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THE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN ‘COLLECTIVE MEMORY’ RESEARCH IN POLAND*

I INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Let me start with a couple of simple exemplary sentences featuring the words ‘memory’, ‘remember’/‘memorise’, and the like:

My Granddad has told me about his wartime experiences. He could remember a plenty of details. He said that certain uncalled-for images kept recurring in his mind, not willing to leave him alone, sometimes obsessing him in the night.

The most recent sociological studies have confirmed the common diagnosis whereby the WWII occupies a place of importance in the family memory of Polish people.

The Warsaw Uprising has in recent years become a nationwide ‘realm of memory’ – to a considerable extent, because of a deliberate historical policy. It has overshadowed the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

On the occasion of the Holocaust Memorial Day, the Institute of National Remembrance – Branch Office of Warsaw has organised a big scholarly conference.

The round anniversary of the war’s outbreak has provided an opportunity for numerous commemorations: the official state ceremony held at the Unknown Soldier’s Tomb, through to school celebrations in hundreds of schools all over Poland.

It is rather easy to spot traces of multiple competitive memories within the Warsaw space.

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A moment of afterthought should suffice – which is perhaps the right thing to do, as the quoted sentences are banal to the extent making them completely transparent – to state that ‘memory’ or ‘remembrance’ means a different thing in each of them. So far, however, as we ‘simply’ practise our daily language and communicate by efficiently using it, these differences in the meanings are negligible. This is the kind of words we use a great deal, after all; such is a significant share of our notions or ideas.

Should we however seek to theorise or, in a modest version, add cogitation to our daily language practice – something which scholarly research encourages, if not binds one to – the matter gets much complicated at once. A grandfather’s reminiscence; a commemorative plaque in honour of city dwellers executed by firing squad, fixed on the adjacent tenement house’s wall; celebrations of the XYZ Remembrance Day seem to belong to completely different registers of reality. With just the indicative examples quoted above, is it possible that all this be reasonably researchable, describable, and convincingly interpretable, using the category of memory and within integrated, albeit trans-disciplinary, studies on (collective) memory?

This question is not merely theoretical, as nowadays we do witness (‘witness’ being an important category in memory research) the crystallisation of such memory-studies field in the Polish humanities and social sciences. Or rather, to pay due tribute not only to a linguistic precision, not so much ‘crystallisation’ as quite conscious establishment of the area. General, and generalising, statements emphasising the significance of (variously conceptualised) memory in contemporary (Polish) culture or Polish society are still predominant, apparently implying the importance and need of further research into memory. Such claims are in frequent cases not so much groundless as evidence-less. But there are exceptions to this rule – let us call it the rule of blurring – in Polish memory research. Or, there are at least some ambitious attempts at sharpening an obliterated nebulous image and more clearly outlining the memory-studies field.

The most recent and, given the context, definitely most important is an essay by Kornelia Kończal and Joanna Wawrzyniak, published lately in *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* quarterly.¹ Its importance is grounded

¹ Kornelia Kończal and Joanna Wawrzyniak, ‘Polskie badania pamięcioznawcze: tradycje, koncepcje, (nie)ciągłości’, *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, lv, 4 (2011), 11–63;

in the fact that, unlike any other so far, this essay ventures to scrupulously reconstruct, and constitutes, Polish research in memory, in its various currents, approaches, and disciplines. And it is not a breakdown or, all the more so, it does not summarise everything that the Polish humanities have written on (collective) memory to date. Such a task would be unfeasible, in terms of reasonable delivery. Instead, the text is a successful concise profile of the memory current, or rather, several important currents, in Polish humanities.

