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## Theories of Social Remembering

- Why does collective memory matter?
- How is social memory generated, maintained and reproduced?
- How do we explain changes in the content and role of collective memory?

Through a synthesis of old and new theories of social remembering, this book provides the first comprehensive overview of the sociology of memory. This rapidly expanding field explores how representations of the past are generated, maintained and reproduced through texts, images, sites, rituals and experiences. The main aim of the book is to show to what extent the investigation of memory challenges sociological understandings of the formation of social identities and conflicts. It illustrates the new status of memory in contemporary societies by examining the complex relationships between memory and commemoration, memory and identity, memory and trauma, and memory and justice.

The book consists of six chapters, with the first three devoted to conceptualizing the process of remembering by analysing memory's function, status and history, and by locating the study of memory in a broader field of social science. The second part of the book directly explores and discusses theories and studies of social remembering. The glossary offers a concise and up-to-date overview of the development of relevant theoretical concepts.

This is an essential text for undergraduate courses in social theory and the sociology of memory, as well as a wider audience in cultural studies, history and politics.

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Cover design: Barker/Hilsdon

[www.openup.co.uk](http://www.openup.co.uk)

ISBN 0-335-20832-0



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Barbara A. Misztal



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# **THEORIES OF SOCIAL REMEMBERING**

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THEORIZING **SOCIETY**

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**Open University Press**  
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McGraw-Hill Education  
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Berkshire  
England  
SL6 2QL

email: [enquiries@openup.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@openup.co.uk)  
world wide web: [www.openup.co.uk](http://www.openup.co.uk)

and  
325 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19106, USA

First Published 2003

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A catalogue record of this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 335 20831 2 (pb) 0 335 20832 0 (hb)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
CIP data applied for

Typeset by RefineCatch Limited, Bungay, Suffolk  
Printed in Great Britain by Bell and Bain Ltd, Glasgow

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In memory of my mother



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## **SERIES EDITOR'S FOREWORD**

Sociology is reflexively engaged with the object of its study, society. In the wake of the rapid and profound social changes of the later twentieth century, there is extensive debate as to whether our theoretical frames of reference are appropriate for novel configurations of culture, economy and society. Sociologists further need to ask whether recent theoretical preoccupations – for example with the ‘cultural turn’, post-modernism, deconstruction, globalization and identity – adequately grasp social processes in the Millennium. One crucial issue here is the relationship between contemporary social problems and theories on the one hand and the classical heritage of Marx, Durkheim, Weber and Simmel on the other. Sociology is still reluctant to forget its founders and the relevance of the classical tradition is both powerful and problematic. It is powerful because the classics constitute a rich source of insights, concepts and analyses that can be deployed and reinterpreted to grasp current problems. But it is problematic because the social world of the classics is largely that of industrial, imperial and high bourgeois European societies prior to the First World War. How do we begin to relate the concepts formed in this milieu to the concerns of the globalized social world that is post-colonial, post-industrial and has seen the rise and collapse of Soviet socialism? Social theory in the twenty-first century further needs to grasp the fateful contemporary paradox that resurgent nationalism and religious attachments, exposing the fractured and dispersed basis of intolerance, accompany the growth of globalized culture, politics and economies. How does sociology reconfigure the understandings of identity, culture, history and society in appropriate ways? These are some of the major challenges for sociology that this series, *Theorizing Society*, aims to address.

This series intends to map out the ways in which social theory is being transformed and how contemporary issues have emerged. Each book in the series offers a concise and up-to-date overview of the principle ideas,

innovations and theoretical concepts in relation to its topic. The series is designed to provide a review of recent developments in social theory, offering a comprehensive collection of introductions to major theoretical issues. The focus of individual books is organized around topics which reflect the major areas of teaching and research in contemporary social theory, including modernity, post-modernism, structuralism and post-structuralism; culture and economy; globalization; feminism and sexuality; memory, identity and social solidarity. While being accessible to undergraduates these books allow authors to develop personal and programmatic statements about the state and future development of theoretically defined fields.

