



## **STATES OF MEMORY**

CONTINUITIES, CONFLICTS,  
AND TRANSFORMATIONS IN  
NATIONAL RETROSPECTION

**JEFFREY K. OLICK, EDITOR**

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AND TRANSFORMATIONS IN  
NATIONAL RETROSPECTION

*Edited by Jeffrey K. Olick*

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## Introduction

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Since at least the nineteenth century, scholars and politicians alike have recognized the fundamental connection between memory and the nation. While political elites invented and propagated legitimating traditions, historians objectified the nation as a unitary entity with a linear descent. At the same time, critics like Renan pointed out that forgetting is at the heart of national self-understanding—forgetting alternative possible stories and alternate possible identifications—while Nietzsche bemoaned the proliferation of “monumental” history. The First World War seemed to many good enough reason to abandon nationalist chauvinism, but for others a myth of the war experience “provided the nation with a new depth of religious feeling, putting at its disposal ever-present saints and martyrs, places of worship, and a heritage to emulate” (Mosse 1990). And the anemic internationalism of the 1920s was just that—inter-nationalism rather than postnationalism, based on a nebulous and misunderstood notion of “self-determination”—where the burning memory of stabs in the back and imposed settlements fanned old antipathies to new heights. Memory has long been the handmaiden of nationalist zeal, history its high counsel. Even those like Nietzsche and Renan who critiqued memory’s ambitions understood its centrality.

Recent theorists of nationalism, however, have challenged both national memory and historiographical nationalism by historicizing the nation as an identitarian as well as political form. As Benedict Anderson (1991: 5) puts it, there is a paradox in “the objective modernity of nations in the [non-nationalist] historian’s eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists.” According to Anderson, the nation is the only candidate to make up for the missing existential securities lost with the decline of the religious world view resulting from the accelerated rhythms of life under print-capitalism. Anderson argues that a massive transformation of temporal perceptions and an associated rise of interest in the past thus made it possible, even necessary, “to think the nation” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nationalism, as Anthony Smith (1986) puts it, in the process became “a surrogate religion which aims to overcome the sense of futility engendered by the removal of any vision of an existence after death, by linking individuals to persisting communities whose generations form indissoluble links in a chain of memories and identities.”

Theorists of postmodernity, however, have focused not on the rise of the memory-nation but on its demise in recent years. This is not old-style modernization theory, which sees nationalism as an intermediate stage in a progression from enchanted to disenchanted world views, though it does occasionally reverberate teleological overtones. Rather, these authors have problematized the role of memory as one component in a complex and shifting amalgam of perceptions that form the pervasive and permanent, though ever-changing, historicity of the world. There are no identities, national or otherwise, that are not constituted and challenged in time and with histories, but nations have had a special place in the history of memory and identity and in the history of their relations. Memory and the nation have a peculiar synergy. Even when other identities compete with or supplant the national in postmodernity, they draw on—and are increasingly nostalgic for—the uniquely powerful forms of memory generated in the crucible of the nation-state.

According to Pierre Nora (1992)—the preeminent figure in recent discussions of the memory-nation nexus—the memory-nation in its ascendancy relied on national historical narratives to provide continuity through identity. In the nineteenth century, Nora argues, the nation as a foundation of identity eroded as the state ceded power to society. The

nation itself, earlier shored up by memory, now appears as a mere “memory trace.” Nora thus sees the nation-state as declining in salience, the last incarnation of the unification of memory and history, a form in which history could provide the social cohesion memory no longer could. But history too has now lost its temporary ability to transmit values with pedagogical authority (Wood 1994). We are left with a proliferation of different memories; the remains of unitary history are but residues scattered throughout the social landscape.

“We speak so much of memory,” Nora writes, “because there is so little of it left.” Where premodern societies lived within the continuous past, contemporary societies have separated memory from the continuity of social reproduction; memory is now a matter of explicit signs, not of implicit meanings. Our only recourse has been to represent and invent what we can no longer spontaneously experience. The memory-nation of the late-nineteenth century was never really up to the task, though it managed for a while because it used the past to project a unitary future. Now, since the end of the twentieth century, we experience a memory boom in which novelty is associated with new versions of the past rather than with the future. In contrast to the historical fever to legitimize the nation-state that Nietzsche derided, “the mnemonic convulsions of our culture,” Andreas Huyssen (1995) writes, “seem chaotic, fragmentary, and free-floating.”

But theorists of postmodernity are divided as to whether this is a case of total loss. Nora’s grand project to catalogue all of the “sites of memory” in French society has been labeled by some critics a neonationalist fantasy (Englund 1992). Patrick Hutton (1993) has characterized it as a call not to celebrate the past but to celebrate our celebrations of the past; Hutton refers to Nora’s project as the attempt to autopsy the past’s remains. On the other hand, many others are relieved by the refutation of nationalist grand narratives. Jonathan Boyarin (1994), for instance, points out that statist ideologies “involve a particularly potent manipulation of dimensionalities of space and time, invoking rhetorically fixed national identities to legitimate their monopoly on administrative control.” Prasenjit Duara (1995) writes that the relationship between linear historicity and the nation-state is repressive: “National history secures for the contested and contingent nation the false unity of a self-same, national subject evolving through time” enabling “conquests of Historical [*sic*] awareness

over other, 'nonprogressive' modes of time." Huyssen (1995) sees in recent positions "a welcome critique of compromised teleological notions of history rather than being simply anti-historical, relativistic, or subjective."

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At a more mundane level, it is clear that questions of memory and its relation to national and other identities have moved to the center of a variety of intellectual agendas in the past ten to twenty years (see Olick and Robbins 1998). Scholars from a wide range of disciplines and with diverse area specialties have begun to examine aspects of social memory. Sources of this scholarly interest include a revival in cultural sociology (Crane 1994) and the sociology of knowledge (Swidler and Ardit 1994), the turn first to social and then to cultural history and the associated questioning of historiography's epistemological privilege (Hutton 1993), as well as multiculturalism's interest in unrecorded histories as sources for alternative narratives and identities. Scholarly interest in memory, however, has largely followed political developments, including the increase of redress claims, the rise of identity politics, a politics of victimization and regret, an increased willingness of governments to acknowledge wrongdoing, as well as the breakdown of repressive regimes that have left difficult legacies behind—all part of the decline of the memory-nation as an unchallengeable hegemonic force. It is possible to trace some of this, as I do in my paper in this volume, to the universal impact of the Holocaust, to principles of justice developed for the Nuremberg tribunals, as well as to German and other struggles with this legacy. But as the theories outlined above demonstrate, there is something more broadly existential and epochal going on here.

