

Introduction

What then is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain to him who asks, me, I do not know. (St. Augustine)

Hardly a day goes by without some media coverage or commentary about the politicization of the past and the politics of memory. There seems to be no shortage of debates about how to represent the past to ourselves and to the next generation. The recent memory boom is visible in history museum debates, monuments, film and photography, commemorations, political speeches and tourism. Academic studies of memory abound in sociology, philosophy, literature, cultural studies and history. Whether one looks at commemorations of the Second World War, debates over appropriate Holocaust memorials or public apologies for national pasts—the issue of memory seems to have an obsessive hold on the public imagination. Are we experiencing more memory now than before or has the mass media simply made us more aware of the recent past? My sense is that the interest in memory is more than an academic trend or a new way of talking about history. Indeed, the politicization of the past is linked to modern perceptions of time and identity. While our backward glance may be seen as a response to the uncertainties of the future, it has deeper roots in modern conceptions of time. To my mind, there are at least three reasons for the centrality of memory in contemporary culture: 1) the modern acceleration of time 2) shift from hard to liquid modernity entailing greater interest in the past and 3) the growing importance of the mass media in everyday life.

The Modern Acceleration of Time

The modern break with tradition, democratization of history, secularization of society and distinction between community and society are among just a few of the phrases associated with modernity. Complementing Pierre Nora's idea of the modern acceleration of history, the German historian, Reinhart Koselleck emphasizes how the break with pre-modernity entails a qualitative shift in our understanding of time (Nora 1996, Koselleck 1985). Beginning with the French Revolution, a different sense of future emerged. While medieval time was predominantly cyclical and contained the Messianic promise of redemption, modern time is open-ended and anticipates an ever accelerating future. The shift to modernity means that 'time is no longer simply the medium in which all histories take place; it gains a historical quality' (Koselleck 1985: 246). Modernity

accompanies a shift in our perception of time and historical consciousness. Heralding a kind of new time (*Neuzeit*), modernity brings about a reversal of the structure of time enabling the future to become increasingly more important than the past. Since the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, belief in progress and the infinite perfectibility of science have become modern creeds that we often take for granted.

Acceleration, initially perceived in terms of an apocalyptic expectation of temporal abbreviation heralding the Last Judgment, transformed itself – also from the mid-eighteenth century – into a concept of historical hope. (Ibid., 36-37)

Koselleck's 'semantics of historical time' is part of his lifelong project, the *Geschichtliche Begriffsgeschichte* (the historical history of concepts) (Brunner ed. 1972-1993). Expressing more than a lexicon of historical concepts, *Begriffsgeschichte* is a method of historical understanding. The purpose of his project is to examine 'the dissolution of the old world and the emergence of the new in terms of the historicoconceptual comprehension of this process' (Koselleck quoted in Tribe 1985: xi). By studying the *Sattelzeit* or dawn of modernity, Koselleck is able to gain insight into modern historical consciousness and temporality. Influenced by Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, he examines how historical consciousness is shaped by the cultural and historical traditions that we are born into. For Gadamer, 'history does not belong to us, but we belong to it' (Gadamer 1975: 277). Koselleck interprets Gadamer's retrieval of tradition as a starting point for exposing the contradictions and ruptures within one's own lived tradition. In many ways, Koselleck's work focuses on a central question:

How, in a given present, are the temporal dimensions of past and future related? This query involves the hypothesis that in differentiating past and future, or (in anthropological terms) experience and expectation, it is possible to grasp something like historical time. (Koselleck 1985: xxiii)

Indeed, Koselleck's distinction between past and future can be linked with Maurice Halbwach's model of frameworks of memory (*les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*) and Nora's places of memory (*lieux de mémoire*). By arguing that the past is a space of experience (*Erfahrungsraum*), Koselleck emphasizes how the past is represented as a kind of topography in maps and timelines. The future, as the horizon of expectation (*Erwartungshorizont*), is qualitatively different from the past because it is open to the unknown and has not yet been experienced. 'The presence of the past is distinct to the presence of the future' (Ibid., 272). The poetic metaphors of the past as a spatial topography are helpful in understanding how experience can be located and concretized into places of memory such as museums and monuments. Likewise, the

metaphor of a horizon invokes Gadamer's hermeneutical 'horizon of understanding' and the open horizon of a future full of unknown possibilities.