Barbara Misztal's *Theories of Social Remembering* addresses the key issues identified in this series. The main aim of this book is to provide an overview of theories of social remembering and to show to what extent they have challenged sociological understandings of the formation of social identities and conflicts. Although memory is essential to the ability of individuals and groups to sustain identities over time it has received relatively little attention in sociology (since Halbwachs' seminal work in the 1920s) by contrast with other disciplines, such as psychology. Yet, as Misztal shows, since the 1980s there has been an explosion of interest in memory following the emergence of new communication media, sites of remembrance, heritage movements, and reassessments of national pasts in new democracies in eastern Europe, South America and South Africa. She argues that in the post-Cold War world, all societies, especially those that have recently gone through difficult, 'heroic' or simply confusing periods, are involved in the deep search for truth about their past. While sociological theories try to shed light on the workings of collective memory, this rapidly expanding field of research is assisted by the shift taking place in sociology from the study of social structures and normative systems to the study of 'practice', stimulated by the growing interest in culture as the constitutive symbolic dimension of all social processes.

In a wide-ranging analysis of theories of memory as a social and cultural process Misztal identifies questions to which there have not yet been coherent answers. These include questions about how societies remember and why the past is of any relevance? *Who* is a remembering subject and *what* is the nature of the past? Misztal argues that for the notion of memory to be a useful analytical concept it needs to retain a sense of both its individual and collective dimensions. She outlines major theoretical approaches with the intention of moving beyond these through close attention to the dynamics of the remembering process. Developing an inter-subjectivist approach Misztal avoids both social determinism and visions of an atomistic individualistic social order. Collective memories are seen as intersubjectively constituted results of shared experience, ideas, knowledges and cultural practices through which people construct a relationship to the past. The main 'memory groups' (nations, ethnic groups and families) are all, however, affected

by processes of social differentiation and globalization. At the same time the decline of traditions and their selective re-appropriation in increasingly plural and fluid social settings creates highly complex relationships between memory and history, memory and time and memory and imagination. Thus Misztal weaves together a theory of social memory that draws on classical studies such as Halbwachs but also regards 'memories' as the embodied accomplishments of agents in a complex world. One consequence of this is that the sites and symbols of collective memories such as museums, monuments, and landscapes become increasingly contested such that memory needs to be viewed as the product of multiple competing discourses.

Understanding memory as a contested terrain is central to understanding the particular character of modernity. Although the recording of personal and collective memory is archaic, modernity encounters 'social amnesia' brought about by the dislocation between traditional and modern forms of cultural transmission. This has been compounded by the way the modern era has been uniquely structured by trauma, of wars, genocide and especially the Holocaust. Whereas memory and the politics of memory are ancient (and Misztal traces their appearance in Ancient Greece) the idea of memory as the recovery of trauma is modern and draws particularly on the unique impact of Freud. The linking of traumatic memory with the struggle for justice poses new challenges for societies to remember their collective wrongs while moving towards forms of reconciliation. *Theories of Social Remembering* brings fresh insight and systematic theorizing to this emerging area and will contribute to deeper understanding of the core theoretical challenges to sociology in the early twenty-first century.

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## INTRODUCTION

This book explores the workings of collective memory by presenting theories and research in this rapidly expanding field. As a result of many recent studies investigating how social memory is generated, maintained and reproduced through texts, images, sites and experiences, the concept of collective memory has become one of the more important topics addressed in today's social science. Although the conceptualization of the notion of memory varies, the increased number of approaches across all disciplines recognizes the importance of social frameworks and contexts in the process of remembering. This recent revival of interest in the concept of collective memory in inter- and cross-disciplinary studies of remembering presents sociology with a unique opportunity. In order to take full advantage of this, we must start with an overview of theories of social remembering. Moreover, if the role of sociology is to investigate the different ways in which humans give meaning to the world (Trigg 2001: 42), and if memory is crucial to our ability to make sense of our present circumstances, researching collective memory should be one of its most important tasks. The aim of this book, therefore, is to examine the contribution of sociological theories to our understanding of the workings of memory, and to evaluate to what extent such studies have challenged our understanding of various forms of collective memory and their role in different societies.

The process of remembering has always fascinated people because it is so fundamental to our ability to conceive the world. Memory, because it 'functions in every act of perception, in every act of intellection, in every act of language' (Terdiman 1993: 9), is the essential condition of our cognition and reflexive judgement. It is closely connected with emotions because emotions are in part about the past and because memory evokes emotions. Memory is also a highly important element in the account of what it is to be a person, as it is the central medium through which identities are constituted: 'A really

successful dissociation of the self from memory would be a total loss of the self – and thus of all the activities to which a sense of one’s identity is important’ (Nussbaum 2001: 177). It can be seen as the guardian of difference, as it allows for the recollection and preservation of our different selves, which we acquire and accumulate through our unique lives (Wolin 1989: 40).

