

## Review Article

### The Case of Modern Memory\*

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More than thirty-five years after World War II, Vitomir Janković, a janitor in the Bosnian town of Odžak, passed away. He was well known for having participated in a massacre of Muslims in November 1941 and was distrusted among his Serb

\* The books under review here include Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer, eds., *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1999), pp. 288, \$19.95 (paper); Pim den Boer, *History as a Profession: The Study of History in France, 1818–1914* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 496, \$77.50; Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 277, \$17.95 (paper); Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 134, \$15.95 (paper); James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 584, \$21.00 (paper); Roger Cohen, *Hearts Grown Brutal: Sagas of Sarajevo* (New York: Random House, 1998), pp. 523, \$29.95; Sarah Farmer, *Martyred Village: Commemorating the 1944 Massacre at Oradour-sur-Glane* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 232, \$17.95 (paper); John Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual, and the Quest for Family Values* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), pp. 310, \$16.95 (paper); Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919–1946* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1994), pp. 245, \$65.00; Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 336, \$23.95; Tim Judah, *The Serbs: History, Myth, and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 378, \$15.95 (paper); Robert Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History* (New York: Vintage, 1993), pp. 307, \$13.00 (paper); Rudy Koshar, *Germany's Transient Pasts: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), pp. 480, \$24.95 (paper); Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London: Verso, 1995), pp. 128, \$18.00 (paper); Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 232, \$15.95 (paper); Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 230, \$15.95 (paper); Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), pp. 492, \$35.00; Pierre Nora, ed., *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, 3 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996–98), pp. 651, 591, 751, \$41.50 each; James Olney, *Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 496, \$35.00; Chuck Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance: One Family's Story of the War in Bosnia* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), pp. 393, \$26.95; Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 389, \$19.95 (paper); Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of the Dead: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 208, \$24.00; Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 276, \$14.95 (paper); and Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, eds., *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 268, \$19.95 (paper).

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neighbors for allegedly informing on fellow partisans months later. Still, Janković was something of a local operator, so news of his death traveled quickly. Avdo Čelik, the son of one of his Muslim victims, heard about it while visiting Sarajevo. He immediately bought a postcard and sent it to the family: “My congratulations on Vitomir Janković’s death like a dog.” It was ten years before Avdo received a reply. “Best regards” was all that had been written by Janković’s son, Mile, who, as ethnic warfare escalated in the former Yugoslavia in 1992, had killed Avdo’s cousins in nearby Višegrad and thrown their bodies into the Drina River. This instance of strife between families across generations is familiar but hardly straightforward. Is it evidence of long-standing ethnic conflicts that get played out over and again? Is it the afterlife of the horrors of World War II? Or is it the opportunism of local vendettas? To make sense of the relations between the Čeliks and Jankovićs and thus to respond to the Yugoslav crisis is to make a judgment about the role of collective memory in social and political life. Just how critical such a judgment is has been made plain by the rush to discern and then to dismiss the “Balkan ghosts” conjured up by Robert Kaplan.<sup>1</sup> This article will attempt to review the historical literature on these and other ghosts and on the structures of temporality that have made ghostly appearances and disappearances possible. While my initial point of departure is Yugoslavia, the focus of the article is on the modern context of the “memory crisis,” and more specifically on the imagination of a collective but imperiled national past bounded in time and space, as well as on the reconfiguration of private life and private remembrance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

## BALKAN GHOSTS

To Chuck Sudetic, whose rich account follows the lives of the Čeliks and Jankovićs, the killings in the 1990s exemplified “a cult of the dead, a world where living memories and bedtime stories merged history into the landscape itself.” Sudetic joins many other well-informed observers for whom the “deadly myths” of Serbian or, for that matter, Croatian nationhood constituted the “deep structure” of the Yugoslav tragedy.<sup>2</sup> The plausible assumption at work here is that national myths embedded in collective memory made ethnic partisans out of village neighbors. In the best popular account of the Serbs, for example, Tim Judah identifies the serial nature of “village burning, massacres, and flight” and structures his narrative as a series of repetitions: 1804, 1876–78, 1912–13, 1941–45, 1991–95. Such a view, Judah concedes, may be “politically incorrect” because it traps his subjects in history and makes their crimes appear inevitable. Judah nonetheless insists on the

<sup>1</sup> Robert Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History* (New York, 1993). For critical but related responses, see Steven R. Weisman, “Coming to Terms with Kosovo’s ‘Old’ Hatreds,” *New York Times* (June 12, 1999); and David Remnick, “The Black Page,” *New Yorker* (June 14, 1999). On Janković and Čelik, see Chuck Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance: One Family’s Story of the War in Bosnia* (New York, 1998), pp. 63, 219. Charles King ties the vignette together in his review, “Shallow Graves,” *Times Literary Supplement* (October 2, 1998), p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Sudetic, p. xxxi.

force of collective myths and the vitality of group memories. "When you talk to these people," he approvingly quotes the nineteenth-century Serb writer Ljubomir Nenadović, "you have the impression that the Battle of Kosovo took place yesterday." Insightful commentators such as Roger Cohen, who follows the saga of several families in Sarajevo; Marcus Tanner, who writes about Croatia; and Robert Kaplan, the title of whose book—*Balkan Ghosts*—neatly summarizes his thesis, underscore the extent to which ordinary people carried about in daily life a "visceral sense of the past."<sup>3</sup> (In sum, these books also testify to immensely productive, satisfying traffic between historians and journalists.)

The transformation of Yugoslavia's past into an extended ever-recurring present was first scrutinized by Rebecca West, whose 1941 study still assumes an authenticating presence. "I would have rather lost my passport and money than my heavily thumbled and annotated copy of [West's] *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*," remarks Kaplan, and the influence is manifest.<sup>4</sup> West was enchanted with Yugoslavia because she found it a "land where everything was comprehensible." It had the "blissful clarity" Roland Barthes found in myth, which works to make "things appear to mean something by themselves." West's East is a place where people played out a historical drama that had been taking place for centuries, and she considered Yugoslavs richer for it. She had no trouble identifying the individuals she met as players of Serb, Croat, and Turkish parts in that grand dramatization. Even the diners in a restaurant in Senj were ethnic representatives first; when a patron shouted out objections to cold soup, West knew that "he was not shouting at the soup. He was shouting at the Turks, at the Venetians, at the Austrians, at the French and at the Serbs (if he was a Croat) or at the Croats (if he was a Serb). It was good that he shouted"; his "forefathers had survived because they had the power to shout, to reject cold soup." Yugoslavia is strikingly transparent, to West and to the country's inhabitants.<sup>5</sup>

The view that collective myths are at work shaping social identities is to be taken very seriously, and their power to explain political motivations, national cohesion, and ethnic massacres will remain in focus. But, as the escapade in West's restaurant might suggest, there are problems with the assumption that historical subjects always act out long-standing collective traditions: soup is sometimes cold. Three sorts of objections have been leveled. The use of the idea of the collective myth obscures its own historical origins; it silences other social identities; and it misunderstands the opportunistic deployment of this idea by elites. The first ob-

<sup>3</sup> Tim Judah, *The Serbs: History, Myth, and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (New Haven, Conn., 1997), pp. 15, 65; Roger Cohen, *Hearts Grown Brutal: Sagas of Sarajevo* (New York, 1998), p. xvi; Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War* (New Haven, Conn., 1997); and Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts*.

<sup>4</sup> Kaplan, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York, 1972), pp. 142–43; Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (London, 1941; reprint, New York, 1982), pp. 1, 128. The conception of the transparency of history and of the past is effectively analyzed by way of Greek examples in David E. Sutton, *Memories Cast in Stone: The Relevance of the Past in Everyday Life* (Oxford, 1998). Incidentally, Sutton anticipates me and makes excellent use of sharply differing opinions on Yugoslavia to make sense of one Greek community's historical consciousness.

jection locates the origins of social allegiances in historical circumstances. After all, Serbs, Croats, and Albanians did not imagine themselves to be cohorts of distinct national entities until the middle of the nineteenth century. And even as ancient history was subsequently rewritten in the nationalist mode, twentieth-century wars hardened and legitimized exclusive national allegiances. Indeed, the reference point to which so many Yugoslav witnesses return again and again in these reports is the very particular, traumatic experience of World War II, in which, we know, Vitomir Janković killed Hasan Čelik, and in which the Ustashe-run Croatian state “intended to exterminate the Serb population and failed only because it lacked the means”; as it was, as many as 1 million Serbs were massacred in Croatia. So much of the century was organized by the war: the “rediscoveries of World War II dead helped to ignite warfare in 1991,” explains Katherine Verdery, “which yielded still other bodies in mass graves, sources of recrimination that fueled the wars further.”<sup>6</sup> That it was World War II that destroyed five of the eleven arches of “the bridge on the Drina” at Višegrad, the “unchanged and unchangeable” endurance of which over the preceding three centuries provided the novelist Ivo Andrić a symbol for the ability of townspeople to forget their misfortunes and to live with one another, well expresses the special force with which the recent history of war acted on Yugoslav political life.<sup>7</sup>

The second objection takes a closer look at individual families and social networks to reveal a much more complicated picture that is otherwise effaced by emphasis on ethnic affiliation. In his absorbing account of several Sarajevo families, Roger Cohen makes clear that a distinctive Yugoslavian—as opposed to Serb or Croatian—identity had a pull of its own. In the 1960s and 1970s young people increasingly thought of themselves as Yugoslav and inscribed themselves in the census as such; they shared recollections of the common burdens of military service or memories of the 1984 Sarajevo Olympics.<sup>8</sup> The frequency of mixed marriages undermined the comprehensive claims of ethnicity as well. Cohen displays these mixtures in the photographs that everybody saved: “The company photograph. The football-club photograph. The school photograph. . . . The friends who met every Sunday to go fishing, or hunting, or skiing.” When the 1991 war started, Cohen argues, people “still thought in the same way; their frame of reference . . . was still those photographs.” However, the continuation of the war and the extent and brutality of its violence irreparably damaged interethnic relations. Cohen tells the sad story of twentieth-century war: “For Haris and Bisera and Fida and Asim in Sarajevo—and Slobodan, Jasna, and Vesna in Belgrade—it became harder and harder to recall the world that had once placed them in the same photographic

<sup>6</sup> Tanner, p. 153; Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of the Dead: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York, 1999), p. 97. See also Robert M. Hayden, “Recounting the Dead: The Rediscovery and Redefinition of Wartime Massacres in Late- and Post-Communist Yugoslavia,” in *Memory, History, and Opposition under State Socialism*, ed. Rubie S. Watson (Santa Fe, N.M., 1994), pp. 167–84.

