

“The Memory-Market Dictum:  
Gauging the Inherent Bias in Different Data Sources Common in Collective Memory Studies”

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Professor Mark A. Wolfgram  
Oklahoma State University-Stillwater  
Department of Political Science  
207 Murray Hall  
Stillwater, OK 74078

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Abstract:

Scholars should view collective memory formation as a social process in which individuals encounter bits and pieces of the past as represented in different social artifacts. These artifacts may be a social practice, such as the telling and retelling of epic poetry, or a physical artifact such as a drawing, painting, photograph or film. The individual interprets these artifacts in a social setting and thereby comes to generate meanings and understandings about the past, which are then shared and exchanged with others.

To present, scholars have drawn upon many different social artifacts in pursuing their studies of the collective memory process, but often without much systematic critical reflection on what biases might be imbedded in these different social artifacts. In this paper, I will further develop what I have called the memory-market dictum. The dictum suggests that the more “capital” a given practice or artifact requires, the more likely this artifact will conform with given social norms of interpreting the past. Through reflection on my own work and a survey of others, this paper will help collective memory scholars think critically about the choices they are making regarding their data sources.

## INTRODUCTION:

Political scientists should care about collective memory studies because the representation of the past is a scarce resource as real as any other economic or material good. The field of collective memory scholarship is and will remain an interdisciplinary field of inquiry. While this is a good thing in terms of the quality of scholarship that scholars have produced, the field's further development may also be hindered for the same reasons. Lacking a clear disciplinary home, collective memory studies and those who work in this field may find themselves more or less marginalized in their own disciplines. While this is less problematic in history, which defines itself in the first instance as a field of inquiry into the past, it is potentially much more difficult in the discipline of political science, where culture is a somewhat suspect term unless qualified as "political culture" or "civic culture". For political scientists, pursuing this line of inquiry is certainly not the easiest pathway to publication in the core journals of the discipline. This is unfortunate because collective memory studies deal with symbolic power, a subject that should be of central interest for political scientists.

While political scientists are more comfortable with the material bases of power, such as money, control over the means of production, or military hardware, they are quite often less well equipped to deal with the immaterial or cultural bases of power. Abner Cohen made this critique in 1974 when he talked about the need for social scientists to work with "two major variables," which he called "symbolic action and power relationships."<sup>1</sup> Cohen said of political scientists and their attempts to deal with culture, "Above all, they suffer from an implicit assumption that political symbols are consciously intended symbols and when some of them write of 'political socialization' their accounts are mechanical and unidimensional."<sup>2</sup> Thus, we can see part of the reason for the title of Cohen's work, *Two-Dimensional Man*, the two-dimensions refer to both symbolic action and power relations. What Cohen is pointing to is the dependence of political scientists on viewing all human action through the pursuit of goals guided by conscious and intentional action – in short rational choice and instrumentalism. In his recent work, Marc Howard Ross is writing in the same direction as Cohen, for a two-dimensional view of human action, by noting that such rational choice and intentionalist explanations lack, "thoughtful consideration of where interests come from in the first place, how interests get defined in specific cultural contests, and the ways that culture structures appropriate ways to pursue them."<sup>3</sup> The intentionalist perspective also seriously risks underestimating the role of emotion, fear, and unconscious reactions to perceived threats. By ignoring the symbolic action part of the equation, a good deal of political science risks resting on the tautological argument of answering, "Why did they do that?" with "It was in their interest to do so." The culturalist approach wants to answer yet another question, "Why did they come to view their interests in that manner?" Answers to this question will require interdisciplinary scholarship.

One way in which we can think about Cohen's distinction between symbolic action and power relationships is to highlight the difference between the immaterial (symbolic) and the material (power). As Cohen argues, humans can be driven to action by either symbols or

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<sup>1</sup> Abner Cohen, *Two-Dimensional Man: An Essay on the Anthropology of Power and Symbolism in Complex Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Cohen 7-9 [one of these page numbers is wrong].

<sup>3</sup> Marc Howard Ross, *Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), xiv.

material power. Yet, political scientists tend to focus primarily on the latter. David Kertzer, another anthropologist, puts it nicely when he writes, “In short, people are not merely material creatures, but also symbol producers and symbol users. People have the unsettling habit of willingly, even gladly, dying for causes that oppose their material interests, while vociferously opposing groups that espouse them. It is through symbols that people give meaning to their lives; full understanding of political allegiances and political action hinges on this fact.”<sup>4</sup> Cohen’s use of the words “symbolic action” and “power relations” is somewhat unfortunate, because it suggests that “power” only exists in the form of physical coercion and control, which is not what he means at all. Rather, as with Ross, Edelman and others, Cohen wants to emphasize that both the symbolic order and physical coercion can drive people to action.<sup>5</sup>

If one accepts that culture is one manifestation of power, then by extension one must also share an interest in collective memory studies. The field of collective memory studies is vast and stretches across many different disciplines, and not all those writing in this field agree upon the use of the term collective memory. Some prefer the use of remembrance, social memory, public memory or historical memory.<sup>6</sup> I prefer to use of the term collective memory because it clearly identifies the origin of this field of inquiry with the work of Maurice Halbwachs. This does not mean that the term is not problematic, as it invokes notions of a collective consciousness or a study of shared mentalities. But many of those working in the field of collective memory studies now agree that research in this area needs to focus on social practice and that scholars should not treat representations of the past as “memory”. At its core, collective memory studies, which focus on practice, are concerned with the generation of meanings about the past and how those meanings are shared and contested within different collectivities.

We can think about the social practice attached to the process of collective memory formation when we keep the following dynamic at the center of our attention. The process of collective memory formation takes place as an individual encounters a representation of the past in a given social context. This is already enough for the process of meaning generation to begin, but for the process to take on cultural significance, the individual then enters into discussions about the representation of the past with others. Out of this process, the individuals will create shared and contested meanings and interpretations of the past. What one needs to guard against in collective memory studies is slipping into a detailed analysis of the representations of the past without situating the analysis in a given social and temporal context *and* reflecting on how people at the time used the representation in terms of generating meaning. It is not unusual for scholars to talk about the social and temporal context, but it is more frequently the case that the interaction of individuals with the representation and their discussions are missing. This is hardly surprising given that this may be the most difficult part of the relationship to capture.