One problem with the diverse landscape of scholarship on memory, and particularly on the memory-nation connection, is that it has often opted for one extreme or the other: either epochal generalizations of the sort outlined above that move in the rarefied atmosphere of general theory and macro-history; or parochial case studies that may appreciate the uniqueness of particular moments in particular places but often miss what is general or comparable in the cases. A common syndrome is the attempt to address through a few references in a first chapter other cases that are rarely examined again in the rest of the work. From the other side, there is the temptation to level unique cases as mere instantiations of a

trend that occurs above or beyond the memory work done in particular times and places, the subjectless history of theoretical eschatology.

The papers presented here seek, in their own ways, to remedy the infelicitous choice between parochialism and generalism in the analysis of the memory-nation nexus. As I've written elsewhere (Olick and Robbins 1998), social memory studies is a "non-paradigmatic, transdisciplinary, centerless enterprise." In other words, despite an enormous efflorescence of interest in social remembering—and particularly in the memory-nation nexus—surprisingly slow headway has been made conceptually and methodologically, and unfortunately little cross-case discourse has developed. The authors here are unusual in that they are immersed in their particular cases as well as fundamentally interested in methodology and cross-case connections. Their papers provide illustrative case studies that contribute to middle-level theory—not as an alternative to either particular or grand approaches, but as part of an integrated program that includes elements of each, where the general and the particular, epochal and eventful, inform each other iteratively in scholarship as they do in life.

The first major issue with which each must come to terms is methodological: How do we approach a phenomenon—or set of phenomena—at once so general and particular? What mechanisms and patterns are common across cases, how are distinct cases connected, and how do we discover or theorize these commonalities and connections without hypothesizing or reifying them? Given the origins of the concept of collective memory in the crucible of statist agendas, unfortunately, scholars of the memory-nation nexus have inherited reductionist tendencies. Regarding nationalism, for instance, Rogers Brubaker has demonstrated that scholars mistakenly begin by trying to define what a nation is because they see nations as entities. In the process, Brubaker argues, they risk adopting "categories of practice as categories of analysis." Nationalists work hard, that is, to reify the term (nation) on which they base their claims. But nations are not entities that develop; they are practices that occur, institutional arrangements that are continually enacted and reenacted. Scholars must therefore be careful to "decouple the study of nationhood and nationness from the study of nations as substantial entities"; they need to study the reifications of nationalists without certifying them ontologically.

Brubaker notes in regard to nationalism research that "one might think this sociologically naive view has no place in recent scholarship."

But the situation is even more dire in the literature on collective memory, where the very term substantializes what is in fact a fluid process. Where *remembering* is a quintessentially relational phenomenon (what is it if not relating?), *memory* is a grossly substantialist metaphor, implying cold storage rather than hot use. This is to say nothing of “collective,” which often implies all the problems Simmel found with “society” when he replaced it with “sociation,” in addition to the standard anti-Durkheimian critique of an assumed unity. How, then, are we to approach collective memory without adopting the bogus naturalism of memory makers or the misleading substantialism of an outdated social science?

The literature on “collective memory” has provided two polar options: either treat collective memory as the lowest common denominator or normal distribution of what individuals in a collectivity remember, or see “the collective memory” as a “social fact *sui generis*,” a matter of collective representations that are the properties of the “collective consciousness,” which is itself ontologically distinct from any aggregate of individual consciousness.<sup>1</sup> Maurice Halbwachs—the seminal figure in this field—often sounds like a true Durkheimian in the latter vein (which makes sense, given that he was Durkheim’s student), but he also provides the seeds of a “third way.” All remembering, Halbwachs argues, takes place in group settings and is a matter of social interaction. In this way, it does not make sense at the limit to distinguish sharply between individual and social memory. Furthermore, highlighting this interactive setting helps avoid hypostatizing memory. Rather, it is to grasp the processual aspects of *remembering*, not the static aspects of *memory*. Halbwachs hints at these moves, though his vocabulary remains distinctly classical.

In more contemporary language, it makes sense to refer to mnemonic “practices” rather than treating “the collective memory” as a “social fact *sui generis*” in the Durkheimian sense, or reducing it to mere properties of cognitive atoms. A genuinely processual scholarship—which, as I discuss at the end of this introduction, is the hallmark of a new historicism in the social sciences—thus avoids the substantialist temptations by viewing social remembering as the ideological projects and practices of actors in settings. People, alone or together, remember, recollect, commemorate, etc. These various mnemonic practices, however, create only the appearance of substance rather than an actual entity scholars should treat as (the?) collective memory. Actors make claims on behalf of memory, assert

what they think it is and what they want to have as parts of it; scholars study remembering and the variety of other practices associated with it (e.g., commemoration, museification, heroization, etc.) but avoid taking claims made on behalf of and in terms of collective memory as indicators of a substantial entity—"the collective memory." The scholar's job, again, is to chart the uses of the claim, not to participate in its ontological transubstantiation from concept into reality.

This point may seem easily assimilable to standard "constructionist" positions in the interpretive social sciences, which emphasize the ways in which taken-for-granted categories of thought and action are really the products of the interested activities of particular actors rather than features of nature. Social constructionism, of course, is a much maligned position, but not always for the right reasons. Critics charge constructionists with idealism, with the assertion that "social reality" is merely the emanation of the minds of social actors. But few constructionists truly go that far. The constructionist challenge is to highlight the active involvement of people in making the social world around them. The real problem with constructionism is thus not idealism. Instead, it is a tendency toward voluntarism: Constructionists often move too easily from W. I. Thomas's famous dictum that "situations defined as real are real in their consequences" *not* to the belief that situations *defined* as real *are* real, but to the belief that all one has to do to create an identity is "imagine" it.

The papers that follow here are more careful. They show how memory-makers don't always succeed in creating the images they want and in having them understood in the ways they intended. Social actors are often caught in webs of meaning they themselves participate in creating, though not in ways they necessarily could have predicted. While these papers do not respond explicitly to a methodological manifesto (mine or someone else's) for social memory studies, taken together they advance our understanding of mnemonic nationalism and national mnemonics in this way. Noting that memory is supposed to underwrite identity by establishing permanence and continuity in the face of rampant change, these papers ask what happens when the conditions of memory itself change dramatically. These papers examine cases in which national memory is in flux, and thus they problematize the idea of collective memory as they study claims made on its behalf.

