
Contesting and surviving memory: space, nation, and nostalgia in *Les Lieux de Mémoire*

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Abstract. In this paper I explore the writings of Pierre Nora on *lieux de mémoire* (realms of memory). Nora's work is a standard reference in geographical writings on memory, yet there are various assumptions in his work that often go unchallenged. An investigation of the concept of nostalgia allows certain levels of yearning to be made clear in Nora's writings. A melancholic nostalgia for 'real environments of memory' and for the unifying power of the nation-state pervades this work. However, Nora hints at the possibility for the survival of memory in the body, and for its defence through the mobilisation of counterhistorical narratives. I conclude through using interdisciplinary theories on embodied memory and sites of countermemory to expand the range of spaces in which the memories of a nation might be constructed, contained, and contested.

Introduction

The intellectual appreciation of memory in the Western world has waxed and waned throughout history. Previous emphases are drawn upon and surpassed within current debates about the role of representation and practice in mnemonic processes, or about the role of trauma and the body (Gross, 2000). The interwar years saw Maurice Halbwachs and Frederic Barlett emphasise the social character of memory, challenging Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud's investigations of internal memory processes. Whereas Marcel Proust and Charles Baudelaire examined the fragmentation of memory in an accelerating age of modernity, the Renaissance saw a rebirth of the classical 'arts of memory' (Yates, 1966). These arts focused on what Plato terms '*anamnesis*', the deliberate act of recollection, rather than '*mneme*', the unbidden emergence of memory (Samuel, 1994, page vii). Recollections of these earlier perspectives on memory have, of course, been selective, partial, and repressive.

However, theories of memory have not developed in isolation. 'Forgetting', as a cognitive mishap or active willing, has shadowed the theory of memory. More recently, conceptions of memory have increasingly been defined against those of (capitalised) 'History' (Jenkins, 1997). Thomas Lacquer has argued that disenchanting liberalism, the claims of the 'silenced and oppressed', and the inability to represent the horror of 20th-century death camps have politicised and further split the relationship between history and memory (2000). History is posed as the story of the triumphant and the literate, whereas memory is the democratic enterprise of oral traditions, folklore, and material culture. This occludes the realisation, Patrick Hutton argues, that history itself is an 'art of memory', but one that presents conscious 'recollections' of the past rather than stressing the social 'repetition' of the past in the everyday present (1993, page 127).

Kerwin Klein has shown that, after a popular resurgence of interest in memory during the 1970s, the topic reemerged in academic circuits in the 1980s (2000). This was the result of influential publications by Yosef Yerushalmi and Pierre Nora (Nora, 1984a; Yerushalmi, 1982). From an initial focus on memory as an underside to historicist total narratives, 'memory' has expanded to cover phenomena ranging from physical to

psychic events, individual to structural processes, and from archives to cultural practice. (Radstone, 2000). Similar terms have undergone parallel expansions. Nostalgia has been 'depsychologised' from a mental illness to a condition of modernity, and trauma is now applied to generations as well as to individuals scarred by an event (Davis, 1979, page 5; Hodgkin and Radstone, 2003a). Although Jewish memory studies, like those of Yerushalmi, have provided valuable and rich contributions to the study of the holocaust, oral traditions, and trauma theory, the work of Nora has been perhaps even more influential.

The *Lieux de Mémoire* project consisted of seven volumes edited by Nora between 1984 and 1992, comprising essays from nearly 120 prominent French scholars. These analyses dissected French memories of the republic, the nation, and France itself (Nora, 1984a; 1986; 1992a). These were embodied in particular '*lieux de mémoire*', which has been translated as 'sites' (Nora, 1989, page 25), 'places' (Kritzman, 1996a, page ix), or 'realms' of memory (1996b).⁽¹⁾ These sites could be 'physical', such as commemorated locations or statues, 'symbolic', including ceremonies and pilgrimages, or 'functional', for instance, associates or dictionaries (Nora, 1989, page 19).

Nora followed the work of Halbwachs (1992), who investigated the social and collective framing of memory. Halbwachs rebelled against any Durkheimian notion of a reified or superorganic cultural memory. Rather, he looked at how social institutions and context made possible certain memories, encouraging certain recollections while discouraging others. Nora examined how certain sites, through their ability to provoke emotional affect, came to embody and instil certain memories and views of the nation. While appearing to embody memory, these self-reflexively memorial sites were claimed to be necessary because real memory had withered away in modern society. As Nora claimed, "What we take to be flare-ups of memory are in fact its final consumption in the flames of history" (1989, page 13).

The legacy of these volumes is considerable. They have bequeathed a form of national introspection that is now international in nature, inspiring works in the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, and the USA (Koshar, 2003). The three German volumes by Etienne Francois and Hagen Schulze (2003) explore contemporary memories in the reunification and Europeanisation era, with an afterword by Nora himself. Beyond national works, the *Lieux de Mémoire* project has provided a methodology and approach to memory that has been influential across the arts, humanities, and social sciences, although Nora has been read as a champion of counter-memory in the United States more than he has been in Europe (Constantina Papoulias, personal communication). Also, within France, the term '*lieux de mémoire*' has been established as a means through which people relate to and remember France itself, and has secured an entry in the 1993 *Grand Robert* dictionary: "a significant unit, either material or ideal, which the will of people or the effect of time have turned into a symbolic element of a given community" (quoted in Carrier, 2000, page 40).

However, this entry embodies the central paradox of the *Lieux de Mémoire* project. The project attempts to perform a postmodern deconstruction of these sites of memory, but an undercurrent of sentimentalism and nostalgia within the project ultimately bolsters many of these sites. This has, ironically, made the project a *lieux de mémoire* itself, as Nora admitted in the concluding essay of the series (1996a). Although intended to avoid commemoration, undermine panegyric narratives, and decompose national history, the project has become a national monument (1996b).

⁽¹⁾ In this paper, the capitalised '*Lieux de Mémoire*' refers to the project of seven original published volumes, whereas the lower case '*lieux de mémoire*' refers to the realms of memory that are the subject of these published volumes.

Although Nora's work has come under repeated criticism, its popularity and usage show no sign of waning. Within human geography, Nora continues to be a standard reference whenever memory is studied. As such, the aim of this paper is not to condemn Nora's approach but to tease out its biases and suggest how they could be remedied. After an investigation into the concept of nostalgia, three main nostalgic trends in the *Lieux de Mémoire* project will be examined. These trends refer to, first, Nora's positioning of the epoch of lieux de mémoire after the previous (utopian) epoch of '*milieux de mémoire*' (environments of memory). Second, Nora's melancholic, and exclusionary, yearning for the coherent power of national identity, as opposed to a pluralistic nationhood, will be investigated. Third, and potentially productively, the consequence of Nora's positioning of resilient memory against social history will be explored.

Building on these trends, I will suggest that Nora's framework *can* accommodate alternatives to predominant craftings of memory. These can come through both sites of counter-memory and the survival of memory, rather than through its subsumption within rationalising history. Before I analyse Nora's nostalgia, I will explore the particular nature of Nora's project and the ways geographers have used his work. Although geographers are only a small fraction of the total number of researchers working on Nora, their emphasis on the material and the 'lived' has highlighted shortcomings within memory literature and resonates with broader trends in memory studies.

Spaces of memory

Much time has been devoted to Nora's treatment of the history–memory relationship and to his methodology. His work, however, has to be viewed in the context of the three groupings of the seven French volumes: the republic, the nation, and different visions of France. In the first volume he sought out symbolic spaces that bound communities to the 'cult' of the republic, such as the tricolour flag, the historian Ernest Lavisse, or the commemoration of 14 July (Nora, 1984a; Taithe, 1999; Wood, 1994). In the next three volumes he explored locations of 'the nation' as the main principle of social cohesion, from the *Annales* school of historiography to national heritage sites (Nora, 1986). In the last three volumes he examined the eclipse of France as a 'memory nation', as multiple forms of social identification and patrimony overrode the dominance of national identification (Nora, 1992a). The chronology underlying the three volumes was a progression in stages of nation-building, which contributed to contemporary memory of the nation: from feudal 'royal memory', to absolutist 'state memory', to postrevolutionary 'national memory', to the 'citizen memory' of republic schools, and finally to contemporary 'patrimony memory' (1996b, page xx).