Once we have a clear view on this process of collective memory formation, we can begin to see how we need to be especially sensitive to the power relationships that will influence the generation of shared and contested meanings about the past. By creating this simple but very specific model, we can begin to think carefully about the interrelationship of the different components. First, consider the production of the representations of the past. What resources need to be brought together to produce a specific representation? Furthermore, what resources or markets might enable or constrain access to a given representation? There are two components

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<sup>4</sup> David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 8.

<sup>5</sup> Cohen 23.

<sup>6</sup> Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

to take into consideration: (1) production and (2) distribution. Then we can think further about the identity of the different individuals, who will encounter these representations of the past. Finally, we need to reflect on the social context within which these discussions will take place.

Let me first introduce one more abstraction and then I will set about illustrating by way of some examples why we need to think carefully about these interrelationships in our scholarship. I use the concept of a memory-market dictum as a way of helping us to think about the political economy involved in the process of collective memory formation. Stated briefly, the memory-market dictum proposes that memory-makers, those that generate representations of the past, require access to some form of “capital” to produce and distribute their representations. The more capital intensive a given representation is, the more sensitive the producer will be to the attitudes of the public at large (democratic regime) or state ideology (authoritarian regime).<sup>7</sup> We can think of the categories of democratic and authoritarian regimes as broad categories that define the social context within which the process of collective memory formation takes place. If the representation fits well with the current views of the past, then it will be easily integrated into the mainstream of the society and the producer is more likely to receive material as well as symbolic credit for their work. If, on the other hand, the producer has created a work that better fits into the category of counter-memory,<sup>8</sup> then the state or society may label the producer as more of a deviant. This effort at counter-memory can certainly be supported by others who favor that narrative over the dominant narrative at the time, but the payoff may be smaller in a market based, democratic society or extremely dangerous and life threatening in an authoritarian society. In the next section I will give numerous examples drawn from a wide array of scholarship set in both the ancient and modern world to help illustrate the memory-market dictum.

## TYOLOGY OF REPRESENTATIONS

I have long suspected that there is less that separates so-called primitive and modern humanity from each other than is often claimed, and the scholarship of the British anthropologist Mary Douglas has certainly provided me with inspiration in thinking in this direction. Douglas once lamented, “So little has been done to extend the analysis across modern and primitive cultures that there is still no common vocabulary. Sacraments are one thing, magic another; taboos one thing, sin another. The first thing is to break through the spiky verbal hedges that arbitrarily insulate one set of human experiences (ours) from another set (theirs).”<sup>9</sup> This is not to suggest that we ignore the substantial differences that do exist between so-called simple and primitive communities compared to the development of complex, modern societies. Rather, Douglas is asking for us to reflect on how some basic problems related to human existence are common across the primitive-modern divide, such as issues of distinguishing between good and evil, between purity and danger,<sup>10</sup> and between legitimate political authority and illegitimate

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<sup>7</sup> Mark A. Wolfgram, *“Getting History Right”: East and West German Collective Memories of the Holocaust and War* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2010), 21.

<sup>8</sup> Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 10-12.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1970; London Routledge, 1996), 7.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966).

authority. Cohen makes a similar observation, “Two sources of the obligatory that are common to both ‘primitive’ and industrial man are discussed. The first is the continuous struggle of man to achieve personal identity, or selfhood. The second is his concern with the perennial problems of human existence, like life and death, fortune and misfortune. On both fronts man resorts to symbolic action, in the course of which he continuously creates and recreates his oneness, and also develops solutions to the big, essentially irresolvable, questions of existence. Man is thus impelled to create symbols and to engage continuously in symbolic activities.”<sup>11</sup> Modern humanity hardly seems to have freed itself from the past, in the sense of saying categorically and in all instances, “The past means nothing!” Indeed, as Marc Howard Ross and others have shown, many very modern ethnic conflicts are rooted in fierce contests over the proper interpretation of the past.<sup>12</sup> Our analysis of such conflicts is not helped if we try to fence them off by labeling them “ancient” or “primitive.” While it is certainly too much to claim that Yugoslavia collapsed because the different national communities disagreed about the proper interpretation of World War II, any careful observer of the conflicts in the 1990s must also readily admit that this was one factor in the country’s collapse into civil war.<sup>13</sup> Getting the interpretation of the past correct has mattered a great deal to both primitive and modern humanity.

With this proposition in mind, I want in this section to work on developing a set of categories for thinking about how we represent the past that can be applied across both primitive and modern societies. Collective memory scholars have, to their credit, worked with a vast array of data types across many centuries. I want to try and create some very general categories to help us think about the different types of data we engage. I have sketched my ideas in figure 1. Let’s begin big and start with the universe and make our first categorical division between the natural world that has been modified by human action and that which remains largely untouched. Let’s call that part of the universe not transformed by human action the landscape. For the most part, this will include the landscapes of earth, but we might also want to include the moon, planets and other aspects of the heavens as well. Human culture is then composed of the material and immaterial, the material including the human transformation of the natural world into different objects of material culture.

