History and Collective Memory: the Succeeding Incarnations of an Evolving Relationship*

Mihai Stelian RUSU
Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj
Faculty of Sociology and Social Work

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Abstract: Collective memory, despite its status as patrimonial notion within sociological tradition, recently escaped this rigid disciplinary straitjacket, becoming a cardinal concept in the contemporary discourse of social sciences and humanities. Understanding the nature of collective memory cannot be reached before clarifying the relation between memory and history. This paper analyzes the different configurations under which the relationship between history and collective memory evolved throughout time. The central argument advances the idea that collective memory crystallizes at the area of confluence between history and mythistory, taking historical facts from the former, and organizing them according to the mythical logic of the latter.

E-mail: mihai.rusu@ubbcluj.ro

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Collective memory: a notion on top of the theoretical agenda of social sciences

Seen as a continuous parade of ideas unfolding through time, the history of social and human sciences appears as a sequence of intellectual fashions, each of them dominated by a central axial concept around which an entire mass of secondary ideas orbit. Until recently, the concept of "culture" has magnetized theoretical imagination, evidence thereof being the impressive collection of "cultural studies" which have emerged throughout the entire territorial panorama of social sciences. Along with what can be called the "mnemonic turn" produced in recent decades, the notion of "memory" has seized the centre stage of the intellectual debates of the moment. Collective memory, a term whose conceptual paternity belongs to the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs,[1] has gained a strong foothold in the marketplace of ideas exchanged in the social sciences. Launched in the academic discourse in the first half of the 20th century, the notion quickly faded into oblivion, only to be resuscitated in the 1980s by a renewed wake of social and intellectual interest in the past. So "collective memory's" academic success comes with a temporal retard of half a century. But all this delay is fully compensated by

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[1] Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (1950; New York: Harper & Row, 1980).

the force with which the contemporary preoccupation with memory has erupted in current discussions: the idea that both contemporary society and social studies are experiencing a "memory boom"[1] is gaining increasingly more ground. There seems to be an unprecedented preoccupation with memory, revealed in the concern of the social actors (both individuals and collective) with protecting and even recovering memory. The fear of losing historical memory pulses through the Western collective consciousness, reflected in the impetus of social movements campaigning for historic preservation of cultural heritage.[2] The memory-focused discourse has reached such impressive heights that a number of critics speak of a "surfeit of memory,"[3] or even of the "abuses of memory."[4] What is certain is that we are witnessing the making of an epoch obsessed with memory, dominated by an "ardent, almost fetishistic memorialism."[5]

It is against the background of this massive revival of public interest in memory that the social sciences responded by creating "social memory studies," which has become probably the most intensely trafficked academic area by researchers coming from the multiple locations of the social sciences disciplinary system. This new territorial province emerged within the disciplinary geography of social sciences is par excellence a multi-disciplinary project, delineating a *rendez-vous* disciplinary space, where history, sociology, anthropology, and social psychology (to mention only the forefront contributors) meet and theoretically cross-fertilize each other. The cardinal notion and the term of reference throughout this discourse is "collective memory," by which is meant the relationship that a society constructs with its own past. A more extensive and technical working definition can be stated in the following terms: collective memory is the retro-projectional system consisting of the social representations of the past developed by a social collectivity in order to make sense of its own past. The "retro-projectional" character of collective memory is given by the fact that social representations of the past are always retrospective projections upon the past made from the present time backwards, which means that they are inevitably coloured by the presently prevailing socio-political interests, aspirations, and imperatives.

A significant part of the intellectual energies and resources involved in the "social memory studies" has been invested in clarifying the problematic relationship between collective memory and history. This paper tries to shed light on the configurations under which the relationship between history and memory appeared in the course of time.

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[1] Jay Winter, "The Memory Boom in Contemporary Historical Studies," *Raritan* 21 (2001): 52-66. My bibliographical inquiry into the conceptual genealogy of the term "memory boom" came to the conclusion that J. Winter is the author of this catch-phrase.

[2] David Lowenthal, "Material Preservation and Its Alternatives," *Perspecta* 25 (1989): 66-77. Lowenthal argues that "Preservation has become a rampant cult. […] Few cultures are except from, few individuals uninfected by, the mania for memorabilia." (67).

[3] Charles S. Maier, "A Surfeit of Memory? Reflections on History, Melancholy and Denial," *History and Memory* 5 (1993): 136-152.

[4] Todorov Tzvetan, *Abuzurile memoriei* (The Abuses of Memory), trans. Doina Lică (Timişoara: Amarcord, 1999).

[5] Pierre Nora, "Reasons for the current upsurge in memory," *Transit* (Europäische Revue) 22 (2002), accessed December 6, 2012, http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2002-04-19-nora-en.html.

Memory and history: a multifaceted relationship

Collective memory and history form an entangled relationship. In order to clarify it, it is imperative to begin by unravelling the multiform relationship between collective memory, on the one hand, and history (including oral history) on the other. But first we need to analytically exfoliate the multiple semantic layers of the notion of "history." The term history can be understood in at least two senses, often confused, mixed, and overlapping in discourses invoking this notion[1]: a) history as the totality of facts and events that had occurred in the past (*res gestae*); this prime meaning captures the objective dimension of the past existence, which is precisely why it may be called *the ontological meaning* of the concept of history ("what objectively existed in the past"); b) history as discourse about the past, embodied in various narrative accounts purporting to verbally reconstruct segments of the past (*historia rerum gestarum*); this second understanding may be denominated as *the discursive meaning* of the notion of history. In many languages of the world, including Romanian, the confusion is further intensified by the fact that the two meanings are not linguistically separated. Worse, in certain languages, the single word that hosts both meanings tends to favour the discursive, narrative meaning of the notion of history. For instance, in Italian, *storia* means both history (in both its objective and discursive meanings) and story, or even lie! Furthermore, a third auxiliary meaning can be added: c) history as a discipline centred on researching facts and event of the past, as well as the main source of discourses about the past. This tertiary understanding encompasses *the disciplinary meaning* of the term history. After splitting the linguistic hair in three semantic dimensions, it must be said that the discussion that follows refers to the second meaning only, i.e. the discursive one, in which history is understood as being a specialized discourse about the past issued by professionals dedicated to the systematic study of the past.

It must be firmly stated from the very outset that the notions of collective memory, history, and oral history overlap to a considerable extent, thus any attempt to define their conceptual content by isolating them from each other is rather the result of a process of abstractization. All the three (collective memory, history, oral history) are thoroughly intertwined, mutually influencing and conditioning each other. Nonetheless, despite the inherent difficulty of circumscribing the exact semantic scope of each concept, we can still force a distinction between them. Collective memory is both what individuals jointly remember from their own lived experience and what is collectively commemorated without being personally experienced. Stated differently, collective memory consists of the common stock of personal memories of public events plus the package of "second hand" memories that are historically inherited and shared by a pool of individuals forming a social community.[2] For the sake of full semantic clarity, it would be useful to operate a distinction between communicative memory and cultural memory.[3] Communicative

[1] Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 102; Neagu Djuvara, *Există istorie adevărată?* (Is There a Truthful History?) (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2004), 16; Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001), 27.

