

# CAN MEMORY BE COLLECTIVE?

ANNA GREEN

MEMORY, in all its guises, has been at the heart of historical inquiry over the past three decades. Cultural and social historians, sociologists, social psychologists, and those working in cultural studies and literary criticism have generated a significant body of work exploring both individual autobiographical memory and collective, public memory. Intense interest in the subject of collective remembrance, initially focusing upon the social and cultural forms through which the violent and repressive history of the twentieth century were recalled and commemorated, has developed over time into a broader, interdisciplinary field focusing upon memory.<sup>1</sup> Over this period, however, research into autobiographical memory has often found itself relegated to the sidelines by the scholarly community's burgeoning interest in the social or cultural memory of the group.

The journal *History and Memory*, founded in the late 1980s with a particular focus upon the collective memories and legacies of Nazism, fascism, and the Holocaust, has recently been joined by the much newer journal *Memory Studies*, intended to facilitate interdisciplinary "dialogue and debate on the theoretical, empirical and methodological issues central to a collaborative understanding of memory today."<sup>2</sup> The first issue of the new journal of *Memory Studies* kicked off with an article by Henry L. Roediger and James V. Wertsch that sought to define the emerging interdisciplinary field of memory studies.<sup>3</sup> Within the landscape of memory studies the authors included empirical history, official national narratives, novels, memorials, case-based law, popular media, corporate memory, and religious ideas. Subsumed under the category of memory, therefore, were hugely divergent forms of historical evidence or representation that in other contexts would be identified by specific terms reflecting the different processes and purposes of creation,

epistemological assumptions, and processes of dissemination/reception, including empirical history; discourse; oral tradition; historical representation or interpretation, performance; fiction; ideology; and myth. The term "memory" has now expanded to encompass all these forms of historical consciousness, a development that received a less-than-enthusiastic response from those historians who define conventional history by its goals of objectivity and truth, as opposed to the subjectivity and partiality of memory. Whatever the merits of this argument, there is no doubt that the encompassing definition of memory studies above has many adherents across a wide range of disciplines, but even the authors acknowledge that the breadth of the field indicates the need for a much more precise terminology around memory.

## MEMORY STUDIES AND ORAL HISTORY

This emerging interdisciplinary field sits alongside that of oral history, the collection and analysis of autobiographical memory, with its much earlier provenance. From the first written histories to the early nineteenth century and Jules Michelet on the French Revolution, the memories of those who participated in events were considered to be invaluable sources for the writing of history.<sup>4</sup> As historical research and writing became a professional, academic discipline with an emphasis upon written archival records in the mid-nineteenth century, autobiographical memory and oral sources lost favor. In Britain, one of the pioneering accounts of "spoken history" in the mid-twentieth century was George Ewart Evans's *Ask the Fellows Who Cut the Hay*, originally published in 1954. This collection of memories of rural labor and life in Suffolk in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries became part of the secondary school syllabus in the 1960s.<sup>5</sup> In the United States, the revival of oral history initially followed a different direction, beginning with the development of an oral history archive at Columbia University in 1948 for the memories of "significant lives."<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, in Britain and the United States, a new generation of post-war historians came to value oral history as an often unique source of information about the lives and perspectives of those outside political, social, or cultural elites. Two journals, *Oral History* (UK) and *Oral History Review* (U.S.), were founded in 1969 and 1973, the product of vibrant interdisciplinary oral history movements that brought together researchers working in the academic, public history, and community sectors.<sup>7</sup>

It might have been anticipated that those engaged in collective and individual remembrance would have a great deal to say to each other. Yet, despite the shared interest in the contexts, concepts, forms, and content of remembering, there has been relatively little interaction. Some scholars argue that autobiographical memories are irrelevant because they have no impact upon the public world. In Nancy Wood's study of memory in postwar Europe, individual and collective memories

both avail themselves of "mechanisms like selection, narrativization, repression, displacement or denial." However, while the "emanation of individual memory is primarily subject to the laws of the unconscious," collective representations of the past represent the conscious purpose of social groups.<sup>8</sup> In this argument, collective action is permitted a high degree of intentionality, whereas individual memory (despite drawing upon the same cultural mechanisms) lacks a similar sense of purpose. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan also differentiated between the active agency of collective remembrance, and "passive memory—understood as the personal recollections of a silent individual," or "*homo psychologicus*—the man of private memory."<sup>9</sup> In these definitions, individual memories were confined to the realm of psychology, presumed to lack conscious purpose and therefore irrelevant for the work of historians.