The re-emergence of interest in the concept of memory in social sciences was triggered by the ‘commemorative fever’ of the 1980s and 1990s. In those decades scarcely a month, let alone a year, passed without some celebrations. This astonishing burst of interest in social memory can be explained by such factors as the impressive number of civic anniversaries (from the American Bicentennial in the USA to the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II), the growing interest in ethnic groups’ memories, the revival of fierce debates over the Holocaust and the Vichy regime, and the end of the Cold War, which brought about an explosion of previously suppressed memories (Kammen 1995a; Ashplant *et al.* 2000a, 2000b). Among other trends responsible for the present-day ‘obsession with memory’ (Huysen 1995) are the increasingly ‘authoritative’ role of films which try to tell us how it ‘really was’, the growing importance of sites of remembrance for tourism and heritage movements, the popularity of the genre of autobiography and the reassessment of national pasts and cultures in the newly democratized countries of Eastern Europe, South America and South Africa, where reckoning with past wrongs has been publicly debated.

While we will return to a detailed account of the factors responsible for the recent visibility and importance of social memory in social and political practice in the following chapters, here it is worth noticing that the ‘recent passion for memory’ (Nora 1996a) has established it as one of the main discourses that is increasingly used in social sciences, not merely to explain the past but also to explore the present. This high status of memory discourse can be seen as a result of three general trends. First, it can be viewed as an effect of the nature of present-day intellectual culture in which a broad pattern of ‘explanatory pluralism’ is increasingly accepted (Kammen 1995a). Second, the recent interest in memory can be explained by the growing use of the past as a screen into which different groups can project their contradictions, controversies and conflicts in objective forms (Huysen 1995). Finally, the rapid expansion of the study of memory has fuelled the rise of sociological interest in culturally acquired categories of understanding, which itself has been stimulated by the development taking place in cultural studies. These three trends, in the context of the development of electronic media and artificial memory storage, ensure the popularity of the notion of memory in sociological texts. The identification of memory and culture directs the search for the sources of stability and consistency of memories – first to ‘schematic organization, which makes some ideas or images more accessible than others, and secondly, to cues embedded in the

physical and social environment' (DiMaggio 1997: 267). Hence, recent scholarship views the construction of memory as a social and cultural process and analyses institutions' aims and operations responsible for that construction, while also examining objects, places and practices in which cultural memory is embodied.

Since remembering 'is nothing but tracking down what is concealed in the memory' (Albertus Mangus, quoted in Draaisma 2000: 35), studies of remembering are nothing less than research into the investigation of memory. Remembering is, writes Draaisma, a process of investigation of the hidden nature of memories. Over the centuries, everyday language has provided people with various comparisons which, through their combination of image and language, are capable of describing the complexity of remembering and forgetting. These analogies, such as caves, labyrinths, grottoes and mineshafts, have always been accompanied by a range of strategies used to assist memory. Various procedures employed as memory aids tend to reflect techniques of their time. In place of the mnemonic aids that supported the memories of the ancient Greeks or the knots tied at the corner of a handkerchief that helped our grandmothers to remind themselves of something, we now rely on external devices such as libraries, electronic diaries and the internet. We also use various emblems of remembrance: from rosemary, carried by Ophelia, who in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* says 'There's rosemary, that's for remembrance' (Act IV, Scene V) to poppies, which are symbols of our remembrance of the victims and veterans of the Great War. The complexity of the process of remembering has likewise been reflected in numerous metaphors developed by philosophers and scientists through the centuries, from Plato's wax tablet and Locke's 'storehouse of our ideas', through Freud's 'mystic writing pad', which erases yet keeps traces of what disappears, to today's comparison of memory to artificial computer memory (Sutton 1998: 13–19). Since the nineteenth century, memory has become the subject of scientific research, yet neither the large and interdisciplinary field of memory studies nor any system of thought provides us with a full picture of human memory. Apart from a common consensus that memory is a complex and hard to grasp phenomenon, scientists – who, by comparison with artists and philosophers, have only approached the topic of memory relatively recently – have not yet produced a full, integrated explanation of the working of memory. While scientists' ideas generally take longer to permeate down into the stratum of everyday society, artists, who have always been fascinated by memory, seem to be better equipped not only to grasp the depth of memory but also to popularize their penetrating insights into its workings.