Since each epoch understands time in a different way—past, present, and future have different meanings at different historical periods. 'Historical time, if the concept has a specific meaning, is bound up with social and political actions, with concretely acting and suffering human beings and their institutions and organizations' (Ibid., xxii). The modern acceleration of time entails more than intensity or speed. As Koselleck notes, it means a completely different sense of temporality in which time is no longer cyclical, but linear and oriented towards the open-ended future. If modernity is associated with belief in a progressively better future, contemporary conceptions of time seem to be marred by the opposite. If anything, one senses more hesitancy towards the future than optimism. Secularization, globalization and a growing mass culture have brought questions of identity to the fore. While we may participate in the same mass culture and consume similar products, the need for a fixed place of identity pushes us further and further towards the past. For it is there, that we seem to find a sense of continuity and stability that is otherwise absent from our everyday life. In many ways, the backward glance of Benjamin's angel of history has become emblematic of the contemporary preoccupation with memory. The angel of history is propelled towards the future while looking back at the ruins of the past.

Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise: it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. The storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin 1968: 257-258)

Benjamin's angel of history famously captures how faith in progress and rationality was ruptured by the barbarism of the Second World War, twentieth century ideologies and the Holocaust. Whether examined as the dark side of modernity in Adorno and Horkheimer's *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* or the modern and postmodern debates about the Enlightenment and meta-narratives; the Holocaust and the Gulag challenge a simple reading of modernity as progress. Described as an aporia for historical narration and representation, the Holocaust presents moral and philosophical challenges to modern identity and history (Friedlander 1992). It is at this point that I find the work of Pierre Nora, Zygmunt Bauman and Andreas Huyssen to be helpful. Nora's excavation of the places of French cultural memory links the modern acceleration of history with a growing interest in the past. If change is a permanent feature of modernity, one response to continual change and the uncertainty of the future is the obligation to remember the past. 'The commandment of the hour is thus "Thou shalt remember"' (Nora 1996: 10).

Liquid Modernity and the Shift from Future to Past

Eschewing earlier distinctions between modern and postmodern, Bauman suggests the interesting distinction between hard and liquid modernity. Complementing Koselleck's ideas about the structural change in temporality between pre-modern and modern, he argues that contemporary society is experiencing a second transformation in the structures of both time and space. In various places, most notably *Liquid Modernity*, Bauman argues for qualitative changes from hard modernity rooted in the industrial age of production to a liquid modernity of consumption and uncertainty. Expanding Marx's idea that 'all that is solid melts into air,' Bauman suggests that distinctions between modern and postmodern miss what is qualitatively different in contemporary society. If Marx's idea of the liquidity of modern society was made in the name of new 'new and improved solids' such as communism and the rule of the working class, Bauman suggests that liquid modernity is hesitant about the possibility of any solid future (Bauman 2000: 3).

The kind of modernity which was the target, but also the cognitive frame, of classical critical theory strikes the analyst in retrospect as quite different from the one which frames the lives of present-day generations. It appears 'heavy' (as against the contemporary 'light' or 'liquefied'); condensed (as against diffuse or 'capillary'); finally, systemic (as distinct from network-like). (Ibid., 25)

If the Fordist factory, bureaucracy and the panopticon represent aspects of hard modernity, liquid modernity is diffused into the globalized shopping mall, internet and advertisement. 'The society which enters the twenty-first century is no less 'modern' than the society which entered the twentieth; the most one can say is that it is modern in a different way' (Ibid., 28). To be modern is to cherish newness and ever-increasing modernization. For Bauman though, liquid modernity is characterized by two features: 'The first is the gradual collapse and swift decline of early modern illusion: of the belief that there is an end to the road along which we proceed, an attainable *telos* of historical change, a state of perfection to be reached tomorrow, next year or next millennium, some sort of good society...' (Ibid., 29) Everything solid melts *without* forming into a new solid. The second feature of liquid modernity is that privatization and individualization accompany the decline of solidity and stability. Large-scale improvements in society are shifted from the state to the individual. "'Fluid" modernity is the epoch of disengagement, elusiveness, facile escape and hopeless chase' (Ibid., 120).

