vichy and anti-Semitism. Because people have for years now dwelled on the dark side of this history, they have, out of masochism, indifference, or ignorance, ended up turning their backs on the bright side.432

Yet this formulation remains unsatisfactory. Weak notions of ‘bright’ and ‘dark’ sides, after all, probably belong either in Star Wars or the speeches of George W. Bush and

should stay there. If the only replacement for a ‘Judeocentrism’ means solely a simplified splicing of the past into good and bad pieces with a preference for remembering the good, then the alternative does not appear to hold much over the present situation. Approaches to history must justify themselves, at least in part, on the quality of the questions they ask. The division of the period of Occupation into Vichy (with anti-Semitism) and Resistance elides the difficult and important questions of, firstly, how the regime and the Resistance were structured around each other, secondly, the role of Jews and place of anti-Semitism in the constitution of the Resistance, and, thirdly, the nature of the large and vague grey zone between the two small minorities of fanatical Vichyites and long-term resistsants.

The perceived need to reintegrate Vichy into a national past, which Rousso has outlined elsewhere, also renders ambiguous the Judeocentrism of history and memory. For both, the question of French complicity and cooperation in Auschwitz and the particularist politics which accompanies ‘Judeocentrism’ disrupt the delineation of a Republican nationalism. As Rousso has noted, ‘in France, the significance of the memory of Vichy antisemitism can be linked to the particular situation of French Jews since the 1970s: mistrust of the classic model of assimilation, criticism of French foreign policy in the Middle East, and fear of a real resurgence of antisemitism.’

Pierre Nora drew upon the same context in fashioning a new memory for France in *Les Lieux de mémoire*. Doubtless part of the prominence of the Holocaust lies in its ability to feed and feed off the identity politics of the late twentieth century. Yet the rise of identity politics and the breakdown of classical models of assimilation, or the ‘Republican synthesis’ which Rousso reaffirmed at the end of the *Vichy Syndrome* account for part of the weighting and evocativeness of the Holocaust in contemporary

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42 Conan and Rousso, *Vichy: An Ever-Present Past*, p.158.
France, but do not explain why that history is so easily adaptable to the political context, nor the original historical constellation. Identity politics and failures of French Republicanism did not invent the Holocaust. Rather, the Shoah is crucially placed on the nexus of a series of faultlines in French identity and national history. Rousso’s proposal of a reassimilation of Jewish suffering into a Republican narrative which focuses on the Resistance is hardly adequate to the situation. When the assumptions are drawn out, the national narrative leaves the implication that Jewish suffering and persecution belongs largely to Jewish identity politics. The Resistance, on the other hand, has its proper place in the history of the Republic.

Once again, the French case echoes the German problem in another reminder that the national framework does not hold all the answers. Omer Bartov has noted how the literature of Alltagsgeschichte created ‘a separation of existences ... there was German history and there was the history of the victims of Nazism, or, as it was perceived both by Germans and Jews, Jewish history.’[^434^] Historiographical exclusions and separations themselves contribute towards the inassimilable nature of the Holocaust into national histories and the consequent, denounced, problematic ‘Judeocentrism’. Neither French nor German histories are unique in this separation of existences. Dutch historiography similarly operates through division, where ‘recent Dutch historical writing, while claiming to be more modern and more academic, has left no place for history’s victims. The debate in that sense is a political one: does the suffering of Jews still belong to Dutch history, or has it become instead the history of others?’[^435^] Luisa Passerini has suggested that notions of silence reflect at least as much the assumptions of historiography as ‘reality’, and the same should be probably be said for the ‘noise’ of

'obsession'. Behind the label stands the desire to fit the Holocaust into an acceptable national framework. Whereas Jews were once highly problematic for the definition of national identity, and under Vichy the distinction between French Jews and foreign Jews was a further subtlety most apparent in defining who was part of the national community, now Jewish history continues to aggravate the twin projects of national identity and professional historiography. The alternatives appear either a separate history (which becomes obsessional) or assimilation and hence diminution within a national narrative.