The said article is important, and worth special attention for our present purpose, not only due to what it describes and reconstructs but owing to what it projects. What it projects is, namely, Polish memory studies. The authors modestly declare their reconstructive intention: 'We are making the very first steps toward reconstructing the diverse traditions in the humanities, which all contribute to Polish memory studies'.² Yet, they immediately realise the tension, apparently limited to semantic, that immediately occurs; they call it a 'substitution problem':

The question on the genealogy and tradition of Polish memory studies inevitably leads to a question that will reappear several times herein and could be called, in a simplified manner, the 'substitution problem'. By following the history of Polish memory studies, as a narrow concept – that is, looking for studies by Polish scholars directly referring to memory-studies terminology – we will obtain a definitely different picture than if we resolved to stretch the conceptual network to embrace the related terms or notions, such as tradition, awareness, identity, and historical culture.³

What they do is, naturally, go for the latter option. However, identification of the 'substitution problem' is not yet mission complete while mapping out the memory research field. Let us take another look at the above-juxtaposed notions: tradition, historical awareness, identity, historical culture, ancientness within the present, etc.; and, let us add to them newer ones, more popular in the Polish memory studies of today, although borrowed from other research traditions: collective memory, social memory, cultural memory, etc. It becomes

also, cf. Robert Traba's introduction to this memory-studies-focused issue of the journal: 'Gdzie jesteśmy? Nowe otwarcie w polskich badaniach pamięci zbiorowej i ich europejski kontekst', *ibidem*, 3–10.

² Kończal and Wawrzyniak, 'Polskie badania', 13.

³ *Ibidem*, 12.

readily realisable that any conceptualisation – quite a number of them functioning as replaceable, thoughtlessly applied terms – imposes or at least prompts a specified cognitive perspective, which may be called cultural-studies-related or sociological. The assumption is that memory, in all its varieties and instantiations, synonyms and periphrases, is an attribute of (the) culture or society – of a larger community, in any case. Seen in this perspective, it is the specific culture or community/group that is the subject of memory, in many cases, an implicitly assumed one. It is the culture/community that remembers (and forgets), with the related human practices and relinquishments in this respect coming as confirmations or exemplifications of those cultures and social patterns.

Likewise with the terminology, and the related research practice, combining ‘memory’ and ‘realm’, which has recently gained appreciable popularity. Such associations are in most cases built, to put it crudely, in either of the two ways: (i) in terms of a specific geographical space (region, town or city, physical place – sometimes being a legacy, relic, or residue from the past); or, some other time, (ii) in reference to cultural symbolic sites – the realms of memory, as per the concept proposed by Pierre Nora and his numerous followers (the nuances between the various variants of the idea being negligible, for our present purpose). Given the perspective described herein, the difference between these two types of location or siting of memory does not appear significantly important. Of higher importance is a radical de-subjectivisation of memory offered by all those concepts. Indeed, they point out to *what* is remembered; sometimes, *how* it is remembered, but usually one would not much be able to say, *by whom*, namely. Unless we regard the French or the Polish people, society, local community, or some other sizeable group – or, ‘culture’, an even less perceptible entity – to be such a ‘someone’, in an en-bloc fashion. In this sense, Poles tend to ‘remember’ the Battle of Grunwald (in German: Tannenberg), and French people, the Battle of Verdun, for that matter.

In all those variants offered by memory studies, memory is detached from its source – that is, unitary psychical or mental processes. What is meaningful in this context is that many Polish texts on collective memory written in the last years refer to a passage from a publicist utterance of Jerzy Jedlicki, assuming a critical attitude toward the notion; let us quote it:

Collective memory? There is none. Memory is always, and only, individual. This holds true in spite of the fact that certain pieces of its content may be shared by multiple individuals; that – following the concept coined by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs – ‘social frameworks of memory’ are existent. But perhaps such pedantic objections are irrelevant? Is it not so that anyone referring to a ‘collective memory’ ... is aware that it is a metaphor, convenient linguistic epitome used to signify those convergent contents that have settled in the minds of many people at a time; or perhaps, of the entire nation? Whether this is really the case, I would not be so positive, as objectified abstractions ordinarily serve as props to our quotidian, if not, at times, scholarly, thinking. Even though, however, the metaphor of collective memory would be explicit to anyone using it, one could still insist that such a conventional collectivisation of memory does nowise facilitate its analytical recognition.⁴

Metaphor, objectivised abstraction, trope, convenient epitome, conventional collectivisation of memory: in brief, a powerful, nominalistic piece of criticism of the ‘collective memory’ concept. Not quite efficient though: today, collective memory is no more limited to a popular concept but has become a recognition slogan in the dynamically developing field of interdisciplinary research and studies. The doubts are still with us, though – or at least are shared by some Polish memory researches, howbeit rarely articulated in a direct way like this.