One of the reasons why there has been a lack of engagement between memory studies and oral history has been the deeply problematic relationship between the memory of the individual and that of the group.<sup>10</sup> As Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone have pointed out: "The concept of memory, in common use as well as in specialist writings, is now very generally taken to have purchase in domains beyond that of the individual; the idea of cultural or collective memory currently seems scarcely more contentious than the idea of individual memory. And yet the question of how, or indeed whether, memory might actually be considered salient at levels beyond the individual—of how we conceptualize memory in order to make such a move possible—remains... remarkably little investigated."<sup>11</sup> Despite this difficulty, and perhaps ironically, it is personal autobiographical memory that has vanished, collapsed into an all-encompassing concept of collective memory.

The difficulty originated with the original conceptual vocabulary around collective memory formulated by the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920s. Halbwachs applied the idea of collective memory to the processes of remembering at every level of society, from the individual to the group, as well as to events directly experienced and those long in the past. Halbwach's understanding of collective memory is the place to start, followed by an exploration of the theoretical developments in both the humanities and social sciences that together created a receptive environment for the revival of his approach to memory from the 1980s on. One consequence of these developments in memory theory has been the complete assimilation of autobiographical or personal memory into that of the group, and the problems with this reductionist approach are explored in the second half of this chapter. The critique will revolve around the current conceptual utility of collective memory, the implications for interpretive theory of the very different social and cultural context—from that of Halbwachs's life—within which most remembering takes place in the early twenty-first century, and will conclude with alternative approaches that can provide a more nuanced and productive understanding of the relationship between the memory of the individual and that of the group.

## MEMORIES AS SOCIAL CREATIONS

What did Halbwachs originally intend when he formulated the idea of remembering as collective memory? First of all, he accepted that memory is a faculty of the individual brain. He wrote that "while the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember."<sup>12</sup> But he went on to suggest that memories are not individual but social creations. It was only through active discourse with others within the same social or cultural groups, such as the family or trade union, that the inchoate dreamlike impressions of individual recollection were turned into meaningful, durable memories. He rejected the idea of any purely individual conscious state, likening such a belief to assuming that "a heavy object, suspended in air by means of a number of very thin and interlaced wires, actually rests in the void where it holds itself up."<sup>13</sup> In some ways, this metaphor can convey the unfortunate image of the thinking, remembering individual as a marionette, rather than an active participant in conversational social relationships. This impression is reinforced when Halbwachs subsequently asserted that the process of sharing recollections of the past within the context of families and other small social groups harmonized individual memories, and contradictory memories faded away:

It is not sufficient... to show that individuals always use social frameworks when they remember. It is necessary to place oneself in the perspective of the group or groups.... One may say that the individual remembers by placing himself in the perspective of the group, but one may also affirm that the memory of the group realizes and manifests itself in individual memories.<sup>14</sup>

Halbwachs included within these shared memories events beyond individual experience, describing the latter as "historical memory" through which individuals linked their own lives to the broader historical events and currents of their time. In a later essay he extended this to events beyond the human lifespan, drawing attention to the importance of both place and commemoration, reflected through the prism of contemporary needs and perspectives, in cementing collective memory for each generation. In "The Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land," for example, Halbwachs explored the ways in which "the collective Christian memory adapts its recollections of the details of Christ's life and of the places where they occurred to the contemporary exigencies of Christianity, to its needs and aspirations."<sup>15</sup> These insights have generated extensive research, in particular, into the relationship between collective memory, ethnic conflict, and nationalism.<sup>16</sup>

Halbwachs's conceptualization of collective memory, therefore, should not be understood as the aggregation of individual memories. He believed that the deeply social process of remembering molds both personal and group memory into a cohesive whole, in accord "in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the

society.”<sup>17</sup> This dimension of Halbwachs’s thought implied that some form of prior collective consciousness shared by all those in the group and into which individual memories are either incorporated or rejected. Halbwachs shared a close working relationship with the sociologist Émile Durkheim, and the latter’s influence can be seen in Halbwachs’s approach to the problem of memory. Durkheim was interested in the processes through which social cohesion is achieved, and in the *function* performed by cultural and social practices that integrated the individual into the group and created social harmony. Believing that memory performed a similar socially integrative function, Halbwachs’s approach to memory was driven by a search for the mechanisms of social cohesion.