[2] Mihai Stelian Rusu, "The Structure of Mnemonic Revolutions," *International Review of Social Research* 1 (2011): 105-121, 107.

[3] Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 125-133, 126.

memory consists of the shared memories within a social community that are based exclusively upon everyday communication, being derived from personal experiences and preserved in the form of oral tradition (i.e. "first-hand" social memory). In contrast, cultural memory consists of the representations of the past transposed into a cultural support (usually written texts, but also material artefacts like statues, monuments, memorials, and other *lieux de mémoire*[1]) that facilitates the inter-generational transmission of social memories (i.e. "second-hand" collective memory). Unlike the communicative memory which is literally embodied (in the sense that it is actually carried inside the bodies of people who are the possessors of these memories), cultural memory is externalized in various artefactual objects (history textbooks are a prime example of products of the textual objectification of collective memory, while memorials best exemplify the material objectification of memory).

The epistemic program of oral history is to construct representations and interpretations of the past based on information collected through interviewing ordinary people. The raw material processed by oral history in order to represent the past is furnished by the lived experiences of ordinary subjects. As a sub-branch of history, oral history emerged from the need to descend from the ivory tower of academic historians directly into the street to listen to voices previously ignored by a historical research too centred on the deeds and acts of the great figures of the past. Oral history, focused on the experiences and memories of ordinary people, sets its goal to free historical research from the Rankean captivity of the archive. Its role within the system of history is to correct the academician propensity deeply embedded in professional history, and thus to provide a counter-weight which would balance the scale by taking into account the perspectives of ordinary people, previously deemed irrelevant and unworthy of attention. The elitist, top-down approach of political and military history is thus supplemented by a popular, bottom-up history. As a consequence, "the V.I.P.'s history" surveyed from a bird's eye perspective, best epitomized in Thomas Carlyle's emphatic emphasis placed upon the Great Men of History,[2] is being substituted for "the worm's eye view"[3] taken from the grassroots level of ordinary men and women's perspectives. Now it becomes transparent that the subject matter of oral history is what I have previously defined, following Jan Assmann, as communicative memory, namely the set of everyday memories derived from first-hand experiences agglutinated in the form of oral traditions. However, as was pointed out earlier, collective memory means more than just communicative memory, so that oral history enables access to only a single layer of collective memory. Therefore, oral history is not adequately equipped for capturing cultural memory with its objectified forms of memory.

Collective memory and history are two different ways of accessing the past.[4] Moreover, collective memory relies on history to legitimate itself and to emphasize the

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[1] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (1989): 7-24.

[2] Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero Worship & the Heroic in History. Six Lectures* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1841), 1.

[3] Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 14.

[4] David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), xxi.

authenticity of its constitutive events (of course, when history contradicts the claims of collective memory, the latter being usually suffused with a strong ideological tint, either historians are discredited or history itself is deemed irrelevant). In its turn, history (as scientific endeavour) is conditioned by collective memory, which orients historical research along the lines defined by its sensibilities towards certain events of the past that carry a heavy symbolic-affective burden. *In extremis*, collective memory dictates the conclusions that must be reached by historical research, so that the moral imperatives of collective memory transform history into a mere confirmational procedure. Fortunately, this possibility is usually rather a seldom scenario, more present in theoretical discussions than found in empirical reality. Regularly, collective memory is constructed with partial scraps of history that are selected and extracted from the flow of time, infused with meaning, and subsequently inserted into the composition of the society's collective memory. In this way, history serves as the fuel for collective memory, supplying it with historical details to be incorporated into the corpus of memory. However, history may also play the diametrically opposite role: that of challenging collective memory's truth-claims, of subjecting collective memory to a drastic cure of demythologization. The way in which history is put to work depends on the socio-political circumstances, depending especially on the political regime that organizes social life. In a totalitarian regime, history is turned into a weapon in the hands of power, and by falsifying history the falsification of collective memory is also being sought after. In a democratic regime, things get more complicated, because history is being used by a host of groups, each of them trying to promote its own political agenda and collective interests by appealing to the past and invoking the precedent. Despite the uses and abuses of history in instrumental purposes even in democratic and open societies, we can take solace in the thought that at least democracy provides the premises for a more objective history, freer of political interests, less loaded with ideological baggage, but also more deprived of comfortable certainties.

The evolution of the relationship between memory and history

From an epistemological angle, the two extreme cases of the relationship between collective memory and history are the following: i) perfect identity, when collective memory confounds itself with objective historical knowledge; ii) total opposition, when collective memory and historical knowledge do not intersect each other's path, not even tangentially. It must be stressed that both situations are hypothetical, very improbable to be found in empirical world. This is because any historical discourse must be founded, ultimately, on the memory of those who directly took part at the events that are being narrated. Not in vain, in Greek mythology, Clio (the muse of history) is the daughter of Mnemosyne (the personification of memory). And memory, both individual and collective, is inherently fallible, incomplete, selective, and partially distorted, which preclude it from being an accurate mirror of the past. Between the two extremes, the overlapping can be more or less extensive. Usually, collective memory carves from history symbolically relevant portions that are subsequently organized into a meaningful narrative, extirpating all the rest of historical reality that cannot be symbolically capitalized for the time being. Even if collective memory is made from factual bits and pieces extracted from the flow of history, during the process of their assembling into a narrative structure injected with meaning, their historical authenticity may be lost, or

their historical validity may be perverted. Collective memory tends to corrupt history, colonizing the past in order to adjust it to the presently dominant political interests and conceptions.

In the course of time, the relationship between memory and history took on various forms. Phasing the history of the problematic relationship between memory and history, Aleida Assmann[1] delineates three distinct stages, evolving in time after the Hegelian logic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis:

a) *identity* between history and memory – the pre-modern period;
b) *polarity* between history and memory – the modern period;
c) *interaction* between history and memory – the post-modern period.

History as memory: pre-modern identity

In chronological terms, the relation between memory and history firstly underwent the phase of identity. Aleida Assmann temporally places this relation of correspondence in pre-modernity,[2] before critical history to have secured its foundations as autonomous scientific endeavour. The "raison d'être" of history was to preserve the memory of the dynasty, the church, or the state. The historian's function, as Peter Burke puts it, was that of being a "'remembrancer,' the custodian of the memory of public events."[3] Once recorded in writing by the historian, these memories of public events were to make the generating source of fame for the great men of history. That is to say, historians had to conform to the role requirements drawn by Herodotus, for whom the task of historians was to be "the guardians of memory, the memory of glorious deeds."[4] As producers of chronicles, historians performed through their writings the same function as the one performed in oral societies by the "memory men," those people socially designated to preserve the memory of the past in cultures alien to the technology of writing. As such, this *mnemonic history* performed more of a political function than a cognitive-intellectual one. Pre-modern history fulfilled a legitimizing function, that of consolidating the institutions of power and ensuring the durability and perpetuation of the dynasty. The illustrative expression that can depict the link between history and memory in this stage is that of history as a tool in the service of power. In this sense, highly suggestive is the famous statement pronounced by John H. Plumb, according to which "the past has always been the handmaid of authority."[5] Fusing the memorial function with the legitimation function,[6] this pre-modern form of history brought a decisive contribution to the ideological reinforcement of the status quo. Regarding this kind of history subservient to the temporal powers it can be said without hesitation that it performs the political function of validating the existing social order ("Keeps the 'quo' in the

[1] Aleida Assmann, "Transformations between Memory and History," *Social Research* 75 (2008): 49-72, 57.
[2] Assmann, "Transformations…," 57.
[3] Peter Burke, "History as Social Memory," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, eds. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 188.
[4] Burke, "History as Social Memory," 192.
[5] John H. Plumb, *The Death of the Past* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), 33.
[6] Assmann, "Transformations …," 58.