<sup>7</sup> Ivo Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina*, introduction by William H. McNeill (Chicago, 1977), p. 92. See also Sudetic on Višegrad, and Cohen, pp. 8, 173, 176.

<sup>8</sup> Cohen, pp. 120–21. See also Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford, Calif., 1998).

frame.” Indeed, a common sight outside the homes abandoned by displaced refugees was the litter of photos and albums that the new owners had thrown out. This trash was evidence not so much for different histories (Muslim rather than Serb) than for different kinds of histories (private rather than collective). Cohen recognizes the stark validity of collective myths during the Bosnian war, when Serbs sought refuge with Serbs, Muslims with Muslims, but he does not regard them as vital forces in the messiness of daily life before the war.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, a number of observers so effectively dismantle the twisted national histories of the Serbs and Croats and, to a lesser extent, of the Albanians that they argue for the spuriousness not only of the claims of myths but also of their appeal. The best and bravest effort is Noel Malcolm’s. In a remarkable analysis of the history of Kosovo, Serbia’s largely Albanian province, Malcolm demolishes one Serb myth after another: the lineup of Albanian against Serb in the Battle of Kosovo in 1389; the long-standing Serb attachment to Kosovo; the alien and destructive nature of Ottoman rule; the recent arrival of Kosovo’s Albanian population. Malcolm goes on to argue that Kosovo’s Serbs and Albanians lived together remarkably peacefully well into the nineteenth century and that, despite rising tensions, less rather than more collective violence took place in the region during the two world wars. Of course, Malcolm knows that invented traditions are no less strong for being fictitious and that historians’ evidence means little in the face of general belief. Nonetheless, Malcolm finds so little complicity of ordinary neighbors in harsh ethnic politics—and even points out that in the 1970s and 1980s the incidence of interethnic rape was lower in Kosovo than in the rest of Serbia—that he goes on to argue that the myths themselves were illusory, little more than the opportunistic creatures of Russian consuls in Prishtina and Mitrovica in the nineteenth century and “a few Serbian politicians” in the twentieth.<sup>10</sup> Even if readers do not accept Malcolm’s final conclusion, his argument for the historical contingency and fragile nature of collective myth is difficult to dismiss.

The political commentary generated by the Yugoslav crisis reveals what is at stake in historiographical debates about social identity and collective memory. The wars in Bosnia and Kosovo pose fundamental questions regarding the strength and endurance of national or ethnic memories, the nature of the relations between officially sanctioned and private or vernacular memories, and the long-lasting effect of specific traumatic events arising out of World War II. Memories are a problem because scholars still do not understand how they tie individuals to groups; nor do they agree whether those ties are somehow archaic or, in fact, quite modern. Moreover, while outside commentators often assume that there is too much memory in the Balkans and consequently regard their work of critical deconstruction as so many steps toward mutual understanding, political leaders themselves fear the disappearance of collective memory and exhort followers not to forget. In either case, memory is regarded as a problem because it is in need of readjustment in order to create or sustain particular political possibilities. Finally,

<sup>9</sup> Cohen, pp. 269, 158.

<sup>10</sup> Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History* (New York, 1998), pp. xxx, 330, 356.

the guiding assumption that collective memories are constructed or constructable raises vexing questions about the historical contexts and the structures of temporality that make such construction work possible. While a great deal of scholarly activity has gone into analyzing the politics of commemoration, the selective screen of memory, and the privileged status of certain narratives about the past, there has been less sustained effort to comprehend the source of the anxiety surrounding collective memory, the reasons why certain links with the past are cultivated, the role of remembering in the modern world, or, for that matter, the grounds for the sudden academic preoccupation with memory.

For Pierre Nora, who has invited the most sustained considerations of memory and history in the ambitious and, I think, truly remarkable volumes *Les lieux de mémoire*, which he edited over the years 1984–92 and large selections of which have now been translated, the definitive mark of the modern age is the absence of the kinds of ghosts that allegedly haunt the Balkans. In the much quoted introduction to the project, Nora develops two parallel arguments, which even as they tend to get in each other's way insist on a radically disenchanting and desacralized world. In his first thesis, Nora draws a sharp distinction between an age of memory, which has passed, and an age of history, in which we currently live. "The equilibrium between the present and the past is disrupted," he maintains, so that "things tumble with increasing rapidity into an irretrievable past"; "the warmth of tradition," "the silence of custom," and "the repetition of the ancestral" are no longer present as a result of the acceleration of time, in which the future has colonized the present with the settlements of the new. What has replaced the self-evident authority of tradition is a self-conscious historical sensibility that is premised on the knowledge of the demolition of tradition. "Memory is constantly on our lips," Nora writes, "because it no longer exists"; *lieux de mémoire* mark out vanished *milieux de mémoire* (1:1). This fundamental rift has been accompanied by the loss of the unselfconscious cohesion of a "living society" and by the conscious work of historical reconstruction. "*Lieux de mémoire* arise out of a sense that there is no such thing as spontaneous memory, hence that we must create archives, mark anniversaries, organize celebrations" (1:3). These cultural productions conjure up past romances but withhold an authentic link to them; they have become substitutes for imagination. Nora's modern age is radically disenchanting and characterized by feeble efforts to reenchant itself. Just when this rupture took place is not clarified by Nora, but his sturdy artisanal metaphors suggest that he has in mind the onset of the industrial revolution and the sustained movement from the countryside to the city, which suggests sometime in the first half of the nineteenth century.

In the same pages, Nora makes a parallel, more parochially French argument structured along the same axis of possession and loss. What is eventually lost according to this second account is the "memory nation," corresponding to the Third Republic (1870–1940), which enabled an "intimate communion" between history and memory around the concept of the French nation. All the practices that distinguished the counterfeit age of history in the first account—archives, commemorations, museums—serve to keep "memory . . . standing on its sanctified foundation" in the second (1:3). This memory is not something that is tenuously recov-

ered (the verb of choice in the first account); rather, it “remains” whole in the sacred space created by the nation. Professional historians, who in the first account embodied the dispossession of the past, serve in the second account “half as soldiers, half as priests” to sustain the life force of national memory (1:5). While Nora’s conceptualization grants the nation fabulous powers, in the writing of the individual chapters these are mostly visible in decay. The second half of the twentieth century shattered the vital memory and social union of the nation. Nora writes with the blunt edge of the gravedigger: France is no longer a stable subject, either on the world stage or amid the movements of mass consumption and identity politics. Indeed, the loss of the memory nation is so impoverishing at the end of the second account that it serves to sustain the bleak picture of the unattainability of memory set out at the beginning of the first. The trauma of the demise of the nation leads Nora to doubt its authenticity altogether.<sup>11</sup>

Loss plays such a dramatic, almost personal part in Nora’s analysis that it prevents him from bringing the two parallel accounts together and providing a more plausible explanation for memory practices in the modern age. Responding to his first account, which was premised on the sharp distinction between memory and history, most critics have rejected Nora’s naturalization of memory in the prehistorical epoch and his desacralization of memory practices in the modern world. They argue that the distinction is altogether too sharp and relies on the dubious notion of an authentically whole past, which in turn renders inauthentic the different kinds of meanings that contemporary actors have found in the past and thus dismisses their versions of the sacred.<sup>12</sup> As for the idea of the memory nation in the Third Republic, one critic has contended that Nora invests the loss of national identity after 1940 with so much poignancy that he overstates the consensus around the nation before 1940 and unreasonably privileges the civic virtue of the nation in contrast to that of “other groups” in society.<sup>13</sup> These critiques have great merit, but many of Nora’s claims remain standing. As his history demonstrates so well, the notion that authentic memory had disappeared or that genuine national feeling had lapsed permeated nineteenth- and twentieth-century thought. It is not loss per se, but the sensibility of loss and the history of that sensibility, that needs to be examined more closely. Had Nora historicized the category of loss, he would have avoided making such grandiose claims for the authenticity of memory, the dispossession of history, and the comity of the nation. Pierre Nora would not have kept slipping into his own primary sources. And yet I believe that Nora is quite aware of his lack of distance; he holds onto the loss of the nation rather than

<sup>11</sup> Pierre Nora, “General Introduction: Between Memory and History,” in *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, ed. Pierre Nora, 3 vols. (New York, 1996–98), 1:1–20, and “The Era of Commemoration,” in *ibid.*, 3:612–37.

<sup>12</sup> Susan A. Crane, “Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory,” *American Historical Review* 102 (1997): 1372–85; Rudy Koshar, *Germany’s Transient Pasts: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1998), p. 7; Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, “Introduction,” in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 2–3.

<sup>13</sup> Steven Englund, “The Ghost of Nation Past,” *Journal of Modern History* 64 (1992): 299–320.

elaborating an abstract history of the idea of the loss of the nation because he wants to reclaim for historians the roles of priest and soldier. These are performances I do not want to dismiss out of hand and will discuss below. For now, I propose to review narratives of loss before resuming a consideration of national and vernacular frames to collective memory.

#### THE SENSIBILITY OF LOSS

Nora's distinction between memory and history, which is mapped onto the divide between premodern and modern, is overly schematic but bears an affinity to the changing structures of temporality that have been examined by intellectual historians such as Reinhart Koselleck and various literary scholars, including Richard Terdiman and James Chandler. In a series of exceptional essays published in 1985, Koselleck argued for the notion of modern time in which the last two or three hundred years have been identified by the continual iteration of the new and different. In the early modern period, he explains, "the present and past were enclosed within a common historical plane" in which Renaissance figures believed themselves to inhabit the same moral and political universe as their Greek and Roman forebears and called upon Classical examples to make sense of contemporary dilemmas: Machiavelli's *The Prince* is the outstanding example. While seventeenth- and eighteenth-century absolutist politics admitted a large number of variations, they were delimited by a comprehensible set of variables and motivations so that "history was comparatively static"; conceived in this way, Koselleck concludes, "nothing particularly new could happen."<sup>14</sup> The French Revolution and the coincident series of technological innovations finally exploded the logic of this history because these events drastically widened the gap between what Koselleck usefully identifies as the "horizon of expectation" and the "space of experience." According to Rudy Koshar, this sudden disjuncture became "the fundamental condition of societal relationships" in modern times; "anticipation of the future worked without deferring primarily to the authority of remembrance."<sup>15</sup> By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Koselleck maintains, a modern structure of temporality was in place, one that admitted a new order of difference by imposing periodicity on linear time and recognizing the present as a state of transition to an uncertain future, and one that relied on an unprecedented standardization of historical experience: contemporaries increasingly shared an awareness of the eruption of new time and therefore could retrospectively endow events such as the French Revolution with universal significance. It was in the very casualness of references to recognizable markers such as "1789" or even "'89" that the new temporal order revealed itself. Longer-term processes such as the expansion of state control, the regularization of schooling and military service, and technologies of communication and transportation further enabled the synchronization of time over space.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), pp. 4, 15.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 275–76; Koshar, p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> On this theme, see Helga Nowotny, *Time: The Modern and Postmodern Experience*, trans. Neville Plaice (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 22–23.