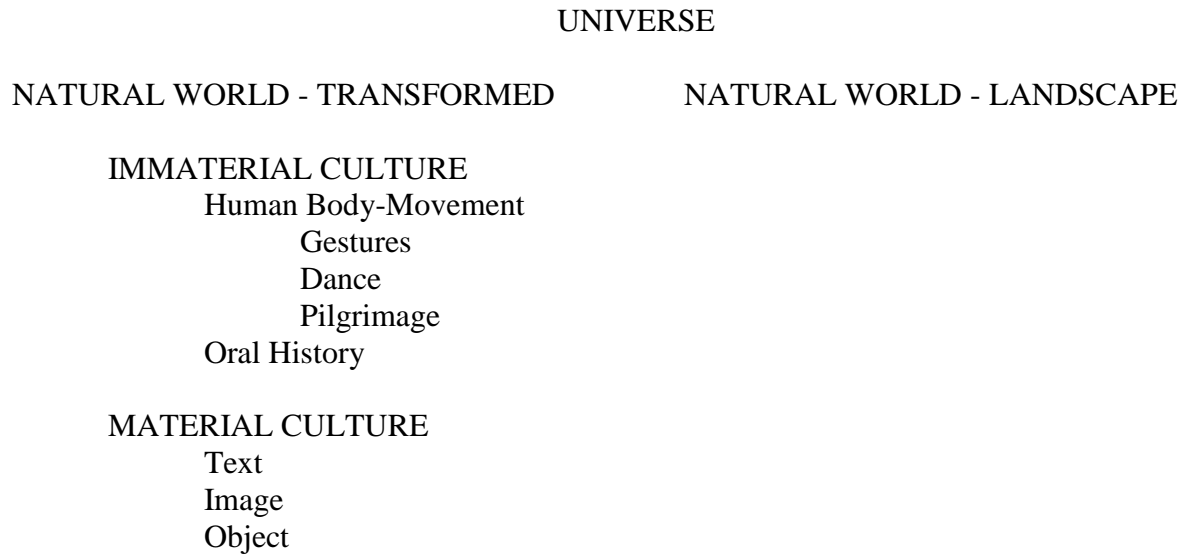
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<sup>11</sup> Cohen 14.

<sup>12</sup> Marc Howard Ross, *Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict*. Marc Howard Ross ed., *Culture and Belonging in Divided Societies: Contestation and Symbolic Landscapes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), chapter 3. Max Bergholz, “The Strange Silence: Explaining the Absence of Monuments for Muslim Civilians Killed in Bosnia during the Second World War,” *East European Politics and Societies* forthcoming.

FIGURE 1.



#### THE NATURAL WORLD - LANDSCAPE

Before we move on to a discussion of the human culture side of figure 1, let's reflect a bit on the landscape and how viewing a landscape can be a representation of the past that fits into the process of collective memory formation. Take for example the oral history of the Chippewa Indians and their explanation of the dune in Michigan known as Sleeping Bear Dune, which is now a national park. The national park website recounts the story as follows, "Long ago, along the Wisconsin shoreline, a mother bear and her two cubs were driven into Lake Michigan by a raging forest fire. The bears swam for many hours, but eventually the cubs tried [sic] and lagged behind. Mother bear reached the shore and climbed to the top of a high bluff to watch and wait for her cubs. Too tired to continue, the cubs drowned within sight of the shore. The Great Spirit Manitou created two islands to mark the spot where the cubs disappeared and then created a solitary dune to represent the faithful mother bear."<sup>14</sup> Human culture is filled with such narratives that find meaning in the natural surroundings. Consider also how the story relates to tragic death and memory. A mother seeks to save her two children only to lead them unwittingly to their death. What could possibly aid the mother in her grief? The Great Spirit provides an answer by transforming the bodies of the children and the mother into the immortal landscape of Michigan, helping to transcend death by creating meaning and a lasting memory. It is a story designed not only to describe the landscape but also to find meaning in the landscape, through narrative, to help one deal with tragic death. If the Great Spirit Manitou has done this for the bears, will he not do the same for his people as they struggle to find meaning in a tragic death?

There are also other examples of how the natural landscape serves as a representation and reminder of the past for communities that have more explicit political consequences. For example, the people living in the Cévennes mountains in the south of France still recall in their oral history and local monuments the resistance of outlawed Protestants who fled to the region when Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes. The royal forces eventually defeated the

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.nps.gov/slbe/planyourvisit/pssleepingbearduneoverlook.htm> accessed 30 April 2010.

Camisards, as the rebels were known, but in so doing also bestowed upon the region a legendary self-understanding for the “Protestant community’s identification of itself as a community of resistance, which is partly backed up by and partly creates a tradition of resistance that has continued to exist in the area until today.”<sup>15</sup> The fact that this community remained largely stable and closely rooted to the surrounding geography has helped to sustain this sense of a community of resistance over 250 years. What challenges have such local narratives of resistance posed to the centralizing French state as well as many other similar modernizing states in many other locations? One can well imagine the deep narratives of local resistance that currently mark the landscape of Afghanistan and the challenges these narratives pose for would-be state-builders in that region.

#### HUMAN CULTURE – IMMATERIAL

Returning to figure 1, let’s begin to consider how humans transform and create meaning in terms of both material and immaterial culture. There are numerous aspects of human culture that can serve as a way of representing the past that leave no lasting material trace, although they can be transmitted from generation to generation through ritual reenactment. A great deal of this immaterial culture can now be captured thanks to modern technological advances, so we will want to keep in mind the vastly increased ability of modern societies to record and archive representations of the past. Even before the creation of different audio and visual recording instruments in the twentieth century, some aspects of these different parts of immaterial culture also included material components. For example, while we do not have an audio or visual recording of theater in revolutionary America, we do have the written plays and a fairly good understanding of the context within which theaters produced the plays.<sup>16</sup> Material and immaterial culture are in a constant interplay with each other.

#### THE BODY – HUMAN MOVEMENT

If we start with the human body and movement, we can begin to reflect on how everyday gestures as well as highly complex dances can embody a representation of the past. Consider, for example, the tradition, among some Christians, of crossing themselves in specific instances. The gesture provides a symbolic invocation of the cross upon which the Romans crucified Jesus and may potentially invoke reflections on the centrality of suffering and martyrdom for the Christian.