I belong to the herd of memory researches and let me declare this openly, so that I avoid pretending I would be unfolding my argument from the standpoint of an external observer. What is more, I have been inscribed in the memory-science project,⁵ and am willingly making myself part of it today: not really on the level of programme declarations but academic involvements and affiliations, though. Yet, I would probably hesitate – even if for a while short enough not to be recognised as not being completely aware of what I am actually doing – if there were someone to ask me if I deal with (a) (collective) memory, or am a *memory student*. Such hesitation would be grounded in the same premises as the doubts expressed by Jerzy Jedlicki: it namely boils down to the question about the analytical potential of the ‘collective memory’ category; or, to depict the matter otherwise, about its de-subjectivisation.

⁴ Jerzy Jedlicki, ‘O pamięci zbiorowej’, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 26 July 1997.

⁵ Kończal and Wawrzyniak, ‘Polskie badania’, 25–6.

Thus, the problem at stake proves philosophical. As Zofia Rosińska aptly puts it in her introduction to a collection of philosophical texts on memory:

Memory is not a neutral notion. It is a philosophical notion, triggering disputes regarding its nature and meaning. The way one understands memory is conditional upon the worldview perspective assumed. This is not to state that memory is an empty idea; it is a blurry one, its limits vague, and it permits that the worldview of the discourse participant be reflected in them; or, as Ricoeur has it, and Aristotle could have said this before: ‘memory expresses itself in multiple ways’.⁶

The high popularity and a premature, often under-thoughtful reception of Maurice Halbwachs’s concept (which at times is no reception at all, but just reproducing a set of a few mainstream notions, if not just one of them) in the works regarded as the new Polish memory studies not always enables to grasp the differences between the various ways for memory to be put in words, and answer the underlying analytical question about its *subject* – the one who remembers (or, who – possibly, what – is the memory’s focus, carrier or vehicle); its *object* – what is it that the memory refers to, that is, what is remembered, what is the memory’s content; and, its *form* – how/in what ways is this remembered, manifests itself, what are the forms it is expressed in. To grasp, in addition, the dynamism of these processes – to see them in a historical, and not just presentistic, perspective – is a task few have successfully tackled.

Setting in an order the by-now-rich and diversified field of Polish memory studies according to such analytical, more precise, categories is a great research venture, so far unperformed. I am obviously not in a position to take it up herein. What I can do, instead, is propose an initial reconnaissance, which I should name methodological, so that I could use a few selected examples to show the variants of Polish memory studies, or, humanistic/cultural-studies/sociological research in memory. I should like to arrange these chosen examples not by research tradition or genealogy, nor by subject – i.e. research themes taken up, and that is, experiences, events, processes concerned by the memory, as excellently done (according to both these criteria)

⁶ Zofia Rosińska, ‘Wprowadzenie’, in Zofia Rosińska (ed.), *Pamięć w filozofii XX wieku* (Warsaw, 2006), 7.

by Joanna Wawrzyniak and Kornelia Kończal – but along the lines of a few analytical categories proposed by Aleida Assmann. This is not going to be limited to the differentiation between communicative and cultural memory; or, between functional ('inhabited') memory and storage ('uninhabited') memory, as popularised by this scholar and by her husband Jan Assmann: a somewhat deeper level will be explored. Encountered will be the distinction into neuronal (biological), social, and cultural dimension of memory. Each of these dimensions may be considered on a few levels: first, a subject of memory should be identified, not necessarily personal (*Träger*); then, an environment, milieu, or communication space where it is sustained (*Milieu*); and, what makes the memory sustainable, supports it, acts as its carrier (*Stütze*).⁷ The semantic confusion around individual and collective memory is partly owed, I should believe, to no discrimination made between these dimensions – in particular, between the subject, so defined, and the vehicle of memory (which are even harder to discern as they are partly synonymous as to their semantic scopes). This is easiest to show using concrete examples: the subject of a biographical memory is myself; my kindergarten pictures are its exemplary vehicle something it is supported upon. A monument, for instance, may be the subject (or, better to say perhaps, focus or centre) of cultural memory – an individual consciousness being its carrier, for a change. Social communication is the environment in which both types of memory are present. According to these categorisations, in turn, the subject (or, perhaps: focus/centre, again) of (a) social memory is the very communication process; individual consciousness is the environment of its presence; symbolic media or cultural artefacts being the carriers or vehicles.