The stress is on sensibility and perception, since Koselleck is tracking not material change itself but the imaginative categories that apprehended it. His premises have provided contemporary theorists invaluable components for a definition of modernity around the notion of “unrepeatable time.”<sup>17</sup> Koselleck’s argument is also consistent with the exemplary analysis of Richard Terdiman, who provides a method for “historicizing memory” and “theorizing recollection.” In *Present Past*, Terdiman argues that in the years that followed the French Revolution “people experienced the insecurity of their culture’s involvement with its past, the perturbation of the link to their own inheritance,” as “memory crisis: a sense that their past had somehow evaded memory, that recollection had ceased to integrate with consciousness.” A disquiet about the status of the past corresponded to energetic efforts to make sense of the past, so that “the nineteenth century’s preoccupation with the developmental character of time cannot be divorced from the disruptions of memory which underlay its theoretical concerns and determined their urgency.” Terdiman covers much of the same ground as Nora, and he relies on the same basic rift at the turn of the nineteenth century: he plainly states that “loss is what makes our memory of the past possible at all.”<sup>18</sup> But Terdiman provides a more systematic, contextual account based on close readings of seminal cultural texts (Musset, Baudelaire, Freud, Proust); he insists that both historical method and the work of recollection are distinctly modern practices that arise out of the nineteenth century’s memory crisis. Terdiman’s analysis is exhilarating because he makes a compelling historical case for modern memory.

The most sustained exploration of temporal identities in the nineteenth century also comes from a literary scholar. James Chandler’s *England in 1819* is an ambitious, complex work that deserves a wide readership among historians. Prompted by a sonnet of Shelley, “England in 1819,” which was written in the tumultuous year of the Peterloo massacre, Chandler wants to know what it means to represent England as a datable, specific case and to endow it with what Lévi-Strauss called “hot chronology.” The argument is historical first. Along with Koselleck, Chandler identifies a fundamental break in the perception of time around 1800: “Where political debate in the 1790s tended to structure itself in terms of threshold distinctions—reason/passion, liberty/slavery, state of nature/state of civil society, nature/second nature—political debate after Waterloo tends to involve arguments about historical movements, historical necessities, epochs, and formations.” Millenarian concepts gave way to viewpoints that were aware of “the movement from one historical epoch to the next.”<sup>19</sup> Chandler gives Georg Lukács the credit he

<sup>17</sup> Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, N.C., 1987), p. 13; Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and the Avant-Garde* (London, 1995), p. xii. Koselleck’s arguments echo those of Klaus Behrens, *Friedrich Schlegels Geschichtsphilosophie (1794–1808): Ein Beitrag zur politischen Romantik* (Tübingen, 1984); Hans Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt, 1966); David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985); Georges Poulet, *Studies in Human Time*, trans. Elliott Coleman (Baltimore, 1956); and Rudolf Wendorff, *Zeit und Kultur: Geschichte des Zeitbewusstseins in Europa* (Opladen, 1980).

<sup>18</sup> Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1993), pp. 3–4, 22, 24.

<sup>19</sup> James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago, 1998), p. 24.

deserves for explaining the plausibility of this new historical specificity. Both the mass experience of the revolutionary wars and the explicitly political nature of the wars made it more likely that contemporaries would regard social fates in terms of historical circumstances and thus would reject a method of analysis that relied on outstanding individuals for one that examined the ordinary but historically situated men and women whom Lukács identified in Walter Scott's fiction.

The recognition that cultural texts issue out of cultural texture had significant political implications as well. The premise that "the individuality of character is derived from the historical peculiarity of the age" not only resulted in the literary enfranchisement of Scott's characters but also set in motion an argument for representing the nation at large. Chandler exposes how the politics of literary representation and the emphasis on the particular case (i.e., "England in 1819") bear on political representation. This "age of the spirit of the age," as Chandler happily apostrophizes the period, disqualified a reliance on great leaders and imagined the particular case—what Scott called "*la vie privée*"—of the people. Moreover, as Chandler points out, the ability of contemporaries to conceive of themselves as historical products of specific periods opened the way for them to think of themselves as active agents. Thus, the "national operation of self-dating, or -redating" also implied "national self-making, or -remaking." National narratives had the crucial effect of recognizing and validating the cultural particulars of citizens. The claims Chandler makes for narrative are extremely strong: "only through such a narrative construction," he argues, "does history find a way to make itself by itself."<sup>20</sup> I find Chandler convincing when he proposes to treat Romantic historicism as a way of picturing the world and thereby enabling action in it. But Chandler, wary of losing the gains he has achieved with his New Historicist method, strains to keep the specific case of "England in 1819" from tumbling into a transnational scheme. He insists somewhat extravagantly on the distinctly British context of his case, in which anxious engagement with both Scotland and the United States enhanced the potential for making the historically specific determinations that Chandler then extends in a series of brilliant moves to "the age of the spirit of the age" and to the case of his own fascination with 1819 in 1981.

The historical consciousness that Koselleck, Terdiman, and Chandler identify at the beginning of the nineteenth century was based on the dramatization of difference in time and space, allowing for the identification of distinct periods and milieus. At the same time, historical specificity held together a mutually recognized unity among cohorts. It became possible to think in terms of the integrity of a single generation in the nineteenth century in ways that were not possible in the eighteenth. Nora himself points out that it was not until after the French Revolution that "a group united by age and dominated by the revolutionary event discovered not just history as man's production of his own existence but also the power of collective action and social germination and the role of time in the unfolding historical process. This deep immersion in history is absolutely inseparable from the emergence of an active generational consciousness."<sup>21</sup> Historical or epochal consciousness was thus premised on rupture and discontinuity in order to distin-

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 78, 89, 149–50.

<sup>21</sup> Pierre Nora, "Generation," in Nora, ed., 1:515.

guish the present period, and it postulated a shared recognition that this was so. While Chandler's argument is mostly exuberant and focuses on new literary and political possibilities of representing the nation, it accommodates a tragic vision of the perishability of the past. The past was increasingly characterized as something it was not before—as a separate, distinct period that was irretrievably past. This new place constituted itself as a field for unprecedented activity: the nostalgic accounting of loss, anguished concerns about the ability to recall and remember, and imaginative renditions of what might have been. The claim for the specific modernity of familiar practices of remembering is compelling. Nonetheless, it tends to flatten out the emotional body of what came before and will be contested by historians of early modern Europe.

The specificity of the case and the method of historicism led to a critical realization that, as Terdiman puts it, “*nothing* is natural about our memories, that the past—the practices, the habits, the dates and facts and places, the very future of our existence—is an artifice, and one susceptible to the most varied and sometimes the most culpable manipulations.”<sup>22</sup> This was devastating knowledge because it made social constructions fragile and it questioned the very basis of identity. Anguished debates over the place of custom, tradition, and inheritance in daily life embellished the nineteenth-century “memory crisis.” Yet the very self-consciousness by which the relations between the past and present were pictured also prompted contemporaries to refurbish customs and traditions presumed to be imperiled or lost. Suddenly, traces of the past were everywhere, and landscape became a rendition of archaeology.<sup>23</sup> Both anxiety about the deprivation of memories and confidence in their renovation marked historical thinking in the nineteenth century. The social networks that Maurice Halbwachs regarded as constitutive of all, even the most personal memory, did not decline; they flourished, and as they did, the collective memories and social identities they fashioned grew more rather than less intense.<sup>24</sup>

The specificity of the case and the method of historicism also help clarify the durable forms that remembering took. “Identity implies the notions of boundedness and homogeneity,” explains Richard Handler, as he questions the usefulness of “identity” as a cross-cultural concept. Once in place, however, the very boundedness of identity in time and place served to authenticate powerful national and personal subjectivities and to privilege their narratives. Both national history and autobiography gave unity, coherence, and priority to the particulars of time and place. “Nations are thought . . . to have definite historical origins . . . to be bounded in space, as indicated on current maps,” observes Handler, and “nations are imagined to be internally homogeneous in terms of what is taken to be shared cultural content—the very stuff, as it were, of identity.”<sup>25</sup> In similar fashion, autobiograph-

<sup>22</sup> Terdiman, p. 31.

<sup>23</sup> See, e.g., Lowenthal.

<sup>24</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York, 1980), and *On Collective Memory* (Chicago, 1992). See also Susan Crane, *Collecting and Historical Consciousness in Early Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2000), which was published too late for this review.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Handler, “Is ‘Identity’ a Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton, N.J., 1994), pp. 29–30.

ical acts are attempts—often quite labored—to locate and to maintain a coherent and particular individual identity. What is more, autobiography and other “humanitarian narratives” flourished when the specifics of the individual case were fleshed out in detail and were made to correspond with identifiable social or political causes in a contextualization that encouraged envy and reflection on the “counternormative” aspects of experience on the part of writers and invited empathetic responses among readers.<sup>26</sup> Without the construction of context, the case of the individual was moot.

James Olney’s searching account of the individual’s narrative performances (his study focuses on Augustine, Rousseau, and Beckett) is pertinent to the study of nationalism. The narrative of autobiography is both extremely durable and surprisingly weak, and it is this tension that gives life writing its dynamic and urgency. According to Olney, “life writing,” the “agonized search for self, through the mutually reflexive acts of memory and narrative, accompanied by the haunting fear that it is impossible from the beginning but also impossible to give over, is the very emblem of our time.”<sup>27</sup> Autobiography is a strong form because, as Olney cites Georges Gusdorf, it “is a second reading of experience, and it is truer than the first because it adds to experience itself consciousness of it.” But it is also weak because narratives, whether or not they are written down, are constructed; they require repeated readjustments over time, and thus they incorporate the memory of remembering and with it the knowledge of the partial, unstable, and tendentious nature of narrative. Olney invites a similar reading of national histories, which are durable because they make the past present. Enchanting the local landscape and constituting commemorative calendars, the national past became, Alon Confino notes, “as intimate and authentic as the local, ethnic, and family past.”<sup>28</sup> National feeling is not the compelling accumulation of group experiences over time; rather, it relies on the retrospective organization of events to achieve intimacy among strangers who claim to recognize and know about each other across space, who validate and pity the misfortunes of contemporaries, and who thereby make connections between their own fate and that of the nation. It must be said that, for all her worrisome enthusiasms, Rebecca West long ago put her finger exactly on the clarity that nationalism realized. At the same time, the history of the nation is frequently enough written in the injunctive mode and thereby inscribes its contingent origins in the text. National history exhorts citizens to remember and to commemorate; envisions the nation’s own demise in the absence of restorative action; and dramatizes the menace of countervailing religious, regional, and class alle-

<sup>26</sup> Mary Jo Maynes, *Taking the Hard Road: Life Course in French and German Workers’ Autobiographies in the Era of Industrialization* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1995), pp. 11–12; Thomas W. Laqueur, “Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative,” in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley, Calif., 1989), pp. 177, 195. On the way in which subjects are constituted by changing notions of the admissibility of evidence, see Joan Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991): 773–97.