Halbwachs’s ideas about collective memory lay dormant for fifty years, and until the end of the 1970s researchers were more interested in the experiential and evidential content of individual, or groups of individuals’ memory. As the oral historian and sociologist Paul Thompson recalled, the first edition of his book *The Voice of the Past*, written in 1977, was “very much a positivistic work... the main argument is the positive value of these memories, and whether or not they’re reliable, and how you decide whether or not they’re reliable. That was the research tradition I was coming from, essentially a social scientific one.”<sup>18</sup> By the time the second edition of the book was published ten years later it included a chapter on “Memory and the Self,” reflecting the influence of new work by the Italian historians Luisa Passerini and Alessandro Portelli. Emphasizing the subjective and creative dimensions of remembering, including silences and distortions, Passerini and Portelli jointly transformed the analytical and interpretive approaches to oral history.<sup>19</sup>

## THE SUBJECTIVE DIMENSIONS OF ORAL HISTORY

In a pathbreaking article published in 1979, Luisa Passerini insisted that historians should recognize and value those subjective dimensions of oral history conventionally derided by historians. “The raw material of oral history,” she wrote, “consists not just in factual statements, but is pre-eminently an expression and representation of culture, and therefore includes not only literal narrations but also the dimensions of memory, ideology and subconscious desires.”<sup>20</sup> The role of female cultural norms, and subconscious resistance, were central to Passerini’s analysis of women’s self-representation in oral testimonies. Researchers from across the social science and humanities spectrum subsequently began to identify and explain the importance of understanding the subjective and cultural dimensions of autobiographical memory, including imagination, symbolism, myth and legend, narrative and genre.<sup>21</sup> These approaches to personal memory and subjectivity reflected quite a different approach to the positivism that informed the early work of Paul Thompson, and they paralleled theoretical trajectories emerging within the wider historical profession.<sup>22</sup>

In a subsequent seismic shift, one that led to acrimonious divisions among historians, the turn to cultural interpretation moved beyond its origins in literary theory, anthropology, and psychoanalysis to focus more exclusively upon language and discourse.<sup>23</sup> The linguistic turn in cultural theory, variously subsumed under the categories of postmodernism or poststructuralism, was based upon the understanding that language and discourse do not *reflect* the social and material world, they *construct* it. There was no accessible social or material reality separate from that constituted by language and discourse. Consequently, the idea of correspondence between language and reality, at the core of empirical history, was considerably reduced, for “language intervenes between human beings and their world,” imposing a set of culturally established meanings.<sup>24</sup>

The implications for conventional approaches to history were profound. A raft of concepts long central to historical analysis, such as agency, intentionality, and experience, no longer appeared to drive human consciousness. At the most extreme end of the poststructuralist continuum, the thinking, reasoning, historical actor vanished, replaced by subject positions created through discourse.<sup>25</sup> Not all poststructuralists would agree that this approach to human subjectivity negated agency. Judith Butler, the feminist theorist, countered that “construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible.”<sup>26</sup> The goal for the historian working within the poststructuralist paradigm became one of disentangling the particular ways in which “subjects mediated or transformed discourses in specific historical settings.”<sup>27</sup>

An example of a poststructuralist approach to oral histories may be found in Penny Summerfield’s study of women’s wartime recollections.<sup>28</sup> Summerfield compared women’s oral histories with the dominant wartime discourses and slotted women’s memories into a matrix of publicly available scripts, such as heroic or stoic narratives, or independent or obedient daughters. But it is impossible to understand, in this poststructuralist approach to oral history, why individuals adopt a particular discourse or how changes in individual perception could occur, without recourse to an external material reality. In many cases, oral history excerpts seem to suggest a more complex set of readings, with individual stories containing evidence of both discursive cultural templates and critical reflexivity. The capacity for reflexivity has the potential to give historians insights into the processes through which challenges to dominant discourses emerge.