As we move from everyday gestures to more elaborate performances of dance and theater, the symbolic complexity can increase rapidly. Ritual and choreographed human movements have long played an important role in representing and connecting human communities with their pasts. It also remains a cultural form that is highly resistant to any successful recording technique. One form of written notation is Labanotation, but even with its incredible complexity, it still provides an imperfect means of recording and thus providing a text for the recreation of dance. Choreographed movement or dance can, nonetheless, provide a very powerful narrative that can link the audience and performer to a narrative of the past, as pain, suffering and death are played out through human movement. Think of the role that dance played in keeping the memory of the disappeared alive in the public sphere during and after the

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<sup>15</sup> J. Fentress and C. Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford, 1992), 93. Also discussed in Alcock 6.

<sup>16</sup> Purcell, Sarah J., *Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 120.

Argentine military dictatorship as the Madres (Mothers) de Plaza de Mayo danced with their disappeared men.<sup>17</sup>

Another dramatic example is the manner in which some Shiite groups commemorate Ashura, which is a day to reflect on the suffering and martyrdom of one of the Prophet Mohammad's grandsons. Some Shiite men flagellate themselves on this day to the point that they bleed, thus creating a very powerful personal and physical bond with the martyr, while also doing so as a spectacle in public and allowing others to participate as well.<sup>18</sup> In this case, the narrative of suffering and pain is reenacted on the bodies of present day male Shiites, and potentially serves not only as a reflection on the past suffering of the community, but also on their current political plight in many Muslim countries, as they often form the minority population in Muslim countries. That the same day is marked with a very different set of memories by Sunni Muslims as a day of triumph for the true religion makes the symbolism of the day potentially a very explosive flashpoint for communal violence.

Although different in character, the ritual enactment of social hierarchies through the Loyalist marches in Northern Ireland is another example of how human choreographed movement can serve to invoke the past as a triumph for the Loyalists and at the same time a hated reminder of defeat for Irish Republicans.<sup>19</sup> The marches in Northern Ireland also help to highlight another important factor to keep in mind with regard to the past and that is the centrality of place. Although there have been attempts to defuse the violence that often accompanies the marches, it is important to remember that it is not enough for the Loyalists to simply march, but that they must march along "traditional" routes, which can heighten tensions with Irish Republicans as these routes take them through Republican neighborhoods. In this manner, the marches are similar to short pilgrimages, journeys that take the pilgrim across a symbolically significant route to a specific location tied to key historical events.

While the word pilgrim and pilgrimage are usually associated with a religious practice, it is also worth reflecting upon both the religious and secular movements of people to special places that are tied, in some manner, to the past. And it will be helpful to think of the political economy that helps to sustain pilgrimages, both religious and secular, and think of tourism in the broadest sense. The importance of pilgrimages in human societies helps to bring together a practice that includes human movement and place, while also generating material culture as well. In her wonderful book *Martyrdom and Memory*, Elizabeth Castelli combines a study of early Christian texts alongside an analysis of material culture, especially with regards to the cult around the early Christian saint Thecla.<sup>20</sup> As she notes, her work on this point begins to cross some disciplinary boundaries, a point that I want to emphasize again as essential as the field of collective memory studies continues to develop. Castelli writes, "There have traditionally been strong disciplinary divisions between the students of early Christianity who interpret texts and those who read images and material artifacts." Again, it is useful to develop areas of specialization, but we need to guard against too much insularity, for what Castelli finds is that the material culture around Thecla came to focus upon a fairly narrow aspect of her overall

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<sup>17</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> <http://atwar.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/12/29/a-shiite-ritual-returns-to-kabul/>

<sup>19</sup> Ross, *Cultural Contestation*, chapter 4.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), chapter 5.



story.<sup>21</sup> For example, Castelli analyzes examples of Egyptian pilgrimage ampullae, which were mass-produced as souvenirs for the pilgrims. One also needs to reflect on the different social classes that would have been more likely to engage textual sources compared to some of the more common aspects of material culture that circulated with images of Thecla. As Castelli notes, “The importance of these sorts of visual images for conveying memory cannot be underestimated in a world that remained extensively illiterate.”<sup>22</sup> Her work helps to illustrate further the central point of this paper that each data source with which we work carries with it a potential bias, of which we need to be aware. In the case of Thecla, to focus solely on either texts or images would have led to a bias in the scholar’s interpretation of the Thecla narrative and its meaning for different classes of people at the time.

Pilgrimages and the associated tourism economy, ancient and modern, are an important source of data that gives us an example of how human agency and cultural practices are related to the process of collective memory formation. The human search for an authentic connection with the past by traveling to a specific location appears to be a quite compelling activity across human societies. W. Fitzhugh Brundage, writes the following about the attraction of Natchez, Mississippi, to tourists seeking to experience the Old South, “As in the past, access to resources will dictate which groups in Natchez and elsewhere are able to enshrine their version of history. Well-heeled and well-connected organizations like the Natchez garden clubs remain far more likely than other groups to secure public recognition of their version of the past. The already considerable influence of private organizations is certain to grow at a time when public funding for historical interpretation is tight and the quasi-privatization of public works gathers speed.”<sup>23</sup> White domination of the tourism industry relative to the influence of American blacks leads to a representation of the Old South that favors one version of history over another. Some white southerners continue to try and separate slavery from the Confederacy and the Old South, or to continue to draw upon the mythology of the faithful slave, making slavery appear less harmful and dehumanizing than it was. In reflecting back on the memory-market dictum, we can see that the tourism industry may have certain aspects associated with it that favor a very conservative, that is to say, mainstream bias.

Alon Confino, a historian of Germany’s recent past, explains very nicely why collective memory scholars should study tourism, “In traveling, like in film, literature, and art, we deal primarily not with accurate representations of social reality but essentially with an artistic representation of the world.”<sup>24</sup> Jim Weeks, in his work on the tourism industry that developed around Gettysburg notes, “Entrepreneurs, promoters, and boosters have labored to attract pilgrims since the battle ended. Second, Gettysburg never was at odds with the marketplace, which instead played a major role in constructing and reconstructing the shrine.”<sup>25</sup> One part of what these entrepreneurs set out to achieve was as broad an appeal to mainstream white America as possible, thus marginalizing competing black American counter-memories of the civil war. This meant marginalizing the centrality of slavery as the cause for the war, and the emancipation

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<sup>21</sup> Castelli 159.