While hard modern temporality is rooted in the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, liquid modern hesitancy toward the future makes the past more attractive. There is a marked shift away from anticipation of the future to memories of the past. Rather than attribute our obsession with the past as a form of pessimism and distrust of the future, Andreas Huyssen argues for a transformation in modern conceptions of temporality akin to Bauman's liquid modernity. 'Thus we are not

just experiencing another bout of pessimism and doubt of progress, but we are living through a transformation (*sic*) of this modern structure of temporality itself' (Huysen 1996: 8). Memories of the past are not captured or relived as 'experience' but rather 're-presentations' of remembered experience. In *Twilight Memories* and *Past Present*, Huysen articulates the link between memory and representation. 'The past is not simply there in memory, it must be articulated to become memory' (Ibid., 3). If the past is the space of experience, then the process of remembering also involves layers of reconstruction and imagination. Huysen captures how images of the past in literature, art and museums represent memories of the past as fragmentary traces, shadows and ciphers. 'At the end of the Proustian experience, with that famous Madeline, is the *memory of childhood (sic)*, not childhood itself' (Ibid.). We cannot retrieve childhood in its entirety, but only a flicker of childhood as it is remembered at a particular time. It is at this juncture of the acceleration of time and the disorientation of identity that memory becomes increasingly linked to that quintessentially modern place of memory and storytelling: the museum.

Memory and the Mass Media

With the omnipresence of the mass media in everyday life, there are more ways to remember and make sense of the past. Representation has shifted not only from an oral to a written culture; but more importantly, from a written to a visual culture. Such a change affects ways in which the past is represented and narrated. Film and photography are powerful media because images simultaneously connect and distance the audience to the past. In their primal sense of immediacy, mass media images link one to the past; however, in their literal suspension of time and narrative, mass-mediated images may also alienate viewers from historical events. Photography and film possess the dual capacity to simultaneously intensify or alienate individuals from a sense of historical consciousness. We are caught in the representation of history 'as if' we, ourselves, were present in this historical event—although curiously outside the event itself. With the development of technology and the mass media, we have the unprecedented ability to archive, catalogue, photograph, film, and record ourselves. As Huysen notes, the late twentieth century is ironically marked by *both* a culture of amnesia and an obsessive desire to remember. 'The difficulty of the current conjuncture is to think memory and amnesia together rather than simply to oppose them' (Ibid., 7). What does it mean to live in a culture in which the memory of historical events is so ephemeral and, yet at the same time, obsessed with chronicling and storing every human activity? Historical events are, on the one hand, recorded with minute attention to detail. Yet, on the other hand recent events are quickly forgotten as a new 'story' replaces the old. It was Adorno who first captured the museal-like quality of modern representation.

The German word, "museal" (museum-like), has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and

which are in the process of dying. They owe their preservation more to historical respect than to the needs of the present. (Adorno 1967: 175)

Adorno's concept of museal has an uncanny quality to it because the function of a museum becomes more like a mausoleum than archive. 'Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association. Museums are like the family sepulchers of works of art' (Ibid., 175). Hermann Lübbe later adds to Adorno's musealization by moving the concept from the formal museum to that of everyday life (Lübbe 1983). Not only is time accelerating; but technological change entails a contraction and shrinking of the present. 'In short, the contraction of the present entails a process whereby the space of time for which we can calculate our living conditions with a degree of constancy is shortened' (Lübbe 2009: 159). What distinguishes contemporary society from previous ones is the knowledge that most of the things surrounding us will soon be obsolete. This conscious knowledge of obsolescence means that the present shrinks in duration when compared with the perception of the present in previous periods of history. As a result of this contracting present, individuals have a greater need to catalogue, record, archive and store things before they are soon replaced by something else. 'Let me reiterate my view that the contraction of the present as outlined here, which complements the process of cultural museumification, represents a necessary but by no means sufficient condition for museumification' (Ibid., 162). Echoing Nietzsche, Lübbe diagnoses contemporary society as obsessed with representations of the past. Reflecting on Lübbe's broader reading of musealization, Huyssen writes that,

Lübbe showed how musealization was no longer bound to the institution of the museum, understood in the narrow sense, but had come to infiltrate all areas of everyday life. Lübbe's diagnosis posited an expansive historicism of our contemporary culture, and he claimed that never before had a cultural present been obsessed with the past to a similar extent. (Huyssen 1996: 22)