'status'"[1]). In these circumstances, history, memory, social identity, and power are all working together to maintain the social order intact.

History contra memory: conflictual polarity

Under the auspices of modernity, the relationship between history and memory underwent significant change. Subsequent to the formation of history as an autonomous discipline, the relationship between the two has suffered a radical mutation, transforming the previous identity into a conflictual polarity. History emancipated itself from the constraining tutelage of church and royalty, assuming a critical, reflexive stance, even espousing a destructive manifesto oriented towards the mythologized memory. The rebellion against memory was made possible only after history underwent a process of scientification during the 19th century, inaugurated by what came to be known as the "Rankean revolution"[2] occurred in German historiography. This is the moment when historical knowledge entered its professional phase by defining its own internal standards, methodological norms, and quality criteria. During this period, the dichotomy between history (understood now as an objective, value-free, and ideologically impartial scientific endeavour) and memory (redefined as a distorted, emotionally contaminated, and subjective history) emerged.

It would be wrong to suppose that the evolution of historical discourse in the direction of criticism meant the conversion of history from the "handmaid of authority" in the challenger of the status quo. Not all history became critical and oppositional. Not even by a long shot! Only a small fraction of all historians assimilated the critical discourse, the large majority continuing to play the role of lay priests of the state or that of guardians of the traditional truths that needed constant historical re-confirmation. Nevertheless, a gradual differentiation occurred between history and memory in the historical consciousness. History and memory started to separate themselves out of the melt they previously formed and each of them began to be conceptualized by contrasting one against the other.

The intellectual tradition that places collective memory at the antipode of academic history has its roots in the conception of Maurice Halbwachs, more specifically, in the radical distinction introduced by the French sociologist between *collective memory* and *historical memory*. In his unfinished work, published posthumously as *La Mémoire collective*, Halbwachs situates history in an antithetical relationship with memory, describing their relation as "the ultimate opposition."[3] Halbwachs identifies a set of polar characteristics that distinguish collective memory from historical memory:

> a) *The continuity of memory* versus *the discontinuity of history*: collective memory favours the similarities, resemblances, and analogies that create what

[1] Derek Jarman, Suso Cecchi D'Amico and Nicholas Ward-Jackson, *Caravaggio*, DVD. Directed by Derek Jarman, British Film Institute (BFI), 1986.
[2] Johnson Kent Wright, "History and Historicism," in *The Cambridge History of Science. Volume 7: The Modern Social Sciences*, eds. Theodore M. Porter and Dorothy Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 113-130, 120.
[3] Halbwachs, *Collective Memory*, 78.

Halbwachs calls the "illusion"[1] of continuity of group's identity through time. While history periodizes the continuous flow of time "just as the content of a tragedy is divided into several acts,"[2] and is focused on capturing the differences between the historical periods cut into separate temporal compartments, collective memory "is a current of continuous thought"[3] that emphasizes what remains essentially unchanged.

> […] history is interested primarily in differences and disregards the resemblances without which there would have been no memory, since the only facts remembered are those having the common trait of belonging to the same consciousness […]
>
> What strikes us about [collective memory], however, is that resemblances are paramount. When it considers its own past, the group feels strongly that it has remained the same and becomes conscious of its identity through time.[4]

As a "record of change,"[5] history manifests no interest in the periods when "nothing apparently happens." Collective memory, in stark contrast, is the "record of resemblances." Ignoring historical ruptures, collective memory is thus capable of providing the group with a "self-portrait" that persists through time in which the group can recognize itself and find its collective identity.

b) *The syntheticity of memory* versus *the analyticity of history*: collective memory selects relevant symbols from the reservoir of history that it distils into identitary narratives. As such, collective memory operates by extracting significant fragments from the community's past, injecting them with meaning, and then synthetizing them into a narrative shot through and through with emotional undertones. The higher the affective charge of the narrative, the more privileged position it will occupy within the historical consciousness of the group members. Instead, history, as disciplined, objective, and emotionally detached inquiry of the past, does not favour the sectors of the historic flow in terms of their subjective relevance, but grants equal cognitive and epistemic importance to all of them. Memory is discriminatory, history is egalitarian. History's analyticity (reflected in the propensity of history to break down the past and analyze it "piece by piece") and chronological egalitarianism (reflected in the treatment with the same respect of all parts of history regardless of their symbolic relevance to society) promote *erudition*.[6] And the necessary consequence of historical scholarship is the limitation of this kind of analytical stance towards the past to a small minority of professionals who are deemed to master and manage the considerable growing stock of technical information about the past. In contrast, collective memory cannot afford to cultivate

[1] Ibid., 87.
[2] Ibid., 80.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 84-85.
[5] Ibid., 86.
[6] Ibid., 79-80.

historical scholarship. Selectively retaining from the past only the events, facts, and figures with symbolic value in the present, collective memory is necessarily schematic and synthetic. The internal logic of collective memory dictates the imperative of establishing a parsimonious relationship with the past. Only the usable past, put in the service of group's interests and needs, will be incorporated in the corpus of collective memory. Simplifying to the extremes, the analyticity of history promotes historical scholarship and erudition, while the syntheticity of memory is conducive to parsimony towards the past.

c) *The subjectivity of memory* versus *the objectivity of history*: closely correlated with the synthetic character of memory is its subjective quality. Collective memory, as conceived by Halbwachs, represents the "living past," consisting of the sections of the past that continue to be active in the group's historical consciousness. On the contrary, formal history represents the dead past, objectively known, but that had lost any symbolic relevance to the group's social life, continuing to survive only as "written history." Kept in archives or deposited in books, the scholastic knowledge of the past is sterile in terms of morally guiding the group's current affairs and actions. Irrelevant for the present purposes of the group, scholastic historical knowledge is seen as continuously embalming a mummified past.

Within the social sciences, a genuine tradition of conceptual borrowing has been established, expressing itself in the form of transfusing or even transplanting notions and ideas across disciplinary lines. Notorious is the adoption of the conceptual pair of "emic" and "etic" from linguistics in socio-anthropological analysis.[1] In the continuation of this tradition of conceptual transfer via the linguistics-to-sociology link, I propose adopting the notions of dialect-grapholect in order to illustrate the relationship between memory and history. The distinction between dialect and grapholect has been worked out by the linguist Einar Haugen,[2] for whom the dialect represents the spoken part of the language, while the grapholect is the written version of the language in question. The dialect is necessarily narrower in scope than the grapholect, the former being the active part of the latter, i.e. the selective sum of words that are orally performed in the contexts of concrete linguistic interactions between members of a given culture. In contrast, the grapholect includes the totality of both spoken and unspoken words of a language, i.e. the written vocabulary, made up of both actively used words in oral practices and un-uttered words that form the passive vocabulary of a language. In an analogous fashion, memory is the *dialectal* past, being performed in the present in commemorative rituals and codified on material supports (e.g. monuments and texts) through which the meanings given to the past can be periodically re-affirmed and passed on to

[1] Petru Iluţ, *Abordarea calitativă a socioumanului* (The Qualitative Approach to the Socio-human) (Iaşi: Polirom, 1997), 38.