Almost all the authors, for instance, highlight that memory itself has a



history; not only do particular memories change, but the very faculty of memory—its place in social relations and the forms it imposes—changes over time. Additionally, memory is never unitary, no matter how hard various powers strive to make it so. There are always subnarratives, transitional periods, and contests over dominance. One tendency in the literature on social memory has been to treat this contestation and struggle for dominance as memory's purpose, that is, to see memory in instrumentalist terms (Olick and Robbins 1998). All of the papers here, however, resist this instrumentalist position without dismissing its insights. As Francesca Polletta argues, for instance, the political stakes in memory are not always clear. Part of the struggle over the past is not to achieve already constituted interests but to constitute those interests in the first place. As Lyn Spillman demonstrates, the pursuit of interests always works in combination with the multivalent meanings that the past allows; neither the "inherent meanings" of the past nor pure exigency in the present can explain why some pasts endure while others die out. Memory's salience at any given point in time, moreover, depends not only on its meanings and their manipulations but, as I and others demonstrate, on the complex trajectories memory forms over time. As Spillman sums it up, memory is consequential but in paradoxical ways.

Additionally, all of the papers here problematize, to one degree or another, conventional distinctions between history and memory as differences between truth and subjectivity. Instead, the papers argue that history and memory are varieties of historical consciousness. While such an approach can lead to an unproductive relativism, these papers pursue arguments that strive merely to show how claims of truth and meaning are accomplished, rather than to judge such claims. As Fred Corney argues, only in this way can scholarship on memory avoid participating in its reification.

Another, perhaps more substantive, similarity in these papers is the way in which many of them highlight the struggle for some kind of "normalization" of memory. Each of the societies discussed in these papers produces ideas of what a normal past should look like, and uses those images as ideals to strive for or denied rights to long for. These images include claims for the genuineness of revolution (imperial France, fascist Italy, communist Russia, Maoist China), of inclusiveness (United States, Australia), of innocence or ignorance (Germany, Japan, Spain), and of

inevitability (Israel). In each case, there are voices and data that deny those claims. Given the seeming pervasiveness of such narrative foils, we might wonder if images of normalcy serve some formal as well as substantive purposes, such as giving identitarian myths—and the programs they motivate—dramatic shape. Just as there are many reasons why cases cannot be normal, moreover, there are many definitions of normalcy. The question is how images of normalcy work within and are produced by particular societies; normalcy is as much an endogenous feature of collectivities as it is an external standard. What are the rules of normalization, and how do these change over time and vary across cases?<sup>2</sup>

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Each of these issues, of course, takes on unique contours in the different cases. In his study of the myth of the October Revolution, Fred Corney highlights the ways in which the same discourse of revolution that underlies political rhetoric has blinded scholarly analysis. Both discourses debate whether the events of 1917 were a “true” revolution. Such a focus on truth or authenticity, in this case and in general, Corney argues, “is not conducive to a reexamination by scholars of their own conceptions, desires or prejudices.” The scholarly and public discourses both employ wooden distinctions between society and state as binary opposites rather than as ongoing cultural constructions. The persistence of such reifications leads scholars after 1989 to search for an “authentic” memory that was repressed by previous political agendas. Such an approach hides the ways in which public and private interpenetrate; there is no pristine memory. Nor is there a primal “event” against which memories can be judged: the October revolution, Corney argues, was above all a remembered event, an event constituted as cultural memory. “Any critical reconceptualization of October,” he argues, “must begin from a critical awareness of this process of construction.”

Simonetta Falasca Zamponi also focuses on a myth of revolution, this time in the case of Italian fascism. Falasca Zamponi’s major contribution here is to situate this myth as a solution to the more general epochal condition of memory, brilliantly theorized by Walter Benjamin as being in a perpetual state of crisis deriving from the lost conditions of authenticity and meaning before time became “empty and homogenous.” The fascist solution, Falasca Zamponi argues, was an attempt to resacralize the world

by bringing back the aura of tradition through manipulation of exactly those technical means that had led to the problematic desacralization in the first place. Fascism's aesthetic politics, she argues, repossessed the rituals and cults that the modern era had promised to crush. In this process, a myth of revolution was central, for it provided the needed sense of continuity by "naturalizing" the fascist regime as an outcome of a long teleological process. "Memory," she argues, "worked as a sealing agent of national consciousness through a normalizing process that linked fascism to the sacred past."

In his study of the Paris Commune, Matt K. Matsuda illuminates how the epochal and the particular unite in one potent symbolic gesture: toppling the Vendome Column. Symbolic gestures, Matsuda demonstrates, are consequential not only because we lose control over their meanings the moment we enact them, but also because they are inextricable links in elaborate systems of meaning. No such gesture can be understood in isolation because it ramifies through a complex and often tightly knit terrain of meanings. But the toppling of the Vendome Column is a conspicuous event not only because of its pivotal political importance but also because of its comment on the epochal significance of the kind of commemoration the column embodied. In attacking this central symbol of the imperial world, revolutionary actors attacked not just the Empire, but the Imperial form of mnemonic legitimation. Resistance against a particular memory thus became resistance against a particular *kind* of memory, a stage in the transformation of the memory-nation nexus.

Papers by Paloma Aguilar, Tong Zhang and Barry Schwartz, Lyn Spillman, and Francesca Polletta focus more closely than Corney, Falasca Zamponi, and Matsuda on the domestic rather than epochal contours of official memory, though they share the focus on memory not as a vessel of truth or mirror of interests but as a process of meaning construction. In perhaps the most classically social-scientific of the papers in this volume, Paloma Aguilar analyzes the memory of the Spanish Civil War, emphasizing the different roles different versions of that memory played in different regions. Noting these differences, of course, destabilizes the very notion of a national memory. On what basis can we identify such a unified entity? Some basic facts may be shared in different populations, but these same facts have widely differing moral and identitarian consequences depending on location, interest, experience, and attitude. Moreover, the

ability of national elites to support an integrative identitarian program depends on their abilities to negotiate and accommodate these different positions. In Spain, this created an environment of mnemonic accommodationism. A unifying agenda could succeed only insofar as it did not exacerbate powerful differences. But in some ways, even this strategy could not succeed because accommodationist attempts ultimately could not circumvent Spain's "plurinational" structure.