We owe a deeper and more insightful understanding of the workings of memory to creative writing, particularly the novel, which is capable of providing the kind of inward, authentically objective account of the past that enables us to understand it (Bakhtin 1981). One of the best descriptions of



the complexity of the process of remembering, understood as an act of representation in the memory of things past, can be found in novels of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It is enough here to mention the impact of Proust's famous masterpiece *Remembrance of Things Past* ([1922] 1989). The unique impact of Freud, who is commonly recognized as one of the forebears of the idea that the past continues to shape the present, can be attributed to his imaginative defiance of disciplinary boundaries which produced the creative combination of both literary and scientific insight. Although another important step in increasing our awareness of the complexity of the process of remembering belongs to sociology, until recently the topic of social memory has received relatively little attention from social scientists generally. Since memory has been seen as a characteristic of societies in which custom or tradition plays a decisive role, and since sociology has been from its beginning interested mainly in societies that place greater value upon change, the role of social remembering has not been an important subject of sociological debates. This was the situation at least until the development of the Durkheimian perspective which has expanded our understanding of the role of commemorative symbols and rituals in crystallizing the past and preserving order and solidarity. Although Durkheim ([1925] 1973) addresses memory directly only in his discussion of commemorative rituals and in relation to traditional societies, he stresses that every society displays and requires a sense of continuity with the past. Durkheim's idea of the importance of a sense of collective identity, seen as being reinforced through links to the past, is further elaborated by Maurice Halbwachs ([1926] 1950). He initiated the conceptualization of collective memory as shared social frameworks of individual recollections and, in the Durkheimian spirit, stressed that the coherence and complexity of collective memory tend to correspond to coherence and complexity at the social level and that this seemingly individual capacity is really a collective phenomenon.

Yet, despite this underlying understanding of the essential role of remembering in social life, and despite Halbwachs' discussion of the notion, it is difficult to find in sociological texts a direct definition of memory or an explicit account of how we remember the past. Collective memory does not seem to enjoy an independent standing, but rather has the status of an ephemeral or residual concept. Nonetheless, because of its crucial role in social life, the notion of social memory has played an important, although maybe not always explicitly formulated as such, role in the social sciences. For example, Weber (1978), who hardly mentioned memory, by rooting claims to legitimacy in tradition, drew our attention to the relations between collective memory and power. Mead (1932) argued that only the present is real, while the past is being continually constructed in and through the present. Following the Durkheimian link between memory and social order, Shils (1981) stressed the connection between collective memory and

tradition-building and argued that culture depends upon chains of memory, or tradition, seen as the storage of inherited conceptions, meanings and values essential for the social order. While such an approach disconnects social remembering from the actual thought process of any particular individual, it establishes the importance of social remembering as closely connected with the unity of a society and the conceptualization of collective memory as guaranteeing social identity, and as dependent on ritualized collective symbols. More recently, Giddens (1984), who does not explicitly rely upon this notion, viewed structures as memory traces which are constantly instantiated in social practices, or, in other words, as existing in the memory of knowledgeable agents.

What is lacking in all these examples is a direct and coherent answer to questions about how societies remember and why the past is of any relevance. This is a surprising absence, especially if we notice that sociological theories' concern with continuity and change entails the passage of time. However, with current sociology becoming aware of the issues of time (see Chapter 5) and with the publication of Connerton's book *How Societies Remember* (1989), which directly addresses the issue of collective memory (see Chapter 4), there are some signs of changes. This temporal turn in sociology, by addressing the question of how to link synchrony and diachrony, facilitates investigations of mechanisms by which societies incorporate of the past into the present. The resulting research is still, nevertheless, open to criticism as many of these new works are tinted by a social determinism of Halbwachs' groundwork analysis of memory. On the other hand, the impressive research in cognitive psychology is under attack for ignoring the social context of remembering, and for overlooking social rules of remembrance that tell us what we should remember and what should be forgotten. In order to overcome the individualistic bias of psychological theories and the social determinism of many sociological studies, this book aims to review traditional and recent interpretations of the idea of collective memory.