<sup>22</sup> Castelli 170.

<sup>23</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 326.

<sup>24</sup> Alon Confino, *Germany as a Culture of Remembrance: Promises and Limits of Writing History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 252.

<sup>25</sup> Jim Weeks, *Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 7.

of the slaves as one of the war's most important outcomes. As David W. Blight has argued in his work *Race and Reunion*, the narrative of North-South reconciliation of white Northerner and white Southern came to displace the narrative of emancipation, which is central to the African American's understanding of the war.<sup>26</sup> Gettysburg became the central symbolic location for this reconciliation, and also, unfortunately, the marginalization of African American narratives of the civil war.

As with the other data with which collective memory scholars work, tourism and pilgrimages need to be viewed within a given social context and with sensitivity to the power relations in that context. This means that if scholars were to focus solely on what is popular and draws mass crowds, they would miss the competition that exists between different groups in the society to get history right – to get the interpretation of history right. In her moving book, Macarena Gómez-Barris looks specifically at the margins of Chilean society and the exile community for representations of Pinochet's dictatorship. She is skeptical about the willingness of the post-Pinochet state to deal with this authoritarian past, "On the part of the state these are often symbolic strategies that assist in the process of smoothing over painful memories on the path toward national unity, strategies that in the case of Chile have aided the process of legitimizing capitalist restructuring."<sup>27</sup> She wants to focus on the margins, on those that are generating counter-memories that challenge the soothing narratives of the state. Although the military bulldozed many of the original buildings at Villa Grimaldi, which became a center of torture and murder during the Pinochet regime, activists and former prisoners reclaimed the space as a site to memorialize the regime's crimes.<sup>28</sup> It may become a pilgrimage point for those who wish to resist efforts to minimize or explain away the crimes of the Pinochet regime. Another example of counter-memory in the US context is Mitch Kachun's work on African American "Festivals of Freedom," in which blacks celebrated their narrative of the civil war and its emancipationist outcome, in contrast to the growing, dominant white narrative of North-South reconciliation, which marginalized the role of slavery in the conflict.<sup>29</sup>

## ORAL HISTORY

There may be a tendency for some to believe that oral history, the stories that we tell each other about our shared past, is more important for so-called primitive, pre-literate societies, than modern day industrialized societies. For those working with oral history, their work spans both the non-industrialized societies of the past and the present<sup>30</sup> as well as modern industrialized societies.<sup>31</sup> In one sense, it is obviously true that oral history mattered more to pre-literate societies, as they had few other means for storing information about the past.

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<sup>26</sup> David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: the Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 2-3.

<sup>27</sup> Macarena Gómez-Barris, *Where Memory Dwells: Culture and State Violence in Chile* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 5.

<sup>28</sup> Gómez-Barris 43, 50.

<sup>29</sup> Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

<sup>30</sup> Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, trans. H.M. Wright (Chicago: Aldine, 1965).

<sup>31</sup> Ronald J. Grele ed., *Envelopes of Sound* (Chicago: Precedent, 1975); Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Lutz Niethammer ed., *Lebensgeschichte und Sozialkultur im Ruhrgebiet 1930-1960: 'Die Jahre weiß man nicht, wo man die heute hinsetzen soll'* *Faschismuserfahrungen im Ruhrgebiet* (Bonn: Verlag J.H.W. Dietz. Nachfolger, 1983).

Nonetheless, oral history continues to play a central role in modern societies as well. Indeed, in totalitarian and authoritarian societies, dissidents and those who wish to maintain some form of counter-memory may have to retreat to oral history, although at the height of the Stalinist terror, it is quite possible that in many cases even this means of transmitting the past was also nearly eliminated. But even when a vast array of other means for storing and archiving the past exists in modern technological societies, oral history remains a critical component for passing on information about the past. For example, Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller and Karoline Tschuggnall trace discussions about National Socialism within German families and between the generations, and examine how family narratives often worked to de-Nazify family members.<sup>32</sup> In some of my own work, I looked at how an oral history archival project in Berlin designed to capture the narratives of “prominent Berliners” at first excluded those who had worked to rescue Jews or resist the Nazis. The same archival project then later, in the context of the 1980s West Germany, sought out these individuals and their narratives about the Nazi past.<sup>33</sup>

Unless there is a means to record oral history, or to capture its echo at a later date, it is a source of data that can be difficult to analyze. But collective memory scholars of both the ancient and modern worlds need to look for clues as to how different groups may have sought to keep stories about the past alive through their telling and retelling in families and other social groups.

### HUMAN CULTURE – MATERIAL

In this section I will turn to a discussion of the material culture that human societies use to archive and represent the past. With technological advances, some of what is brought into the material culture is a recording of some component of the immaterial culture discussed above. For example, oral histories can be recorded and archived or be the source for a novel, dance rituals filmed, and economic data on tourism analyzed. While on the one side I want to deemphasize the divisions between so-called primitive and modern societies in terms of the relevance of the past for humans living in both settings, there is no question that technological developments have changed what can be stored and represented and how widely these representations can be distributed. I divide the discussion of material culture into three categories, text, image and object. I then close with some reflections on the consequences of the digital age, in which the cost of generating and distributing representations of the past to between 1 billion or 2 billion internet users is very close to zero.

### TEXT

Undoubtedly one of the most important developments in human history was the creation of a written language and its implications for the exercise of political power. It is not an accident of language that the word “authority” combines notions of texts and power. With the creation of a written language, human civilization was put on a very different path as the amount of information that could be stored and referenced increased dramatically over what could be achieved in a civilization limited by access only to an oral tradition and ritual.