Lyn Spillman undertakes a rich comparison of centennial and bicentennial celebrations in the United States and Australia. Her explicit goal is to theorize why memories differ not regionally but over time—why some memories at a national level persist while others fade. Here Spillman develops a productive combination of "instrumentalist" and "essentialist" approaches. The former sees the past as a malleable resource in the present, subject to the vicissitudes of contemporary usefulness and power. Spillman demonstrates through her cases that such an approach cannot account for the differential persistence of similar founding moments. Her answer is that differences of persistence are the results not of the inherent meaning of past events or of present exigency alone but of the combination of meaning and exigency, in which the degree of the past's meaningful multivalence increases its likelihood of survival. In the cases she analyzes, the crucial difference lay in their openness to oppositional politics: where they were open, they persisted; where they were not, they lost salience as oppositional consciousness gained power.

Tong Zhang and Barry Schwartz address similar issues, though in their case tracing the career of a reputation—that of Confucius—through a particular transformative event—the Cultural Revolution in Maoist China. Like Matsuda, they highlight the complexity of a cultural system, demonstrating the cultural logics of memory: "The communist establishment," they demonstrate, ". . . was simultaneously drawn to Confucius because his memory legitimated its hegemony and repelled by Confucius because his ideals opposed its revolution." "The regime's reinterpretation of Confucius," they argue, "was required by the logic of its new political cause, but the significance of that new interpretation cannot be reduced to the political interests it served." The solution, they contend, was not to alter the image of Confucius but to develop a new form of appropriation: "critical inheritance." The important generalizable point here is that the malleability of memory is neither a given nor even something that varies

quantitatively: malleability changes qualitatively—it is sometimes a matter of alteration, sometimes a matter of selection, and sometimes one of inflection. Malleability, moreover, is in the context as well as in the image. While one might be concerned with the characterization here of China as a “backward” society, the sociological insights about memory—the emphasis on the social context not only of memories but of the conditions for transforming them—are key and durable.

Francesca Polletta’s paper on the memory of Martin Luther King Jr. in the U.S. Congress shows at an even closer level the problems with straightforward instrumentalist accounts: she demonstrates how difficult it is for actors, and by extension for analysts, to know what the different interests are in battles over the past. She argues that interests are defined in the course of struggles over the past, not prior to them, by showing how black legislators negotiated the perils of their liminal position between legitimate authority and oppositional challenge. The general lesson from this case, she argues, is that states are not monolithic entities but comprise numerous actors with overlapping, competing, and changing constituencies. Her analysis highlights the unique problems that commemorating dissent can pose for “open” societies. Such challenges, Polletta writes, show how cultural conventions of commemoration are neither unchanging nor universal but rather the products of ongoing struggle.

Papers by Ram, Olick, and Gluck show how memory contestation is not just the product of social contestation but is part of official narratives themselves. In his study of the recent (and ongoing) Israeli historians’ dispute, Ram shows how collectivities are involved in a constant process of selection among various narrative options. This process, however, has become even more problematic in recent years. Ram situates the new Israeli critical discourse within developments in academic historiography toward a questioning of history’s epistemological claim, and also within broader epochal shifts toward a postmodern society rife with tensions between the global and the local. Following Nora and the other epochal theorists discussed earlier in this introduction, Ram argues that Israel is facing the declining salience of the unitary memory-nation, a “scrambling of the unilinear and teleological national metanarrative by a variety of supra-narratives, subnarratives, backlash narratives, and subsidiary narratives.” Historical revision, as is occurring in Israel, is now a worldwide phenomenon and sheds as much light on the present as on the past.

My own paper on official memory in Germany since 1989 shares many of the themes discussed in the other papers. I simultaneously situate the German case in the more general context of the politics of regret and trace that mood to the history of the German case. Like the others, I resist purely instrumentalist approaches, arguing that it is essential to appreciate how memory is path-dependent as well as instrumental and meaningful. The German case is an especially interesting demonstration of these processes in part because memory has been such an explicit presence in public discourse there for so many years. There is much to be learned, I argue, from how German leaders have negotiated their desire for “normalization” through the related strategies of relativization and ritualization. If history is any indicator, we should see these strategies adapted and adopted elsewhere as well. The lesson for the theory of memory is that whether the past passes away or not depends not only on its meanings and its contexts, but also on its forms and commemorative trajectory.

In a particularly important paper for understanding the epochal contours of memory, Carol Gluck focuses on the “end” of the “postwar” in Japan. The “postwar” is such a perspicuous concept for analysis because it embodies a central modern narrative desire—the desire to move beyond a bad past to a good future. Nevertheless, as Gluck argues, “the discursive solidity of modernity, of course, was a mirage.” Japan experienced multiple postwars deriving from multiple and, in important ways, incompatible narrative frameworks, and thus ended these postwars at diverse times and places and in diverse ways. This multiplicity, Gluck argues, “rendered different fractal patterns of . . . [Japan’s] late modernity, itself understood as a belated opportunity to remedy the defects of an earlier phase of the process of becoming modern.” The ends of Japanese postwars, in this way, imply the end of a particular conception of the modern, one in which memory can be reconciled with past understandings, contemporary desires, and future ambitions. Situating the memory of the Second World War within the memory of earlier periods of Japanese history and within global narratives of progress reveals what Gluck calls “conceptual insufficiencies” for facing an end of one thing without it indicating a direction for the next. It may have been a great gesture to topple imperial legitimization along with the Vendôme Column as Matsuda discusses, but with the loss of the Utopian vision inherent in that gesture we no longer quite know what to hope for. And as Nora, Anderson, Smith, and the other

theorists of nationalism cited above argue, national memory and commemoration are fundamentally hopeful practices. Gluck's paper develops the dark side of these transformations.

Finally, from a rather different vantage point, Eviatar Zerubavel reveals some features of national commemoration that are not obvious with either theoretical or case study approaches. In particular, Zerubavel illuminates the ways in which national calendars serve as cognitive maps organizing structures of national identification. While there appear to be a number of competing narrative structures for the "postwar," differing interest positions on commemorative issues in different countries, diverse ideas of historical normalcy, and so on, there are some remarkable consistencies across cases in both the forms and contents of temporal mapping through national calendars. Indeed, Zerubavel argues that "even what may at first glance seem nation-specific is usually but an exemplar of some *transnational* commemorative pattern." The important result here is that there is something specific and unique about national commemoration as a form. Even as modernity becomes less certain and the meanings of the past seem to multiply and become less secure, the basic institutional structure remains fairly constant. Certainly, there has been some innovation in national liturgies as well as in the interpretation of established dates, but calendars as cognitive maps make powerful institutional sources of stability. Zerubavel thus identifies a powerful mechanism of commemorative consistency as well as an important set of characteristics of national commemoration *per se*.