In English translation only three volumes were produced, cohering around the reworked themes of 'conflict and divisions', 'traditions', and 'symbols' (Kritzman, 1996b; 1996c; 1996d). In the first volume he analysed the ways in which the traditions of the ancien régime were overcome by those of the republic (Bodnar, 2000). In the second selection of essays he focused on the traditions associated with the image of France, organised around the rites and rituals of land, cathedral, and court (Nora, 1996c). In the third volume he focused on the changing meaning of emblems and physical sites associated with the republic, and concluded with an analysis of symbols through which the French people supposedly identify themselves.

However, it is Nora's introduction to the first volume, published in *Representations* seven years before the first translated volume, which has had the widest effect in the English-speaking world (1989). It was here that Nora explained the concept of lieux de mémoire in depth. It was claimed that these sites are now necessary because most people no longer live in *milieux de mémoire*. Nora claimed that, with the rise of

modernism and its attendant traits of globalisation, mediatisation, democratisation, and massification, modern media is substituted for collective memory. What we have now is not lived memory, but reconstructed history. To compensate for this lack, sites of memory have arisen.

Before critically examining these terms, the utilisation by geographers of Nora's work will be summarised to highlight some of the cracks in the monumental *Lieux de Mémoire* project. Most of this work has concerned physical sites, especially monuments. Hutton has shown that this fits into a longer tradition, including works by Phillipe Aries and Maurice Agulhon, that examines the rise of commemoration in the 19th century as a public admission that the past was becoming ever more distant (Hutton, 1993). This literature acknowledges, in line with Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983), that traditions are 'invented', but also stresses Halbwach's emphasis on the social framing mechanisms of individual memory.

Nuala Johnson, who acknowledges Nora's influence, has stressed the political importance of public sculpture and architecture in anchoring collective memory (2004). While Charles Withers claims Nora can be used to examine the fragmentary nature of memory and the contestatory nature of remembrance (1996), others have worked to expand and test an approach inspired by Nora's work. Maintaining a mostly 'top-down' emphasis in examining sites of memory, Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson have stressed the conflict at the elite level of planning in postsoviet Moscow (2002). There has been tension over whether to glorify, disavow, or contest soviet statues and monumental spaces. Although it is stressed that there has been little nonelite input at the planning level, the actions of the public in honouring, profaning, or even destroying statues allows them to 'speak back' to the state (2002).

Having examined the importance of statuary for nationalist movements, and the gendered nature of these images, Nuala Johnson has stressed the shortcomings of the literature concerning war and collective memory (1995; 1999). These works have tended to stress the theories and actors behind commemoration, whereas Johnson emphasises the reading of these statues by 'minor actors' and the way they are brought to life in ritualistic spectacles that can entail parody as well as adoration. As such, we must remember the contestable nature of social memory and the various readings of urban texts (2004). Andrew Charlesworth has stressed that, although Nora inadvertently claims that other identifications are pushed aside in memorialisation, the capacity of these sites for metamorphosis means that the emphasis must remain on interpretation, as he shows in his case study of Auschwitz (Charlesworth, 1994). Michael Heffernan has similarly stressed the tensions between grieving relatives and official commissions in the crafting of landscapes of remembrance after the First World War (1995).

Yvonne Wheelan has gone beyond symbolic appropriations of memorial sites to look at the physical violation and destruction of British colonial monuments in Ireland, both before and after independence (2002; 2003). Evidence is presented dating back to the 18th century of British statues being painted and defiled, bombed, and, after independence, sold to commonwealth countries. While retaining an emphasis on material sites of memory, Kenneth Foote has examined sites that did not necessarily have a physical monument (1997). These are US sites of violence or tragedy that expose a range of commemorative techniques. These include the sanctification of sacred, although mostly secular, sites through the tactics of bounding, maintaining, owning, and commemorating. Other techniques include the designation, but not consecration, of sites, their rectification (to put right a tragedy), or their obliteration. Although the term 'obliteration' means to 'leave no trace', Foote admits that the desire to forget can never be completely satiated (1997).

In my own research on imperial and nationalist spatial politics in colonial Delhi I have examined the scales of memory places deployed by the Indian anticolonial movement (Legg, 2003a). These ranged from sites at which the colonial justification for outbreaks of police violence was challenged, political processions that drew upon religious traditions of urban display, community-level organisation of local rituals, down to attempts to politicise traditional domestic homeplaces (2003b).

However, these measures were organised by the Indian National Congress, which came to dominate the nationalist movement with its secular, nonviolent creed. This vision bolstered memories of a united Indian homeland that itself had never existed before colonial cartography and administration. Such practices excluded the other imagined, but no less real, homelands of different nationalist groups. The Muslim League dreamed of a Muslim majority state, communists idealised a class-free society, Anglo-Indians yearned for a place of belonging between England and India, and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and other Hindu nationalist groups idealised *Hindutva*, a Hindu nation of religions indigenous to the subcontinent.

Furthering this movement beyond material foci of commemoration, Michael Landzelius has challenged the tendency to memorialise the past (2003). Rather, he encouraged a 'spatialised disinheritance' that would not petrify the past but would, rather, maintain its complexity and forestall a closure of meaning. Such tactics can be used to change the appearance of earlier monuments in order to challenge their foundations, as James Young has stressed in his work on German countermonuments that foreground rather than obfuscate their crisis of representation (1993).

Karen Till has added further depth to the memory work on contemporary Germany through her geo-ethnographic work in Berlin (2005). Till uses the notion of haunting to look at how places instil possession, absence, and desire in the urban landscape. Overturning the archaeological metaphor that presumes the existence of stable historical meaning beneath the present, Till draws out the tension in marking absence and loss in 'places of memory'. Although not directly challenging Nora's work, Till regeographicalises the concept through emphasising depth, erasure, and contestation.

This literature has raised several issues concerning Nora's project. These include the contested construction of memorial sites, their undetermined readership, and the very ability of sites to carry and interpolate meaning. I will argue that these issues emerge from the structure of Nora's writings, which maintain a nostalgic view of a united and uniting nation behind lieux de mémoire.

Nora and nostalgia

"The nostalgic dreams of a moment before knowledge and self-consciousness that itself lives on only in the self-consciousness of the nostalgic narrative. Nostalgia is the repetition that mourns the inauthenticity of all repetition and denies the repetition's capacity to form identity."

Susan Stewart (1984, page 23)

Before I analyse the place of nostalgia in Nora's work, the history of the concept itself must be unpacked. The term 'nostalgia' comes from the Greek for a painful longing (*algia*) to return home (*nostos*) (Boym, 2001). The term was coined in 1688 to describe the disease that led to the despondency of Swiss mercenaries positioned outside their homeland (Staborinski, 1966). Bryan Turner traces nostalgia back even further, although he locates it in the melancholia of Greek intellectuals rather than in a specific longing for some home (1987). By the 20th century, however, nostalgia had been demilitarised and demedicalised, coming to refer to the incurably wistful modern

condition (Boym, 2001). As Fred Davis claimed, this resulted in a sociolinguistic paradox which semantically deterritorialized the core referent: the home (1979).

As with 'memory' the task is to delimit and classify 'nostalgia' in order to deploy it in specific ways. Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw suggest three conditions for nostalgia (1989). First, they argue that it depends on a secular and linear conception of time with some concept of progress, although Roland Robertson has shown that this should not restrict nostalgia to the 'West', because of its articulation in 19th-century Turkey, Japan, and China (1990). Second, the failings of the present must be apprehended in the absence of some redemptive history that promises eventual salvation regardless. Third, evidence of the past is required to prompt nostalgic yearning.