The process of tracking a collective memory over several decades was probably always fraught with danger. The very concept of collective memory, as suggested above, has only the most doubtful usefulness. The context of the 1980s and 1990s and the dictates of national identity evident in the literature suggest that 'memory' serves best in endowing a political construct in continual revision with a degree of coherence and normality unwarranted by analysis. Yet the language of memory narratives has also proven particularly adaptable. Notions of obsession, repression and trauma float through the literature, although often without any self-awareness as to the assumptions implicit in their use. Although he does not indulge in the vocabulary of psychoanalysis, Peter Novick's recent *The Holocaust in American Life* furnishes another analysis of obsession. Novick, too, is ultimately interested in identity, specifically American-Jewish identity (and the context of US politics), rather than the Holocaust. He deplores 'the inward and rightward turn of American Jewry in recent decades' and the consequent 'erosion of that larger social consciousness that was the hallmark of the American Jewry of my youth'. While eschewing the label of repression, Novick's book nevertheless bears the characteristic markers of the literature of memory. The book attempts to

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decrease the obsessional nature of an event in present-day identity politics. Novick, too, develops the argument that the Holocaust obscures other issues and that anachronism has triumphed in discussion of the Second World War. Thus the obsession with the Holocaust (which has little to do with the US) has meant 'the shirking of those responsibilities that do belong to Americans as they confront their past, their present, and their future'. While Americans (or anyone else for that matter) hardly needed the Holocaust to shirk responsibility towards the past, the event can doubtless help that evasion. Yet such conventional misuses and abuses of history hardly justify the necessity of a past to pass away.

The lessons which history might have to offer, perhaps particularly the history of the Holocaust, constitutes the heart of the problem. According to Novick, 'whatever the sources of Americans’ concern with the Holocaust, and whatever its depth, there is broad agreement on the rationale for that concern. The Holocaust, everyone agrees, is the bearer of urgently important lessons'. And for Novick, if the lessons of history justify the past’s prominence, the Holocaust is singularly ill-suited to the task:

Most of the time, when we say that an event carries lessons that can be applied in another situation, we're doing what's called making an analogy. ... The very characteristic of the Holocaust that make it such an appealing illustration of this or that lesson make it a dubious source of lessons. The Holocaust is invoked in support of various lessons because it is so dramatic, so horrific, so extreme. ... the very extremity of the Holocaust ... seriously limits its capacity to provide lessons applicable in our everyday world.

However, a few ambiguities lurk in Novick’s case. The resemblance of his argument to those contentions of participants in the Historikerstreit or in the ‘Vichy syndrome’ (while in a very different context with very different intentions), suggests that talk of ‘extremity’ (like obsession) offers less value as an analytic tool than for its polemical

438 Ibid., p.16.
439 Ibid., p.238.
utility. Novick rightly points out that history does not provide lessons that can fit on a bumper sticker; yet ‘there are no lessons’ is an equally facile slogan, as is ‘too extreme’. There can be little doubt of the Holocaust’s ‘extremity’, but what that means is another matter – it should not serve as the excuse to marginalise the Holocaust as irrelevant from ‘our everyday world’, an event unrelated to ‘us’, perpetrated by Nazis, who as Steven Spielberg has shown are simply ‘mad’.

Few would argue with Novick’s statement that ‘any wisdom to be acquired from contemplating an historical event ... would derive from confronting it in all its complexity and its contradictions.’ However, history cannot be segregated as the affair of professionals. Just as Novick nostalgically appeals to a romanticized image of American Jewry as once characterized by a ‘social consciousness’ now absent, he indulges in a preference for a history secure from the pretensions and prejudices of a past at once political, public and pertinent to the present. History should not serve as a reservoir of comforting cliches and easy moralizations. Yet a history without lessons may be the lesser for it.