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Taken together, the papers assembled here draw on and contribute to a growing consolidation of social memory studies, one that includes an interest in general epochal theory and the expert knowledge of area specialization. They show as well how theories of memory, theories of nationalism, and case studies are all involved in the same analytical project and are each necessary to its fulfillment. The papers do this, moreover, while avoiding the twin pitfalls of reification and voluntarism common in these enterprises. They emphasize the ongoing processes of social construction without ignoring instrumental, institutional, and historical claims. The book's title—attractive for the double meaning of states—may thus appear somewhat misleading: the memory discussed here is never static.

Theorists like Brubaker, among many others, have lately argued that historical social science has paradoxically been less genuinely historical than earlier models—turning more to data from the past but starting with unhistorical, static, substantialist, and otherwise discreditable concepts. A recent volume of essays on the so-called historic turn in the human sciences (McDonald 1996), for instance, argues that the social scientific turn to history, while salutary, has largely failed to historicize its own concepts. The approach to memory in national contexts developed here seems to be just the kind of historicizing project demanded, and the essays here are thus part of a broader transformation in historical social science. In what ways?

First, memory is the central faculty of our being in time; it is the negotiation of past and present through which we define our individual and collective selves. Memory should thus be a central topic for historical sociology. But second, the kind of approach developed in these essays, one that resists reification and instrumentalism, is crucial to the interrogation of categories of analysis that “processualists” (Brubaker 1996), “relationists” (Emirbayer 1997), and “temporalists” (Abbott 1988; 1990; 1994; Somers 1996; and Sewell 1996) have called for. Neither the nation nor memory is “natural,” nor are their relations straightforward. Social memory studies of this kind thus mark a major transformation in the historical social sciences just as they interrogate major transformations in the social world as we assumed it was. To do this well, we need the approaches developed in these papers as well as the conversation that emerges out of juxtaposing them here.

#### NOTES

1. See Olick (1999) for a review of these two approaches.
2. See the special issue of *Sozialer Sinn* (vol. 2, 2001) on normalization.

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Rethinking a Great Event:  
The October Revolution  
as Memory Project

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What if that discourse about [the French Revolution as] a radical break reflects no more than the illusion of change? . . . Unless the historian comes to grips with it, he is bound to execrate or to celebrate, both of which are ways of commemorating.—François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*

Insofar as we yield without struggle to an external suggestion, we believe we are free in our thought and feelings. Therefore most social influences we obey usually remain unperceived.—Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*

Even under the increasingly more open conditions of glasnost and after, the October Revolution has proven difficult for Western, Soviet, and post-Soviet historians to reconceptualize. In this essay I shall examine the reasons behind this difficulty and suggest where a reconceptualization of October might fruitfully be sought. Rethinking October from the perspective of recent research into the construction of historical or collective memory, I will argue, affords unique insights into exactly why October has proven so enduring. Focusing on the October Revolution as the crucial element in the primarily Bolshevik efforts to establish and enshrine the legitimacy of the new Soviet state during the first decade after October

1917 problematizes the event in a way that traditional approaches, deeply implicated in this issue of (il)legitimacy, are unable to do.<sup>1</sup>

#### THE SOVIET PAST AS POLITICAL PROBLEM

In early 1995, the right-wing Liberal Democratic Party's (LDPR) faction in the Russian parliament (Duma) tabled a draft law entitled "On Recognizing as Illegal the Coup d'État [*gosudarstvennyi perevorot*] in Russia on 7 November (25 October) 1917." In March, Pavel Volobuev (1995: 3), a prominent historian, criticized the draft in a letter to *Pravda*. He drew an analogy between this act and the actions of the Chamber of Deputies in Bourbon France in 1815 that launched "malicious attacks and slander against the revolution and its activists" in an attempt to "extirpate from the popular consciousness any memory of the revolution." The failure of this attempt, he noted, was evident in the continued celebration by Frenchmen of 14 July, "the day of the start of one of the greatest (but also bloodiest) revolutions," as a national holiday. Volobuev warned that in its wake such a law could bring other laws abolishing all decrees taken by the Soviet government from 7 November 1917 to 5 December 1936. He sarcastically urged the LDPR to take the bull by the horns and propose a draft law recognizing the February Revolution as a coup d'état as well. In closing, he warned the authors of the draft law that "any disrespect for the history of the Fatherland, especially for its great pages, will sooner or later be avenged."

The draft law and Volobuev's response to it were interesting for what they revealed about the terms of the protracted debate about the Soviet past across the preceding decade. The LDPR had attacked the legitimacy of October by denying its right to be termed "revolution." Volobuev defended its legitimacy in a familiar Soviet-era invocation of October's place in a broader (French) revolutionary tradition, its place in individual and historical memory and in the national identity of Soviet Russia. As Martin Malia (1992: 9) has noted with regard to the question of whether October was a genuine workers' revolution or an armed insurrection by a political clique, such debates were really about the "legitimacy of the Soviet regime." Furthermore, since October has frequently been the conscious or unconscious telos of many historians' works, defining both the choice of

and justification for the subjects studied, it is difficult to overestimate the significance of the issue of (il)legitimacy.

Still, this issue remains largely unquestioned in the many Western studies of glasnost-inspired revisions of the Soviet past. Such studies contrast the tentative modifications to the history of the October Revolution during the first years of glasnost against the “frank reassessment of the Revolution” (Marsh 1995: 147) that has purportedly occurred during the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> As evidence of such changes, Western scholars (Marsh 1995: chap. 9; Davies 1989; Nove 1989) point to the (re)publication of early sources critical of October, the appearance in the academic and popular press of less caricatured representations of those individuals or groups who opposed the Bolsheviks early on, or the “return” of those Bolsheviks who came to oppose party policies during the course of the 1920s. Similarly, in these first years of glasnost, Soviet historians (“Izuchenie” 1987: 52) identified the kinds of “new themes and trends” needed for a reappraisal of October, singling out the role of the intelligentsia, the urban middle classes, the antidemocratic regimes on White Guard territory, the “revolutionary creativity of the masses,” and so on. Discussion of the viability of various “alternatives” to the October Revolution was widely welcomed as evidence of this reappraisal (Mogil’nitskii 1989; Shister 1990; Rogovin 1992; Butenko 1990; Frankel 1992: 3–13). Even for those historians who raised doubts about the traditional Soviet picture of a united Bolshevik Party under Lenin, faithfully supported by the masses and in firm control of the revolutionary timetable, October qua revolution remained beyond the limits of disbelief (Startsev 1987). Quite the contrary, the 70th anniversary of October 1917 brought to the pages of academic journals renewed pledges of faith from Mikhail Gorbachev in a landmark speech on this occasion, casting the present upheavals in Soviet society as a continuation of the October Revolution (“Oktiabr” 1987; see also Iotov 1987). As the Soviet historian V. M. Selunskaja (“Izuchenie” 1987: 60) wrote at that time: “The October Revolution is the primary event of the twentieth century. Soviet historiography must preserve this fact in the historical memory of the peoples, reconstructing an ever more complete, adequate, and objectively truthful image of the first victorious socialist revolution in all its complexity and contradictoriness.”