An advantage stemming from the specification of these analytical (rather than 'real') dimensions and categories is, I should reckon, a nuanced depiction of the various forms of memory that would annul, or at least relax, the tension between the extremely individualistic (memory as a 'purely individual phenomenon') and the extremely collectivistic ('memory can only be collective, always') concepts. What it also does is it enables one to exceed the philosophical or literary claims such as 'culture is memory' or 'memory is everything we

⁷ Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (Bonn, 2007), 31–6.

have',⁸ or, 'everything is, somehow, related to memory',⁹ not subject to any empirical validation whatsoever.

While selecting my examples of Polish memory studies, I did not pay attention to the academia or institutional affiliations of the researchers identified, or identifying themselves, with this particular current of Polish humanities. Coincidentally or not, most of them represent historiography, sociology and cultural studies.

II ON THE SIDE OF MEMORY: INDIVIDUAL MEMORY VERSUS SOCIAL/ CULTURAL MEMORY

The above is (continually) an important, if not central, discrimination in memory studies, although it rather often tends to disappear from the view in a memory and memory-studies fever. Individual or, better to say, autobiographical memory seems in an obvious way to belong to a specific individual, forming his or her inalienable property. What is more, it forms and, perhaps, founds his/her identity; or, at least, its important dimensions (let me put aside, for the time being, how blurred the notion of 'identity' can be). Biographical memory concerns, at least fundamentally, one's own experiences, albeit it makes them fit into broader structures of knowledge on the past (psychologists single out episodic and semantic memory). An individual preserves them in the form of memories, or reminiscences, processing, analysing, and evoking them. These elaborations and evocations have a historical, social, and cultural context to them. This is why autobiographical memory triggers interest not only among psychologists, although it is probably them who research into memory in the strictest sense – i.e. as a psychical phenomenon.¹⁰

The others: historians, sociologists, anthropologists, culture experts, and others, seek for the content of a memory, i.e. what is

⁸ Marian Golka, *Pamięć społeczna i jej implanty* (Współczesne Społeczeństwo Polskie wobec Przeszłości, 5, Warsaw, 2009), 8.

⁹ Astrid Erll, 'Cultural Memory Studies. An Introduction', in *eadem* and Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies* (Berlin, 2010), 2.

¹⁰ Psychological literature dealing with autobiographical memory is enormous. A Polish-language synthetic monograph is Tomasz Maruszewski's book *Pamięć autobiograficzna* (Postępy Psychologii, Gdańsk, 2005).

remembered (and forgotten), or trace the patterns of remembering (and forgetting), that is, traces of what is social and cultural within an individual memory; they watch the material of which autobiographies are constructed.¹¹ It is worth emphasising at once that memory, as a research category, is not always at the centre of studies of this sort. Another central categories in lieu of it may include *experience*, *biography*, or, for instance (and, naturally, not coincidentally), *narration*. It is clear that for one to be able to tell a story of his or her experience or biography, it has to be somehow remembered. There is a difference, however, as to whether we approach this remembering as the purpose of our research or as a means to an end: an important, not infrequently key, and the only one, though often troublesome, filter through which to cognise something other than memory itself.

Good examples are provided by the rich Polish tradition of sociological biographical studies. For several dozens of years, the basic source for cognising the social reality within this tradition was memoirs acquired by way of contests announced in the press. As the etymology indicates, memoirs can only be made based on (a) memory. Once they are there – as is known, thousands of them have appeared in Poland¹² – they are sensibly interpretable with memory-related issues put aside. This is what the classical Polish researchers did, as a general rule – to name Florian Znaniecki, Józef Chałasiński, Jan Szczepański.

Today, it is not memoirs but audio- or video-recorded narrative biographical interviews provide the basis for sociological biographical studies. Seen from the memory-studies aspect, they are founded on autobiographical memory. This is not to imply that memory, autobiographical included, is the central analytical category within this research current.