## SOCIAL IDENTITY

Alongside the cultural, interpretive approaches to memory outlined above, and similarly highly influential among researchers in the field of memory studies, was the idea of social identity developed by social psychologists in 1979.<sup>29</sup> From that

psychologists and social historians have largely focused upon the second dimension of self, the relational or social. Identities are created through relationships with other groups of people, and individuals may have multiple identities attached to different roles, groups, or organizations from the family to the nation. The volume of work on social identity is enormous, and as a concept it has been described as "vague, ambiguous, and enigmatic," resulting in a range of interpretive applications.<sup>32</sup>

As public and social, rather than private and personal, the concept of social identity provided historians with a means to connect human subjectivities with more abstract categories of political and social analysis.<sup>33</sup> This was particularly evident in the field of political history, where the concepts of identity and collective memory have led to a large body of work exploring the links between memory and national or ethnic identity, especially in contexts where either one or other is called into question through past or present conflict.<sup>34</sup> The use of reified collective memory as ahistorical or anti-historical, the expression of "some eternal or essential truth" about a people or a nation state.<sup>35</sup>

Halbwachs's theory of collective memory therefore accorded with interdisciplinary developments in contemporary theorization around subjectivity that emphasized its relational, unconscious, and discursive dimensions. Its revival also owed a great deal to what has been described as a late-twentieth-century "memory boom" in societies across the Western world. This fascination with the past—variously described as an "obsession with memory," saturation with "creeping heritage," or more positively as "the historicist turn in national life"—was reflected in the expansion of museums, the building of new commemorative monuments, and the restoration of historic neighborhoods.<sup>36</sup> Historians began to think more deeply about social and cultural memory. In France, the historian Pierre Nora set out on an extended project to construct an alternative narrative of French history, one based upon a thematic approach to symbolic memory, the texts, sites, and symbols deemed to be central to French collective memory and French identity.<sup>37</sup>

Across a range of disciplines, cultural and social theory coalesced around the concept of collective memory, subsuming all forms of remembering, personal and group, experiential and learned, under one conceptual framework. As a consequence, human subjectivity came to be perceived as socially and culturally determined to the point where the idea of personal memory became irrelevant. The sociologist Michael Schudson, for example, argued that since memory can be expressed only through the "cultural construction of language in socially structured patterns of recall; in the most important sense all memory is collective cultural memory."<sup>38</sup> This emphasis upon the social and cultural structures of remembering, and upon form rather than content, undermined notions of human agency and, as a consequence, undermined the value of personal memory as a source of knowledge about

the past. "The past," he wrote, "is not a collection of years ago, 'to elaborate the collective side of one's conscious life, does not render the individual a sort of automaton, passively obeying the interiorised collective will?'" Turning the relationship around, how was collective memory created?<sup>39</sup>

The processes through which public or cultural memories are created and sustained are diverse and complex, emphasizing some aspects of the past while neglecting or repressing others. Some historians and sociologists have declined to use terms such as social, cultural, or public memory, or mnemonic practices.<sup>40</sup> Was it really possible to speak of a shared collective memory? Above all, has the idea of collective memory been extended beyond the point of conceptual utility?

Collective memory has, in the terms of Mieke Bal, become a "travelling concept."<sup>41</sup> It may be found across many academic disciplines, from sociology (where it began) to history, social psychology, marketing, and law among others.<sup>42</sup> As a result, there is no consistency concerning the object or meaning of collective memory. In practice, it may mean quite different things. The historical sociologist Jeffrey Olick identified the major theoretical fault line running through collective memory theory. Collective memory, he suggested, may be either:

the lowest common denominator or normal distribution of what individuals in a collectivity remember, or... "the collective memory" as a "social fact sui generis," a matter of collective representations that are the properties of the "collective unconscious" which is itself ontologically distinct from any aggregate of individual consciousness.<sup>43</sup>

The two sides can be described as the "distributed version" versus the "strong version" of collective memory. Halbwachs has generally been credited with the latter approach although his writings gave grounds for both positions.<sup>44</sup> While most contemporary scholarship adopted some form of the distributed version, it was not uncommon to find sweeping assertions about the degree of homogeneity within collectivities that invoked the existence of some form of external collective consciousness. In practice, many different forms of historical consciousness were included under the label of collective memory, for example memory as learned knowledge of the past alongside memory as recall of direct experience; and shared memories of recent events alongside knowledge of events beyond the human life span.