<sup>27</sup> James Olney, *Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life Writing* (Chicago, 1998), pp. xiv–xv.

<sup>28</sup> Alon Confino, “Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method,” *American Historical Review* 102 (1997): 1402.

giances. The nation has had the special ability to organize remembering because it appropriates and thus recognizes as exemplary the ordeals of its people in the struggle to constitute itself.<sup>29</sup> This is the story that Nora tells so well.

#### THE MEMORY NATION

At the very end of *Realms of Memory*, Nora imagines the end of the era of commemoration: "The tyranny of memory will have endured for only a moment—but it was our moment" (3:637). This assessment of negligibility in fact recuperates the modern role of memory that, contrary to Nora's initial banishment of memory to the prehistorical age, did indeed exercise "tyranny" over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Nora and his collaborators show, memory cults flourished throughout the nineteenth century and gave shape and intimacy to the most important of these, which was the nation. Nora himself points out that the "memory nation" of the Third Republic was built in the modern period: "It was the nineteenth century . . . that invented the 'France' of which this book is an inventory" (2:xii). This formulation is much truer to the evidence than Nora's claim later on for a "traditional French predilection for memory" and an affinity between the French and the Jews, who, Nora repeatedly maintains, "survived throughout history as a 'people of memory'" (3:xii). "What characterizes all these traditions is that they date from the nineteenth century," Nora explains, "even those whose roots can be traced back to much earlier times were revived and reformulated in the nineteenth century. The 'land' would not exist as such without the ruralist and protectionist movement of the late nineteenth century. The 'cathedral' would not exist without the re-Christianization of the Restoration and the Romantic movement" (3:xi). Nora's model for the priest and soldier of the republican "memory nation," the historian Ernest Lavissee, conceived his great *Histoire de France* as a deliberate attempt to "knit the garment of history rent by the French Revolution and create one seamless, synthetic nation: France and the Republic" (1:xix) and to use for that garment only unassailable archival documents. An archivally based history would make the case for France; "the general truth of the archive" would authenticate "the specific truth of the nation."<sup>30</sup>

The case of Ernest Lavissee recalls how unsatisfactory the distinction is between history and memory. Both Nora and, before him, Maurice Halbwachs take history to be a critical, desacralizing enterprise that exposes the discontinuities that collective memories are designed to deny.<sup>31</sup> Pim den Boer's substantial study of the discipline of history in nineteenth-century France, *History as a Profession*, suggests why this distinction is not convincing. Boer demonstrates that public interest in history presupposed what is awkwardly translated as the "historicization of the

<sup>29</sup> See also Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed. (London, 1991), pp. 197, 206.

<sup>30</sup> Pierre Nora, "Die 'Histoire de France' von Ernest Lavissee. Pietas Erga Patriam," in *Zwischen Geschichte und Gedächtnis* (Berlin, 1990), p. 60.

<sup>31</sup> Nora, "General Introduction" (n. 11 above), 1:3; Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, p. 86.

worldview": "The world, culture, society, political organization—indeed everything came to be seen as the effect of a historical process, as a development." Around the turn of the nineteenth century, Boer continues, "changes in social and political life were no longer considered deviations from the original order or revolutions of the eternal wheel of time; instead, they appeared to be significant and essential stages in a development that was generally described as progress." In other words, both the pertinence of historical study and the rise of memory cults presupposed a consciousness of how differences worked themselves out in history. The professionalization of history, set in motion by the state's 1818 decree that specialists teach history in royal and municipal lycées, corresponded to growing interest in the particular case of France. Up until the nineteenth century, history had largely been taught through the works of Classical historians; thereafter, the demands of a growing readership for national history required closer attention to local color and archival sources—to the character of the case, as Chandler would put it.<sup>32</sup> To Augustin Thierry, "the real history of the country, the national, popular history" of France, remained hidden from view under "the courtier's cloak." What was needed was Walter Scott's "eagle-glances at the historical period," which anticipated Thierry's own historicist intentions to uncover "the general characteristics of the epoch," that is, "the different manners and mutual relations of the various classes of men."<sup>33</sup> Boer honors the "historical method" of Thierry, and later of Lavissee and Charles Seignobos, scholars who resisted "opinions based on faith and tradition" in order to "observe people in action," and he condemns in a gratuitous, undeveloped aside their twentieth-century counterparts who allegedly cozy up to "dogmatic historical theories." In fact, Boer himself underplays the extent to which the critical method served the unmistakable political theme, "the growth," in his words, "of national unity and of durable institutions."<sup>34</sup>

What Lavissee's *Histoire de France*, along with the school reader derived from it, the *Petit Lavissee*, and the popular children's book *Le tour de la France par deux enfants*—"The Little Red Book of the Republic," as Jacques and Mona Ozouf cunningly describe the 1877 text—demonstrated was the degree to which society was scrutinized for its "nationness" and the nation and the national past came to be recognized in local places—in old buildings, marketplaces, and cathedrals and in rivers, forests, and hilltops.<sup>35</sup> Of course, scrutiny was selective and suppressed particular versions of the past and identities that did not correspond to the nation; it bears repeating that remembering and forgetting are two sides of the same coin.

<sup>32</sup> Pim den Boer, *History as a Profession: The Study of History in France, 1818–1914* (Princeton, N.J., 1998), pp. 341–42.

<sup>33</sup> Augustin Thierry, "Autobiographical Preface," in *The Historical Essays* (Philadelphia, 1845), p. xi, and "First Letter on the History of France," in *ibid.*, pp. 96–97.

<sup>34</sup> Boer, pp. 346, 364. See also Linda Orr, *Headless History: Nineteenth-Century French Historiography of the Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1990), which appeared after the publication of Boer's original Dutch text.

<sup>35</sup> Pierre Nora, "Lavissee, the Nation's Teacher"; and Jacques and Mona Ozouf, "*Le tour de la France par deux enfants*: The Little Red Book of the Republic," both in Nora, ed. (n. 11 above), vol. 2. In *Germany's Transient Pasts* (n. 12 above), p. 44, Koshar felicitously refers to the process of "scrutinizing society for its 'nationness.'"

Nonetheless, the claim for the substantiality of the public memory of the nation is strong. National memory corresponded to the wider commercial and public exchanges that were taking place in the nineteenth century, to newly vitalized conceptions of political agency, and to the claims for popular enfranchisement that accompanied them. It provided emotionally resonant connections to otherwise broken pasts and anonymous strangers. With this in mind, Rudy Koshar argues the German case for the perdurability of national memory work in his outstanding book *Germany's Transient Pasts*. "Modernity's awful lightness, promoted by its unending production of societal resources outside experiential boundaries," Koshar explains, "has been countered, evoked, explained, and even facilitated by the nation's unbearable and enduring weight." The nation was surely constructed, and Koshar has no argument with this incontestable truth. But what does "constructed" actually mean? We are too happy simply to arrive at this insight; Koshar endeavors to sharpen its edge. "Nationalist speech makers, preservers of historic sites, and composers of national rhythms," he observes, "do not have unlimited scope to invent and manipulate cultural images." This is so because the point of national memory work is "to arouse remembrance per se rather than to remember something specific." Or, more precisely, the point was "to help the German people 'recognize itself'" and to see a "most natural connection" between past and present. National memory thus did little to encourage Germans "to remember specific events or injustices" such as Nazism. In this pathbreaking book, which follows important work by Celia Applegate and Alon Confino, Koshar demonstrates that citizens took great pleasure in the lavishness of the past and were accordingly reluctant to reflect on it critically.<sup>36</sup>

Although Koshar suggests that in the 1970s and 1980s new commemorative cultures formed around the activism of women, trade unionists, and environmentalists, as well as marginalized ethnic groups, all of whom began to search for the traces of "repressed or vaguely felt pasts"—activity, incidentally, that Nora reprimands for being "unpredictable and capricious"—the power of national memory is indisputable and is manifested again and again in its ability to keep other pasts and other renditions from articulating themselves.<sup>37</sup> The simple, profound story that Sarah Farmer has to tell about Oradour and the death of the memory of death is a case in point. *Martyred Village* opens with the killing of 642 women, children, and men of Oradour-sur-Glane by German and French soldiers on June 10, 1944, just four days after the Allied invasion of Normandy, and concludes with the death, in March 1988, of Marguerite Rouffanche, the sole survivor of the massacre in the village church in which the women and children had been shut. These deaths mark how the memory of the dead shaped what became "the city of the dead." Among the martyred villages in France, Oradour not only lost the most citizens but also lost most of its citizens, and yet, Farmer argues, "the facts of the massacre, in and of themselves, [were not] sufficient to confer particular meaning to the site." What

<sup>36</sup> Koshar, pp. 8, 259, 331. See also Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, Calif., 1990); and Alon Confino, *The Nation as Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871–1918* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1997).