[2] Einar I. Haugen, "Linguistics and Language Planning," in *Sociolinguistics: Proceedings of the UCLA Sociolinguistics Conference 1964*, ed. William Bright (The Hague, Mouton De Gruyter, 1966): 50-71, 53.

future generations. In contrast, professional history, since it encompasses all knowledge about the past (subjectively relevant and irrelevant alike), is the *grapholectic* past. The same relationship between memory and history, dialect and grapholect, living past and dead past, is captured by the conceptual pair of canon and archive.[1] The canon is the "cultural working memory,"[2] expressing the active dimension of cultural memory. The canon's defining element is its "notorious shortage of space"[3]; this shortage makes exclusion as fundamental in the establishment of the canon. By contrast, the archive can be seen as the "cultural reference memory,"[4] expressing the passive dimension of cultural memory.

d) *The internality of memory* versus *the externality of history*: due to its subjective nature, collective memory is an *emic* representation of the past, accessing the common past from an internal perspective. Since the social group is the support and bearer of collective memory, it follows that collective memory cannot be but an internal gaze, rooted within the group's social life. Critical history, understood as objective and non-partisan examination of the past, is detached from the group's social framework. In this qualified sense, history is *etic*, scrutinizing the past from an external position. The external gaze of critical history creates the conditions for objectivity, which is possible to be reached (in a significant measure, but never in its fullness) only as a result of socio-emotional detachment and de-familiarization.

e) *The multiplicity of memories* versus *the singularity of history*: "there are several collective memories. […] History is unitary, and it can be said that there is only one history."[5] Since there is an intimate link between every group and its collective memory of the past, it follows that there are as many collective memories as there are groups. The subjective nature of collective memories makes them mutually incompatible and thus impossible to be harmonized into a single collective memory of humanity. The same cannot be said for history. Although there certainly are partial histories (e.g. the history of Romania, the history of Transylvanian peasants, or the history of childhood), these can be merged together into an overall picture: the comprehensive history resulting from the collage of specific histories is "like an ocean fed by the many partial histories."[6] Implicitly in the opposition between the multiplicity of memories and the singularity of history, there lies another essential tension: the one between the universal and the particular. Collective memories, as the possession of the groups, are necessarily particular, while history – objective, emotionally

[1] Aleida Assmann, "Canon and Archive," in *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 97-107.
[2] Assmann, "Canon and Archive," 100.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 102.
[5] Halbwachs, *Collective Memory*, 83.
[6] Ibid., 84.

detached, external and immune to the group's domestic turmoils – tends toward universality.

Halbwachs's antithetical dichotomization of collective memory and formal history has been further continued, developed, and radicalized by a series of thinkers. The most influential successor of Halbwachs in this direction of counterposing history to memory is the Annales School historian, Pierre Nora. Prototypical for illustrating the relation of polarity between collective memory and critical history is the statement of Pierre Nora: "Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition."[1] Nora continues by pointing out the stark contrasts between the two, arguing that memory is the lived connection with the past, while history is objective representation of the past; memory is the possession of the group, acting as cohesive cement for group solidarity and fountainhead of group's identity, while history is universal; memory is affective and non-reflexive, unconscious of its successive transformations as it adapts its content to the continuously changing exigencies of the present, while history is critical, permanently on sceptical guard and suspicious of memory's claims. Critical history cuts the umbilical cord that connects the group to its cultural identity, a bond that memory is desperately trying to keep tightly knit. Memory sacralizes the past, while history disenchants it, being "iconoclastic and irreverent."[2] Forcing this comparison in religious terms, Tzvetan Todorov considers that "historians do not aim to increase the supply of holly images, or to enhance the cult of saints and heroes, or to wash the feet of 'archangels.'"[3] Its refusal to contribute to sacralizing the past turns history into a "sacrilegious" endeavour, since it desecrates through critical inquiry what collective memory sanctifies.

The head-to-head comparison is further extended by Peter Novick, for whom collective memory is ahistorical, or even anti-historical.[4] Historical analysis implies the full awareness of the complexities of the facts examined, along with affective detachment as necessary measure in order to grasp the multidimensionality of the past. Abandoning value judgments and embracing the principle of axiological neutrality open the possibility for accepting ambiguities, "including moral ambiguities, of protagonists' motives and behavior."[5] In contrast, collective memory simplifies the inherent complexity of historical facts, reducing them to "mythic archetypes." Moreover, collective memory takes a single, morally engaged, perspective, thus being unable to tolerate ambiguities in interpreting historical events and persons. Elaborating on the opposition between resemblances and differences emphasized by Halbwachs, Novick points out that decisive for historical analysis is the consciousness of the *historicity* of events, the awareness that the events under study belong to the past. Collective memory, in contrast, denies the historicity of events, stressing instead their continuing presence and decisive relevance *hic et nunc*. Lastly, but not the least, collective memory has a prominent

[1] Nora. "Between Memory and History," 8.
[2] Ibid., 10.
[3] Tzvetan Todorov, *Hope and Memory. Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 200.
[4] Peter Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory: The American Experience* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 3-4.
[5] Novick, *Holocaust and Collective Memory*, 4.

identity function, expressing an "eternal or essential truth about the group," which, once in place, comes to define "an eternal identity for the members of the group."[1]

The critically minded historian becomes a debunker of memory, a deconstructor of the heroic master narratives woven around mythic nodes. Critically driven, the historian comes out of the Herodotean role of guardian of the memory of glorious deeds, and enters the role of "guardian of awkward facts," exposing "the skeletons in the cupboard of the social memory."[2]

Summing up, the characteristics that distinguish collective memory from critical history can be listed in two antithetical records of a synoptic table.