While agreeing with Bal that "travelling concepts" often lead to productive, interesting interdisciplinary cultural analysis, I also share her concern that the casual invocation of concepts as labels does not facilitate meaningful insights. In other words, the value of the concept lies in its capacity to help us "understand the object better *on its*—the object's—*own terms*."<sup>45</sup> The question that needs to be raised is whether the widespread and casual invocation of a single term, "collective memory," to cover virtually every aspect of historical consciousness assists the meaningful understanding of the object, that is, memory and remembering.

104  
MEMORY AND HISTORY  
CAN MEMORY BE CO...

Another way of approaching this issue is to ask: What are the criteria for an effective and useful concept? The political scientist John Gerring began his study of this question with *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*, when Humpty Dumpty insists that when he used a word, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less." To this Alice responds, "The question is, ... whether you *can* make words mean so many different things."<sup>46</sup> What are the criteria for evaluating whether a concept is providing an avenue for meaningful analysis, or has become a more or less generic label covering very different things? Gerring proposed a framework of eight criteria essential to what he describes as "conceptual goodness": coherence, operationalization, validity, field utility, resonance, contextual range, parsimony, and analytic/empirical utility. Let us look at how well the concept of collective memory fulfills Gerring's requirements for two of these criteria: coherence and validity.

All referential concepts, Gerring argued, "perform a grouping or sorting function. A concept gathers together things that are alike in some respect, distinguishing them from those things that are different."<sup>47</sup> Does the concept of collective memory, as currently applied, appropriately perform this sorting function? Closely allied to coherence is validity: to what extent is collective memory an accurate description of that it seeks to represent? As it stands, collective memory can be used to describe both remembered sense experience or learned information, two ways of knowing about the past. Autobiographical narratives, the shared oral traditions of groups such as the family, and the public myths of the nation state have all been described, at various times, as collective memory, as have films and novels. Are all these forms of thinking about the past sufficiently coherent? Is there a valid degree of alignment between term and object to justify the generic application of the conceptual term collective memory?

## THE NEED FOR A MORE PRECISE CONCEPTUAL VOCABULARY

The definition of memory most frequently accepted comes from psychology: the individual brain's ability to store, retain, and subsequently retrieve information, which encompasses both experiential and learned memory. It may be useful to draw a parallel here between episodic memory (personal, experiential) and semantic memory (collective, learned). These two forms of memory are closely intertwined. Cultural historians will rightly point to the importance of semantic memory—the norms and values of our social environment—in providing the structure and meaning for episodic memory.<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, subsuming both forms of memory under the concept of "collective memory" has the effect of obliterating two obvious and major qualifications to this apparently seamless relationship.

First of all, each individual has an array of memories, which may not be shared by others. Such memories do not vanish, contrary to Halbwachs's assertions, in the absence of a social context through which they are constantly reinforced. While the frameworks for understanding past experience are derived from the social and cultural context, most individuals in contemporary societies are exposed to a cacophony of conflicting ideologies, values, and beliefs. Collective memory appears to operate on an understanding of semantic memory where remembering is reduced to a predetermined set of cultural norms. But in a culturally diverse and mobile world, to what extent are individuals able to select or choose from the alternatives open to them? There is also evidence that conceptual knowledge (semantic memory) differs in important ways between generations.<sup>49</sup> In searching for evidence of predetermined discourses and cultural identities within expressions of memory, are historians failing to hear or see the signs of critical reflection or contestation? Cultural history is frequently criticized for its failure to explain changing mentalities or subjectivities; could these be some of the reasons why?

A major problem for the field of memory studies lies in expanding the idea of memory beyond the individual. Scholars have argued that many ethnic and national identities in the contemporary world were constructed by memory, rather than the other way around. The basis for identification with the group, in Halbwachs's theory, is a moral and emotional desire for harmony.<sup>50</sup> In this case, identity, determined by collective consciousness, precedes memory: "Memory is determined by an identity (collective or individual) *that is already well established*."<sup>51</sup> However, contemporary conflicts suggest that insecurity around identity has also led different ethnic and national groups to create historical memories to stabilize and deepen group identification, to the extent that "a rule might be postulated: where identity is problematized, memory is valorized."<sup>52</sup>

This process became very clear during the breakup of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, at times with catastrophic consequences. In *Voices of Collective Remembering*, published in 2002, James Wertsch demonstrated the persistence of national cultural narratives in the context of the breakup of the Soviet state. Broad narrative templates continued into the present, even as detailed knowledge of specific events disappeared among the younger generations.<sup>53</sup> The point at issue here is whether this construction of historical consciousness is best conceptualized as a form of collective memory. The school students in Wertsch's study were too young to remember World War II. Their knowledge and understandings of the period were derived from a range of sources, including their grandparents' memories, state-sponsored textbooks, and popular film. Defining learned forms of historical consciousness as collective memory runs the risk of reifying national memory and obscuring the processes through which dominant political and cultural elites deploy cultural symbols and narratives in pursuit of ethnic or nationalist ends.