<sup>37</sup> Koshar, pp. 313, 322; Nora, "The Era of Commemoration" (n. 11 above), 3:618.

made Oradour such a congenial site for national commemoration was the uncertainty as to why the Germans targeted the town, one in which there had been no resistance activity. It did not fit into a specific chronology of events that dramatized the activity of the *maquis*, Vichy authorities, or German occupiers; it thus side-stepped politically contentious issues to “stand as a symbol for the suffering of France.” The implicit message that “every French person, regardless of political choice or wartime activity, had been at risk” quickly governed the commemorative politics of the Fourth Republic. This led to gross distortions. So determined was official France to represent itself as victim that it could, on the one hand, compare the massacre at Oradour to the extermination of the Jews and, on the other, pardon those Alsatian soldiers who, serving with the Germans, supposedly against their will, had been convicted of participating in the massacre.<sup>38</sup>

The amnesty vote in the National Assembly led the actual inhabitants of Oradour, who saw things quite differently than the politicians in Paris, to cut themselves off from the rest of France, to recall all the killers, and to turn in on their sorrow: “from 1953 until the early 1960s there were no public activities or gatherings: no first communions or baptisms, no weddings, no dances.” Even the Communist politics of this poor municipality retreated in the face of a desperately sad culture of single-minded commemoration. But carried as it was by the friends and relatives of the dead, local memory eventually subsided as well. Old inhabitants died, and young people and newcomers rebuilt associational life and eventually fielded a champion football team. The ruins told other stories as well. On display were the personal effects of the dead, but whereas the identity or ration cards of the men “portray sudden, violent death,” the toys, thimbles, buttons, and keys that had been in the pockets of the women and children said little about “the particular historical conditions of the war”; they “conjure up instead an innocent vision of a golden past.” (Interestingly, the women’s artifacts are more true to the official story of the Republic, with its emphasis on innocence; the men’s lend more support to the local version, which recognizes complicity.) Moreover, new plaques on Oradour’s streets indicate the professions and names of the former inhabitants. These old-time professions (e.g., clog maker, cooper, well digger) give “the sense not only of a lost town but of a lost epoch as well.” And “as the ruins are eroded by rain and cold they become less a commentary on Nazi barbarism and more a general metaphor for broader notions of time, catastrophe, destruction and decay.”<sup>39</sup>

The ruins are disappearing, and readers are left with final, material evidence for the perishability of memory. I think this is where Farmer wants to lead us, yet she also indicates the displacing forcefulness of official memory. In the first place, it was the French government, and particularly Charles de Gaulle—acknowledged here as “a master of constructing ‘mobilizing myths,’” France’s struggle in a “thirty years’ war” with the Germans among them—that dramatized the massacre at Oradour, a town that survivors otherwise might have rebuilt as they got on with their

<sup>38</sup> Sarah Farmer, *Martyred Village: Commemorating the 1944 Massacre at Oradour-sur-Glane* (Berkeley, Calif., 1999), pp. 55, 58.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 178, 113, 193.

lives, as happened in other martyred villages. In the second place, the operations of national memory distorted the story that the people of Oradour wanted to tell, so that the role of all soldiers in the massacre got lost. The effect of the amnesty in 1953 was to displace Oradour altogether; in its insistently local version of events it cast itself off from the nation. In its loneliness, Oradour teetered between “the all of madness and the nothing of forgetting,” refusing social integration until, one by one, the survivors died.<sup>40</sup> Like the survivors of Vichy’s deportation of French Jews or the veterans of France’s forgotten war in Algeria, Oradour was mad (“no weddings, no dances”) because it lived out what the nation had repressed, which was complicity. Oradour’s trauma after 1953 revealed both the violence of national memory and, paradoxically, the urge to find a place in it, for to recognize oneself in national history was to resist the oblivion that is otherwise the fate of so many local memories. This is, I think, why Oradour took such pride when in 1970 its newly founded football club made it to the departmental championships; the town was no longer a place lost to history.<sup>41</sup>

#### VERNACULAR MEMORY

For Oradour, 1953 was in some ways as traumatic as 1944, a state of affairs that indicates the gap between national memory and local memory, and the inhospitality of the one to the other. Historians have become increasingly aware of the vivacity of local and other vernacular memories, and they have criticized Nora for his single-minded focus on the nation and his assumption that it constituted the most natural, self-evident expression of French political life. On the basis of the record of American history, for example, John Bodnar sharply distinguishes official, or national, memory from popular memory.<sup>42</sup> And Marita Sturken argues that “it is precisely the instability of memory forms,” their fragmented, interiorized nature, that “allows for renewal and redemption” and resists official accounts.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the very poignancy that the domestic lives of contemporaries achieved in national narratives encouraged the generation of vernacular memories and counternarra-

<sup>40</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, 1996), p. 34.

<sup>41</sup> Farmer, pp. 6–7, 185. See also Pierre Birnbaum, “Grégoire, Dreyfus, Drancy, and the Rue Copernic: Jews at the Heart of French History,” in Nora, ed., 1:415–17; Antoine Prost, “The Algerian War in French Collective Memory,” in Winter and Sivan, eds. (n. 12 above); and Martin Evans, “Rehabilitating the Traumatized War Veteran: The Case of French Conscripts from the Algerian War, 1954–1962,” in *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Martin Evans and Ken Lunn (Oxford, 1997), pp. 73–85. The force with which Gaullist myths have represented the nation is also discussed in Katherine Conley, “The Myth of the ‘Dernière poème’: Robert Desnos and French Cultural Memory,” in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer (Hanover, N.H., 1999), pp. 134–48; Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge, 1991); and Pierre Nora, “Gaullists and Communists,” in Nora, ed., vol. 1.

<sup>42</sup> John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, N.J., 1992).

<sup>43</sup> Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997), pp. 3–5.

tives. Although national history has been a remarkably durable form that allows people to tell and share the history of their lives, it is not the only possible history. The events at Oradour attest to continuous, though uneasy traffic between local experiences and national understandings; they also tell of the (unresolved) need for local memory to find a place in national memory.

In *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, Jay Winter makes a strong, eloquent claim on behalf of local communities of bereavement. He opens his book on post-World War I mourning with a description of *J'accuse*, Abel Gance's 1919 film about World War I. In a scene that was eventually scrapped, Gance conceived of a "supernatural *menage à trois*" in which the fallen war hero returned to live with his widow and her new husband. "All over Europe," Winter comments, "people had to live with the shadow of war" and had to learn to live with the dead. The imagined *menage à trois* suggested how important it was for the bereaved to find a place for the dead in their hearts and in their homes. Winter emphasizes this intimate sphere of commemoration, although he neglects to investigate further "the preservation in households of possessions, photographs, personal signatures of the dead." Commemoration was not an official or state act, and it did not perform a state claim on private bodies, Winter insists, as he puts Foucault back on the shelf: "that meaning was highly personal." The most poignant illustration of the private claims on the public was the massive disinterment of soldiers' bodies from battlefield cemeteries and their reburial in local graveyards. Only in France was reinterment permitted, and an astonishing 40 percent of the 700,000 identified bodies went back home at state expense. The dead were reburied as the sons of fathers and mothers, not of the Fatherland.<sup>44</sup> The war was remembered, Winter concludes in a related article, "overwhelmingly as an event in *family* history."<sup>45</sup>

The commemorative activity of "adoptive kin" complemented that of family. Given the fact that the army of veterans and disabled was too large, and "the limits on state expenditures too restrictive," small groups organized to press their own interests, to husband their own resources, and to give their "adoptive kin" a "hand on the road to recovery."<sup>46</sup> For Winter, this busy associational activity confirmed "the exuberance of civil society." What has gone unrecognized, he argues, is "the tendency of ordinary people to come together and to reflect publicly on what happened to them, to their loved ones, to their particular world, when war descended on their lives."<sup>47</sup> While Winter does not replicate Bodnar's division between the "dogmatic formalism" of official culture and the "complex or ambiguous terms" of "the real language of grief and sorrow," he privileges nonetheless private spheres and local places: this is where collective memory—"the sound of voices once heard by groups of people" who gather for a common purpose—operates. From the state, on the other hand, with its "bulky, rationalized, and hierarchical institutions," veterans and families could expect little support. Only "the scale of

<sup>44</sup> Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 144, 51, 94, 26.

<sup>45</sup> Jay Winter, "Forms of Kinship and Remembrance in the Aftermath of the Great War," in Winter and Sivan, eds., p. 42.

<sup>46</sup> Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, p. 44.

<sup>47</sup> Winter, "Forms of Kinship and Remembrance in the Aftermath of the Great War," p. 41.

local action” was small enough to “give free range to the expression of sentiments of loss.”<sup>48</sup> Winter develops the tension between the ideals of the nation and the needs of the bereaved, but then lets it go slack. The years of remembrance eventually followed “a path to recovery,” and families picked up “the threads of their lives.” In the end, Winter strikes the same elegiac note as Farmer: little remains of the “associative forms arduously constructed over the years by thousands of people, mostly obscure.”<sup>49</sup>

It is not unfair to say that Winter choreographs an escape from the nation and from history itself as he moves thousands of fallen soldiers from French battlefields to village graveyards and on to restful oblivion. His commentary on Käthe Kollwitz, for example, stresses the “timeless” aspect of bereavement: “there is no signature of the artist, no indication of individual proprietorship, no location in time or space. Only sadness, the universal sadness, of two aged people, surrounded by the dead.”<sup>50</sup> This scene at the German war cemetery in Roggevelde (Belgium) is extremely important to Winter, for he wants to draw the attention of readers to the ordinary families that fought and survived the war and mourned its losses. (He does not consider how Kollwitz herself directed the move out of politics and into universals.) In *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, and in *War and Remembrance*, a volume that Winter and Emmanuel Sivan edited, the accent is on “the exuberance of civil society” and on the ways in which vernacular remembering disassembled the political purposes of the national state. “The upheavals of this century have tended to separate individual memories from politically and socially sanctioned official versions of the past,” Winter and Sivan conclude.<sup>51</sup> The independence of vernacular meanings in the context of total war is a paradox that can be resolved: no other previous war had mobilized so many bodies or disrupted the lives of so many families as had World War I, and soldiers, workers, and the bereaved made powerful claims on the collective memory of the war in order to restore a measure of balance to their lives. Families moved around each other differently long after the armistice had been concluded—caring for disabled strangers, telling stories, and physically gesturing their affections.<sup>52</sup> The lasting significance of Winter’s work is to insist on remembering in private life and to make sensible the injuries to individual people. Telling the story of the trauma of twentieth-century war as a history of grieving families raises crucial questions about the self-evidence of personal experience, the unhealed wound of trauma, and the encompassing role of social narratives.

However, the argument is not conclusive because the sight of the dead did not

<sup>48</sup> Bodnar, pp. 13–14; Winter, “Forms of Kinship and Remembrance in the Aftermath of the Great War,” pp. 24, 33.

<sup>49</sup> Winter, “Forms of Kinship and Remembrance in the Aftermath of the Great War,” pp. 43, 60.

<sup>50</sup> Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, p. 108. Winter’s stress on “timelessness” is not careless: see pp. 53, 108, 113.