Table 1. Collective memory versus formal history[3]

Collective memory	**Formal history**
organic, synthetic, non-reflexive	artificial, analytic, self-reflexive
affective, selective, subjective	emotionally detached, critical, objective
emic, partisan, particular	etic, neutral, universal
implies an identity project	aspires towards an objective account of the past, irrespective of the consequences for the group's identity
intolerant towards ambiguity	acknowledges ambiguity and complexity
sacralizing, reverential, passeistic	sacrilegious, irreverent, iconoclastic
simplifies the past and ignores the findings that do not match the self-serving narrative	constrained by archive material
conservative and resistant to change: bypasses counter-evidence in order to preserve the already established story	opened to revision: embraces the findings of new research and alters the image of the past in the light of new evidence

The table presents the contrasting characteristics of memory and history, but opposes memory to an idealized image of history, *as it should be*, not as it actually is. This makes the head-to-head opposition between memory and history an unbalanced comparison, since it counterposes a descriptive image of collective memory (as it really is) to a normative image of analytic history (as it should be). The entire comparison is structured upon the implicit assumption of historical realism, according to which history is an endeavour capable of exactly reconstructing the past "as it really was" (Leopold von Ranke: *wie es eigentlich gewesen*). Precisely this positivist claim I will call into question, arguing that history shares many traits with collective memory, in the sense that historical knowledge too is conditioned by the socio-cultural contexts in which it is produced. Historical research cannot seclude itself from society, and thus cannot be completely immune to socio-political infiltrations. This is why its conclusions,

[1] Ibid.
[2] Burke, "History as Social Memory," 192.
[3] Nora, "Between Memory and History," 8-9; Novick, *Holocaust and Collective Memory*, 3-4; James V. Wertsch and Henry L. Roediger III, "Collective Memory: Conceptual Foundations and Theoretical Approaches," *Memory* 16 (2008): 318-326, 321.

advertised as Olympian and detached from any emotional or political pulsations, cannot but bear the marks of the socio-political regime that embeds the production of historical knowledge.

An epistemological detour at this point of argumentation appears as necessary in order to elucidate the intricate relationship between history and memory. Especially urgent is the task of clarifying "the nature of history," given that in the last half of century the historical endeavor of objectively knowing the past was increasingly brought into question. The contesting voices challenging the validity of historical knowledge progressively gathered momentum as they acquired increasingly stronger postmodernist overtones. At this moment, history as discipline and discourse about the past is internally broken into rival epistemic factions, each of them advancing disjunctive agendas and conflicting views on the image of history. A quadruple fracture line cuts across the historical community delineating four schools of thought: a) reconstructionism; b) constructionism; c) deconstructionism; d) endism.[1] The order of their disposal reflects the order of their chronological appearance. Reconstructionism is the doctrine best summarized in Leopold von Ranke's precept, of writing history "as it really was." Its central axis rests on the doctrine of realism, which makes two assertions: i) the past has a reality of its own, independent of the mind and knowledge of the researchers (the ontological postulate); ii) the past, waiting "out there" to be discovered by historians, is, in principle, objectively knowable (the epistemological postulate). The objective cognoscibility of the past is conditional on two generic elements: i) the existence of sources as the foundations for inferences through which the reality of the past can be reconstructed; ii) compliance with methodological protocols, criteria of validity, and the rules of inferential logic (in short, respecting "the rules of historical method," to paraphrase the title of the famous book written by Émile Durkheim[2]).

The second pillar supporting the reconstructionist paradigm is the old Aristotelian doctrine of "apartheid" between history and poetry. In his treaty on literary theory, *Poetics*, Aristotle introduced a definite separation between them: history relates "what has been," while poetry expresses "what might be."[3] This "Aristotelian demarcation" is one of the two cornerstones of reconstructionist epistemology. As historiographical style, reconstructionism shows a reverential attitude towards the institution of the archive, regarded as the crucial data bank containing the raw materials used by historians in theoretically re-assembling the past. For the reconstructionist historian, the archive is the *locus* of history, the site where the reality of the past is concentrated in documents. Another particularizing feature of reconstructionism is given by its atheoretical, sometimes even "rabidly anti-theoretical,"[4] orientation. Confident

[1] Keith Jenkins and Alun Munslow, "Introduction," in *The Nature of History Reader,* eds. Keith Jenkins and Alun Munslow (London: Routledge, 2004), 1-18.

[2] Emile Durkheim, *Regulile metodei sociologice* (The Rules of Sociological Method), trans. Dan Lungu (1895; Iaşi: Polirom, 2002).

[3] Aristotel, *Poetica*, trans. C. Balmuş (Bucharest: Editura Ştiinţifică, 1957), Sections 1451a and 1451b, 31; See also Beverley Southgate, *History: What & Why? Ancient, Modern, and Postmodern Perspectives*, 2nd Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 15.

[4] Keith Jenkins, "Preface to Routledge Classics edition," in *Re-thinking History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003): xv-xx, xvii

that historical facts extracted from the archives speak for themselves, the narratives related from within the reconstructionist paradigm are characterized by a minimum level of theoretical reflexivity. Traditional historians' mistrust of theory finds its full expression in the words of Arthur Marwick (one of the coryphaei of reconstructionism), for whom theorists are nothing but "interlopers"[1] undermining the historical discipline. A further distinctive feature of reconstructionism resides in its *ideographic* approach, given by the historical research's focus on specific military events and political actions. Preference for the ideographic style of doing history leads toward conceiving history in terms of chronologically sequenced eventful narratives (*histoire événementielle*), where the importance of the "Great Men of History"[2] is highly oversized.

As a revised offshoot of reconstructionism, constructionism abandons the absolutist claims of reconstructing the past as it really happened in its original totality (as expressed by Ranke's epistemological aspirations). Constructionism acknowledges the impossibility of total and integral reconstruction of the past, but does not give up the possibility of a tentative, limited, incomplete, but still *quasi-objective knowledge*. Completeness and integrality, both building blocks of the reconstructionist project, are reformulated as the principles of *incompleteness* and *partiality*, inherent to all intellectual constructions which aim to apprehend the past, as far as possible, in a realist and objective fashion. If reconstructionism is founded on the premise of epistemological *absolutism*, constructionism is built upon the principle of epistemological *fallibilism*[3]. Moreover, the anti-theoretical orientation of reconstructionism gives way to embracing social theory as paradigmatic framework in terms of which historical facts are being interpreted. A further revision consists in the move from ideographic towards nomothetic, which results in refocusing the centre of interest from surface events and concrete individuals to deep structures and long-term processes. The constructionist style of doing history is embodied in the French school of historiography coagulated around the *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* journal. Despite the differences in nuances between them, both doctrines can be framed in the family of epistemological realism, since both reconstructionism and constructionism are characterized by their belief in the possibility of objectivity of historical knowledge – naïve faith for the former, qualified belief for the latter. Furthermore, both can be described as positive epistemologies, since they both aim to develop assertive statements that establish facts about the reality of the past. In contradistinction, the other two epistemologies of history (deconstructionism and endism) can be classified as negative epistemologies, since both set their objective to reject the possibility of legitimate and disinterested knowledge of the past.