Any concept must surpass its rivals. If collective memory fails the test for "conceptual goodness," is there any other term that does a better job? First of all, the concept of collective memory does not adequately capture the complex cultural and social processes of personal or group remembering, subsuming these under

a functionalist metaphor.<sup>54</sup> Secondly, its use has been stretched far beyond the boundaries of validity. Virtually all forms of thinking about the past—experiential and learned memory, history and fiction—have been dragooned into the collective memory compound. The old binary distinctions between individual and collective are clearly unsustainable, but neither is the collapse of personal memory into the collective. The memory of the group is not identical to that of the individual within it: “the emblems and articulations of memory in flags and films, memorials and museums, are in a different register of memory to that of the single individual’s recollections of his or her own life, however, the two may connect.”<sup>55</sup>

There is a desperate need for a more precise conceptual vocabulary around memory, not one generic label that forecloses on the analytical or interpretive process rather than opening it up. Many of these terms already exist but have been largely eschewed in favor of one label, that of collective memory. Public memory, cultural memory, social memory, autobiographical memory, mnemonic practices, mnemonic communities, among others, all have greater coherence and validity derived from stronger conceptual roots within established paradigms of intellectual inquiry.

In terms of autobiographical memory, is there a way forward that incorporates the social and relational dimensions of remembering, without the cultural reification implicit in much collective memory theorizing? At the core of Halbwachs’s theory of collective memory was the exchange of memories within small familial or social groups, such as trade unions. While these exchanges undoubtedly still continue, the wider society of which they are a part has changed in fundamental ways. New communication technologies, such as the Internet, greater geographic mobility, and higher levels of education have all combined to create a very different context within which many people remember the past. The work of the anthropologist Daniel Miller is instructive in thinking about the implications of these changes.<sup>56</sup> Miller’s research was based upon the diverse, multicultural, and relatively anonymous experience of living in urban London, in contrast to the small, stable, and more homogeneous communities of the early twentieth century upon which Halbwachs based his theory of collective memory.

Miller’s analysis also brought together all three dimensions of the self: the material/bodily, the social/relationships, and the reflexive, and his conclusions fundamentally challenge much contemporary scholarly debate around human subjectivity. Taking thirty households in a randomly chosen London street, Miller undertook an ethnographic study exploring the role that objects from houses to pets to Christmas decorations play in human relationships. He predicated his approach on a belief that people find it easier to talk about their lives through their possessions than they do in response to direct questions. The modern state, Miller argued, provides a context in which material wealth and education, among other factors, permit individuals a much greater degree of “creative autonomy” than those from earlier human societies. In combination with a pluralist, multicultural society, he argued that identity and culture “increasingly look vestigial.” Miller was struck by the “astonishing diversity and uniqueness” of those participating in his project, and he concluded:

among the things once accomplished by individuals and households, is the increasingly delegated downwards, to individuals and households, is the responsibility for creating order and cosmology. . . . An order, moral or aesthetic, is still an authentic order even if one creates it for oneself and makes it up as one goes along, rather than just inheriting it as tradition or custom.<sup>57</sup>

Individual or household aesthetics, defined as the patterns or organizational principles, he concluded, are produced through reinforcing influences and networks of relationships, of interaction with other people, and with material culture. Miller’s interactive model of human consciousness, grounded in the individual and his/her relationships and networks, contrasts with Halbwachs’s static theatre metaphor, with its puppet connotations.