The phenomenon of musealization is visible in commemorations, film, photography, Internet archives and television. The more uncertain the future appears, the greater the desire to find solace and security in the past. The musealization of the past is connected with changing perceptions of time and space—as time accelerates and the present shrinks, the past seems to be captured, reconstructed, copy/pasted, blogged, tweeted and frozen at a dizzying pace. Like Huyssen and Lübbe, Baudrillard recognizes the musealization of everyday life. 'The museum is now everywhere, like a dimension of life itself' (Baudrillard 1983: 15). The mass media age has not only altered our understanding and remembrance of recent history, but has also changed the ways in which we identify and situate ourselves within the flow of historical events. By supplying a steady stream of stock images ranging from documentary footage to television dramas and cinema, an iconic vocabulary of images has developed. Cultural memory, as the indirect remembrance of the past that is linked to the present

is both intensified and lessened through the image database of the mass media. Koselleck's description of modernity as future-oriented and Bauman's conception of liquid modernity helps us to situate stories of the past within the framework of liquidity, fragility and uncertainty. Likewise, the shift away from the future towards the security of the past is accompanied by an increasing musealization of everyday life as the mass media offers more possibilities for representing the past.

Cultural Memory in the Information Age

With the advent of the Internet, we've come to expect easy digital access to the past. With a click of the mouse and the right hotlinks, history seems to literally unfold before our very eyes. Yet, there is something deeply troubling about our near obsession with storing the past. Are we really more in touch with the past than before or has the digital age ushered in a false smugness? Nietzsche's ascerbic critique of 19th century historicism still offers insight into our 21st century 'historical fever' (Nietzsche 1980: 10). By trying to capture every aspect and detail of the past, we risk losing sight of the present. History has to be useful *for life*; it shouldn't take us away from it. Nietzsche argues for the necessity of finding a balance or horizon between memory and forgetting. To put it simply, he cautions against the tendency to become a 'gravedigger of the present.' In his mind, there are three different kinds of historians or gravediggers: monumental, antiquarian and critical. Monumental history is reductive and simplifies the ambiguous complexity of historical choices. Large events and heroes are contrasted with the ordinariness of contemporary life. Events in the past form a great chain or grand narrative—culminating in the paucity of the present. Nietzsche cautions against a monumental vision of the past because it tends to dwarf the present by calling undue attention to heroic ruptures and breaks within ordinary time.

Thus, whenever the monumental vision of the past rules over the other ways of looking at the past, I mean the antiquarian and the critical, the past itself suffers damage: very great portions of the past are forgotten and despised, and flow away like a grey uninterrupted flood, and only single embellished facts stand out as islands... (Ibid., 17)

Antiquarian history, on the other hand offers a pious vision of the past. Like the antique collector, the past is preserved uncritically for the sake of preservation. As such, the past becomes a place of consolation and reassurance. When the antiquarian vision of history dominates, Nietzsche detects the 'odour of decay' (Ibid., 21). With the emphasis on preservation for the sake of preservation, the present loses its link to the antiquarian past.

When history serves past life so as to undermine further and especially higher life, when the historical sense no longer preserves life but mummifies it: the tree dies naturally, beginning at the top and slowly dying towards the roots – and in the end the root itself generally decays. (Ibid.)

The present is eclipsed by an uncritical appreciation of the past. Finally, the critical historian condemns and judges the past based on the needs of the present. While a critical sense of history is necessary so that individuals in the present can judge the past rather than revere or preserve it, Nietzsche criticizes excessive critique because it too easily leads to a denial of the link between past and present.

It is always a dangerous process, namely dangerous for life itself: and men or ages which serve life in this manner of judging and annihilating a past are always dangerous and endangered men and ages. For since we happen to be the results of earlier generations we are also the results of their aberrations, passions and errors, even crimes; it is not possible quite to free oneself from this chain. (Ibid., 22)