Yet as R. W. Davies (1997: 11–12) has shown, by the turn of the decade

the early modifications to the official interpretation of October produced not a reevaluation of October but rather a wholesale condemnation of it by several erstwhile defenders of orthodox Leninist positions. This rejection of the Soviet past by indigenous historians was endorsed by prominent Western historians as a vindication of their own approaches (Conquest 1990, 1992; Pipes 1994; for a critique of this tendency, see Kenez 1991, 1995). The failed coup of August 1991 was followed by the removal of many symbols of Communism, indeed by a “new orthodoxy” of anti-Communism, although in 1991 October could still find its public defenders as a “genuinely popular revolution” (Davies 1997: 41, 47). Davies (1997: 11) cited a more typical sentiment expressed in April 1990 by a Soviet historian who insisted that the “true history” of the Soviet period could be written only if the “path on which Russia had embarked in October 1917 was recognized to be illegitimate.”

In this atmosphere, the 73rd anniversary of the October Revolution became in the pages of *Pravda* a rearguard defense of the holiday against suggestions from certain quarters that the birth of the Soviet state should no longer be celebrated.<sup>3</sup> Articles welcomed the new political thinking “free of the myths and dogmas of the age of barracks communism” but cautioned against attempts “to negate the great and the valuable in our historical heritage.”<sup>4</sup> Two noted historians wrote in support of the holiday and against the “present noisy campaigns against Lenin, Bolshevism and the October Revolution, indeed against Soviet power itself.”<sup>5</sup> Editorials insistently chronicled the crowds of people who, despite the harsh conditions of life, turned out “in support of October” not only in Moscow but all over the country.<sup>6</sup> Personal pledges of support for the October Revolution were featured.<sup>7</sup> A year later, one newspaper published quotations ranging from a traditional embrace of October as the “stellar hour of the peoples of Russia” to a condemnation of it as a “very important event which had exclusively negative effects on the fate of Russia and all the rest of the world.”<sup>8</sup>

The formal denunciation of the Communist past peaked with Boris Yeltsin’s dissolution of the Supreme Soviet in the fall of 1993 and his pledge in November to do away with the “vestiges of the Communist and Soviet past” (Davies 1997: 59). This process was still incomplete four years later. On succeeding anniversaries of October, *Pravda* continued, although less and less defiantly, to be a beleaguered voice in support of the

holiday. On what would, under the Soviet state, have been a gala celebration of October, the 75th anniversary was marked by a banner headline in *Pravda* noting that a ceremonial meeting devoted to this anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution had *not* taken place, and by articles that imagined how the centenary of October would look back at 1992 as a time when Russia was “the center of world anti-Communism.”<sup>9</sup> Subsequent anniversaries were marked on the pages of *Pravda*, and scarcely anywhere else, by complaints about the lack of festive crowds on the streets and the threatening presence of security forces, and by ever more frequent evocations of nostalgia for the unity and comradeship of earlier anniversary celebrations.<sup>10</sup>

The reexamination of the Soviet past ushered in by glasnost and reflected in these changing commemorative efforts has been regarded, in the West and in the USSR, as essentially a *political* problem. Soviet historians’ and others’ conscious use of the October Revolution as a tool of political legitimization of the Soviet state has long been recognized (Bonwetsch 1976). Few would deny that Soviet historians wrote within political constraints that produced some of the driest and most formulaic writing on Soviet history, particularly on the October Revolution and the Bolshevik Party (Von Hagen 1992; Enteen 1989a, 1989b). Soviet academicians themselves criticized the “tremendous ideological and political bias” (Sakharov 1993: 191) that marked Soviet historical scholarship, or they explicitly blamed the “politicization” of history in the 1920s and 1930s for “monstrous aberrations” in Soviet society (“Istoricheskaja nauka” 1990: 75). Increasingly, they self-consciously rejected their earlier “politicized” approaches to their history, now championing the filling in of the “blank spots” (*belye pjatna*) in their past, in an attempt to “complete” the historical record. Consciously “removing” themselves from their histories, glasnost-era historians embraced the illusion that historians merely provide the mouthpiece through which history speaks, through which documents relate past events.

Western scholars have long contrasted traditional Soviet scholarship against their own supposedly more objective and dispassionate accounts of the Soviet past. Just as, 30 years before, Robert V. Daniels’s (1967: ix) study of October sought the “historical truth about the October Revolution,” so Edward Acton’s (1990: 209) recent “rethinking” looked to newly accessible archives to spur the effort “to recover the real drama of 1917

from the myths that it inspired.” Both sides of the divide shared the same goal: a more truthful and complete record of the October Revolution, a goal that they believed could be attained under more judicious political conditions. That many researchers believe this record can be found in the Soviet archives is shown by the “archival gold rush” (Von Hagen 1993: 99–100) many have engaged in since the late 1980s. This focus on the political, pivoting on the issue of October’s (il)legitimacy, has reduced Soviet historiography in the West and increasingly in Russia to what David Joravsky (1994: 851) has called a “good guy–bad guy melodrama.”