Deconstructionism is the phalanx of postmodernism in historical thought. Opposable point-by-point to the epistemological assumptions of reconstructionism, the deconstructionist program considers objectivity to be at best a comfortable illusion. Deconstructionists protest that the "ideology of objectivity" not only legitimates the

[1] Arthur Marwick, "Metahistory is Bunk – History is Essential," Inaugural lecture at the Open University, 5 October 1993, cited in Southgate, *History*…, 3.
[2] Carlyle, *On Heroes*, 1.
[3] Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), Sections 1.141-1.175. C.S. Peirce was the first to advance "the doctrine of fallibilism" concerning human knowledge.

flawed traditional historical approach, but also conceals behind the smoke screen of objectivity a fierce will to power and domination. History, seen by reconstructionists as belonging to science, is placed by deconstructionists within humanities, sharing the same cognitive status as literature and other forms of artistic creation. Taking the view of history as rather an "aesthetic narrative" than an intellectual product derivative of empirical constraints, deconstructionism is anti-representational, anti-empiricist, and relativist. Anti-representational, since it rejects the correspondence theory of truth upon which any realist epistemology is founded. According to the deconstructionist view, historical narratives do not correspond to any concrete realities of the past, but instead are aesthetic-literary creations of the "author-historian." As such, they cannot legitimately claim to be objective representations of the past, but simple *fictional* productions that create the past rather than discovering it out there. "Histories qua histories are always representational failures,"[1] and this undeniable "fact" brings "wonderful news" that need to be celebrated. It seems that deconstructionism, although highly aversive towards the appeal to facts, has, after all, its own apodictic facts! Evidently, this internal contradiction is not resolved by what can be called the postmodernist strategy of *scare quoting*, as illustrated in the following statement:

> And this "fact" – the fact that histories are irreducible to "the facts" and thus knowledge closures; the fact that histories always contain acts of the creative imagination – means that histories are impossible to close down, because it is impossible to close down the imagination.[2]

The anti-empiricist element of deconstructionism derives from the understanding of historical accounts as "acts of imagination": "histories as such are aesthetic, figurative productions."[3] Central to this conceptualization of historical theories in aesthetic terms is the position of Hayden White, for whom the historian "performs an essentially *poetic* act."[4] This conviction leads White into concluding "the ineluctably poetic nature of the historical work."[5] Elaborating on Hayden White's aestheticizing conception, Keith Jenkins and Alun Munslow assert that "histories are aesthetic, figurative, positioned, imaginary artefacts – and especially *literary artefacts*."[6] For deconstructionists, history is nothing more than just another literary genre, since they conceive history as being "indeed a narrative, aesthetic and thus fictive creation."[7]

Now is the right time to signal a rhetorical manoeuvre specific to postmodernist reasoning by invoking an eloquent example of what can be called *the postmodernist argumentative contortion*. Here is the quote:

> [Narrativization, i.e. the process of organizing unstructured information about the past into a narrative pattern] is just an act of imagination. And this imaginative, constitutive element gives history qua history the unavoidable

[1] Jenkins and Munslow, "Introduction," 4.
[2] Ibid., 3.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), x.
[5] White, *Metahistory*, xi.
[6] Jenkins and Munslow, "Introduction," 4.
[7] Ibid., 5.

> status of being *fictive*. Not, let us note immediately, the status of being a piece of *fiction* […] but fictive in the sense of *fictio*; that is to say, made up, fashioned, created, fabricated, figured. We thus take it as read that histories as such are aesthetic, figurative productions.[1]

The reasoning follows the rhythms of a two steps, back-and-forth dance. In the opening move, a radical, if not outrageous, statement is being put forward that shocks common sense. In our example, the "radical prologue" comes in the assertion: "history is unavoidable fictive." Immediately following is the twisting moment, the step back, the dilutive addition: "fictive in the sense of *fictio*." The provocative radicalism of the initial statement is partially retracted by invoking a play of words. The rhetorical strategy employed to deliver the persuasive argument looks like a threat of bomb attack, that immediately after it was announced, its authors rush to diffuse it as quickly as possible. If "fictive" simply means that the historical account is the intellectual production of the historian, who must use his or her "historical imagination" (in a sense analogous to Charles Wright Mills' "sociological imagination"[2]), what is the point of using such a provocative descriptor? Certainly every thoughtful historian acknowledges that facts do not speak for themselves, that the "voices" of the past are in fact mute, and that the historian is the one who speaks on behalf of the past through the account that s/he is piecing together from the available evidence.

Epistemological relativism arises naturally from such a fictional understanding of history. If histories are but artistic creations free from the double constraints of empirical evidence and the canons of formal logic, then surely *anything goes*[3]. Relativism substitutes the realist precept expressed by Ranke as the mission statement for the reconstructionist program ("writing history as it really was") with the slogan of epistemological anarchism summarized by Paul Feyerabend in the phrase "anything goes." Relativism is also the doctrine to which Lucian Boia pays allegiance in his repeatedly expressed views on the nature of history: historical knowledge is the incomplete, simplified, and distorted image of the past endlessly redefined under the pressure of the present. The radically flavoured relativism embraced by Boia postulates the impossibility of objective knowledge in history: "It must be understood that *objective history does not exist*. Indeed, not only does it not exist; it cannot exist."[4] The historical discourse drastically filters actually happened history, it artificially injects order and coherence into the empirical mess of events, and thus it "dramatizes" the action and infuses it with a "well-defined sense."[5] But Boia does not stop here: the historians, as tireless creators of meanings, coherence, and order, "produce a sort of 'fiction' out of 'true' materials."[6] We find in Lucian Boia the same practice of *scare quoting* that was pointed out earlier. With this picture of historical discourse, the differences between history and fiction tend to fade away, being increasingly more difficult to perceive the borders between the two. History and fiction dissolve each other

[1] Ibid., 3.
[2] Charles Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959).
[3] Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (New York: Verso, 1993), 14.
[4] Boia, *History and Myth*…, 28.
[5] Ibid., 27.
[6] Ibid.

into a literary-aesthetic creation. Important to mention is that Boia, vocalizing the relativistic beliefs shared by all deconstructionists, does not refer to the distorted history, ideologically biased, and contaminated with all sorts of corrupting assumptions. He is speaking of historical discourse as such, about history *per se*. And this is what makes his relativist position all the more radical.

Finally, the last epistemological faction is the one that Jenkins and Munslow call *endism*. The authors whose conceptions on history fall into this category over-radicalize the deconstructionist program, bringing into question not only the realist postulates of both reconstructionism and constructionism, but the very sense of historical endeavour and knowledge. As such, the endists do not hesitate to declare, with all the intellectual morgue required by such a mortuary pronouncement, "the death of history." If reconstructionism is grounded on realism, and deconstructionism finds its epistemological support in relativism, endism is founded upon scepticism, or even cynicism, concerning historical knowledge. The major differences that divide the four epistemological schools of thought are summarized in the following table.

Table 2. Epistemologies of history

	Reconstruction ism	**Construction-ism**	**Deconstruc-tionism**	**Endism**
epistemological valence	positive epistemologies		negative epistemologies	
epistemological doctrine	naïve realism	critical realism	relativism	scepticism
relation with theory	anti-theoretical	uses social theory to interpret the past	uses philosophical theory to problematized the past and the knowledge of it	uses philosophical theory to dissolve historical discourse
incredulity towards the conclusions and meaning of historical research	absent	mitigated	pronounced	total (hyperbolic)