<sup>51</sup> Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, “Setting the Framework,” in Winter and Sivan, eds. (n. 12 above), p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> On this theme, see Elisabeth Domansky, “ Militarization and Reproduction in World War I Germany,” in *Society, Culture and the State in Germany, 1870–1930*, ed. Geoff Eley (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1996).

automatically create a site of memory. Twentieth-century war, even by virtue of its industrial capacity and conscript armies, did not simply propel private lives onto public stages to contest “socially sanctioned” memories. Winter himself acknowledges the authority of “social scripts,” which resisted innovation and routinely disallowed particular stories: the memories of Algerian veterans constitute one obvious example, those of the townspeople of Oradour another. In a closely observed analysis of Armistice Day ceremonies in Britain, Adrian Gregory concludes that “the civilian bereaved always came first in any clash of interests” with ex-servicemen. To privilege the “soldier’s experience” by listening to his pain and anger necessarily “engendered a terrible callousness towards the feelings of the bereaved,” whose sacrifices needed to be made meaningful. Even after the outpouring of bitter, fictionalized renditions of the war in the late 1920s, the nation provided the most enduring narratives by which families could make sense of their losses.<sup>53</sup> Antoine Prost is also impressed by the common choreography of Armistice Day in France. That almost every town in France built a monument to the fallen says as much about the strong hand of the republic in guiding commemorative practices as it does about the numbers of young men killed. What “set it apart from all other republican ceremonies,” argues Prost, was that Armistice Day “celebrated not abstract principles but concrete citizens . . . the occasion was not to honor the fatherland . . . it was the fatherland that honored its citizens.” Prost is at pains to keep readers from misunderstanding the ceremonies of the dead as jingoistic, and he wants to uphold a common republican frame. Whereas Winter stresses the “highly personal,” Prost privileges the virtuous public, in which a “single collective actor” spoke the “impersonal rhetoric” of a “republican cult.” Prost, like Nora, cherishes the unisonality of the Third Republic. Verdun, he writes, marks the “apogee of nineteenth-century patriotism,” a moment when men endured “conditions that have become unimaginable” and did so out of “inward consent.” War at the end of the twentieth century, by contrast, threatened humankind as a whole, not France itself, and therefore did not call upon national duty. The implication is that World War I and the Third Republic tended to be mutually reinforcing, patriotism making the sacrifices imaginable and the losses in turn strengthening the republic. Although Prost wishes away the petty, conspiratorial atmosphere that corrupted French politics in the 1930s and culminated in paralysis in 1940, he makes the useful point that wartime memories sought out the narrative of the nation.<sup>54</sup> I wonder whether war and its remembrance were not ways for ordinary people to perform otherwise unavailable public roles. Modern war may well have made attractive and pertinent collective national myths, even as the vast scale and brutal aspect of the fighting generated thousands of disillusioned counternarratives. Indeed, post-1945 national identities in Europe are in large part sustained through memories of World War II.<sup>55</sup> In light of the exemplary studies by

<sup>53</sup> Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919–1946* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 51, 120–21, 226–27.

<sup>54</sup> Antoine Prost, “Monuments to the Dead,” in Nora, ed. (n. 11 above), 2:323–24, 329–30; Prost, “Verdun,” in Nora, ed., 3:401.

<sup>55</sup> See, e.g., Tony Judt, “The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe,” *Daedalus* 121 (1992): 83–118.

Winter, Prost, and Gregory, it seems clear that the memory of the war achieved its eloquence partly as a private matter but also as a public performance, and it depended as much on silence as articulation.

Catherine Merridale's incisive discussion of "war, death, and remembrance in Soviet Russia" in the Winter and Sivan volume is a superb illustration of the difficulty private memories had speaking for themselves and the ease with which they were contaminated by national projects of remembrance. There is unquestionable poignancy about the "proscribed memories" of the Stalin era—"tales of arrest, disappearance, lost parents, orphans" that were "kept alive as family secrets, private narratives rehearsed in kitchens." But, Merridale argues, "family secrets" crumbled at the touch: not only did the state destroy photographs, burn letters and diaries, and make it dangerous for relatives to safeguard what had become state's evidence but in addition "personal grief had no wider framework, no mirror in which to observe itself." Although Merridale does not quite want to say it, potentially subversive memories of the Stalin years seem to have vanished easily without witnesses to give them credence or narratives to provide them structure. Indeed, there was almost no public memory of Russia's horrific experience of mass death in World War I, blocked as it was by the revolution. There were no Russian equivalents of the veterans' groups, war memorials, and gestures of remembering that are the subjects of so many of the books under review here. A larger point that Merridale does not consider is how Stalinism, and its ambition to engineer human souls, made available techniques of subjective understanding and remembrance and encouraged autobiographical writings that, for all their political excisions and literary conventions, generated a resonant sense of self that was no less sincere for being Soviet.<sup>56</sup> The remembering, scrutinizing self is itself a historical and, in part, Soviet composition. Nonetheless, Merridale helpfully draws attention to the particular ability of public narratives to provide some expression to individual tragedies: private memories of Stalinism could be "preserved, though partially," she writes, whenever "state-sponsored ceremonial sank hungry roots into the deep well of historic pain and loss." For example, "the woman whose husband had disappeared in 1937 (and who had nonetheless given all her energies to the war effort for five years) could bring her grief, if not a story about it, to the solemn meetings in May every year as easily as her neighbor, the war widow." Along the margins, "groups which were excluded or overlooked" cultivated "counter memories in the very shadow of the official history."<sup>57</sup>

The implication of Merridale's research is that even the most traumatic personal memories had difficulty finding terms of articulation when they were not spoken

<sup>56</sup> Catherine Merridale, "War, Death, and Remembrance in Soviet Russia," in Winter and Sivan, eds., pp. 63, 75. See also Jochen Hellbeck, "Laboratories of the Soviet Self: Diaries from the Stalin Era" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1998); and Igal Halfin, "From Darkness to Light: Student Communist Autobiography during NEP," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 45 (1997): 210–36.

<sup>57</sup> Merridale, pp. 75–77, 79. On memories under state socialist regimes, see also Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, 1994); Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1994); and Watson, ed. (n. 6 above).

for by more embracing—and selective—national renditions. At the same time, individual selves did find means of expression through public narratives. The nation, in particular, can be usefully thought of as a memory system that enabled individuals to recognize their lives in nonrepeatable, historical time. Because of their boundedness in time and space, national narratives have an unusual ability to organize remembrance and to make the past sensible. The nation's capacity to represent the messiness of daily life in meaningful and transparent terms is exactly what Nora and his collaborators cherish. It is such a valuable object because the imaginary ties among the individuals of a national cohort have made it possible for social groups to act and to dream for themselves a better or different future. With its emphasis on collective virtue, guilt, and crime, its melodramatic emplotment, so to speak, the national narrative has provided the machinery for all sorts of social action. Although these dreams are not necessarily peaceful, Nora expresses a palpable nostalgia for the robust political projects that civic nationalism enabled at the beginning of the twentieth century. At the same time, the very forcefulness of the representational powers of the nation have worked to disable other narratives—those of the silenced veterans in Gregory's account, for example, or of the widows of the disappeared in Merridale's. Contesting the narrative of the nation, the partial recuperation of these marginal stories is a declaration of independence, a resolve to fashion new political affinities.

The history of private life and the historical conditions that make it possible for people to reflect on their sense of self, to fashion their own interior spaces, and to speak up for themselves has yet to be written. We know little about the historical circumstances that encourage practices of personal remembering and vernacular commemoration. Terdiman, for one, suggests that the nineteenth-century "memory crisis" entangled the way even private people regarded and reconstructed their personal pasts. A growing literature on subjectivity focuses on the appearance of highly personal narratives in which subjects picked at the thread of their lives from the larger fabric of their time and place.<sup>58</sup> Diaries, memoirs, and autobiographies are all self-reflective forms that were invigorated at the end of the eighteenth century. At the same time, the ability to picture oneself, to make determinations about bad or good luck and about the work of social forces, and to make a case for oneself, needs to be understood historically. "Peoples are not always subjects constantly confronting history as some academics would wish," Michel-Rolph Trouillot astutely observes; "the capacity upon which they act to become subjects is always part of their condition. This subjective capacity ensures confusion because it makes human beings doubly historical or, more properly, fully historical. It engages them simultaneously in the sociohistorical process and in narrative constructions about that process."<sup>59</sup> By remembering and telling stories about them-

<sup>58</sup> See, e.g., Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *The Turning Key: Autobiography and the Subjective Impulse since 1800* (Cambridge, 1984); Laqueur (n. 26 above), pp. 176–204; Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780–1930* (London, 1995), *Past Tenses: Essays on Writing, Autobiography, and History* (London, 1992); and Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989).

<sup>59</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995), p. 24.

selves, subjects distinguished between the “I then” and the “I now” and between the self and society and therefore thought of themselves as acting and as being acted upon. In many ways, this capacity to picture oneself recapitulates the method of historicism in which the specificity of the case is associated with structures of periodicity. In other words, the remembering self should be regarded as a historical rather than transcendental subject. It is an entity formed by the practices of social life and does not stand ready-made on its outskirts. Highly original studies by Carolyn Steedman, Annette Kuhn, and Marianne Hirsch examine the work of memory in private life and reflect on the historical nature of the self-consciousness of the individual.

“When I first came across Kathleen Woodward’s *Jipping Street*,” writes Carolyn Steedman about a 1928 memoir of working-class life at the end of the nineteenth century, “I read it with the shocked astonishment of one who had never seen what she knows written down before.” Steedman’s astonishment is the forceful recognition that “what she knows” is not a general condition but (to use Chandler’s words) a specific (political) case that can be “written down”; it is knowledge about the shared particulars of time and place that invites reflection. The moment is familiar because Steedman recognizes herself in the contours of someone else’s life, but unfamiliar as well because Steedman sees herself in a new way, in the stream of historical time. In an exceptional book, Annette Kuhn suggests how this work of picturing proceeded in the development of her own political subjectivity. Looking at the composition of old family photographs is a practice of revealing stories, she writes: “Ways of knowing and ways of seeing the world” that “are rarely acknowledged . . . in the expressions of hegemonic culture.” In a riveting look at a picture of “young Annette” dressed up on the occasion of Queen Elizabeth’s coronation on June 2, 1953, Kuhn weaves together the history of family, class, and empire. “Fussy and overdecorated,” Annette’s fancy frock was handmade by her mother, one piece among the many that announced the scrimped economy of the family: Kuhn’s wardrobe consisted of clothes too small because they were worn an extra year, or too large in order to last for years to come, or too standard (the seven-year-old’s coronation dress was cut from the same pattern of the dress she had worn at a wedding when she was five). Indeed, fashion gave historical circumstances particular legibility; both Kuhn and Steedman dwell on how well clothes expressed various class renditions of the ever-changing postwar “new look.” That Annette’s mother dressed her up on Coronation Day also indicated the value working-class families placed on a “well turned out” child. Coronation Day reflected hopes for a more prosperous life in the postwar years and longing for “attachment to larger ties: community, nation, Empire.” By reading photographs for the settings they stage, and for the dramas about girlhood, class, and empire they enact, Kuhn musters the ability to resist the wider claims of allegiance and virtue they represent. “The loyalty, the wish to belong, claimed in the outward display of a ceremonial dress and a photograph of it are riven with disenchantment,” Kuhn concludes; “a daughter disappoints, an Empire crumbles.” Such a radical position, Kuhn implies, would not be possible without an awareness of the “relations of class, national identity, and gender,” which facilitate not a

timeless but a “timeful,” contingent, and historically situated reading.<sup>60</sup> Historians would do well to consider these private archives more carefully and to write histories of the uses of photography, the idea of home, and the subversive play in the attic that give them definition. They suggest ways in which historical consciousness is personal as well as collective.