These historical geographical categories are largely compatible with Turner's four dimensions of nostalgia (1987). Like Chase and Shaw, Turner stressed the feeling of historical decline but took this to the second, intimate level of the loss of personal wholeness and moral certainty. This combines with the third level, that of mourning for lost individual autonomy and freedom within an increasingly bureaucratic state. This is implicit in the fourth dimension of lost spontaneity and simplicity. Although Turner's approach is sociological, he goes on to make the more philosophical claim that consciousness leads to alienation from our surroundings. If being content is incompatible with knowing that we 'are', then 'nostalgic ontology' is an important feature of human existence. However, this claim that nostalgia accompanies consciousness, which must predate Western modern society, contradicts the dimensions outlined above which, justifiably, aim to delimit nostalgia to historical and geographical locations.

However, acknowledging nostalgia as 'social' does not discount an investigation of its inner workings. Although, as I show below, periods of nostalgia are linked to the sociocultural and political-economic environment, the 'home' that is yearned for need not be so real. Stewart has argued that nostalgia is a form of sadness without object. The yearned-for object only ever existed as narrative and thus is always absent, being felt only as a haunting lack that attaches itself to a sense of dwelling (see the quote at the head of this section). This dwelling is often an impossibly pure lived experience of a utopian origin. As such: "This point of desire which the nostalgic seeks is in fact the absence that is the very generating mechanism of desire ... : nostalgia is the desire for desire" (Stewart, 1984, page 23).

Yet, Stewart is wrong to claim that nostalgia is only "behind and before experience", not taking part in "lived experience" (1984, page 23). As Davis stressed, despite not being caused by the past, nostalgia is not simply an isolated mind trick or state of solipsistic narcissism (1979). Interactions with an unpredictable and hostile external world must provoke the nostalgic, at some point, to question this desire and its images, and even to question the need to question this desire. Davis categorized these approaches into three orders of nostalgia (1979). The first, simple nostalgia, is the positive evocation of the past against negative feelings towards the present. Second-order, reflexive, nostalgia questions the accuracy and completeness of nostalgia itself. Third-order, interpreted, nostalgia questions the reaction to nostalgia, directing questions not to the image of the past but to, as Stewart would put it, the desire for desire. For example: "why am I feeling nostalgic?" "What purpose does this serve?"

Although apparently unaware of Davis's work at the time of writing, Svetlana Boym has deployed two similar categories (Boym, 2001). 'Restorative' nostalgia focuses on *nostos* and aims to reconstruct the lost home, often in association with religious or nationalist revivals. As Alison Blunt has argued, these nostalgias are 'productive' and embodied in the world, although this does not necessarily make them 'progressive' (2003, page 19). However, 'reflective' nostalgia dwells on *algia*, and has no place habitation. It is embodied in the essence of movement, not in the essence of destination.

Restorative and reflective nostalgias are not only personal, but prone to historical periods and common modes of relating to the world. Nostalgia often follows both historical events and social change (Davis, 1979). David Lowenthal has written of the emergence of widespread nostalgia in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, as a result of the political upheavals that severed generational memories (1993). Similarly, Richard Terdiman writes of a 'memory crisis' in 19th-century France, in which people struggled to deal with their new relationship to the past (1993, page 29). This was not just a postrevolutionary nostalgia, but one associated with the social changes of industrialisation, urbanisation, demographic expansion, and a media industry that encouraged an awareness of the past. As memory became envisaged as a representation of the past, not as its repetition, it became amenable to nostalgic desires provoked by sociohistorical change. However, Davis has argued that this "constant movement in sociographical space" dislodged psychological attachment to a house and allowed nostalgia to roam: "In short, *home* is no longer where the hearth is" (1979, page 6, emphasis in original).

Robertson has suggested that the roaming of nostalgia took in the territory of the intellectual (1990). As nostalgia for the past flourished in literature, monuments, and ceremonies after the 1850s, so there emerged a series of sociological theories that retained a deeply nostalgic basis. Despite yearning for the objectivity of a social science, these theories are haunted by a sense of loss. Various commentators have detected nostalgic divisions between a negative present and a positive past in the work of the following authors: Kierkegaard's absurdity of faith versus Hegelian reason; Schopenhauer's Buddhist reconciliation with the world versus Hegelian historical optimism; Karl Marx's primitive communism and undifferentiated past versus modern division of labour; Friedrich Nietzsche's (imagined) alpine romantic sublime or an (imaginary yet historical) Greece versus unhappy integrated civilisations, Socratic rationalism (Strauth and Turner, 1988); Ferdinand Tönnies's *gemeinschaft* (community) versus *gesellschaft* (society); Max Weber's irrational satisfactions of charisma and tradition versus rational, bureaucratic society (Chase and Shaw, 1989); Claude Lévi-Strauss's oral traditions and direct contact versus privative societies of written documents (Stewart, 1984); Georg Simmel's individual freedom and creativity versus threatened socialibility (Boym, 2001); Georg Lukács's being-at-home in the world versus transcendental homelessness; Emile Durkheim's ascriptive feudal society of strong communities versus rootless, ambiguous identities (Chase and Shaw, 1989); the Chicago School of Sociology's cohesive society versus the atomized, heterogeneous, and disorganised city (Wolf, 1982); Theodor Adorno's unadulterated needs, local consumption versus age of overproduction and commodification (Stauth and Turner, 1988); and Fernand Braudel's trading markets versus money-based and infrastructure-based markets (Terdiman, 1993).

Special place is given to Tönnies, whose 1887 publication influenced much of 20th-century sociology and history (see Tönnies, 2001 [1887]). Tönnies suggested a historical evolution from traditional communities of memory repetition (*gemeinschaft*) to modern, urban societies of memory recollection (*gesellschaft*). Yet, Terdiman claims, "Tönnies transformed his account of traditional memory into a systematic *nostalgia for memory*" (1993, page 44, original emphasis). The nostalgia was presented both as a historical division and as being oriented in space. *Gemeinschaft* was associated with the rural, as opposed to the ephemerality of Baudelaire's urban flaneur (Gilloch, 1996). But it was also associated with the orientalist primitive (Said, 1978). Colonial geography and anthropology made the empire functional and, in Robertson's phrase, gave it "a nostalgic injection of Western *gemeinschaft*" (1990, page 46). For instance, Marcel Mauss spatialised Durkheim's nostalgic division, positioning the aboriginal as the

living past and Western society as a fragmented collection of autonomous individuals (Antze and Lambek, 1996). Memory was thus envisaged as something the periphery has, in the idea of the ‘people without History’ opposed to the ‘culture’ of the metropolis (Tai, 2001; Wolf, 1982).

It appears that nostalgia has accompanied the rise of modernism and colonialism, but how should we treat this emergence? Stewart unambiguously returned nostalgia to its origins, not as a biological disease but as a ‘social disease’ that privileged the past over the present in terms of authenticity (1984, page 23). Lowenthal suggested that nostalgia is often thought to be as pathological as the melancholia that afflicted its 18th-century victims (1989). But, if nostalgia is criticised for its commercialisation and prevalence in the media, it is also posed as reactionary and thus as ideological.

Raymond Williams has suggested that rural nostalgia obscured the responsibility of capitalism for industrial miseries, although it has also saturated left-wing visions of preindustrial utopias (Davis, 1979). As such, nostalgia has been criticised as a fear of change and, in Marxist terms, as an opiate of the masses that induces false consciousness and blunts their radical zeal. In sentimentalising tradition it justifies the position of the elite and thus represents a “contemporary malaise” (Chase and Shaw, 1989, page 1).