The main issue requiring clarification is the question of *who* is a remembering subject and *what* is the nature of the past. Following the claim of many writers, we argue here that in order for the notion of memory to be a useful analytical concept we need to retain a sense of both its individual and collective dimensions (Funkenstein 1993; Schudson 1997; Zerubavel 1997; Prager 1998; Sherman 1999). While societies, to use Funkenstein's (1993) instructive comparison, do not remember in the same way as they do not dance, individual remembering takes place in the *social context* – it is prompted by social cues, employed for social purposes, ruled and ordered by socially structured norms and patterns, and therefore contains much that is social (Schudson 1995; Zerubavel 1997). Such a perspective, by pointing out that individual memory is socially organized or socially mediated, emphasizes the social dimension of human memory, without, however,

necessarily being a straightforward projection of the shared remembering. In other words, the main assumption of the intersubjectivist sociology of memory is that, while it is the individual who remembers, remembering is more than just a personal act. The intersubjectivist approach, the significance of which becomes clear to its full extent in the course of the whole book, advocates the study of social contexts in which even the most personal memories are embedded, and the investigation of the social formation of memory by exploring the conditions and factors that make remembering in common possible, such as language, rituals, commemoration practices and sites of memories.

Turning now to the question about the nature of the past, we can, following Sartre, say that the past is not over and done with. It, like the present, is to some extent also part of a social reality and 'that, while far from being absolutely objective, nonetheless transcends our subjectivity and is shared by others around us' (Zerubavel 1997: 81). The past is not simply given in memory, 'but it must be articulated to become memory' (Huysen 1995: 3). This unavoidable gap between experiencing an event and remembering it, filled up by our creative interpretation of the past, constitutes memory. Moreover, we recall and memorize the past which is passed to us in various cultural practices and forms, which further suggests the social construction of the past as its memory is located in a wide range of cultural routines, institutions and artefacts (Schudson 1995: 346–7).

The argument that memory is intersubjectively constituted – which assumes that while it is an individual who remembers, his or her memory exists, and is shaped by, their relation with, what has been shared with others and that it is, moreover, always memory of an intersubjective past, of a past time lived in relation to other people – seems to be a central characteristic of new sociological theories of memory. Following this development, the book is primarily concerned with the social aspects of remembering and the results of this social experience – that is, the representation of the past in a whole set of ideas, knowledges, cultural practices, rituals and monuments through which people express their attitudes to the past and which construct their relations to the past.

### **The outline of the book**

The book consists of six chapters, with the first two devoted to elaborating the conceptualization of the process of remembering by analysing memory's function and history. Chapters 3 and 4 directly explore and discuss theories of social remembering, and Chapters 5 and 6 examine the location of memory in a broader field of social science and review the main fields of memory studies. After a short conclusion, the glossary offers a concise and up-to-date overview of the development of relevant theoretical concepts.

Chapter 1 directly addresses the issues concerning the functions and forms of memory. After a short presentation of the various forms and kinds of memory, sociological definitions of memory and collective memory's significance in modern societies are discussed. Collective memory is defined as the representation of the past, both that shared by a group and that which is collectively commemorated, that enacts and gives substance to the group's identity, its present conditions and its vision of the future. The next two sections examine the social formation of memory by looking at communities and institutions of memory. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the evolution of the status of memory, where it is argued that the shift in the prestige of memory can be linked to cultural change, seen as associated with the advancement of the means of communication and the transformation of techniques of power.

In order to throw light on changes in the status and meanings of memory, Chapter 2 briefly examines how cultures have been affected by the shift in the means of communication and social organization. It presents the history of memory by discussing the changes in aids to memory, from visual mnemonic techniques, through writing and print, to today's computer-enhanced methods of storing, transferring and constructing memory.

Chapter 3 is a summary presentation of the main theories of social remembering. It starts with Halbwachs' theory of social memory which draw on the Durkheimian perspective. This is followed by an overview of another influential approach, known as the invention of tradition, or the presentist approach. This approach describes how the social past has been constructed or reappropriated in order to serve current social interests and needs. In the next part of the chapter we critically evaluate the popular memory approach that explores how, when and why some social events are likely to form part of popular or unofficial memory. The final section examines recent works on social memory and directs our attention to the social and institutional relations of the production of memory, arguing that memory, far from being mechanical or stable, is actively restructured in a process of negotiation through time.