Nietzsche's observations on the abuse of a historical sense, whether monumental, antiquarian or critical still ring true today. Great leaders and epochs loom large as cultural 'islands' of the past while our mass culture thrives on antiquarian oddities and quaint theme parks. The building of memorials and museums coupled with the re-naming and demolition of older ones is a perennial point of contention. In this age of information overload, where yesterday's newspaper is already an antique, the present is often reduced to a minute nanosecond. Obsessed, as we are, with archiving our personal pasts—in family albums, genealogies, videos and digital cameras—all experience is increasingly digitally mediated. Ours seems to be an age of instant memorialization. It is difficult to simply experience an event without recording or capturing it for later viewing. Caught on vacation without a camera, we somehow feel that we are missing something without the mediation of its visual representation. Whether or not we actually look back at the photos that we took is of lesser importance than the actual snapshots that magically validate our experience as authentic and meaningful. The camera placates our fears of forgetfulness by capturing the moment. Our obsession with memory is driven by an injunction against forgetting. The present exists for us as a kind of 'memorial culture.' Because we are saturated with images of the past through de-contextualized documentary film footage, cd-roms, websites, audio recordings, history books, novels, museum exhibitions, and memorials, the past becomes a virtual treasure chest to be ransacked at will. By blurring the line between information and entertainment, the mass media provide the illusion of re-experiencing the past. With this curious distortion of past and present, we experience time differently. It is dilated and seems to exist simultaneously within the present.

But do the mass media help us to remember more? With the speed of contemporary technological change, old media become obsolete faster than we can translate the data into a new readable form. Paper once filled the national archives, now they include celluloid, outdated hard drives and unreadable databases. So what happened? And how might the information age affect our cultural memory? In many ways, Siegfried Kracauer's astute observation that the things of everyday life are more revealing than philosophical systems may illuminate our peculiar predicament.

The position that an epoch occupies in the historical process can be determined more strikingly from an analysis of its inconspicuous surface-level expressions than from that epoch's judgments about itself. Since these judgments are expressions of the tendencies of a particular era, they do not offer conclusive testimony about its overall constitution. The surface-level expressions, however, by virtue of their unconscious nature, provide unmediated access to the fundamental substance of the state of things. (Kracauer 1995: 75)

Our historical fever and obsession with the past are immediately visible in the multitude of digital collections and archives. Kracauer's emphasis on the mundane and quotidian provides a fresh approach to understanding how new information technologies are affecting our sense of time and history. Places where information is stored such as collections, archives and digital archives provide 'unmediated access' to our perception of the past.

Collecting and Archiving

Any set of things no matter how small can be a collection. From stamps to rare books and paintings, a narrative is given to organize the objects. The collector is not interested in the function of the objects, but in the stories that these objects house. As Walter Benjamin wryly noted, 'The period, the region, the craftsmanship, the former ownership—for a true collector the whole background of an item adds up to a magic encyclopedia whose quintessence is the fate of his object' (Benjamin 1968: 60). Objects become souvenirs (or places of memory) inspiring recollection. They are ruins or traces of a bygone time. As owners of collections, we are heirs to a past and progenitors to a possible future. This passion for collection has taken on a new twist with eBay, blogs, Facebook and YouTube. Concurrent with the speed of technological change is our desire to stand still and find a link—no matter how tenuous—to a warmer past. Collections store memories and fixate identities. Here again, Benjamin rings true: 'every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector's passion borders on the chaos of memories' (Ibid.). The collector has his or her own sense of order that he bequeaths to his things. Without such a narrative, the found objects are no longer collectibles worthy of another's gaze, but oddities destined for forgetfulness. When something enters a collection, it has secured a

foothold in our memory. When Otto Bettmann fled Germany in the 1930s, he left with a trunk full of otherwise random pictures that later became the powerful Corbis collection. Many documentary stock images owe their sustenance to his chaotic passion for collecting the flickering images of recent history. Whether images, books, or china; collections are reduced to things that somehow evoke a glimpse of the past. They are 'things' that someone, like Bettmann, deemed worth salvaging from the dustbin of history. Whether they finally end up on someone's shelf, a second-hand store or in a museum as part of a blockbuster exhibition, the objects are still things suffused with whimsical meaning.