In opposition, Lowenthal accused those who disparaged nostalgia of ignorance and exaggeration, yet his justifications for this claim are unstable themselves (Lowenthal, 1989). He claims that nostalgia was present in the 19th century, not just in the present, and also in ‘less decadent’ contemporary nations such as China or the (then) Soviet Union. As such, this yearning is part of the fabric of the modern world, akin to Turner’s ontology of human alienation (1987). However, the prevalence of a phenomenon does not validate it or discount its negative effects. Lowenthal attempts to do this by claiming that nostalgics do not want to return to the past; but that they ultimately cherish its unattainability. However, through bolstering certain visions of the past nostalgia *does* have a contemporary effect and must be critiqued. But how do we do this?

Davis has argued that nostalgia need not be viewed negatively in certain situations (1979). It can diffuse panic, reactivity, and uncertainty and offer stability in times of conversion. Moving from stability to change, Turner argues that nostalgia can actually be radically critical through depicting ‘the modern’ as a departure from authenticity (1987, pages 154–155). This has been traced in the protestant invocation of the original Christian community, Marxist appeals to precapitalist social relations, and Nietzsche’s commitment to a nostalgic Hellenism. Similarly, David Eng and David Kazanjian have suggested that a melancholic relation to the past could in fact represent a refusal to accept dominant narratives (2003). This activates a continual yearning for an active relationship to ‘history’. Halbwachs also argued that nostalgia allowed one to escape the constrictions of time and social coercion by focusing on the past (Vronen, 1986).

The tension between these arguments can be resolved by recalling Boym’s division of focus in nostalgia between *nostos* and *algia*. Those restorative nostalgias which dwell on and glorify a past home can disable an engagement with the present through idolising the ‘return’. However, reflective nostalgias dwell on the present. They parody essentialism and contemplate ways to engage the past in the productive contemporary period. In the following sections I will argue that, despite a reflectively postmodern methodology and aim, Nora’s sentimental attachment to the French nation inserts a restorative yearning throughout his writings. This is apparent in his concept of *milieu de mémoire* (*née* *gemeinschaft*) and in his perennialist approach to the nation. Finally, his nostalgia for bodily memory and contested histories offers the potential for a redemptive nostalgia, which contains optimism for individual interpretation and recollection.

Milieux de nostalgie

“There are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory.”

Nora (1989, page 7)

In a recent article entitled “After loss, what then?” Judith Butler investigated loss as a social, political, and aesthetic condition, rather than as a psychological state (2003). This can be interpreted as a tracing of trauma as it afflicts collective, rather than individual, memory. After processes such as genocide, slavery, or colonisation, Butler claimed that communities must comprehend the loss of loss. Somewhere, sometime, something was lost, but no memory can retrieve it. This situation is not, however, a void of productivity. What emerges is “a spectral agency, one for whom a full ‘recovery’ is impossible, one for whom the irrecoverable becomes, paradoxically, the condition of a new political agency” (page 467). I would suggest that nostalgia is one form of this agency. Like the loss of loss, the desire for desire has lost its founding object yet continues to inspire action. A *gemeinschaft*, precapitalist society, or rural idyl is presumed to have been lost and thus becomes a free-floating signifier of desire.

Various commentators have positioned Nora within the previously mentioned genealogy of nostalgic authors. Terdiman placed Nora’s irrevocable division between rural and industrial epochs as the inheritor of Tönnies’s dichotomy, whereas Boym, Andreas Huyssen, and Till have commented on the clear nostalgia at play in his work (Boym, 2001; Huyssen, 2003a; Terdiman, 1993; Till, 2003). Nora’s lost object of desire is the *milieu de mémoire*, epitomised by peasant culture and portrayed as a ‘quintessential repository of collective memory’ (1989, page 7). Here, without self-consciousness, experience was enveloped in the warmth of tradition, the ancestral, and custom. Yet these real environments of memory are thought to be not just *before* modern France, but also *outside* of it. New processes of history, the conscious ordering of the past, are said to have recently disturbed colonial nations, where real memory had been preserved by “primitive or archaic societies” (Nora, 1989, pages 7–8). Similarly, Nora maintains that it was only in the mid-1970s that the ‘peasant world’ was definitively concluded with the end of rural society (1996a). As the number of agricultural labourers dipped below 10% of the national workforce and Latin mass was said for the last time across the fragmented and ephemeral *milieux* of the French countryside, a quiet change in the national collective consciousness took place.

Whereas the present used to be a “recycled, up-dated past”, it became radically different from a past that increasingly became invisible, provoking the urge to archive and to recollect consciously (Nora, 1989, page 16). Nora acknowledges that this inspired waves of nostalgia and the creation of *lieux de mémoire* in an attempt to cradle memory. Yet he cannot acknowledge the nostalgia for a *milieu* that epitomised what John Frow termed immediacy, presence, holism, and plurality (1993).

As Paul Antze and Michael Lambek have argued, “It is unlikely that there ever were untroubled, homogenous *milieux de mémoire*, ... or that such *milieux* were not characterised by specific formulations of memory in their own right” (1996, page xv). Although such nostalgic musings seems harmless, it is their role as the negative of a restorative nostalgia for the nation that urges their problematisation. To apply Turner’s four dimensions of nostalgia, Nora mourns the decline of *milieux de mémoire*, the loss of moral certainty they entailed, and the emotional spontaneity of peasant culture. However, the final dimension of nostalgia for an imaginary age of individual freedom and autonomy prior to institutionalised regulation and state bureaucracy is negated by Nora’s second wave of nostalgia.

The nation's past

“Other countries may owe the sinews of their cohesion and the secret of their togetherness to economics, religion, language, social or ethnic community, or to culture itself. France has owed them to the voluntary and continuous action of the State.”
Nora (1992b, page 34)⁽²⁾

Having divided French history into the memory epochs of milieux and lieux, Nora then made a further distinction. History in the 19th century was predominately that of the nation, whereas from the 1930s history came to serve society. From complementing the state, memory came to highlight many different contemporary forms of identity and to investigate past mentalities. However, Nora does not describe this process impassively. In serving society, history had “abandoned its claim to bearing coherent meaning and consequently lost its pedagogic authority to transmit values” (Nora, 1989, page 11). The new system is “disparate”, “more elective than imperative”, and without a “commemorative superego” or “canon” (Nora, 1996a, page 614). Mass media and popular heritage have replaced the state in being able to define a national past. Two hundred years after the event, the revolution had ceded its role in national identity formation to a broader range of events, embodied in lieux de mémoire (Hutton, 1993). The breakdown of the nation's appeal occurred in three states, accompanying the wars ending in 1918 (the Great War), 1945 (the Second World War), and 1962 (the Algerian War) (Nora, 1996a).

A heavy nostalgia haunts Nora's recollection of a unifying nation-state memory. Yet, as Davis argued, nostalgia is prompted by the present not just by the past. Nora follows other French historians in examining national memory in times of identity transition. Ernest Lavisse (1900–11) bolstered the historical self-image of the third republic during times of imperial expansion, and Ernest Renan (1990) placed the soul of the nation in memory not in territory after the loss of Alsace and Lorraine to Prussia in 1870 (Tai, 2001). Decolonisation and economic change in the 1960s prompted the study of marginal groups, although this subnational focus was not retained (Nora, 1996b). Finally, François Furet (1978) argued in the 1980s that the decades after the tumultuous Parisian protests of 1968 had seen the end of the French Revolution (Tai, 2001). It was in this period of historiographically questioning how to locate France and understand its past that Nora's work was so well received.

However, the historical and geographical context not only *allowed* Nora's work, but also *shaped* it. Bell has argued that the real subject of *Les Lieux de Mémoire* is the decline of France (1997). In an age of European Union integration, US global hegemony, and threatened French linguistic influence, Nora appears to mourn an age of national cohesion and power. Globalisation and the formation of transnational trading blocs are, however, felt worldwide. The specificity of Nora's work is made more apparent by its obvious links to a postimperial European nationhood that mourns its participation in global forces which no longer sway to its will. However, this mourning is not inevitable in, and is even contradictory of a postmodern methodology. After examining this framework, I will assess the portrayal of France's past and the critique of the present involved.