When scholars study texts as a part of the process of collective memory formation, they need to reflect carefully on the resources that may or may not be available to different groups in

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<sup>32</sup> Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller, and Karoline Tschuggnall, “*Opa war kein Nazi*”: *Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2002).

<sup>33</sup> Mark A. Wolfgram, “Rediscovering Narratives of German Resistance: Opposing the Nazi ‘Terror-State’,” *Rethinking History* 10, no. 2 (June 2006): 201-219.

a given society to generate the texts and gain access to them. For example, in the ancient world, only a very limited and educated elite was in a position to generate and consume texts, and as Castelli shows, the early Christian church used its control over the texts of the early Christian martyrs as a way of shaping a specific understanding of suffering and redemption. As Alcock comments in her argument for expanding the types of data that scholars work with in dealing with social memory in the ancient world, “Literary and epigraphic evidence has borne the brunt of reconstructing ancient attitudes to the past, and nothing can, or should, dislodge such sources from their place in this analysis. Yet *sole* dependence on them, as remarked earlier, carries with it certain decided hazards. Such texts best illustrate dominant commemorative narratives, and it is rare for them to offer alternative versions or a glimpse into the potential range of counter-memories. . . Male, elite, and urban perspectives, almost inevitably, pronounced upon what was deemed ‘worthy of memory.’”<sup>34</sup>

A further advancement in the influence that texts could have on representing the past came as the production and distribution of those texts accelerated dramatically with the development of the printing press and moveable type in Germany by Johannes Gutenberg around 1440. In his classic work on the development of modern nationalism, which one can think of as a community of shared collective memories, Benedict Anderson locates the creation of the printing press at the center of the development of national communities, communities of individuals who would come to have a shared sense of the past even though the vast majority of them would never meet face to face.<sup>35</sup> With the development of the printing press and then other means of generating texts and circulating them in an ever-wider fashion, a revolution in communication was underway. And as literacy spread with the increased number of books, the authority contained in any given text was now open to wider interpretation. Not only could more individuals record their own observations and recollections, they could also turn these into a book and distribute them over wide geographical expanses. As the production and circulation of texts increased, it became increasingly possible for dissidents inside and outside the Catholic Church to challenge Church authority and control over the Bible and its interpretation. It is difficult to imagine the Protestant Reformation without this revolution in communication.

What the scholar of collective memory needs to keep in focus are the power relations that develop as a result of these changes. Which individuals or groups in a given society will have more or less access to generating texts and then having those texts published and distributed? With the development of simple writing instruments and paper, and then the typewriter and computer, the cost of generating a text has become minimal, while the printing and distribution could remain a significant barrier. The internet and the digital age of the text are now having profound impacts on the production and circulation of texts, a point I will return to below.

Each era will require its own analysis, but if we look at the 20<sup>th</sup> century and reflect on the memory-market dictum, we can recognize some important patterns. In democratic, capitalist societies, publishers served as a key gatekeeper in determining how much access any given narrative of the past would have to the broader marketplace. The ideology of profit and pursuing mass markets became the primary factor in shaping how many texts were published and how widely they were distributed. Over time the reduced costs of producing books has allowed for numerous very small presses to continue to function, thus providing for a means of keeping counter-memories in circulation as well.

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<sup>34</sup> Alcock 23.

<sup>35</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* revised edition (London: Verso, 2006 [1983]), 33-46.

Within authoritarian and communist societies, it is useful to think about the relationship of texts and books to other ways of representing the past, such as film and television. Think for a moment about the different cost structures that exist between the generation and distribution of texts and books compared to television programs and movies. The fact that books were much less expensive helps us to understand why dissidents were first able to express themselves through writing and then, in some cases, in theater, film and television. For example, the so-called samizdat presses, literally self-published press, became an important way for dissidents within the Soviet Union and throughout central and eastern Europe to challenge the authority of the Communist party. Most important for our discussion here, some of those samizdat publications included challenges to the ruling Communist party by recording the party's past crimes. Given the extremely repressive nature of some of these states, which varied over time, the "press" was sometimes nothing more than hand-copied texts that circulated within small networks of trust. The Communist state was, from time to time, able to push the dissidents back into the technological era prior to 1440.

But there were significant differences between the different Communist regimes, and even the regimes themselves differed significantly over time. Postwar Yugoslavia stands out as an example of a Communist regime that became quite liberal for periods of time. In talking about Yugoslavia, one must also give special attention to the republican structure, as the patterns of repression and liberalization varied between the republics. The immediate postwar period from 1945-1948 was filled with brutal efforts by the Communists to gain control over the country, and 1948-1955 was marked by purges to remove Stalinists or other "counter revolutionaries," after Yugoslavia broke free of direct Soviet influence. The years from 1955-1970 saw an increasing liberalization, with the 1970s marking a return to greater repression, and then from 1980, with the death of Tito, until the collapse of the federation in the early 1990s, continued repression, but from a much weakened Communist party.

It was toward the end of the middle liberal period that Dragoslav Mihailović managed to publish his book *Kad su cvetale tikve* (1968) [When Pumpkins Blossomed (1971)]. The central character is Ljuban, who grows up amongst gang violence in one of Belgrade's poor districts. He also has to deal with the family's history and the fact that his brother and father were taken to Goli otok, a brutal prison camp, during the anti-Stalinist purges after 1948. His father returns a broken man, while his brother never returns. When he tries to find out more information about his brother, he is blocked and warned not to ask more questions. The book was a huge success in Yugoslavia and was turned into a theater play. But by the time the play was ready to be performed in Belgrade, Communist party officials blocked the performances, realizing their mistake in allowing this piece of the party's past to reach a broader public. Mihailović's work was hardly alone at the end of the 1960s, a time during which artists, filmmakers, theater producers and writers were challenging many different aspects of Yugoslav society, including the state's preferred interpretation of the recent past.