Collections can be private, but archives are by nature meant for public display. Originating from the Greek *arkheia* or town hall, the archive is, by definition, 'a repository for memories or information: *the archive of the mind*' (*American Heritage Dictionary*). Historically though the conception of the archive has already gone through a dramatic sea change even before the appearance of the Internet. In pre-capitalist societies, memory was in the hands of the church, state, and noble families. Archives were maintained and used by scholars and priests rather than by society in general. In many ways, Pierre Nora's ruminations on memory illuminate our present situation. 'Modern memory is first of all archival. It relies entirely on the specificity of the trace, the materiality of the vestige, the concreteness of the recording, the visibility of the image' (Nora 1996: 8). In the general introduction to his edited volumes on French national memory, Nora reflects on the structural shift that the category of memory is undergoing in a mass media age. 'We suffer from a hypertrophy of memory, which is inextricably intertwined with our sense of memory's loss and concomitant institutionalization' (Ibid., 9). The obsession with storing the past accompanies a deep awareness of the loss of traditional life. Because the pace of everyday life is so fast, we try to grasp whatever remains and fragments we can. The past validates our fragile foothold on the present. 'What we call memory is in fact a gigantic and breathtaking effort to store the material vestiges of what we cannot possibly remember, thereby amassing an unfathomable collection of things that we might someday need to recall' (Ibid., 8). Collections, card catalogues and archives bequeath an order to the mountains of information and detritus surrounding us.

While traditional collections and archives house original objects; the Internet and visual media store copies and simulations. Photography was the first stage in the blurring of original and copy. Likewise, Andy Warhol's prints proved the futility of trying to distinguish between the two. With the Internet, the line between referent and copy is completely distorted because 'there is no there, there.' The Internet heralds a structural transformation not only of our systems of information storage and retrieval but more importantly of how we think about ourselves as historical beings. What and how we remember are irreparably altered. As James Gleick says,

Meanwhile, in its unofficial way, the Internet is transforming the way information is stored. The traditional function of libraries, gathering books for permanent

storage or one-at-a-time lending, has been thoroughly confused. Archiving of the on-line world is not centralized. *The network distributes memory (sic)* (Gleick 1999).

Internet experts such as Stewart Brand caution that we are becoming cultural amnesiacs (Brand 1999). The rapid obsolescence of media technology blocks our access to the past because we will not be able to read the old files. Our fantastic short-term memory comes at a very heavy price because in the long run, we forget more. Whereas paper can be read by anyone, files stored in outdated computer languages are easily lost in space. Arguing for the necessity of a long-term time frame, Brand and his colleagues are in no way harkening back to a pre-computer age. Rather they are quick to point out the irony of our information age. We seem to have more information than before, but the speed of technological change obfuscates our ability to 'read' the texts. While the past seems infinitely accessible, computers cannot create a living link between past and future. Acutely aware of the power of the Internet, Brand cautions against the Faustian seduction of technology and argues for a responsible use of digital media. He doesn't advocate a return to the old Smith-Corona but attentiveness to how the Internet is altering our sense of time and historical consciousness. The Internet indulges the antiquarian in us by literally preserving infinite amounts of information. Virtual archives have merged with musty attics. As Gleick bleakly observes,

The Internet turns a large fraction of humanity into a sort of giant organism – an intermittently connected information-gathering creature – and really, amnesia doesn't seem to be its fatal flaw. This new being just can't throw anything away. It is obsessive. It has forgotten that some baggage is better left behind. *Homo sapiens* has become a packrat. (Gleick 1999)

So we are back to Nietzsche and the 19th century. We have to find a balance between the historical and unhistorical. Not everything is memorable. The human ability to adapt and place events into perspective is central for keeping a perspective on life. Whether Nietzsche's antidotes of the unhistorical (forgetfulness) or the ahistorical (art and science) are sufficient is an open question. Nonetheless, there is a correlation between the speed of everyday life, fragmentation of individual identity and obsession with the past. Nietzsche's sharp condemnation of the 19th century sentiment as 'gravediggers of the present' is deeply unsettling and perhaps also unfair—but that does not mean that it is not worth thinking about. On the contrary, the digital media age seems to encourage more storage and categorization of things from the past. It is Nietzsche's central theme, namely that the past does and should matter, *within* the light of the present that is important to keep in perspective.