Nora's aim was not to catalogue lieux as repositories of real memory but to show that they are as fallible and capricious as memory itself (Bell, 1997). The aim was, thus, to peel away their levels of meaning and expose the invented nature of 'traditional' memories. As such, any nostalgia at play would be reflective,

⁽²⁾ Many thanks to David Bell for providing me with details of this passage, originally quoted in Bell (1997, page 34).

questioning the drive of nostalgia itself and dwelling on fragments of temporalised space (Boym, 2001). Krzysztof Pomian's review of the way the imagery of the Franks and Gauls has been used throughout history demonstrated the malleability of the past and its use in the present (1996). The methodological emphasis is thus in line with the postmodern focus on memory as an object of study rather than as a distortion of historical truth.

However, the strength of this presentist and genealogical approach is matched and blocked by the nostalgic urge. Nostalgia is the antithesis of a Foucauldian genealogy. Michel Foucault dismissed the search for origins in favour of tracing a present situation back through time and space and reveal its multiple and heterogeneous backgrounds (1977). Against this, nostalgia imagines an originary homeland born from the negative of the present, and displaces it in time and/or space.

As such, the problem with Nora's collection is that, as Bell put it, some lieux are more memorable than others (Bell, 1997). What began as genealogical and critical becomes genuflectory and devotional. This is particularly the case in lieux that represent French government or culture, such as elite academic institutions and the Louvre: what Steven Englund suggests could be considered as Althusserian ideological state apparatuses (1992). This has the effect of stressing the success of the state in dictating memory and excluding the claims of counter-memory.

But are there reasons to assume that nation memory was ever comprehensive in France? Nora (1984b) has claimed that, in the 19th and 20th centuries, an authoritarian, unitary, and exclusivist system forged memories of the republic (Wood, 1994). This involved a mobilisation of revolutionary memory against destabilising forces and threatening social alliances, consolidating its combative unity on an exclusionary ethos.

Nora's insistence that the memory nation was the last unification of memory and history has often been accepted. Peter Carrier has written of the effectiveness of the state and its institutions under the third republic in ensuring that collective memory reflected official historical interpretation (2000). Lowenthal has suggested that post-revolutionary "French history seems designed to expunge divisive counter-memories" (1993, page 175). Nancy Wood has written of a past era of "the nation-states's unassailable supremacy as the key organizing principle of modern societies, [in which] memory relied primarily on narratives of a national past to provide the thread of continuity between past, present and future" (1994, page 129). Hutton has also written that in the modern era memory was identified primarily with the political history of the modern state (1993). Rather than reflecting on the forces at work, this emphasis only gives weight to a restorative urge based on a perennialist concept of the nation and a negative depiction of heterogeneous memories.

François and Schulze's (2003) work provides a counterstudy, highlighting the specificity of Nora's model to France, although this model itself may be suspect. Germany does not have a continuous history as a state, and as such defines itself more through culture and language than through history, as Nora admitted could be the case in the quote heading this section. As such, against the nostalgic tendency, Germany is identified more by a responsibility towards learning from the past and by a commitment to strengthening the postunification nation (Breuille, 2003). Similarly, Bruno Tobia has shown that regional affiliations worked against attempts to combine tradition and modernity with an ideology of the modern state in 19th-century Italy (1996).

Mitch Rose has recently argued that too many examiners of resistance envisage a stable and monumental edifice in which the task is to find possible points of weakness (2002). Against this, deconstruction should highlight how reified objects are always already in the process of deconstruction themselves. Although Nora claims to observe always self-deconstructing and reconstructing lieux de mémoire, he actually posits the

nation as a real and perennial form within these sites.⁽³⁾ As Englund has argued, Nora defends nationalist orthodoxy while appearing to criticise it by presenting the nation not as symbol but as the highest reality (1992). The result, as Hue-Tam Ho Tai has suggested, is that, despite the different perspectives on the nation, they are presented as having only one object that is indivisible over time and space (2001).

It is the contemporary geopolitical position of France and the popular questioning of nation-state memory that leads to Nora's elegiac tone and "late imperial mourning" (Englund, 1992, page 311). The project itself is even referred to by the editor of the translated volumes as a "symptomatology of cultural melancholia" (Kritzman, 1996a, page ix). This melancholia for the nation and nostalgia for the past is, again, not simply wistful. It excludes some groups from a formative role in national identity and forecloses a pluralistic conception of the contemporary, postcolonial nation.

Whereas Nora has claimed that lieux de mémoire aim to block forgetting, the classification of certain lieux as pertaining to national identity must block and forget rival forms of nationhood (1989). Huyssen has argued that historical memories of modernity are still lacking in anamnesis (1995). Anamnesis refers here to the recognition of difference and otherness and to the constitutive reliance of dominant memories on exclusion. Who, then, in his reconstruction of the memory places of modern France, does Nora exclude?

The project is saturated with what Englund refers to as the indissociability of the nation and state, refusing to acknowledge that the nation might result from nonstate or antistate initiatives (Englund, 1992). The 500-year-old French Empire is hardly considered in terms of its effect on national identity besides in an article on the Colonial Exhibition of 1931 (Ageron, 1984), despite the ongoing debates colonialism prompted about the 'rights of man' (Tai, 2001). Nor is internal colonialism fully considered. Although the bureaucratisation of the provinces and the spread of the standardised French language are covered, the reception of these measures is not recounted, and there is no consideration of regional subnationalism.

Even when the outside world took human form in France, the periphery was not considered, especially in the English translations. Nora has been publicly criticised for failing to acknowledge immigrants, who were not 'easily adaptable' to 'Frenchness' (Nora, 1996b, page xxiii), in a country in which, Bell claims, one in four citizens has a foreign-born grandparent (1997). Yet a popular awareness of this ethnic diversity was repressed, in the past, for fear of damaging a tenuous national unity based on shared language and culture. Nora failed to challenge this official censoring and displays an especial disinterest towards counter-memories that challenge the Europeanness of the French nation.

Nora also displayed the nostalgic tendency to imagine a unified and rural beginning; Nora's collection emphasises the countryside over the towns and cities. Although geographical divisions within France are mapped, social divisions between the left and right, catholic and protestant, are not always given the formative role they deserve.⁽⁴⁾ So what vision of the French nation emerges after these exclusions?

Boym claimed that, in relation to nationalism, restorative nostalgia had two narrative plots: right-wing conspiracy theories or more general musings on the restoration of origins (2001). Although there is no question of Nora's involvement

⁽³⁾ For a discussion of the perennial tendency in theories of nationalism see John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith (2000).

⁽⁴⁾ John Breuilly (2003) has noticed a similar failure in Francois and Schulze's (2003) work on German places of memory to analyse nonnational sites of memory within the nation, such as the Berlin insurrection of 1848 or socialist 1 May celebrations.

with the conspiracy theories, the inner logic of the lieux de mémoire project fails to encourage multiple imagined communities based around ethnic or social principles through its attention on a unitary national homeland. Nora has claimed that realms of memory can stress solidarity and organisation while also tolerating multiple voices (1996b), and Carrier claims that a pluralist understanding of memory as constellation represents the diversity of French history in Nora's work (2000). However, Carrier has to admit from the start that this pluralist effort is undermined by the projection of a unitary total history of Frenchness over all the subject matter. This is the central tension in the lieux project and recurs throughout Carrier's defence.

Raphael Samuel criticised Nora for focusing on official memory rather than on popular memory (1994). Carrier, in reply, stressed Nora's liberal political convictions underlying his emphasis on plurality, but noted that these convictions are not always carried through (2000). Similarly, Carrier acknowledges that lieux are instrumental and functional in maintaining national identity, yet that they are not supposed to be able to rally communities in defence of minority or national rights (2000). It is later argued that lieux de mémoire are politically inert and thus do not fuse or divide French society. However, it is immediately acknowledged that "Nora's system does not account for the problem of minority identities opposed to integration" and thus the political inertness is based on the exclusion of politically contentious claims on the nation (2000, page 41).