#### OCTOBER REIFIED

Such reappraisals, to invoke François Furet’s (1981: 17) conclusions from his study of the French Revolution, continue to execrate or celebrate October, thereby commemorating it. They in effect maintain its reified status and obstruct any deeper analysis of its historical and cultural genesis as a foundation event and its very real political and social function as such within early Soviet society. “Reification,” Richard Handler (1994: 27) points out with reference to such terms as *nation*, *culture*, *tradition*, and *identity*, is “an epistemological problem not easily vanquished, for it pervades the rhetorical and conceptual apparatus of our scientific world view.” His words apply equally well to the concept of revolution and to such related concepts as state and society. From the moment they took power in October 1917, the Bolsheviks deployed enormous resources to cast the takeover as a bona fide revolution, while their opponents were equally insistent on casting it as an illegitimate coup by a clique of adventurers (and “outsiders”). Generally, however, there was little disagreement about what constituted revolution, merely that this event did not merit the term.

It should not be surprising, given the conscious process of reification and mythicization of the October Revolution that took place within the USSR, that the event was for decades beyond question, certainly politically and perhaps emotionally, for many Soviet historians. More interesting is that revolution writ large shaped the debate among Western historians too. A denial of the very applicability of the term to the events of October 1917 was implicit in those scholars (Schapiro 1970; Daniels 1967;

Wolfe 1961) who, influenced by the totalitarian theories of the 1950s, sought the motive forces of the October overthrow in the program and resolutions of the Bolshevik Party and the actions and ideologies of its leaders, particularly Lenin. Guided by similar assumptions, other scholars (Brovkin 1987; Broido 1987; Radkey 1958, 1961) have sought explanations of October in the “failures” of other parties or individuals rather than in the “successes” of the Bolsheviks.

Those Western scholars who cut their political teeth during the social activism of the 1960s faulted political historians for paying too much attention to the state and the party and underestimating what Ronald Suny (1983: 32) calls the “more fundamental social and economic structures and conflicts in Russian society.” For them, the October takeover was not a political coup by “outsiders” confined largely to Petrograd and Moscow but a countrywide, socially anchored revolution. These scholars attempted to identify the social legitimacy of the October Revolution through an examination of the role it played in one or another social or political group. Some (Haimson 1964, 1965, 1988) sought the causes of the revolution in the polarizing rifts among various classes from the turn of the century onward. The Bolshevik Party was no longer studied as the dominion of a handful of politicians, but as an organization integral to society, or at least to the working class (Rabinowitch 1968, 1978; Service 1979). The part played by the working class, and to a lesser degree by other social groups, in bringing about the revolution “from below” became a major focus of Western research (Kaiser 1987; Gill 1979; Suny 1972; Pethybridge 1972). Driven by similar conceptions, others (Wildman 1967; Bonnell 1983; Lane 1969) sought the longer-term “roots” of the revolution, again especially within the working class.

In a sense, October’s affirmers and deniers were motivated by the same desire, namely, to save society from the state. Those who celebrated it as a revolution regarded it as a perhaps destructive but ultimately empowering force, providing voices to the silent masses. One such study aimed to show the “unheroic side of the Russian Revolution, of the ordinary men and women whose participation was essential to the revolution’s outcome” (Koenker 1981: 3; Smith 1983; Mandel 1983, 1984; Pethybridge 1964). Those who regarded it as a “classic coup d’état” contrasted it with “genuine revolutions, [which] of course, are not scheduled and can-



not be betrayed" (Pipes 1993: 498; see also Pipes 1992). In this view, Bolshevik power, illegitimately gained, could be maintained only through force, and in the final analysis only at society's expense.<sup>11</sup>

Such views share the conception of state and society as binary opposites, fostering a belief among many scholars that society's "true" voices were to be found in opposition to the given political regime (or state) (Mel'gunov 1953: 7; Schapiro 1977; Bettelheim 1976). This was considered particularly fitting in the case of the socialist or postsocialist states, "unauthorized representations of the past [being] the . . . windows through which we seek to understand socialist systems" (Watson 1994: 2). State institutions and policies were believed to impose an "official," largely sterile culture on a population by any means necessary. The illegitimate nature of the Soviet regime could be revealed, it was argued, by drawing back the "veil" of official culture, as historians claimed to divine the "genuine" thoughts of the people in the street, to hear what they "really" believed when not parroting the official line for personal gain or physical survival.

Recent studies, beginning to draw on Furet's insights (see, for example, Suny 1994), have attempted to understand the Soviet system not as a polarized, dichotomous entity but rather as a broad cultural and political project that provided individuals and groups with a wide variety of opportunities to create places for themselves within this system. In his study of the culture of the city of Magnitogorsk during the 1930s, Stephen Kotkin (1995: 22) proposes a shift in focus from "what the party and its programs *prevented* to what they *made possible*, intentionally and unintentionally." Kotkin's (1991) focus on the importance of language in the revolutionary exercise of power, as well as on the institutionalization of the very categories by which individuals in this new state conceived of themselves as part of this new state, has profound implications for the study of October. For the October Revolution was most enduringly a linguistic and institutional battle, the spoils of which would be the opportunity to recast the political, social, and cultural terrain of the former Russian Empire in profound ways. Sheila Fitzpatrick (1993) has called the process engaged in by the Bolsheviks after October 1917 a "reclassing" of society, involving not only the ascription of class categories but also the framing and construction of the bodies of information on which historians would draw for their analyses of this society.

For the most part, this institutional and linguistic battle for October was fought within the context of “commemorating” it. Early on, the Bolsheviks argued that the underground existence and conspiratorial nature of their party, and the destruction of much documentation during the civil war period, ensured that written sources on October were scant. As the Marxist historian Mikhail Pokrovskii (*Deviataia konferentsiia* 1972: 102) told a party gathering in 1920, the party’s “archives” had been “carried in the pockets of secretaries and destroyed tens of times over.” It was widely agreed from the very beginning by Bolshevik leaders that personal and group reminiscences about October would inevitably play a major role in preserving it (*Ko vsem chlenam partii* 1920). These reminiscences would form the basis of the new revolutionary “archive.”

The October Revolution, then, was above all a *remembered* event, an event constituted as cultural and historical memory intended to legitimize the young Soviet regime. It is precisely in this process of linguistic, historical, and cultural constitution (and the power relationships it reveals) that several scholars have found a fruitful focus for their research (e.g., Foucault 1980; Hall 1982). Some have drawn upon the recently discovered theories of the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1925, 1980) on collective memory. His argument that people remember only within certain social groups or frameworks and that memories, and therefore thought, cannot be constituted outside of them has shifted the focus of study from the event itself to the *process* of remembering the event, taking into special account the structuring of the groups in which memories are articulated.<sup>12</sup> Ignoring this process can only reinforce the reification of the event; indeed, reification requires that this process of constitution recede into the background (De Certeau 1986: 203).