Chapter 4 addresses the issue of the nature of remembering by exploring how collective consensus is connected with the actual thought processes of any particular person. It discusses the embodiedness of memory as well as what makes an individual memory social. The role of generation and the significance of tradition, as a chain of memory, in shaping processes of remembering is also examined.

Chapter 5 examines the complex relationships between social memory studies and historiography, philosophy and psychology and argues that there is a need for an interdisciplinary integration of memory studies. After suggesting that further developments in our understanding of social memory should be built upon careful integration of various vocabularies and ideas with a continuation of the sociological tradition in the study of

memory, the chapter concludes with several illustrations of battles over memory.

The final chapter, which is devoted to an examination of the main trends in studying memory in the social sciences, provides an overview of four of the most important fields of research. The first section looks at the high-profile commemorative activities of recent years which have been reflected in numerous studies of war memory, commemoration rituals and public and personal remembrance of conflicts. Following the widespread interest in the subject of identity in recent sociological writings, the next section looks at the growing number of studies trying to shed light on the links between memory and identity and on the conditions behind various groups' attitudes towards their past in different periods of their history. Turning to studies of memory and trauma, we discuss investigations of Holocaust memory and look at how they explain the shifts and changing phases in countries' responses to the Holocaust throughout the postwar decades. The recent search for explanations about why certain social events are either retained or forgotten and how, when and why some social events are more likely to form part of social memory, is also of great importance in studies of the role of memory in securing social justice. The final section looks at the issue of retrospective justice and shows how and why newly democratized regimes construct new memories by addressing, with a help of their legal systems, the wrongdoings committed in the past era.

Since memory practices are increasingly seen as the central characteristic of contemporary cultural formations, studies of social memory are becoming an important part of any examination of contemporary society's main problems and tensions. Thus, it is concluded that studies of collective memory can provide important insights for a general theory of modernity.

### **Further reading**

- Olick, J.K. and Robbins, J. (1998) Social memory studies, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24(1): 105–41.
- Zelizer, B. (1995) Reading the past against the grain, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 12: 214–39.
- Zerubavel, E. (1997) *Social Mindscape: An Invitation to Cognitive Sociology*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.

## MEMORY EXPERIENCE

### The forms and functions of memory

*'... whatever takes place has meaning because it changes into memory'*

*(Milosz 2001)*

Human ability to retain and recollect a fact, event, or person from memory has been a topic of considerable interest to both scientists and artists for a long time. Yet, taking into account varieties of personal remembering (ranging from remembering an emotional feeling, through remembering where I left my car keys, or how to run the spelling check on my computer, or the date of the Battle of Hastings or how my daughter looks), it seems almost impossible to find a common underlying conceptualization of the process. Moreover, as its task involves summarizing, condensing or rewriting past events, memory is a complex but fallible system of storing information (Baddeley 1989: 51). Because of this difficulty in analysing memory we should view this faculty as some kind of active orientation towards the past, as an act of 'thinking of things in their absence' (Warnock 1987: 12). By referring to the process of remembering as 'memory experience' (Warnock 1987), we focus on the uniqueness of memory as a 'dialogue with the past' (Benjamin quoted in Lash 1999).

Memory has many forms and operates on many different levels, and the things that we remember are of many different kinds and are remembered for many different reasons. For example, there is the memory of how to ride a bicycle, which has been defined as a *procedural* memory; there is also the memory of such facts as that bicycles have two wheels and sometimes a bell, which has been defined as a *declarative* or *semantic* memory (Baddeley 1989: 35–46). Another type of memory is personal memory or

*autobiographical* memory, which is the way we tell others and ourselves the story of our lives. Although autobiographical memories are not necessarily accurate, they are ‘mostly congruent with one’s self knowledge, life themes, or sense of self’ (Barclay and DeCooke 1988: 92). When talking about *cognitive* memory, we refer to remembering the meaning of words and lines of verse: ‘What this type of remembering requires is, not that the object of memory be something that is past, but that the person who remembers that thing must have met, experienced or learned of it in the past’ (Connerton 1989: 23). Yet another kind of memory is *habit* memory, which refers to our capacity to reproduce a certain performance and which is an essential ingredient in the successful and convincing performance of codes and rules. Habit is the mode of inscribing the past in the present, *as present*. In this case, memory denotes a habitual knowing that allows us to recall the signs and skills we use in everyday life. This kind of memory, like all habits, is sedimented in bodily postures, activities, techniques and gestures. Such conceptualization of the process of remembering, where memory ‘gets passed on in non-textual and non-cognitive ways’ (Connerton 1989: 102), allows us to study social remembrance by focusing on the performance of commemorative rituals.