Carrier further demonstrated the contradiction between the (pluralistic) methodology and (essentialist) nationalism in claiming that places of memory are not homogenising. He then insisted that Nora's aim is not to oppose the different memories of different groups but to determine their common qualitative basis, which was claimed to be cultural, not political (2000). People may be free to pick which lieux they identify with, but Nora's selection of lieux to characterise the nation is proscriptive and heavily nostalgic. As such, Carrier ultimately has to admit that Nora's project "nevertheless reflects the republican model of cultural integration" as a result of the absence of contentious challenges to cultural uniformity (page 54).

Thus, beneath the claims of plurality, Nora is actually wary of the social division and exclusion that the new particularistic cultural ethos may bring, although he distances himself from conspiracy theories and the scapegoating of outsiders they can inspire (Wood, 1994). Ironically, it is only with a model of the nation-state that stresses productive conflict and contestation that Nora's model can provide an accurate portrayal of the past. This could also found a vision of the nation for the present that does not exclude those whose daily life in the nation does not resemble that of *Les Lieux de Mémoire*.

The problems with Nora's work circulate around the issues of memory: not just the (rose-tinted) lens through which the past is viewed, but also the way memory is conceived. Mostly, as Hutton has argued, memory in the *Lieux de Mémoire* project is viewed not as a spirit to be resurrected, a mentality to be enlivened, or mores that endure but as the rhetoric of commemoration (1993). This excludes, in most cases, the question of reception. Tai has read Nora against the literature that examines memory in terms of opposition to state power (2001). Memory work on the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe as well as the holocaust literature shows memory in its most local, diffuse, and polysemic in undermining nationalising projects. Without these emphases, Nora failed to view the local within the national, the anchoring of memory in community, or the role of gender as productive rather than as representative of the nation.

Englund also stresses that the nation should be dereified and examined as a contested concept (1992). This would involve asking questions such as: what are the

competing images of the nation? Who is using the national vocabulary? For what end is it deployed, and what are its deficiencies? These questions were posed by Natalie Davies and Randolph Starn in the introduction to Nora's translated article published in 1989 and have haunted his work ever since (1989). A conception of the nation that can accommodate these questions exist within Nora's work and will now be explored.

Beyond nostalgia?

Nora's terms and concepts can be utilised effectively, but only if they are heavily qualified. First, the inconsistencies in his definition of memory need to be analysed. Memory is portrayed as *passive*, by using the traditional language of the feminine and the East. Memory is open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, and susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived (Nora, 1989). The inevitable endgame of memory is that it is "wholly absorbed by its meticulous reconstitution" (page 13). However, Nora finds it impossible to retain this pessimism throughout the account. Beyond the spaces of history, Nora vaguely suggests that memory is "retained as the secret of so-called primitive or archaic societies" (page 8). Likewise, lieux de mémoire are described as the "ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has *barely survived* in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it" (page 12, emphasis added). Certain minorities are said to jealously defend their privileged memory that has retreated to protected enclaves. Yet, rather than being posed as evidence of the potential resilience of memory, these cases are projected as further confirmation of the dominance of history: "without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep them away" (page 12).

Nora himself is guilty of a form of epistemic violence, characterising memory as that which is silenced and quelled. Within his writing there is a genealogy waiting to be released, a tracing of the voices and markings at the edges of disciplined space and rationalised history, the existence of which is attested by the founding moment on which his history is based. Nora quotes Halbwachs, suggesting there are as many memories as there are social groups, that memory is multiple yet specific (Nora, 1989). If this is the case, how can all memory be homogenised by the relatively totalising and unspecific schemata of history?

Foucault's work forces us to ask why, if resistance were not possible, would such extreme measures be taken to discipline and govern space and society? (Elden, 2001, page 106). Likewise, through reading and examining the continual and gigantic effort of history, what we are simultaneously reading and confirming is the opposite but equal underside that is memory. Nora also offers hints towards the location of memory. 'True memory' resides in gestures, habits, skills, unspoken traditions, the self-knowledge of the body, unstudied reflexes, and ingrained memories (Nora, 1989, page 13). When passed through history, these become voluntary and deliberate, never social and encompassing. Thus, the first place to look beyond history is the body and habituated practices of the social body.

Another inconsistency in Nora's work is in his use of the term 'history'. As against the passivity of memory, history is undeniable *dominant*. It is described by using the traditional vocabulary of the masculine and the West. It is dictatorial, commanding, all-powerful, spontaneously actualising, and that which reinvents tradition (Nora, 1989). Having conquered memory, history reconstitutes the past. Yet, again, Nora goes on to suggest an alternative to this reading of history, showing how historians denounce the hypocritical mythologies of their own predecessors (1989). This process is 'fundamentally unsettling' because it shows that historians themselves are vulnerable to memory and situatedness, and that their knowledge is indistinguishable from the

power that granted and enabled their accounts. These recollections of the past must also depend upon traditional ‘repetition’ which undermines any claim to scientific objectivity (Hutton, 1993).

If history is produced from a vantage point of patronage, this opens the possibility for counterhistories, for alternative patrons, and knowledges that play to a different tune. Again, Nora operates within a Foucault-inspired framework, but one that collapses under the full weight of a Foucauldian understanding of power (Foucault, 1980). The Halbwachs-inspired understanding of social or collective memory hints at the lack of a true ‘history’, replacing a verifiable past with a discursively mediated knowledge born of social interaction. However, Nora refuses to acknowledge the power relations behind such practices of truth production and the positionality of the perspectives from which the lieux are selected. Similarly, power must be acknowledged as circulatory, as something sustained in individual uptake through technologies and practices of the self, and mediated dialogically through contextualised understanding, discussion, and contestation (Foucault, 2001 [1982]).

Nora is right to suggest that “Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects; history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to *relations* between things” (1989, page 9, emphasis added). But what Nora does not stress is that these relations are *power relations*, and that power is never incontestable. Steps were made towards acknowledging sites of counter-memory through his later distinction between imposed and constructed lieux. The first of these involves an intentional memorial inscription, such as an official state symbol, whereas the second involves unforeseen mechanisms, human effort, and certain combinations of circumstances (1996c). Nora also hinted at the ability of minority groups to regain independent memories when he discusses how, during the collapse of nation memory and the rise of prolific commemoration, history and memory blurred. What are today referred to as working-class, female, or Occitanian ‘memories’ actually mark the advent of historical consciousness in defunct traditions from which the members are separated (1996a). These histories were not included in ‘official history’ because the “national group was generally constructed by stifling them or reducing them to silence, or because they did emerge as such into history” (1996a, page 626). In this sense, counter-memories are as consciously created as lieux de mémoire, but are founded on a counterhistorical narrative.

Therefore, within Nora’s description of history, there are two ruptures through which we might glimpse traces of an alternative genealogy. First, he states that history is suspicious of memory and that its “true mission is to suppress and destroy it”, yet that practices of the body, both social and individual, can harbour memory from this annihilation (1989, page 9). Second, the situatedness of history means that, as memory recedes in the face of time–space distancing, globalisation, and/or colonisation, more than one form of history can attempt to represent and speak for those who find themselves bereft of traditional memory. Rather than the victorious procession of History, what we can see is the survival of memory and a multiplicity of attempts to colonise the “shore” as the “sea of living memory” recedes (page 12).

We can thus return to the lieux de mémoire, those *cenotaphs* (literally ‘empty graves’) of memory which, rather than acting as the final refuge of memory, mark those places and ways in which history has appropriated the space and function of memory. To place these concepts in physical space, the sites of the first conduit outlined above would not be these lieux but would be spaces outside those of modern, industrial, bureaucratic functioning in which traditional forms of embodiment and practice can survive, such as the home or the neighbourhood. They would also include

temporal reterritorialisations of formal spaces—for example, the carnival, the festival, the squat, or the rally.