The vocabulary of memory, when used to shape a narrative of the afterlife of an event, works to provide fairly obvious and easy didactic meanings. Obsession and repression are tendentious terms, too often invoked without thought to their assumptions and the context in which they take significance. Yet the decades of ‘memory’ have been marked, alongside a simple moralizing, by the increasing sense of an absence of lessons which the past might provide. At the beginning of the 1990s, just prior to the real take-off of memory, Tim Mason lamented the decline of ‘fascism’ as an interpretive tool for

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440 Ibid., p.243-4.
441 Ibid., p.261.
understanding the first half of the twentieth century, and the consequent creeping irrelevancy of the period:

Most theorists of "Fascism" in the 1960s and 1970s understood Nazism also as a repository of possible lessons, warnings, and injunctions about economic and political developments in the near future; the Third Reich was "relevant." This is far from the concerns of those scholars who now wish to "historicize" it; the latter do not wish to deny its moral, cultural, and political implications for the present, but they do assert that Nazism belongs definitely to the past.\footnote{\textsuperscript{443} Tim Mason, 'Whatever Happened to "Fascism"?', in Thomas Childers and Jane Caplan eds, \textit{Reevaluating the Third Reich}, Holmes and Meier, New York, 1993, p.257.}

For Mason, the trend was reinforced by a focus on the most 'extreme peculiarities' of Nazism, its institutional Darwinism and racial policies. Rather than the integration of history into a national narrative, like the advocates of historicisation or Rousso later in the decade, Mason suggested the necessity of a comparative perspective, taking particular account of Italian fascism. Saul Friedländer has made a similar argument: "the point is not that concepts such as "totalitarianism" or "fascism" seem inadequate for the contextualization of the "Final Solution," but, obversely, that these concepts fit much better the particular phenomena they deal with once the "Final Solution" is not included."\footnote{\textsuperscript{444} Friedlander, \textit{Memory, History and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe}, pp.56-7.} Mason and Friedländer describe the obverse of the same phenomenon. Either a part of the period (often the 'final solution', and more particularly 'Auschwitz') is isolated and studied separately to the context, or the period is more easily understood when part of that history (again, often the final solution) is exempted. These observations point to a situation which memory literature perpetuates - the massive failure of the categories deployed to apprehend the history of the period.
Conclusion

The language mobilized to understand a phenomenon plays a crucial part in shaping that understanding and the entire literature of memory would be better off dropping both ‘memory’ and the Freudian language of psychoanalysis for the more specific categories of national identity and the processes of exclusion and absence by which it is constituted and represented. Memory is a misnomer. The valid distinctions between oral and individual memories and professional historiography cannot be objectified into a self-serving presentation of history as objective and apolitical. ‘Memory’ has no exclusive claim to authenticity, and history is always partial, political, and tied to its own historical context. While individual memories have their social frameworks and both can be studied, the notion of ‘collective memory’ oversimplifies a series of processes, and most often simply serves to naturalize the collective invoked.

The memory boom also reflects a pedagogical uncertainty. Perhaps approaches to the past have always been characterized by either simple lessons or none at all, but part of the interest in memory appears to be the compelling desire for some sort of lesson or lessons to be taken from a past which is passing away. Ironically, the language of memory often only aids this disappearance. In this context, historians should probably beware the indulgent distinction between history and memory and the easy dismissal of the more facile and simplistic features of public ‘memory’. They may contrast unfavourably with the narratives of historians, but historians as often as not create the narrative of history, memory or of national identity which they want. The tendency to write a narrative which ends either in obsession, the belated but inevitable lifting of repression or the self-satisfied exposure of long-term myths, sits, uncomfortably but in many ways naturally, alongside the irrelevancy of professional history which seems to accompany the present day.
Alongside (and through) the theoretical, historiographical and narrative uses of memory exists its value for the market. Memory sells, in book titles, films, museums and souvenirs, offering an appropriation of a past, a possession of it, an appreciation of it, that history appears incapable of providing. In this context, neither the boom in memory, its study, nor its critique holds much comfort. In the flood of memory and the ebb of history’s relevance, historians need to be aware that the past’s superfluousness is also their own, except as the purveyors of a saleable, completely marketized and commodified form of history: infotainment.
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