The major Polish centre of biographical studies, being a peculiar inheritor and continuator of the 'Polish method' in sociology, is formed of a milieu of researchers, primarily cultural sociologists, associated

¹¹ Harald Welzer, 'Materiał, z którego zbudowane są biografie', in Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska (ed.), *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa. Współczesna perspektywa niemiecka* (Horyzonty Nowoczesności, 80, Cracow, 2009).

¹² An estimated 900,000 texts have been gathered owing to memoirs contests held in Poland over a few dozen years, most of which have been irretrievably lost; cf. Dariusz Wierzchoś, 'Zwyczajne życie zwykłych ludzi. Losy archiwum Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Pamiętnikarstwa', <<http://histmag.org>> [Accessed 27 Aug. 2012].

with the Institute of Sociology, University of Łódź – particularly, with the local Faculty of Cultural Sociology. It is there that the most important conferences on biographical studies are held. A nationwide, open-ended, interdisciplinary seminar has been functioning there for a dozen-or-so months, with researchers from various academic hubs present and debate on their biographical research projects.

Important, if not key, for the contemporary biographical and narrative profile of this hub was a research project carried out in the first half of 1990s under the name ‘Biography and National Identity’.¹³ The local researchers, such as Zbigniew Boksański, Andrzej Piotrowski, Marek Czyżewski, Alicja Rokuszewska-Pawełek, Kaja Kaźmierska, and others, introduced at that time in the countrywide scholarly circulation the theoretical-methodological concepts of Fritz Schütze, inclusive of his extensive and detailed propositions regarding the technique of narrative interview and analytical categories useable in its interpretation. It is very telling that the book published as a report on this research contains not a single article which whose title, or central subject-matter analysed, would make a direct reference to memory. A definite majority of those essays revolves around the categories of biography and autobiography (autobiographical narrative) and identity – thus sticking close to the subject of research defined as follows:

The central aim behind the project under discussion was to try and find, based upon the contents and forms autobiographical narrations assume, what the associations are between the experiences of people of Polish nationality, determined by the timeframe of the Second World War, and those aspects of their social identity which refer to their sense and ways of determining and communicating (about) their own and alien national identity, then and now.¹⁴

No direct reference to memory is made, again, in two important works of Łódź-based researchers, written within the same research perspective and based upon the same studies, albeit they both refer, in their entirety, to memory. Both of them, i.e. Kaja Kaźmierska’s book *Doświadczenia wojenne Polaków a kształtowanie tożsamości etnicznej*.

¹³ For an extensive report on this research, see Marek Czyżewski, Andrzej Piotrowski and Alicja Rokuszewska-Pawełek (eds.), *Biografia a tożsamość narodowa. Praca zbiorowa* (2nd edn Łódź, 1997).

¹⁴ Andrzej Piotrowski, ‘Wstęp’, in *ibidem*, 5.

Analiza narracji kresowych [Wartime experiences of the Poles and the shaping of an ethnical identity. Analysis of eastern-borderland narratives] (1999) and postdoctoral-degree-qualification book by Alicja Rokuszewska-Pawełek, *Chaos i przymus. Trajektorie wojenne Polaków – analiza biograficzna* [Chaos and coercion. Wartime trajectories of Poles: A biographical analysis] (2002), assume a sort of analogy, following Fritz Schütze's concept, between contemporary autobiographical story and biographical experiences and processes. Both seek to draw out the interrelations between the latter and broader social processes; also, to show the social-cultural patterns of experiencing and telling the past or biographies.¹⁵

The subsequent book by Kaja Kaźmierska, *Biografia i pamięć. Na przykładzie pokoleniowego doświadczenia ocalonych z Zagłady* [Biography and memory: The generational experience of the Holocaust survivors as a case in point] (2008), is even more important, especially given the perspective assumed herein for memory studies. This time, memory clearly appears upfront in the title, and forms the main subject of analysis. The introductory, 'theoretical' chapters may serve as a decent introduction to our contemporary memory-studies research. The book discusses the major categories used in various currents of memory research, along with a profile of Polish and Jewish collective memory (or rather, different collective memories) in view of Polish-Jewish relations. In spite of such shift toward a collective/social/cultural memory, the empirical section of this book focuses on individual autobiographic texts (literary, reminiscent/recollective, narrative interviews) of Jews returning after many years to their birthplaces. Experience and biography, and autobiographical memory, remain the central analytic categories. Collective memory appears as if at the background – as a context, significative resource, reference framework for what is individual, and deeply existential. The memory of a community or group – wherever referred to – appears deeply rooted in the experiences of its members, never boiling down to their simple generalisation.