Photography plays such a large part in the work of memory because it elaborated a commemorative culture that permitted the family to think of itself in historical terms. Kuhn’s father worked as a semiprofessional photographer, selling his services door-to-door and undoubtedly sharpening his daughter’s keen eye, but snapshots, photographs, and photo albums were commonplace items in working-class homes; in this respect Kuhn’s household was not exceptional. An irrepressible Pierre Bourdieu goes so far as to say that “photographic practice only exists and subsists for most of the time by virtue of its *family function* or rather by the function conferred upon it by the family group, namely that of solemnizing and immortalizing the high points of family life.”<sup>61</sup> At the same time, photographs documented the perishability of its subjects. “The photograph’s seizing of a moment always, even in that very moment, assumes loss,” notes Kuhn: “The record looks toward a future time when things will be different, anticipates a need to remember what will soon be past.”<sup>62</sup> In this view, photography is the very expression of Terdiman’s “memory crisis,” at once creating a documentary record of the past to fashion a sense of continuity and performing the anxiety about the durability and authenticity of the connections that have been established.

In a remarkable study, Marianne Hirsch explores more closely the way in which commemorative practices and particularly photography have shaped the family’s sense of itself. Like Kuhn, Hirsch recognizes that photographs depict the ideology of family. The dresses, the poses, and the spatial arrangements among the subjects represent relations of power in the family to reveal “the family’s unconscious optics.” But Hirsch is also interested in the way that photographs create “post-memory,” which Hirsch defines as “the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth.” She is particularly concerned with stories of trauma such as those that have emerged from the Holocaust. Photographs give plain evidence of the lives that have been destroyed; they are “an enduring ‘umbilical’ connection” to a past life. Even as “they affirm the past’s existence,” however, “their flat two-dimensionality” signals the past’s “unbridgeable distance.” As Hirsch develops her analysis, memory work hovers uncertainly between the poles of loss and recovery. If photographic arrangements such as those introduced by Kuhn allow the individual to find her own way out of the shadows of expectation and proprietorship, the photo albums Hirsch studies end up repairing ruptures of “emigration and exile, of death and loss.” “In reunifying a fractured personal his-

<sup>60</sup> Carolyn Kay Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (London, 1986), pp. 16, 29–30; Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London, 1995), pp. 4, 8, 63–65, 82–83.

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), p. 48.

<sup>62</sup> Kuhn, p. 42.

tory," Hirsch confesses, "I may forgo the possibility of a radical break, but I resist a discontinuity that has also become coercive." Thus, the displacements that the camera exposes in family placements are the building blocks to a creative fashioning of self along lines of continuity and discontinuity.<sup>63</sup>

Hirsch associates postmemory with "postmodern subjectivity," which is shaped "in relation to an elsewhere," to "a temporal/spatial diaspora," but the contemporary moment she describes is more prolonged than she allows.<sup>64</sup> The stories about loss, exile, and identity that Hirsch and Kuhn unravel reveal operations of an exuberant culture of commemoration that is at the heart of modern subjectivity. By placing themselves into historical time, autobiographers and their readers, and photographers and their subjects, defined themselves in relation to an elsewhere and an elsewhere and made loss a significant source in the composition of the self. The narratives they created were case studies of the determinations of time and place, and thus a product of nineteenth-century historical consciousness. In this way, personal acts of remembering relied on general structures of temporality; texts in the private sphere were in large part constituted by the texture of the public sphere.

In an extremely important and as yet underappreciated book about "myth, ritual, and the quest for family values," John Gillis explores the origins of these private histories. Whereas middle-class families in Britain and the United States had shown little concern about their origins before the nineteenth century, after 1800 a feeling of having been ravaged by time turned "living rooms into family portrait galleries" and "attics into archives."<sup>65</sup> "What sets our age apart," he continues, "is that each family is now the creator and custodian of its own myths, rituals, and images."<sup>66</sup> Historians of private life concur: the early nineteenth century witnessed an explosion of autobiographical writing, diary keeping, scrapbook pasting, and portrait taking. Families took more care to commemorate personal occasions such as birthdays, holidays, and Christmas. Memories were "hoarded like capital," summarizes Anne Martin-Fugier.<sup>67</sup> Acts of remembering (and forgetting) created the romance of the family, always shoring up the power relations of family ideology—it was usually women who guarded over memory, for example—but also constituting the family as a social entity and an active subject.

Gillis opens up enormously productive ways to think about the history of the private sphere and individual subjectivity. He does nothing less than fill in the personal side to the historicist imagination, which after 1800 enabled more and more Europeans to recognize themselves in the boundedness of time and place and thus to see themselves as a "case" that corresponded to a distinct, historically situated identity. Any number of subject positions could be elaborated, as the "case

<sup>63</sup> Hirsch, pp. 11, 22–23, 192, 214.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 266–67.

<sup>65</sup> John R. Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual, and the Quest for Family Values* (New York, 1996), pp. xvi, 6, 18.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xvi–xviii.

<sup>67</sup> Anne Martin-Fugier, "Bourgeois Rituals," in *A History of Private Life: From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, ed. Michelle Perrot (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), pp. 263–65.

study” method encouraged narrative expositions both of national culture and of individual subjectivity. What is perhaps troubling in this account is the privileged status of narrative, which seems to invalidate experience as such and to brush aside the nontextual reality of pain and poverty. The ways in which experience might speak for itself or disrupt narrative will remain a hotly debated question. However, the ultimate challenge of the works under review here is to advance the argument that a history of subjectivity is very much a history of representation. As Trouillot argues, one part of experience is the capacity to see oneself acting and thereby to assume or identify with a particular subject position. A fully narrativized world is extremely rich precisely because it produces so many ideas about acting on and transforming material conditions. Historical narratives are disconcerting as well because they are inherently unstable and contain their own “disruptions, lacunae, conflicts, irreparable losses, belated recognitions, and challenges to identity.”<sup>68</sup> They offer possibilities for acting in the world, but they withhold a sense of security.

#### TRAUMA AND ENCHANTMENT

An unusually sophisticated body of work on trauma directly engages the question of the status of experience and the authority of narrative. While this scholarship focuses on extreme, boundary events such as the Holocaust, and is generally ahistorical, it highlights the general capacity of narrative structures to integrate experience or stimuli in an understandable, orderly fashion. *Trauma* is originally a Greek word meaning “wound,” but in contemporary medical and psychiatric literature, summarizes Cathy Caruth, “the term *trauma* is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind.” It breaches “the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world” and manifests itself in the nonsymbolic realm of dreams or flashbacks.<sup>69</sup> In this conception, an event is traumatic not because it is horrible, although it may well be, but because it cannot be assimilated by the individual’s view of the world. Trauma is therefore taken to be an affront to understanding. Not surprisingly, it invites the attention of the therapist “to whom the traumatized subject can bear witness, and thus integrate narratively what was until then an assailing specter.”<sup>70</sup> But it also attracts the attention of scholars who see trauma as something that eludes the conventions of knowledge and thereby performs an odd freedom beyond literary narratives and social sanctions. Depending on the postmodern proclivities of the investigator, trauma is regarded either as an unmediated, literal manifestation of an event, and thus as a guarantor of the veracity of what is otherwise incomprehensible, or as a sign of the impossibility of full knowledge. While these are not incompatible positions, they are useful in different ways.

<sup>68</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1998), p. 24. See also Scott (n. 26 above), Trouillot (n. 59 above), and Gillis (n. 65 above).

<sup>69</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* (n. 40 above), pp. 3–4.

<sup>70</sup> Mieke Bal, “Introduction,” in Bal et al., eds. (n. 41 above), pp. x–xi.

For Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, scholars engaged with the Holocaust and its aftermath, the ragged edges of testimony, the “bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed,” articulate the exceptional trauma of the experience; what cannot be said is as eloquent as what happened.<sup>71</sup> Cathy Caruth, who has perhaps explored the concept most widely, readjusts her focus. Trauma, she argues, “opens up and challenges us to a new kind of listening, the witnessing, precisely, *of impossibility*.” In difficult cross-cultural interactions, the mutually shared suspicion of not being able to understand a traumatic event “may provide the very link between cultures: not as a simple understanding of the past of others, but . . . through the departures we have all taken from ourselves.”<sup>72</sup> In this gap between consciousness and memory, the encounter with the strange and the shocking leaves open the opportunity for innovation. In his essay “Against Consolation,” Martin Jay reflects on Walter Benjamin’s deployment of shock and trauma to contest the smooth operations of bourgeois culture. By “not letting the dead rest in peace,” unwilling to make sense of his friends’ antiwar suicides in 1914 in terms of “sacrifice, atonement, and reconciliation,” Benjamin “assumed the guise of the ‘destructive character’ who wanted to blast open the seemingly progressive continuum of history, reconstellating the debris in patterns that would somehow provide flashes of insight into the redemptive potential hidden behind the official narrative.”<sup>73</sup> In other words, explains Kevin Newmark in an allied essay, traumatized memory is “the site where change can be produced” because “no one system or process of experience can ever sufficiently ensure that all foreign elements will merely ‘expire.’” Memory work recuperates the squandered potential of modernity: it is “the place where the wholly unexpected and accidental can now happen to the subject, making it into something different or other than it previously was, as was in fact the case when ‘modernity’ occurred historically to interrupt once and for all the unified structure of what we continue to call ‘traditional’ experience.”<sup>74</sup> Once again, memory cultures are associated with the breaks and innovations of modernity, with its debris-like nature.