Personally, the position that I embrace regarding the epistemology of history is that of *fallibilism*, corresponding to the constructionist school of thought from the quadruple classification developed by Jenkins and Munslow. According to the fallibilist belief system, politically disengaged critical history is an attempt to rationally reconstruct the past on the basis of the available objective evidence. Nevertheless, the scarcity of evidence is responsible for the incomplete and tentative nature of any historical conclusion. Historian's inferences, even if logically sound, can reflect only partially (and possibly distorted) the historical reality. Complete reconstruction of the

past is impossible. Historical representation inevitably performs a reduction to scale, since a model as complex as the represented object is meaningless, and in the case of history, definitely unattainable. "Mapping the landscape of history"[1] is never going to give us a one-to-one temporal chart of the past.[2] Besides, historians are prisoners of the present, who can hardly escape their temporal localization to situate themselves beyond, or outside, time. This temporal captivity explains why most historical accounts are affected by a presentist bias. If we introduce into the equation also the ideological influences that colour historian's orientations, it becomes clear that the past "as it really happened," in its intact and unaltered totality, is irrecoverable. Historical knowledge must give up the dream of attaining absolute and definitive truths, because they are beyond the grasp of science, and settle instead for the more modest aspiration of trying to approximate as accurate as possible (but always imperfect) the structures and meanings of the past. However, the intellectual constructions developed by historians in order to make sense of the past are far from being mere fictional creations similar to literary genres. Even if they are intellectual constructions, they respond to a different set of criteria of validity than that of aesthetic-literary works for which notions such as validity are nonsensical. Against fictionalist view, it must be stressed that historical facts, in the form of elementary truths about the past, certainly exist. Of course, "facts that can be established beyond all reasonable doubt remain trivial."[3] But their objectivity resides precisely in the elementarity of these factual truths situated beyond any rational suspicion. The existence of the Holocaust is one such objective historical fact. On the other hand, quantifying the exact number of victims of the Holocaust is indeed beyond the epistemic possibilities of historical inquiry. In such situations, we must content ourselves with approximations. Even more problematic becomes the condition of historical knowledge when it tries to grasp the meanings of some historical phenomena or to understand the intentions of historical actors. But the barriers are far from being insurmountable even in this case. The subjective dimension of both collective mentalities and historical actors is not irretrievably lost. Working on the same example already mentioned, it is known what were the ideological resorts that motivated the actions leading to the Holocaust in Nazi Germany. Who can state that a work that constructs, according to the standards of historical method authorized within the community of professionals, a history of Auschwitz during the Third Reich, is a simple fictional creation, belonging to literary genre, that is, to the realm of imagination uncontrolled by empirical constraints? Against the central theses of the fictionalist doctrine of history, it must be emphasized that "the difference between historical fact and falsehood is not ideological."[4] With regard to the Holocaust, to continue the

[1] John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[2] See Jorge Luis Borges, "On Exactitude in Science," in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 325 for a fascinating literary treatment of "map–territory relation." With a few literary strokes, Borges explores the absurdity, and ultimately the futility, of such an ambitious undertaking.

[3] William H. McNeill, "Mythistory, or Truth, Myth, History, and Historians," *American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 1-10, 2.

[4] Eric J. Hobsbawm, *On History* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 272.

example, the historical reality is in principle knowable: "Whether the Nazi gas ovens existed or not can be established by evidence."[1] History is fictive only to the extent that it disregards what Eric Hobsbawm considers to be the foundation of historical inquiry: "the supremacy of evidence."[2]

History and memory: interaction and complementarity

Based on the extent of the supremacy of evidence, a decisive distinction must be operated between: a) politicized, partisan, ideologically engaged history, which tends toward the fictional extreme of the continuum, where the imaginary reigns supreme; b) professional critical history, which although cannot completely purge itself off of politico-ideological infiltrations that distort its aspirations towards objectivity, succeeds in constructing approximate representations of past realities. In the first category, that of ideologically politicized history, fall all nationalist histories written with the purpose of legitimizing the nation-state. These types of narrative exemplify what Bernard Lewis called "history for purpose."[3] Also in this category is the right place for genuinely fictional histories, of the kind written by Nicolae Densuşianu in his *Prehistoric Dacia*, in which he launched the phantasmagorical hypothesis that on the current Romania's territory flourished, eight thousand years ago, the Pelasgian civilization, out of which the entire European culture emerged. Latin became, in Densuşianu's historical scheme, a dialect spoken within the Pelasgian civilization. Cataloguing all eccentricities contained in Densuşianu's work spanning well over a thousand pages would occupy an unjustifiable amount of space. Suffice it to note that Lucian Boia considers *Prehistoric Dacia* as "the expression of the strongest dose of the imaginary in Romanian historiography,"[4] while Vasile Pârvan, referring to Densuşianu's work, qualified it as "fantasy novel."[5] So, is there any difference at all between the historical accounts presented in Densuşianu's *Prehistoric Dacia* and Pârvan's *Getica* respectively? Are both figurative creations, fictional productions emerging out of historical imagination? My firm position is that the only answers that can be given to these questions are categorically affirmative to the former, negative to the latter. We are forced to discriminate between history of scientific quality, which responds to the exigencies of method and logic, and history of poor scientific quality, tributary to wishful thinking and extra-scientific purposes (political, ideological, etc.). Only the latter, i.e. Densuşianu's *Prehistoric Dacia,* is truly fictitious.

If this fundamental distinction is accepted, collective memory can be related in opposition with critical history. On the other hand, between collective memory and fictional history there is an elective affinity as well as overlapping rather than net opposition. Decupling collective memory from fictionally tilted history is much more difficult to effect than separating collective memory from analytic history.

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[1] Hobsbawm, *On History*, 272.
[2] Ibid.
[3] William M. Brinner, review of *History: Remembered, Recovered, Invented*, by Bernard Lewis, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 8 (1977): 575-577, 576.
[4] Boia, *History and Myth*…, 97.
[5] Ibid.

The relationship between collective memory and history can be characterized as *theoretical distinctivity* and *practical communion*. Theoretically, collective memory is drastically differentiated from academic, professional history. The precise distinction resists only artificially maintained on a theoretical level; practiced history, however, in contrast to its idealized image, is often just as imbued with political, ideological, methodological biases (to name only a few sources of distortion), which move it closer to collective memory. Practiced history and collective memory criss-cross one another and intertwine with each other forming an intricate mesh that is the societal representation of the past. This amalgamation of practiced history and collective memory has been captured in notions such as "mythistory" or "mythoscape."

The interstitial space between scientific history and fictive history is much too broad not to accommodate intermediary forms of construing the past. I have argued to this point that between scientific history and fictional history stands practiced history. But the latter does not fully exhaust the buffer space between scientific history and the purely, or mostly fictional, history. Enough space is left for mythistory, i.e. the mythical way of addressing and making sense of the past. Mythistory, understood as mythical representation of the past, emerges on the territory between practiced history and fictive history, which can be called *mythscape.* By the notion of "mythscape," Duncan Bell is referring to the "discursive realm in which the myths of the nation are forged, transmitted, negotiated, and reconstructed constantly."[1]