The capacity for self-fashioning, to borrow the term from Stephen Greenblatt’s study of the Renaissance, may not be new. But while Miller rejected the vocabulary of “choice,” there is surely an element of conscious personal selection among the potential relationships and networks available in modern, multicultural cities. There is, as some argue, “much leeway in what one can claim to be.”<sup>58</sup> On the whole, theories based upon the idea of choice have been influential in the disciplines of economics and political science, where the possibility of conscious rational individual human choice and action has retained a stronger purchase upon intellectual enquiry and debate. Choice theory may have two dimensions, “an exploration of what it means to be rational or as a description of how people act in practice.” The latter is not necessarily taken to imply a particular set of rational calculations, just that people “act as if they do.”<sup>59</sup> This aspect of choice theory has potential links with emerging developments in cultural history. The linguistic determinism of the past two or more decades may be on the wane, moderated by cultural approaches that recognize the active nature of the engagement between culture and practice, and the creative role of human actors in this process. Although the vocabulary of choice remains restricted to the social sciences, interest in human intention and agency are re-emerging in cultural history through a focus upon the interplay between cultural systems and cultural practice.<sup>60</sup>

## PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

The problem driving this analysis has been the conceptual incorporation of personal memory into collective memory, and it seems appropriate to end by reiterating the value of autobiographical memory to our understanding of both past and present. The specific content unique to personal memory and the choice (conscious or unconscious) of the frameworks through which personal experience is remembered and understood, provide the means through which historians can test grand narratives against personal memory or measure history from above against history from below. Personal memory can also tell us when, and sometimes why,

or dominant discourses. Oral historians need to remain alert to memories that do not fit the collective patterns, or those that are consciously reflexive and reveal the tensions between inheritance and critique in human consciousness. Contemporary theorizing around collective memory has paid too little attention to the capacity of individuals to reflect critically upon both their own experience and practice, and those of others. It is upon the latter, the capacity of individuals to recognize and critically reflect upon their experience and beliefs, that active human agency ultimately depends. Human subjectivity is more active, engaged, and critical than contemporary theory permits. We must keep space for the resistant, curious, rebellious, thoughtful, purposeful human subject.

## NOTES

1. Henry L. Roediger III and James V. Wertsch, "Creating a New Discipline of Memory Studies," *Memory Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008): 9–22. This has been accompanied by anthologies, readers, and theoretical texts on the subject of memory. For recent examples, see Barbara A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Buckingham: Open University, 2003); two volumes in the Transaction Memory and Narrative series: Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, eds., *Memory, History, Nation* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 2006) and Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin, eds., *Memory Cultures* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 2006); in the Stanford Cultural Memory in the Present series, Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006); Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Michael Rossington and Anne Whitehead, eds., *Theories of Memory: A Reader* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 2007).
2. See Andrew Hoskins et al., "Editorial," *Memory Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008): 5.
3. Roediger and Wertsch, "Creating a New Discipline of Memory Studies," 9–22.
4. Jules Michelet, *The People*, trans. John P. McKay (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), xxvii, 4–5.
5. George Ewart Evans, *Ask the Fellows Who Cut the Hay* (London: Faber and Faber, 1956).
6. Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 22.
7. See the editorial, fortieth-anniversary issue of *Oral History* 37, no. 1 (2009): 2.
8. Nancy Wood, *Vectors of Memory: Legacies of Trauma in Postwar Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 2.
9. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, "Setting the Framework," in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 6, 10.
10. For an early formulation of the conceptual difficulties attached to collective memory, see James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); see also the discussion in Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, 1–30.
11. Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, "Rethinking Memory," *History Workshop Journal* 59 (2005): 130.
12. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. by Lewis Yandl Ditter (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 40.
13. *Ibid.*, 49.
14. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. by Lewis Yandl Ditter (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 40.
15. *Ibid.*, 234.
16. For contrasting perspectives on this relationship, see Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002) and Anthony Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); see also Ed Cairns and Micheál D. Roe, eds., *The Role of Memory in Ethnic Continuities, Conflicts, and Transformations in National Retrospection* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003).
17. Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 40.
18. Paul Thompson, interview by Karen Worcman, Sweden, 1996, 32. See Qualidata, University of Essex: <http://www.esds.ac.uk/qualidata/online/data/edwardians/biography.asp>.
19. Luisa Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); "Women's Personal Narratives: Myths, Experiences, and Emotions," in *Interpreting Women's Lives*, The Personal Narratives Group, 189–97 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991) and *The Battle of Valle Giulia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997).
20. Luisa Passerini, "Work Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism: Work in Progress," *History Workshop Journal* 8 (1979): 84.
21. Some examples from an extensive body of work are Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, *The Myths We Live By* (London: Routledge, 1990); Marie-Françoise Chanfrault-Duchet, "Narrative Structures, Social Models, and Symbolic Representation in the Life Story," in *Women's Words*, ed. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, 77–92 (London: Routledge, 1991); Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994); and Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
22. See Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Peter Burke, *What Is Cultural History?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Anna Green, *Cultural History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), chap. 4.
23. Ron Grele was one of the first oral historians to draw explicitly upon theories from linguistics in the 1970s, using linguistic structuralism to identify the narrative frameworks of stories about past labor conflicts: "Listen to Their Voices," *Oral History* 7 (1979).
24. Catherine Belsey, *Poststructuralism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6.
25. See J. W. Scott, "Experience," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (London: Routledge, 1992).
26. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 2006), 201.
27. Kathleen Canning "Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historicizing Discourse and Experience," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 19, no. 2 (1994): 373–74.