Habit-memory differs from other types of memory because it brings the past into the present by acting, while other kinds of memory retrieve the past to the present by summoning the past *as past* – that is, by remembering it. Remembering submits the past to a reflective awareness and it permits, by highlighting the past’s difference to the present, the emergence of a form of critical reflection and the formation of meaningful narrative sequences. Although remembering, like habit, can be seen as a constant effort to maintain and reconstruct societal stability it, unlike habit, is also a ‘highly active, effortful process’ (Young 1988: 97). While remembering, we deliberately and consciously recover the past, so whatever memories ‘route into consciousness, they need to be organized into patterns so that they make some kind of continuing sense in an ever-changing present’ (Young 1988: 97–8). Hence, memory, as the knowing ordering or the narrative organization of the past, observes rules and conventions of narrative. For example, successful narratives about the past must have a beginning and an end, an interesting storyline and impressive heroes. The fact that memorizing is not free of social constraints and influences suggests the importance of another type of memory – namely, *collective* or *social* memory, which is our main concern here.

This book focuses on similarities between the ways in which people assign meanings to their common memories, while adopting the intersubjectivist approach which allows us to avoid both theories rooted in social determinism (which subordinate individuals totally to a collectivity) and visions of an individualistic, atomized social order (which deny the importance of communicative relations between people and their social embeddedness). Its

main assumption is that remembering, while being constructed from cultural forms and constrained by our social context, is an individual mental act. Therefore, our intersubjectivist explanation of how we remember also acknowledges that – despite the fact memory is socially organized and mediated – individual memory is never totally conventionalized and standardized. The memories of people who have experienced a common event are never identical because in each of them a concrete memory evokes different associations and feelings. The relation between collective and individual memory can be compared to the relation between language (*langue*) and speech (*parole*), as formulated by Saussure (Funkenstein 1993: 5–9). Language, as a collective product, is separated from the variety of uses to which particular speech acts may be put; thus it is, like collective memory, an idealized system. Variations in individual memories, which can be compared to the scope of freedom with which we use language in particular speech, reflect the degree to which a given culture permits conscious changes and variations of the narrator in the contents, symbols and structures of collective memory.

Underscoring the intersubjectivity of memory, the sociology of memory asserts that the collective memory of a group is ‘quite different from the sum total of the personal recollections of its various individual members, as it includes only those that are *commonly shared* by all of them’ (Zerubavel 1997: 96). The collective memory, as the integration of various different personal pasts into a single common past that all members of a community come to remember collectively, can be illustrated by America’s collective memory of the Vietnam War, that is more ‘than just an aggregate of all the war-related recollections of individual Americans’ (Zerubavel 1997: 96). Moreover, the prominent place of the Vietnam War (rather than, for example, the Korean War) in the memories of Americans also suggests that the division of the past into ‘memorable’ and ‘forgettable’ is a social convention, as it is society that ensures what we remember, and how and when we remember it.

Memory is social because every memory exists through its relation with what has been shared with others: language, symbols, events, and social and cultural contexts. Much research illustrates that memory is intersubjectively constituted because it is based on language and on an external or internal linguistic communication with significant others (Paez *et al.* 1997: 155). The way we remember is determined through the supra-individual cultural construction of language, which in itself is the condition of the sharing of memory, as a memory ‘can be social only if it is capable of being transmitted and to be transmitted, a memory must first be articulated’ (Fentress and Wickham 1992: 47). As the past is made into story, memories are simplified and ‘prepared, planned and rehearsed socially and individually’ (Schudson 1995: 359). Any retrospective narratives’ chance of entering the public domain is socially structured: ‘Within the public domain, not only the



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