Historical myth must be clearly differentiated from both historical fact and historical fiction. Historical fact, established as a consequence of rigorous inquiry, consists of highly reliable representations of some past realities; nonetheless, historical facts remain, in principle, fallible, and subject to revision. John H. Goldthorpe formulates the following definition, which the British historical sociologist considers to be the best answer to the question "what is a historical fact?": "a historical fact is an inference from the relics."[2] Embracing the fundamental epistemological postulates of realism regarding historical knowledge, Goldthorpe strongly emphasizes the idea that "we can only know the past on the basis of what has physically survived from the past: that is, on the basis of the relics – or of what may be alternatively described as the residues, deposits or traces – of the past."[3] The slogan advanced to capture the essence of his conception is "no relics, no history."[4] The residues of the past survive in three main forms: a) natural remains, such as bones or excrements; b) material artefacts, such as tools, weapons, domestic objects or works of art; c) "objectified communications," namely written documentary records of human communication. Even though relics (the inferential foundation of historical facts) are characterized by *finitude* and *incompleteness*, Goldthorpe insists upon the possibility of establishing historical facts where the traces of the past allow for making controlled inferences. Of course, like any inductive reasoning, the historical fact established by an inference from the relics falls

[1] Daniel S. A. Bell, "Mythscapes: Memory, Mythology, and National Identity," *British Journal of Sociology* 54 (2003): 63–81, 63.
[2] John H. Goldthorpe, "The Uses of History in Sociology: Reflections on some Recent Tendencies," *The British Journal of Sociology* 42 (1991): 211-230, 213.
[3] Goldthorpe, "The Uses of History," 213.
[4] Ibid.

under the general principle of fallibility, which characterizes the entire spectrum of human knowledge.

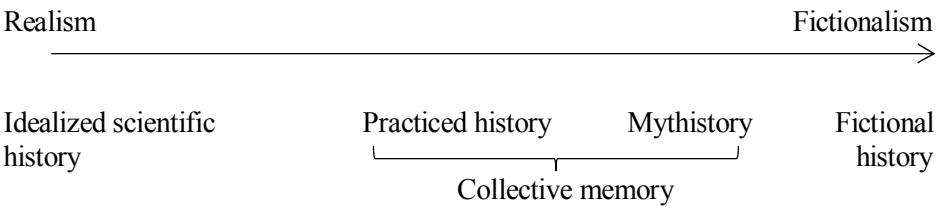
In total contradistinction to historical facts stand historical fictions epitomized in the fantastical speculations of Nicolae Densuşianu. The myth, however, although belonging to the realm of the imaginary, keeps contact with reality in that "it is not merely a story told but a lived reality."[1] In Lucian Boia's conception, myth is an "imaginary construction […] which serves to highlight the essence of cosmic and social phenomena, in close relation to the fundamental values of the community, and with the aim of ensuring that community's cohesion."[2] In his attempt to elucidate the nature of mythical phenomena, Boia determines myth's constitutive dimensions as follows: a) myth incorporates a truth considered to be essential for the community that embraces it, an "eternal truth" in which the group's collective identity resides; b) it is highly symbolically charged, having a built-in moral grid for interpreting reality through which it functions as axiological guide for the community; c) it is reductionistic, since it simplifies the complexity of historical phenomena, paying selective attention only to what can be integrated into its schematic understanding of reality. We can add to these essential features Malinowski's famous remark that myth is a "sociological charter,"[3] because it anchors the present in the past and thus performs the function of validating and justifying the established social structure and organization. Besides the function of social integration, included in Boia's definition, the legitimizing role of myth cannot be overlooked. Malinowski is again illuminating in this respect too: "the myth comes into play when rite, ceremony, or a social or moral rule demands justification, warrant of antiquity, reality, and sanctity."[4] Mythistory, in the form of Romanian nationalistic history throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, for instance, provided the Romanian national state that was either in blueprint or in the making with a triple "warrant of antiquity, reality, and sanctity" by which to legitimize its right to political existence. National memory, Romanian and elsewhere, drew heavily from the "mythothèque" created by this mythical mode of addressing the past.

Collective memory forms at the junction point between practiced history and mythistory. Which does not mean that in collective memory's content do not creep in reliable information belonging to scientific history, or fictitious elements borrowed from fictional history. No doubt that both real historical data and fictional information infiltrate the corpus of collective memory. The difference is that most materials making up collective memory's thesaurus come from practiced history and mythistory. To sum up, collective memory is supplied predominantly from two sources: a) practiced history, which provides factual information about the past, but which comes already partially biased in the direction of glorifying the community's past; these are then processed and turned in historical master narratives, "semantically loaded" with meanings relevant to the present needs of the community in question; b) the second major supplier is the *mythothèque*, i.e. the collection of historical myths culturally shared within a social

[1] Bronislaw Malinowski, "Myth in Primitive Psychology," in *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* (New York: The Free Press, 1948), 72-124, 78.
[2] Boia, *History and Myth*…, 29.
[3] Malinowski, "Myth in Primitive Psychology," 120.
[4] Ibid., 85-86.

community resulting from the workings of mythistory's representation of the past. Figure 1 below offers a schematic depiction of the connections between all this different types of construing the past and collective memory.

Figure 1. The typology of history along the realism-fictionalism axis



With the awareness of all these various types of compositions in which memory and history subsists, the relation between collective memory and history began to be understood in terms of complementarity and interaction, and not as standing in opposition and conflict to each other. This latest development is specific to the contemporary period of post-modernity in which history and memory are seen as engaged in a dialogical conversation. Two developments are decisive in characterizing the new situation: a) the dissolution of the radical opposition between history and memory, as a consequence of acknowledging that history in praxis is not as objective as it claimed to be; b) the awareness that official history can be supplemented by memory (especially through oral history research), while memory can be corrected by historical research.1 The new consensus is that each of the two forms of knowing the past has the capacity to the fill the gaps in the other's system of knowledge. Instead of competing in the race for postulating absolute truth (objective or subjective), the rivalry has been replaced by a common partnership in knowing the multidimensionality of the past.

Conclusions

The understanding of collective memory (i.e. the way in which a social community represents its own past, be it real or imaginary) is conditioned by decrypting the multifold relationship that memory has with history. This paper described the typology of relations established in the course of time between memory and history, tracing their incarnations in three successive configurations, each of them specific to a particular time-frame: from their identity in pre-modernity, through conflictual polarity in modernity, towards interaction and complementarity in post-modernity. The paper then differentiates between four types of doing history and spreads them on a continuum ranging from total objectivity to completely fictive (i.e. "idealized scientific history," "practiced history," "mythistory," and "fictional history"). Equipped with these conceptual distinctions, the paper argues that collective memory is being articulated at the confluence between practiced history and mythistory, both of these being in their turn influenced by the cultural background (Weltanschauung) against which they

[1] Assmann, "Transformations…," 63.

function. Moreover, against the contemporary postmodernist current that fights for demoting the cognitive status of historical knowledge to the level of fictional aesthetic constructions, the paper defends the possibility of quasi-objective knowing the expired reality of the past. Between the Charybdis of absolutism and the Scylla of relativism, the paper defends a soft and limited objectivity,1 epistemologically sanctioned by the doctrine of fallibilism. Rigorous inquiry combining ascetic discipline with theoretical insight opens the possibility of attaining reliable historical knowledge, but unavoidably fallible, tentative, and incomplete.

[1] As espoused by Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta Books, 1997), see especially Chapter 8, "Objectivity and its limits," which concludes with the following statement: "For my part, I remain optimistic that objective historical knowledge is both desirable and attainable" (252). Against postmodernism's apocalyptic skepticism, I fully share Evans' epistemological optimism.