To date, scholars of early Soviet history have rarely treated the role of remembrance and commemoration problematically (a notable exception is Von Geldern 1993). For these scholars, glasnost represents the retrieval of suppressed historical memory. Memory is treated as a passive or brutalized victim of the manipulations and distortions of Communist ideology extending back to the late 1920s, even earlier in some cases. With “historical truth . . . on the march,” goes a common sentiment, the historians’ task becomes the “historical return of memory” (Coquin 1989: 21,

24; see also Brossat and Combe 1990; Merridale 1996). In this approach, both individual and collective memory would seem to exist outside the narrative or discourse, while “real” memories of events are somehow preserved in suppressed form beneath the “official” memory. For these researchers, “unofficial” memory serves as society’s moral firewall against the encroachments of the state: “Wherever memory is impoverished, culture is also impoverished in its most vital foundations, and with it morality as well in all its manifestations, from politics to daily life” (*Pamięć* 1976: v). The recovery of memory is crucial, in Geoffrey Hosking’s (1989: 118) view, “and by that I mean real memory, not the mythologized substitute.” Such views are offered as yet one more proof of the deeply illegitimate nature of the system, best captured in Malia’s (1994: 270, 314) indictment of the entire system as being held together by a socialist “Myth-Lie.”

These views do not do justice to the breadth and power of the October memory project. Its power derived from its makers’ invocation, both conscious and unconscious, of certain conventions that rendered the process of construction embedded within it commonsensical or beyond question. For the makers themselves, these conventions were “natural” ways of telling their story and of persuading others of its relevance to their daily lives. Power in Bolshevik hands of course meant the power of the bullet, and this has been well and rightly documented in the historiography. It also, however, meant narrative power—that is, the power of the story and hence the power of language, without which the bullet would have little meaning, and archival and institutional power, without which the story would have little authenticity. “The action of a rioter in picking up a stone,” observed Keith Baker (1990: 13, 41) in his study of the French Revolution as meaning-making process, “can no more be understood apart from the symbolic field that gives it meaning than the action of a priest in picking up a sacramental vessel.” This process, he noted, occurred simultaneously at various levels, including the archival, symbolic, and political levels, and involved veritable “ideological arsenals.” (On the selective and constitutive role of archives, for example, in institutionalizing a major narrative, see Trouillot 1995: 52–53.) The potency of the narrative form, its pretensions to be the communication of past reality, and the conscious and unconscious elements of the processes of storytell-

ing have received deserved scholarly attention of late (White 1987; Kozicki and Canary 1978; Harlan 1989). Moreover, the Bolshevik story of October derived much power from its invocation as a story already told. Indeed, the Bolsheviks and other revolutionaries intentionally told their story as the telos of a venerable, transcendent revolutionary tradition dating back to the French Revolution, a tradition that was invoked and reinvoked, vainly throughout the nineteenth century, most promisingly in the form of the Paris Commune of 1871, and as apotheosis in October 1917.

The Bolsheviks were also informed by traditional notions about what it actually meant to “remember” a past event and by a belief that if individuals were not very quickly caused to fix the memory of the October Revolution in their minds, it, and its significance, would dissipate. They immediately set about “recording” it while it was still “fresh” in people’s minds. They courted “eyewitnesses” and “participants” in particular because they believed that these people represented the most reliable criterion of the authenticity of the narrative. As one scholar notes (Lass 1994: 91), the eyewitness is traditionally regarded as “history’s most valued source. . . . An individual’s narration is valued because it authenticates what it provides: the what and how of past events. The witness’s eye is also the eye of memory.” The elastic nature of this term is revealed by the explanatory note (Ko vsem chlenam partii 1920: 9) to a questionnaire on the October Revolution: “Anyone who was in Russia in the past three years has had the chance of either observing or even taking part in the events that have occurred.”

Within days of the takeover, the government newspaper, *Izvestiia*, carried a notice on its front page calling on all “comrade participants of the October overthrow” to send articles, reminiscences, poems, and “materials related to the October Revolution” for a special jubilee issue.<sup>13</sup> Various announcements were made of intentions to publish ambitious and costly collections of reminiscences on the October days.<sup>14</sup> The Union of Soviet Journalists even appealed on the radio and in the press to foreign comrades from “Communist and revolutionary socialist parties and groups, and also to the writers, scholars and philosophers affiliated with them,” for their opinions about the Russian Revolution. These foreign comrades were asked whether they believed that the October overthrow had laid the basis for a world socialist revolution, what response it evoked

in the proletariat of the respective country, and which of the measures of Soviet power the respondents regarded as “positive” and which as “mistaken.”<sup>15</sup>

These early piecemeal efforts soon gave way during the 1920s to far more organized and institutionalized attempts to ground the new Soviet state in an accumulation of evidence of its legitimacy. Institutionally, this took the form of a panoply of complementary organizations. In October 1918, a Socialist Academy of the Social Sciences was set up to coordinate the production of Marxist publications, enlist prominent Marxists from abroad, and train specialists in a Marxist approach to the writing of history. The Scientific Society of Marxists followed in December 1920, the Institute of Red Professors in February 1921, and the Scientific Research Institute in 1922. In May 1924, the Institute of Lenin was ceremonially opened. These organizations were essentially information-producing bodies, and the information they produced was stored in a centralized network of new archives, an institutional sanction of the authenticity of the materials contained therein.

Within this context, the explicit efforts to construct October as part of historical memory also took on institutional form. The Bolshevik Party set up institutions to “record” personal and group reminiscences of October, including, among many, the Commission on the History of the October Revolution and the Communist Party (Istpart for short) (1920–28), the Commission on the Twentieth Anniversary of 1905 (1924–25), and the Commission on the Tenth Anniversary of October (1926–27). The October Revolution was also a primary focus of other organizations of this kind set up in the early 1920s, such as the Commission on the History of the Trade Union Movement, the Commission on the History of the Youth and Communist Movement, the Society of Former Political Prisoners and Exiles, and the Society of Old Bolsheviks. All were devoted in one way or another to producing cumulative “evidence” of the October Revolution. As the charter of Istpart stated (*Ko vsem chlenam partii* 1920: 7), “Our attitude to the documents of the revolution must be as active as our attitude to the events of the revolution.”

These efforts were reinforced in turn by the accumulation of visual “evidence”: renamed streets and squares all over the country; new statues and plaques appropriately inscribed; decorated buildings and squares on the anniversaries of October; carefully choreographed processions that lit-