Nora himself admitted that real memory was spatially demarcated. Whereas “dominant lieux” were imposed and cold, “dominated lieux” were “places of refuge, sanctuaries of spontaneous devotion and silent pilgrimage, where one finds the living heart of memory” (1989, page 23). Drawing on the example of the difficult assimilation of Muslims into French society, Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan have similarly stressed that the ritual or sacred has not vanished, but perhaps it may now be found in places other than churches or synagogues (1999).

Yet there are also sites of the second conduit, not a memory that survives by chance but sites of counterhistory that fight against forgetting and reread events by using a separate narrative. As Jonathan Boyarin has commented, “Space for memory is also contested through ephemeral demonstrations against forgetting” (1994, page 20). These sites of countermemory, not havens of ‘true’ memory but constructs that claim the function of memory in the name of an alternative history, would not be official or obvious. Counterhistorical movements would not necessarily have the resources to erect and maintain physical monuments. Rather, these sites would be corporeal, unofficial, temporal, and reterritorialising or deterritorialising, born in social memory and rumour (Legg, forthcoming).

The urban form is suited to a combative range of memory politics, and to inducing understanding of those politics, because of its density of population and its ability to retain memory traces, whether in the material environment or in social myth. David Gross has written of three types of urban memories (1990). The first, memories of specific events, corresponds to sites of countermemory and mark particular happenings at particular sites—for instance, the storming of the Bastille in Paris in 1789. The second type concerns previous forms of life, or surviving memories, that are associated with parts of the city, such as ethnic groups or classes in certain neighbourhoods. The third type, of the ‘past as such’, refers to the material traces of bygone eras, although the contemporaneous objects which gave these sites meaning have also passed. The first two of these urban memories will be further investigated as correctives to Nora’s vision.

Countermemory

Sites of countermemory are not Young’s countermonuments, which are sites that challenge the ability to monumentalise the past (Young, 1993). Rather, they resemble Richard Werbner’s sites of ‘antimemory’, which evoke imagined, buried, or repressed remembrance, whether to aid nation-building regimes, states-in-the-making, or antielite subalterns (1998). Hutton has shown that the examination of countermemories focuses on social as well as political history, collective mentalities rather than those of the elite, and female history as well as male history (1993). These are not just of historical importance, but can effect contemporary restitution and reparation, force recognition of wrongdoing, and increase the readiness of groups to listen to the stories of the previously silenced (Hodgkin and Radstone, 2003b).

Tai acknowledged the importance of countermemory, but also its absence from lieux de mémoire (2001). Despite occasional references to countermemories, Nora fails to recognise consistently the converse side of lieux de mémoire. Because memory is selective it must forget as much as it remembers, and the discussion of Nora has shown that this forgetting has political consequences.

Jenny Edkins (2003) has explored state-backed processes of memory and forgetting through examining the treatment by sovereign powers of traumatic events. Although ‘trauma time’ marks an event of exception and unsettling irregularity, Edkins shows how attempts are made to incorporate tragedy into the linear time of the stable,

regulating nation-state. However, the role of the state in many of the incidents of famine, genocide, and war which it attempts to commemorate bestows linear, state time with the potential for disruption through sites of counter-memory.

Edkins (2003, page 31) directly challenges Nora's conception of memory through emphasising its practical and potentially insurrectionary capacity. As Gross (2000, page 133) has argued, "always available to anyone at any time is the freedom not only to remember in a manner unlike most other people but also to remember other and different things than are encouraged by conventional norms." Gross (page 134) continued that "To remember differently, then, is no easy task. It takes effort, determination, and self-initiation to search out and hold onto counter-memories at a time when most others are content with the memories that are already in circulation." Yet, rather than these memories having to be hacked out forcefully, they are a constitutive part of dominant memory. These counterdiscourses, claims Terdiman, have the mnemonic function of recalling the "dominant others" and restoring the excluded subjects and perspectives to false totalisations (1993, page 19). For example, Derek Gregory (2004, page 9) has followed Ali Behdad in locating postcolonial critique as a form of counter-historical memory work: a process of anamnesis (Behdad, 1994, page 8). Postcolonialism seeks out the continuing influence of colonialism in the present so as to subvert it, forbidding us to forget the violence, both physical and epistemic, of colonial modernity.

Further developments of Nora's framework have highlighted the restrictive nature of a solely national focus, which in turn opens up a wider scope for counter-historical collaboration. In Francois and Schulze's (2003) direct application of the *lieux de mémoire* template they insisted on emphasising the permeability of Germany and Europe, presenting the nation as outward looking, multilevelled, and transnational (Koshar, 2003). Similarly, working outwards from Germany, Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider have examined the diffusion of the holocaust discourse through a globalised memory culture (2003). Ideas about the holocaust have become inscribed in situations as diverse as Rwanda, South Africa, Latin America, and the Balkans. The idea of transnational memory-scapes brings into question who is remembering, what is being remembered, and to what degree can the nation-state monopolistically interpret historical memory, if it ever could?

Such work chimes with Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer's work on the 'postmemories' of people who have memories of places or events, often in other countries, that they have not encountered, as a result of the enculturating properties of a particular group or family (2003). Huyssen has, however, challenged Levy and Sznaider's concept of cosmopolitan memory, suggesting it privileges processes of deterritorialisation and Eurocentric concepts, without paying due attention to reterritorialisation in both the 'core' and the 'periphery', which could produce transnational or postnational networks of solidarity (2003b).

As an example, Huyssen (2003a) has examined sites of counter-memory in Buenos Aires. The Parque de la Memoria (the memory park) is a monument to the roughly 30 000 individuals who 'disappeared' during the Argentinean military dictatorship of 1976–83. The site resists the desire to forget these traumatic deaths and, as such, makes the memorial a site of intervention and agency today. Yet, a deep understanding of the site must include how it has been influenced by international commemorative spaces and discourses centred around, for instance, the Jewish Museum in Berlin or the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington. Thus, sites of counter-memory can use internationally developed tools against forgetting in combination with the local and impassioned activities of the aggrieved: the Argentinean monument marks the site where the mothers of the disappeared voiced their grievance to the state.

However, it would be a mistake to fall into a nostalgic reverie over counterhistorical groups that always manage, against the odds, to resist dominant ordering and coercion. Terdiman's earlier work stressed the difficulty of denouncing a regime without being drawn into its rhetoric and thus negating the antagonism (1985). Although discourses function most effectively when they appear 'natural', their policing function is exposed in their exclusion of antagonists, who can situate historical discourses as viewpoints not as truths. However, in examining this process, one may simply examine the construction of a rival set of lieux de mémoire that are still conceived within Nora's framework. Although Hutton recommended the study of counter-memories, he warned against bolstering a division between memory and history (1993). Instead, he argued for viewing all histories as based on 'repetition' and tradition. Similarly, Kerwin Klein stressed that memory and history are still treated as antithetical when they should complement each other (2000).

Paul Connerton has highlighted the nature of this symbiosis in social memory, where the social memory is maintained through objects and performances (1989). These performances are not static but manipulated and updated with changing regimes. This can be achieved through ceremonies, which publicly mark the changing times, or through bodily practices whether of clothing, posture, or carnivalesque spatial performances. Although these practices cannot help drawing on the old, whether in rejection, parody, or satire, they lay the foundations for a new social memory. Connerton stresses that social memory need not always be state sanctioned and recorded in the official archive. To recollect social memory is a genealogical task, rather than one of historical analysis. This genealogy must take in both counter-memorial, commemorative acts, and the way that memory survives and evolves in the social, and anatomical body. As such "commemorative ceremonies prove to be commemorative only in so far as they are performative; performativity cannot be thought without the concept of habit; and habit cannot be thought without a notion of bodily automatisms" (1989, page 14).

Embodied memory

How should one interpret Nora's claim that the body can retain 'real memories'? Is this just a nostalgic hangover, a displacement of the yearning for a milieu de mémoire from the historically distant into the corporeally intimate? Is there a case for redemptive or productive nostalgias that are not reclusive or negative? Nora's nostalgia for milieux de mémoire and the nation was criticised because of the negative impression it gave of a contemporary, more culturally heterogeneous, society. If nostalgia produced an image of the past that involved *more* contestation and memory survival, would this be justified? That is, can the nostalgic search for nonstate memories be warranted?