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Although each generation discovers new ways to order the chaos around them, the desire to remember and tell stories about the past is as old as the goddess of

memory herself. In the Greek world, memory was personified in the titan goddess, Mnemosyne. As the daughter of time (Kronos) and earth (Gaia), Mnemosyne had the gift of reason and the ability to name all objects that we now remember. As a mythological figure, Mnemosyne personifies the mysterious combination of memory, imagination and storytelling. According to Hesiod, Mnemosyne slept with Zeus for nine consecutive nights and gave birth to the nine muses: Clio, the muse of history, Urania, of astronomy, Melpomene, of tragedy, Thalia, of comedy, Terpsichore, of dance, Calliope, of epic poetry, Erato, of love poetry, Polyhymnia, of songs to the gods, and Euterpe, muse of lyric poetry. If the muses each inspire particular manifestations of creativity, Mnemosyne is the mother of all creativity. Embodying memory, she is able to order the flow of time into a narrative form that can be remembered. Combining experience and imagination, memory is an integral part of the human condition—whether in its ancient Greek or modern manifestations. Mnemosyne is thus by implication not only the goddess of memory but the mother of storytelling. Narrative and representation are attempts to cast chaos into order, to make sense of things that would otherwise seem random, chaotic and meaningless. Whether manifest as myth, history, tragedy, philosophy, song or dance—all recorded human activity has its origin in Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory.

The various chapters in *Memory and Representation in Contemporary Europe: The Persistence of the Past* are reflections on different aspects of memory in contemporary Europe. Why do certain places and not others symbolically capture the past and freeze time? Likewise, why does the process of memory, as a fluid and changing activity, seem to prevent its own solidification? The chapters reflect not only on the persistence of the past as a theme linked to media, modernity and time, but also discuss the politics of memory within a changing Europe. The first two chapters were written on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the fall of communism. ‘The Slippery Slope of Memory’ (Chapter 1) analyzes different ways of coming to terms with a difficult past. Discussing Timothy Garton Ash’s prescient outline of the problem of how to deal with the past, the essay argues for the fluidity of past and present as well as on the dual dangers of the sacralization and trivialization of memory. ‘Agreeing to Disagree’ (Chapter 2) addresses the question of whether Europe even needs a common memory of World War II and the post-war period. In this longer essay, the legacy of the past as both an inheritance and a burden is addressed. Framed within the context of a traumatic understanding of the past, ‘Agreeing to Disagree’ suggests that there are three broad narratives about World War II: a West European, East European/former Communist and Russian/Soviet. Each of these narratives locates the memory of the Holocaust in a different way. In reflecting on this matrix, I maintain *both* the centrality of the Holocaust and the importance of plurality.

The next three chapters analyze cultural examples from Germany after unification. These chapters focus on uncanny places of German memory as represented in novels, photographs and individual biographies. ‘The Ethics of Seeing’ (Chapter 3) discusses the ideological power of documentary photographs

taken in Germany at the end of the war. Reflecting on Dagmar Barnouw's *Germany 1945* and Barbie Zelizer's *Remembering to Forget*, the essay is also a meditation on Susan Sontag's concern with the power of documentary photography to shape memories of the past. 'The Sound of Silence' (Chapter 4) compares Bernhard Schlink's novel *The Reader* with Gesine Schwan's book, *Politics and Guilt*. Here, I examine the power of silence—from repression and evasion to how silence affects the next generation. In looking back one might say that both Schlink and Schwan suggest that one has a moral responsibility to address the past, *whether* one wants to or not. Connected to 'The Ethics of Seeing' and 'The Sound of Silence', the essay 'Living in the Third Person' (Chapter 5) reflects on the life of one individual who tried to live by the motto that not only is the past a foreign country, but also a different person. 'Living in the Third Person' examines how a former SS officer, Hans Schneider officially 'died,' renamed himself Hans Schwerte, remarried his wife and adopted his child only to later become a well-respected professor of German literature in West Germany. The life of Schneider/Schwerte is an uncanny example of self-transformation from authoritarianism to democracy.