The 1970s saw a return to more repression, but after Tito's death in 1980 there was an explosion of material that found its way to the general public and challenged the behavior of the party during the anti-Stalinist purges. Antonije Isaković's two-volume novel *Tren* (1982) [Moment] was completed in 1979, but publication was delayed until after Tito's death.<sup>36</sup> Most significantly for our discussions here, Isaković based his novel on interviews with survivors from Goli otok, an example of oral history transformed to text and then published as a widely

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<sup>36</sup> Antonije Isaković, *Tren: kazivanja Čeperku* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1982).

distributed book. There are numerous examples that followed immediately after Tito's death, first taking the form of plays and books and then only a couple years later Emir Kusturica's international film success with *When Father Was Away on Business* [*Otac na službenom putu*] (1985).

The development of written language, increases in literacy, the means by which texts could be written and then produced and distributed have all had an impact on the ability of human societies to connect and represent their shared pasts. The ability to create, read, and produce texts has varied over time and been governed by different power relationships. As Alcock has noted, we should not abandon the use of texts, especially when working with how ancient societies related to their past, but we should recognize that in all contexts, certain biases are embodied in the production and circulation of texts.

## IMAGES

In thinking about images, it is important to realize that these different categories have rather fluid boundaries and that texts, images and objects often are combined in different presentations of the past. For example, one clue to aid our interpretation of Thecla's representation on some of the ampullae on which she appears is the fact that there is sometimes some accompanying text as well. In terms of recording human history and providing a window onto the past, the image came before written language. And no sooner was written language developed then we began to design pictures to accompany the text. Texts and images have long interacted with each other.

For non-literate societies, images became an important way of referencing the past, as with the images of Thecla on the sides of the pilgrimage ampullae souvenirs. Although the early Christian Church had reservations about the use of images, the Church soon became the chief sponsor of generating images to place on altars and on the walls of churches to tell the stories of the martyrs and Christ to the illiterate populations. The wealthy and powerful not only had their portraits painted, but battle scenes were imagined and recorded as well as many other subjects, with the content of painting become more popularized over time. More secular themes began to appear and representations of commoners and ordinary life become more prevalent.

The discovery and rearranging of images has played a critical role in how the past is captured and represented, but we have to be careful with how we use photographic data. Let me take just a couple of brief examples from my own work. The Nazis certainly liked to have themselves and their victims photographed, as long as they were in control of the editing and selection process. There is no shortage of official Nazi images that apparently show the strict order and discipline of the movement, which actually, still today, exaggerates how disciplined the Nazis actually were.

Consider also the photographs that we have of the so-called Kristallnacht, November 9, 1938, when the Nazis organized the destruction of Jewish shops, residences and synagogues. We have pictures of Kristallnacht that the Nazis approved, and not surprisingly when combined with the term Kristallnacht – “The Night of the Broken Glass” – we are by and large left with images *and* texts that focus on the material destruction of that night. What is almost completely absent from postwar West German newspaper commentaries and reflections back on Kristallnacht is the realization that Jews were beaten to death, that some Jews fought back and tried to defend their property and lives, and that in the following days Jews and others were marched through the streets, in front of the public, on their way to the first concentration camps in Germany. One reason these other narratives are missing or marginal is not that there were no

pictures taken, but that the Nazis tried to destroy all of the pictures that did not fit their preferred narrative. The Nazis had no use for images of Jews fighting back against impossible odds and had these pictures destroyed. Through their control over the images of their regime, the Nazis still have quite a powerful hold over today's public in terms of having themselves seen as they wished to be seen. The French police did the same after their massacre of Algerian protesters in the streets of Paris in 1962 as they systematically sought out those with cameras and seized their film. In the absence of these photographs, the 1962 massacre is not well remembered in France today.

But the Nazis could not control everything. In a development that presaged the era of the ubiquitous cell phone, its digital camera, and the images that eventually surfaced from Abu Ghraib, the US prison in occupied Iraq, where US soldiers abused and humiliated Iraqi prisoners, German soldiers went to war with some of the first inexpensive and mass produced cameras. The military command was unsuccessful in eliminating the use of the cameras by the troops, and what the soldiers recorded and then brought home with them has led to a significant upheaval in German society. Like the US soldiers at Abu Ghraib, the German soldiers recorded their own war crimes. Postwar West German society developed a mythology about the "clean Wehrmacht" as many aspects of official as well as popular culture tried to build a clear narrative barrier between the "Germans" and the "Nazis." In this mythology, the Wehrmacht was on the side of "the Germans" and not Hitler. But the photographs that the Wehrmacht soldiers took, once they were organized and put on public display, had the potential to explode this narrative barrier between Germans and Nazis. What began as a rather simple exhibit of these photographs in Hamburg in 1995 led to a major controversy about the nature of the Wehrmacht during WWII.

What is significant for our discussion here is to again reflect upon questions of who had the resources to produce images at different points in time. And then, also to reflect upon the consequences of moving into an era in which the mass reproduction of these images has spread from books to the internet. The speed of the reproduction and the ability to alter images has increased dramatically with the prevalence of digital formats.

## OBJECTS

The material culture that can serve as a reference point for the past is perhaps limitless, but scholars of collective memory have rightly focused their attention in specific areas. Some of these objects may be created with the explicit intention of creating a referential point with the past, such as monuments and memorial markers, while others may have meaning assigned to them later, such as buildings that take on specific memorial like significance later, such as the Athenian Acropolis.<sup>37</sup> In thinking about the built environment, we will want to give attention to the ways these objects are incorporated into the practice of human culture.