I find this work extremely suggestive, and recent collections edited by Cathy Caruth; by Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer; as well as by Winter and Sivan are significant interdisciplinary contributions. Taken as a whole, they explore the ways in which individual memory resists the “smooth continuity between past and present” and stays outside socially sanctioned narratives. Memory records traces of the unspeakable, the matters that official narratives cannot or will not recognize. Sarah Farmer’s study of the townspeople of Oradour and Annette Kuhn’s interrogation of herself are good examples of the dissonant memories that get screened out by the accepted version of events but are not completely lost. In

<sup>71</sup> Shoshana Felman, “Education and Crises, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching,” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore, 1995), pp. 16–17. See also Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (London, 1991).

<sup>72</sup> Cathy Caruth, “Trauma and Experience: Introduction,” in Caruth, ed., pp. 10–11.

<sup>73</sup> Martin Jay, “Against Consolation: Walter Benjamin and the Refusal to Mourn,” in Winter and Sivan, eds. (n. 12 above), pp. 228–29.

<sup>74</sup> Kevin Newmark, “Traumatic Poetry: Charles Baudelaire and the Shock of Laughter,” in Caruth, ed., p. 238.

the case of traumatic events, memories may “remain in the body: in each of the senses, in the heart that races and skin that crawls.”<sup>75</sup> Whether or not that biological residence makes the event true or lends it particular veracity remains an open question, however. Likewise, it is not clear whether the debris to which Jay refers or the leftover “foreign” memories in Newmark’s account are actually “unclaimed experience” or simply unclaimed story lines. Dominick LaCapra, for example, warns against the hypostatization of experience as “the source of authenticity or authority.” Indeed, he questions the assumption that the narratives that give lives order and meaning are “somehow less authentic than what is argued to lie beneath.”<sup>76</sup> What unsettles LaCapra is how quickly preoccupation with fragmentation and trauma leads scholars to the unjustifiable step of taking the insufficiency of integrative mechanisms to be the expression of their invalidity. With this step, “history is marginalized in the interest of History as trauma indiscriminately writ large.” LaCapra barely contains his impatience with critics such as Lawrence Langer who seem to resist the opportunity of reconstituting the life of injured victim, even in a limited way, convinced as they are that the integrity of the life narrative that such a reconstitution would require has been wholly destroyed. LaCapra finds the intellectual choice that results frighteningly restrictive: “the phantasm of total mastery, full ego-identity, [and] ‘totalitarian’ social integration,” on the one hand, or “acting out repetition compulsions with endless fragmentation, aporias, and double-binds, on the other.” What is left untheorized is “the possibility of working through in which totalization . . . is actively resisted and the repetition-compulsion counteracted.”<sup>77</sup> LaCapra thereby joins a growing number of commentators for whom the fascination with trauma and historical disaster is an aestheticization of incommensurability and separateness, a Balkanization of experience that countermands the vexing obligations of acculturation and accommodation.<sup>78</sup>

There is a commonsense association of trauma with the ills of the modern world. Freud first associated trauma with industrial accidents in the nineteenth century and elaborated his comments in acknowledgment of the neuroses generated by World War I. Auschwitz and Hiroshima fully disclosed the catastrophic potential of modernity. In this regard, one of the manifestations of the catastrophic age is taken to be the insufficiency, even the illegitimacy, of narrative. However, what is left undeveloped in these accounts is the loss of what has been displaced: the life narratives that “recount a history, reconstruct a sense of agency, and rebuild a life.”<sup>79</sup> The accent usually falls on the extremity of conditions and the impossibility of understanding. Yet the traumatic response can also be seen as the very measure of the authority that narratives had once assumed in the lives of individual subjects.

<sup>75</sup> Susan J. Brison, “Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self,” in Bal et al., eds., p. 42.

<sup>76</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994), pp. 196, 200.

<sup>77</sup> LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, pp. 45–46, 111.

<sup>78</sup> See, e.g., Charles Maier, “A Surfeit of Memory? Reflections on History, Melancholy, and Denial,” *History and Memory* 5 (1993): 136–51; Wachtel (n. 8 above), pp. 237–45; Michael André Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley, Calif., 1994); and Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston, 1999).

<sup>79</sup> LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 196.

Langer, for example, contrasts “modern identity,” citing the philosopher Charles Taylor’s description of “the sense of inwardness, freedom, [and] individuality,” with “the diminished self” of Holocaust survivors. As we have seen, Langer is harshly criticized by LaCapra for taking this opposition to be a characteristic of the modern condition, yet by yoking together “modern identity” and the “diminished self” he also hints at the affinity between the historically specific circumstances in which modern identity is cultivated and the trauma that is the unexpected negation of that cultivation.<sup>80</sup> It is worth considering whether trauma is itself a historical case, a manifestation of the social narratives by which modern subjects move about in historical time.

The keen interest in the case of trauma is an apt illustration of the final case that needs to be resolved: the recent proliferation of studies of memory and remembering. There are logical reasons why historians should be interested in memory. This century has mobilized and uprooted unprecedented millions of people, exposing them to history. “Modern warfare is a potent generator of memories,” explains Merridale: “The involvement of every citizen, the unaccustomed collectivities, the emergencies and shock, the loss, the private totems and shared superstitions leave indelible prints on the imagination.”<sup>81</sup> At the same time, the “organized oblivion” of totalitarian dictatorships in which a single narrative was imposed has made the study of remembering and forgetting an important part of the reconstruction of posttotalitarian civil society.<sup>82</sup> The very “exuberance of civil society,” as Jay Winter puts it, has generated a plurality of memories. The conditions of globalization, the impact of the media, the extent of migrations have generated cultural hybrids and new stories worldwide. The consequence of what Arjun Appadurai calls “modernity at large” at the end of the twentieth century has been to throw into doubt the centrality of the nation-state as an organizer of social meanings and to question the logic of assimilation. A veritable publishing industry around Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck examines the posttraditional aspect to late modernity in which individuals have been largely “disembedded” from social milieus such as neighborhood, religion, ethnicity, and even family. They find less applicable the experience that those milieus had transmitted as people move about among a variety of social settings, and, as a result, quite self-consciously construct morally autonomous life trajectories.<sup>83</sup> The validation of these new subject positions requires a recognition of the plurality of memories, the crosshatch of scars.

The next step is small but audacious: the view that history and memory are narrative systems designed to fashion active subjects invites historians to admit

<sup>80</sup> Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven, Conn., 1991), pp. 198–203. Italics added.

<sup>81</sup> Merridale (n. 56 above), p. 61.

<sup>82</sup> Claudia Koonz, “Between Memory and Oblivion: Concentration Camps in German Memory,” in Gillis, ed. (n. 25 above), p. 258; Winter (n. 48 above).

<sup>83</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, 1996); Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, Calif., 1991); Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernisierung: Eine Kontroverse* (Frankfurt, 1996); and Ulrich Beck, *Die Erfindung des Politischen* (Frankfurt, 1993).

their own complicity in those systems and to take up what Nora has identified as their roles as soldiers and priests. Nora celebrates the collective action that the case of the nation enabled at the beginning of the century, and he has not entirely given up hope for the possibility of a community bounded by remembrance that is able to act collectively. The presentness of the past in the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere in Eastern Europe exerts such horrified fascination on Western observers not least because it indicates the possibilities for creating new allegiances and new meanings. In her absorbing book *The Political Lives of the Dead*, for example, Katherine Verdery makes a case for studying postsocialist politics and the importance attached to “political symbolism, life experiences, and feelings” in order to come up with a “more enchanted view of politics.” The politics of the dead in Hungary, Romania, and Yugoslavia have created “a newly meaningful universe,” one which is deeply disturbing, but alluring for the fact of innovation.<sup>84</sup> Dead bodies, Verdery explains, lend themselves to endeavors to rethink the boundaries of the community. Reburials of notables such as Hungary’s Imre Nagy, the Greek Catholic bishop Inochentie Micu, and Serbia’s World War II dead identified very particular ancestries and created explicit zones of inclusion and exclusion. Exemplary autobiographies of suffering and victimhood, Verdery argues, made the case for the newly vitalized nation. While all lives are contradictory and polysemous, the corpses that constituted the material evidence of those lives “have a single name and a single body,” and they thus “present the illusion of having *only one* significance.” The “political work” of dead bodies in Eastern Europe, Verdery concludes, “is to institute ideas about morality by assessing accountability and punishment, to sanctify space anew, to redefine the temporalities of daily life, to line people up with alternative ancestors and thereby to reconfigure the communities people participate in.”<sup>85</sup> In similar fashion the narratives of loss and displacement that Kuhn and Hirsch trace contribute to new life trajectories and to a kind of enchantment. And, finally, the interest in trauma can only be fully explained by a willingness to let the guise of the “destructive character” contest the imperatives of the present and the authority of its official narratives with evidence of the strange and incomprehensible.

The innovations of memory work rely in large part on a consciousness of and identification with loss, a disorientation in modernity that encourages new rounds of self-reflection and self-assertion in the troubled space of time. From Hegel to Hobsbawm, modern testimony insists on seeing it like this: “everything is becoming so different.”<sup>86</sup> It sets the stage for thinking about the world in secondhand terms of rupture and repair, of displacement and resettlement, of disconnection and remembrance. It is attention to the discontinuities of the social world that

<sup>84</sup> Verdery (n. 6 above), pp. 126–27.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29, 127.

<sup>86</sup> What I regard as the signature phrase of the modern is Johannes von Müller’s, a noted historian who writes to his brother about his astonishment at the French Revolution. See his letter of May 20, 1797, in Johannes von Müller, *Briefe in Auswahl*, ed. Edgar Bonjour (Basel, 1954), p. 212. On Hegel, see Perry Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement* (New York, 1992), p. 293; otherwise, see Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes* (New York, 1995).

makes available new subjectivities such as the nation. That national memories, in particular, remain so resonant in Yugoslavia and elsewhere is not because they are more true, but because the narratives of collective guilt and collective victimization they generate have the effect of recognizing and commemorating individual suffering in socially meaningful, if tendentious, ways. Thus, the nation has been the dominant form that historical consciousness has taken. Set against an imaginary (or future) age that does not acknowledge loss or the possibility of recovery and does not approach the past with anguished concern or see in it a fragile otherness, the modern case seems remarkable for its investment in memory and the violence of its excisions, for the album of photographs that lies in the trash.