The next two chapters, 'Goodbye to Grand Narratives?' (Chapter 6) and 'Memory, Pluralism and the Agony of Politics' (Chapter 7) deal with examples from the Estonian political landscape. 'Goodbye to Grand Narratives?' suggests that the controversy accompanying the re-location of a Soviet-era war memorial was testimony to what Tony Judt called the 'unraveling' of post-war memories. The comfortable cold war narratives of winner and loser, liberator and fascist literally crumbled at the feet of a solitary sculpture in the center of the Estonian capital. 'Memory, Pluralism and the Agony of Politics' discusses the dangers of reading the past through the eyes of victimhood. Taking issue with Schmitt and Mouffe's antagonistic politics based on the dichotomy of friend and foe, I suggest a greater appreciation of pluralism in the sense of Arendt and Berlin. In many ways, the essay is linked with earlier themes and argues for a richer understanding of pluralism over a dogmatic and antagonistic representation of the past. 'Memory, Pluralism and the Agony of Politics' likewise attempts to steer through the difficulties of relativism and the temptation to use the past as a weapon against political opponents. The final chapter, 'The Fata Morgana of Revolution' (Chapter 8) highlights how memories of revolutions are part of the story of modernity. 1989 has joined the pantheon of earlier revolutions. Symbolizing radical newness and rupture, revolutions are the pinnacle of political action. Reflecting on Arendt's ideas about revolution, the essay analyzes their ephemeral and transitory nature. The postscript discusses the legacy of totalitarianism and the revolutions of 1989. The issue is less of whether one should remember, but rather *how* to internalize the various lessons of the past for the future of Europe.

One could say that the challenge of a book about memory lies in its seeming randomness and incoherence. That is, to some extent true. Reflections on memory are not always read from front to back—but rather offer the reader the chance to read the parts that are of interest to them at a particular moment. Likewise, chapters do not provide a neat argument with conclusive findings. But, the more

that I teach, write and think about memory, the more I become convinced of its fragmentary and ephemeral nature. The chapters in *Memory and Representation in Contemporary Europe: The Persistence of the Past* thus offer the reader occasions upon which to take stock of different but overlapping contours of past and present in contemporary Europe. Looking back, they are united in their intellectual reference points and influences. In addition to the seminal work of Nietzsche, Gadamer, Halbwachs and Nora, there are four thinkers whose work permeates all of the chapters, that of Arendt, Berlin, Judt and Sontag. The book thus stands literally on the shoulders of giants. Why have I singled out these thinkers and not others? Simply because these are the thinkers, to whom I have returned to, over and over again as a reader, teacher and writer. Although they are different, they share deep moral convictions and poetic styles of writing. Moreover, they are masters of the essay as a literary form of writing.

Arendt is certainly a strong voice haunting this book. From her controversial ruminations on the banality of evil to her majestic plea for new beginnings and the need to think from the point of view of the other person, Arendt is a rich source of inspiration. Her discussion of pluralism complements that of Isaiah Berlin. Both recognize the allure and dangers of trying to fit the complexity of the world into one philosophical or ideological system. Berlin's arguments against monism and passionate plea for pluralism are an integral theme throughout this book. What links Arendt and Berlin to Sontag's work is a deep appreciation of literature. Whether found in Kafka, Broch or Benjamin, the poetic imagination is acknowledged as an important expression of the link between past, present and future. Sontag's influence is most visible in her prescient reflections on photography. To my mind, she is unparalleled in her assessment of the power of the image to enforce and re-enforce a moral position. The final giant whose influence is felt in almost every chapter is that of Tony Judt. Unique in his combination of historian, moralist and public intellectual, this book would be unimaginable without his polemic observations on post-war Europe. By adding the suffix *mis* to memory, Judt added another dimension to the dichotomy between memory and forgetting. A mis-memory does indeed contain a grain of truth, but is somehow off the mark and remembered as the entire truth. Likewise, the metaphor of the unraveling of memory invokes Penelope as she spins her cloth each day only to unravel it in the evening. Memory of the past defies completion—parts are woven together, while other pieces unravel. What links all four writers together is a common concern with the old problem of evil. Defiant against cynicism and relativism, there is a burning sense to try and understand the moral choices that individuals make within the context of their times and to acknowledge the legacy that is the direct or indirect consequence of those actions.

Memory is a *re*-presentation of past experience. One can neither recall everything nor re-live something that happened in the past. Memory, by its very nature is fragmentary, episodic, unpredictable, and yet full of meaning for the one who remembers. One could say that it is the very impermanence of memory that seems to defy representation. Whether expressed in historical documents, novels, monuments, poetry or film—there is an explicit attempt to catch meaningful traces

of the past for future generations. The act of memory recalls and interprets the past in both its positive and negative aspects—as tradition and traumatic burden. Regardless of whether memories of the past are written, sculpted or captured on film—as representations, they have a way of taking on a life of their own.

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