But this does not mean that the monument that has been removed, destroyed or overgrown with weeds is without importance to our studies. Consider for example the transformation of the post-Soviet symbolic landscape as hundreds of monuments were attacked by the local populations or taken down by municipal authorities.<sup>38</sup> To the extent that our studies are diachronic, the multiple uses, discarding and rediscovery of different monuments or locations

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<sup>37</sup> Alcock 5. Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

<sup>38</sup> *Disgraced Monuments*, dir. Mark Lewis and Laura Mulvey. Monumental Pictures, 1993. Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson, "Unraveling the Threads of History: Soviet-Era Monuments and Post-Soviet National Identity in Moscow," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 92, no. 3 (September 2002): 524-547.

will be of great interest for collective memory scholarship. How often throughout history did conquerors build their religious houses on top of the ruins of the now subject population's houses of worship? In the 1460s, the conquering Turkish troops built a mosque inside the Greek Parthenon, but this was then later destroyed.<sup>39</sup> In 1680, the Pueblo Revolt in the American Southwest saw the indigenous population destroying the church of the Spanish conquerors and then building their own sacred kiva on the site of the Spanish church.<sup>40</sup> In India, Hindu nationalists used the claim that the Babri Masjid mosque had been built on the birthplace of Rama, a Hindu god, as a basis for forming a mob that destroyed the mosque in 1992.<sup>41</sup> In Kosovo during the UN and NATO administration of the Serbian province, Albanian nationalist mobs repeatedly attacked and destroyed not only Serbian homes but also Serbian Orthodox monasteries.<sup>42</sup> The built environment and material culture in the largest sense offers numerous points for inquiry.

## THE INTERNET AND THE DIGITAL AGE

We are in the midst of another revolution in communication technology, and the impact of this revolution on how human collectives reflect on their shared sense of the past is still largely unknown. I will limit my discussion to the impact of this transformation on the memory-market dictum. Does the dictum apply better to the pre-digital age, or does it still have some usefulness in the currently evolving digital revolution? Has the digital age changed the nature of symbolic capital?

First, we need to realize that only between 1 to 2 billion people use the internet on a regular basis. The old patterns that structure the production and distribution of representations of the past remain largely unchanged for the vast majority of humanity. But for those that are in the middle of the digital revolution, what are the consequences with regards to the memory-market dictum? One central point is the virtual elimination of some costs for gaining access to the marketplace. The costs of internet-wide distribution are basically zero, and the costs of producing texts and images have also become incredibly inexpensive. One clear indicator of this is that the production of information is currently outstripping the available storage capacity. Within two years, it is projected that twice as much information will be generated compared to the available storage.<sup>43</sup> So rather than moving into a world in which everything can be saved, the digital world, for the foreseeable future, will be one in which ever more information is generated but even larger amounts of that information will not make it into some form of storage.

Although we do not yet fully understand the consequences of the digital revolution and its potential impact on the process of collective memory formation, it does not seem that power and resources are going to disappear from the equation, but they will be transformed. For example, state ideology will still play a critical role, as suggested in my first formulation of the memory-market dictum. China has used the digital revolution to block the ability of the Chinese population to learn about their government's massacre of their fellow citizens at Tiananmen

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<sup>39</sup> Alcock 5.

<sup>40</sup> Alcock 13.

<sup>41</sup> Richard H. Davis, "The Rise and Fall of a Sacred Place: Ayodhya over Three Decades," in *Culture and Belonging in Divided Societies: Contestation and Symbolic Landscapes*, ed. Marc Howard Ross (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 25-44.

<sup>42</sup> Iain King and Whit Mason, *Peace at Any Price: How the World Failed Kosovo* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

<sup>43</sup> "Data, Data Everywhere: A Special Report on Managing Information," *The Economist*, February 27, 2010, 3-5.



Square in 1989.<sup>44</sup> And the capacity of any of us to find useful information on the internet is almost wholly dependent upon the search engines that help us find what we are looking for. Capitalist market pressures are being brought to bear on these search engines to marginalize, potentially, content that some might want to locate.

So let me suggest that my original categories of authoritarian and democratic regimes still matter, and that the ideologies of the state and the marketplace will continue to play a role as well. What will change in the digital world will be that power will shift from the question of production and distribution to the ability to find what we are looking for. State ideology and the forces of the capitalist marketplace will put pressure on the search for information. And as I mentioned above, the amounts of information being generated are already outstripping our capacity to store the information. The new resource scarcity will, for the foreseeable future, be storage, and therefore the archivists, in the broadest sense, will not have lost their power. Furthermore, information that is not transferred into a digital format or falls to the fringe of the digital world may become seriously marginalized. How likely is it that a scholar will find an article if it is not in a favorite database? Furthermore, given the surfeit of information, there may be an increasing need for hierarchies to tell us what is important. The role of the editor may yet return with a vengeance.

While the digital revolution will have some as yet largely unknown impact, we should not forget that a great deal of what has been discussed in this paper might will remain largely unchanged. I do not foresee the digital revolution leading to sacred places losing their draw on pilgrims, or landscapes becoming meaningless. I cannot imagine that oral history will disappear, although its face-to-face transmission may become less frequent or shifted into digital forums on the internet. I do not foresee that we will stop building monuments or naming places and that the promised authenticity of place will lose its magical appeal. The digital revolution will transform the nature of power relations; it will not negate them.

## CONCLUSION

A major challenge for collective memory scholarship at this point is to continue the expansion of our studies across disciplinary boundaries. Although there are real and rhetorical surges from time to time on the importance of interdisciplinary work, the structures of the scholarly world often work against the development of such projects. Scholars as rational choice creatures are rarely given incentives to pursue interdisciplinary work, but this will be essential if collective memory scholarship is to develop successfully as a useful field of inquiry. The potential is there, and I find the possibilities exciting. As we begin to work in this direction, it will be important for us to keep the memory-market dictum in mind as it offers a way for us to reflect critically on the different data sources we encounter and study. We need to remain mindful of the power relations that exist in the different social contexts that we study. These power relations will help determine what is produced, how widely it is distributed, and who has access to the material. And we must, as Cohen and others have reminded us, give equal attention to the symbolic and political sources of power.

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<sup>44</sup> *The Tankman*, dir. Antony Thomas. PBS-Frontline, April 11, 2006.