29. H. Tajfel and J. C. Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel (Monterey, Calif.: Brooks/Cole, 1979).
30. For a good discussion of self and identity in social psychology, see Martha Augoustinos, Iain Walker, and Ngaire Donaghue, *Social Cognition*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2006), chap. six.
31. Jerrold Seigel, "Problematizing the Self," in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, ed. Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, 285 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
32. Fernando Aguiar and Andrés de Francisco, "Rational Choice, Social Identity, and Beliefs About Oneself," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences Online First*, doi:10.1177/0048393109333631 (Mar. 25, 2009):5. Economists have been more interested in the problematic relationship between social identity and rational choice theories; in history and historical sociology, the focus has been upon social identities and group cohesion.
33. See Charles Tilly, ed., *Citizenship, Identity and Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 7.
34. Jeffrey K. Olick, ed., *States of Memory: Continuities, Conflicts, and Transformations in National Retrospection* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), 4; Allan Megill, "History, Memory, Identity," *History of the Human Sciences* 11, no. 3 (1998): 39–40.
35. Peter Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001 [1999]), 4.
36. Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 5; David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), xv, xvi; and Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (London: Verso, 1994), 169.
37. Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996–98), 3 vols.; see also Green, *Cultural History*, chap. 6.
38. Michael Schudson, "Dynamics of Distortion in Collective Memory," in *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains and Societies Reconstruct the Past*, ed. Daniel Schacter, 346–47 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995).
39. Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, ix.
40. See Green, *Cultural History*, 105–6.
41. Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).
42. Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method," *American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (Dec. 1997): 1386–87; James W. Pennebaker, Dario Paez, and Bernard Rimé, eds., *Collective Memory of Political Events: Social Psychological Perspectives* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997); Judy Foster Davis, "Aunt Jemima is Alive and Cookin'? An Advertiser's Dilemma of Competing Collective Memories," *Journal of Macromarketing* 27 (2007): 35; Mark Osiel, *Mass Atrocity, Collective Memory, and the Law* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1997).
43. Olick, *States of Memory*, 6.
44. James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 20–29.
45. Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities*, 8. Italics in original.

- Cambridge  
47. Ibid., 41.
48. Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, 2–5.
49. Pennebaker, Paez, and Rimé, *Collective Memory of Political Events*, 40–43.
50. See Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam, "Collective Memory—What Is It?" *History and Memory* 8, no. 1 (1996): 30–50; and Osiel, *Mass Atrocity, Collective Memory, and the Law*, 213–14.
51. Megill, "History, Memory, Identity," 44. Italics in original.
52. Ibid., 40.
53. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, 176–77.
54. Gedi and Elam, "Collective Memory: What Is It?" 30–50.
55. Hodgkin and Radstone, *Memory, History, Nation*, 8.
56. Daniel Miller, *The Comfort of Things* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008).
57. Ibid., 293.
58. Megill, "History, Memory, Identity," 41.
59. Michael Allingham, *Choice Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 9.
60. See Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing After the Linguistic Turn* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 18.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Cubitt, Geoffrey. *History and Memory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007.
- Hodgkin, Katharine, and Susannah Radstone, eds. *Memory, History, Nation*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 2006.
- Mistral, Barbara A. *Theories of Social Remembering*. Buckingham: Open University, 2003.
- Radstone, Susannah, and Katharine Hodgkin, eds. *Memory Cultures*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 2006.
- Rossington, Michael, and Anne Whitehead, eds. *Theories of Memory: A Reader*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 2007.
- Wertsch, James V. *Voices of Collective Remembering*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.