First, Nora has the support of a strong academic tradition that locates memory in the body, whether cognitively or socially. For instance, neurocognitive scientists have highlighted different types of memory. Conscious memories of facts and events (declarative memories) function differently to nonconscious memories such as skill learning or habit forming (nondeclarative or procedural memories). Larry Squire argues that such memories cannot necessarily be called forth to consciousness because they were formed before or outside of declarative memory (1999). However, Antze has criticised such neurocognitive models for excluding the role of the symbolic in memory formation and in the application of procedural memories to future contexts (2003).

The mediated nature of memories presumed to be bodily memories has also been applied in social contexts. Various branches of literature have considered the potential of the body to carry memory and to transmit it across generations. Tony Bennett is justified in criticising 18th-century to 19th-century organic 'depth models' of the body that saw it containing memories of past generations (2003). However, he is wrong

to classify Nora within this tradition, as Nora's bodily memories were cultural and ingrained rather than being biological and inherited.

Memories are embodied because they are multisensory and in many cases prelinguistic. Even cognitive recall can create strong physical reactions, such as nausea or an adrenaline rush, and physical stimuli such as smells, songs, or textures can provoke unbidden recollections. Our 'bodies' themselves, or the part of the brain controlling the body, also harbour certain memories. These can be place-bound attachments, bodily routines, or physical changes in the body related to lifestyle (Nast and Pile, 1998). As such, people perform their identity not only through social presentation, but also through working on their bodies, through diet, exercise, or constraint, such that bodies bear the memory of previous identity choices (Butler, 1993).

Nora's particular conception fits more within Michael Bakhtin's study of the carnivalesque, which identifies bodily memories as the underside of official order. The carnival was read as a time to release bodily desire and nonstate forms of memory. However, Terry Eagleton (1981) has suggested that the carnival is a bounded liberation that actually reinforces social stability through stressing what cannot be performed in normal circumstances (Lewis and Pile, 1996).

It is, therefore, impossible to argue for a bodily memory outside of social context, just as commemoration is impossible, in Connerton's terms, without bodily automatisms. However, theories of memory must stress the bodily and the surviving aspects of memory because of their underemphasis in traditional theories (Landzelius, 2004). Thus, accompanying Werbner's antimemories were immediate memories—that is, traces of past experiences in the body that are kept alive and kept from being forgotten (Werbner, 1998). Similarly, in addition to emphasising countermemories, Gross stressed "enduring non-contemporary memories" (2000, page 143). These memories survived in "out-of-the-way places" (page 143), representing a living presence of the past, whether peripheral (rural or religious) or underground (hiding places). These memories "sequester and thereby protect still living models of noncontemporaneity, enabling them to continue on, in no matter how reduced a condition, within the context of a present that in most respects is antagonistic to them" (page 143).

The spatial element in Gross's example is significant. Experiences of space are vital for locating and provoking memories that are often identified solely with the body. Mike Crang and Penny Travlou have explored Michel de Certeau's writings on place as haunted by dream sites (Crang and Travlou, 2001; deCerteau, 1985). Here, contradiction and surprise association unsettle one's experience of spaces supposedly controlled by 'history'. Similarly, Boym argued against the ability of history or the nation to dictate memory space. She stressed that collective memory, in conjoining the various social frameworks of individual recollection, was diverse, as opposed to the single teleological plot of nationalist narratives (2001). This became evident in her archaeologies of postcommunist metropolises in which memory was porous, in the Benjaminian sense (2001). Beneath the totalitarian spaces of Moscow as the 'New Rome' there continued to thrive Moscow as 'Big Village', community spaces that were sly and concealing rather than open (2001). Similarly, Alessandro Portelli argued that, as a result of a Nazi massacre in wartime Rome, the urban arena simultaneously contained two cities: a middle-class Rome of graceful, private mourning, and a south Italian city of loud, embodied, uncontrolled grief (2003).

The emphasis on human places beneath bureaucratic or rational spaces is in synergy with a return to examining bodies as subjectively experienced and possibly resistant, rather than as spaces of Foucauldian discipline writ small. Both bodies and the landscape effect identity through material grounding and through coordinating processes of subjectification. While they can be sites of loss, they also maintain traces

and resistant presences. As Radhika Mohanram has suggested, if the body retains the presence of indigenous traces after colonisation then “‘Place’ signifies the loss of language through the process of colonialism, yet a simultaneous alterity of consciousness suggesting the undertow of indigenous identity seeping through, and restructuring colonized identity” (1999, page 55).

This alterity can be historicised and defended as counterhegemonic identity, but this countermemory emerges from and relies upon memory traces that survive haphazardly in marginal and ‘out-of-the-way’ places. Memory and history are, as such, locked in an intimate embrace rather than in the aggressive duel that Nora suggests. It is only through combining an analysis of national lieux de mémoire with spaces of memory contestation and survival that complete and inclusive conception of the spaces of the nation can be created.

Conclusion

This paper began with a consideration of the concepts of memory and nostalgia and, via the works of Nora, it is to those themes which we must circuitously return. Theories of nostalgia have highlighted both its negative and positive potential, both of which rely upon the centrality of an imagined homeland. Nora’s homelands of the milieux de mémoire and the unified nation have haunted his work and, despite claims for polyvocality, have restricted the view of the nation he propounds.

Nora has also consistently worked towards a particular conception of memory, despite claiming that memory is many things, from remembrance to custom to practices (1996a). The emphasis was explicitly on symbolism and mythology (1989). As Nora stated, the goal was “to define France as a reality that is entirely symbolic, and thus to reject any definition that would reduce it to phenomena of another order” (page xxiv). Yet memory is increasingly being stressed as being of another order to the symbolic. This order is that of ‘practice’, of memory that emerges from experience, cultural meaning, and social institutions (Antze and Lambek, 1996). This lived experience concerns subjectification: the role of the individual in capitulating to subjugation or in taking up technologies of the self (Radstone, 2000). In failing to consider this order, Nora’s nostalgias are not forced into sufficient contact with the situations that could challenge their imaginary origins.

Although this may seem harsh on Nora, critical attention is demanded by the influence of his work, and his determination to craft the Lieux de Mémoire project into the fourth type of French history, following those of Jules Michelet, Ernest Lavisse, and Fernand Braudel (Nora, 1996b). In lived contexts, seemingly solid symbolic structures can be challenged with alternatives, whereas in the complexity of practical society alternative memories survive and proliferate. It is through placing such sites in their context that the nation is exposed as contested in another sense. Various globalised forces work to undermine the nation-state as the conductor of memory, whether these forces are those of economics, cultural commodities, social movements, or transnational memories and means of commemoration. Countered from above and below, Nora’s emphasis on the nation seems increasingly out of place(s).

However, if Nora’s work displayed what Davis (1979) termed ‘simple’ nostalgia (and this review has been ‘reflective’ in questioning restorative nostalgia images), what would third-level ‘interpretative’ questions show about the *need* to critique nostalgia? I have argued that nostalgia for milieux de mémoire and the memory nation is negative because of its impacts on historical methodology and views of contemporary heterogeneous societies. However, Nora’s emphasis on the real memories of the body implicitly associates them with the nostalgic yearning for real milieux de mémoire. Similarly, there is a danger of romanticising antistate memories

and their supporters. Yet, this disposition points to the possible survival of memory beyond historical spaces and processes and can thus be both productive and progressive. While we remain critical of sources and agendas, an awareness of surviving traditions can offer reassurance in times of globalising and unsettling change, and listening to counterhistorical stories can launch a radical critique of present systems. When added to state and social memories, these elements can provide a more inclusive and cosmopolitan image of the nation's past and hopefully a more integrative and inclusive framework for the future.

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