¹⁵ German sociologist Gabriele Rosenthal is an author of importance within the research field in question, also for the Łódź-based scholars. Her most important and most frequently quoted study on the theory and methodology of biographical studies is *Erlebte und erzählte Lebensgeschichte. Gestalt und Struktur biographischen Selbstbeschreibungen* (Frankfurt a.M., 1995).

Among the important publications that analyse individual memory (single individual memories of specific persons) and endeavour to extract not only the historical experience of those remembering and telling their stories but also, broader social and cultural contexts of this memory, two other books in the broad current of Holocaust studies are worth mentioning: Barbara Engelking's *Zagłada i pamięć. Doświadczenie Holocaustu i jego konsekwencje opisane na podstawie relacji autobiograficznych* [The Holocaust and memory. The Holocaust experience and its aftermath as reflected in autobiographical accounts] (1994; 2nd edn 2001); and, Małgorzata Melchior's *Zagłada a tożsamość. Polscy Żydzi ocaleni "na aryjskich papierach". Analiza doświadczenia biograficznego* [The Holocaust and the identity. Polish Jews saved owing to their 'Aryan papers'. Analysis of a biographical experience] (Warsaw, 2004). To be (methodologically) precise, it needs being added that both authors have based their books on their biographical interviews with Polish Jews, Shoah survivors.

I could be enumerating more studies or essays, but those few examples – methodologically well-defined, although taken from various fields, or even research schools – should suffice to show a certain type of Polish social studies, approaching memory as, first of all, an individual phenomenon, appurtenant to concrete people, giving them (and the researcher) some access to their past, their past experiences, their identity. This is obviously not an immediate or direct access; the past itself does not have to be historically or objectively true. Suffice it to be psychologically true, and thus revealing the social-cultural, and symbolical, position of those remembering. It is them, the remembering, that, being the concrete individuals (albeit usually anonymous, in the texts getting published), remain at the centre of such research. They are the subjects of this memory, and of the experience that stands behind them. The research of this kind is, thus, biographical – with biography and autobiography being the analytical focus – rather than memory-studies-oriented.

The opposite pole of the sociological and cultural-studies-related afterthought on memory is the research defining memory, in the first place, if not exclusively, as a collective phenomenon. The terminological confusion in this field is enormous. Attempts at arranging the terms and notions in an order, be it extemporaneous, have been made several times, and are continually made anew. It does not seem, however, that any of the resolutions regarding these terms/notions

could win common acceptance among Polish memory scholars, at least for the time being. This is partly due to various research traditions, varied genealogies of contemporary Polish studies on (collective) memory – however it is named. It would not seem much reasonable to me to try and bring about any semantic rearrangement in this respect, or even re(-)construct the terminological chaos.

In spite of all these objections, it can basically be said straight forward that 'collective memory' is a notion that has settled in Polish sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, etc. And it seems to be becoming part of so-called common and wide circulation. Even though some users might understand it differently, some preferring to replace it with (an)other notion(s), or have it eliminated completely, there nonetheless exists some elementary consensus around it, as it seems to me. Whenever we use the 'collective memory' category, its designation is more-or-less known – which suffices, as long as someone does not inquire thoroughly, for a language usage to get consolidated.

This popularity of the category in question is rooted in different sources. It partly ensues from the retarded, against the Western humanities, but intense memory turn, or boom, which to a considerable extent means the earlier-elaborated research categories being borrowed. 'Collective memory' fits all the better as a loan-notion as it has been elaborated not as part of some current fashion but comes from Maurice Halbwachs, the memory researchers' favourite classical author.

But borrowings, or loans, is not what it all boils down to: this is but a current, reinforcing and stimulating, context. Polish empirical sociology has had a long-standing tradition of studies on the phenomenon that it calls, as we also name it today, collective memory [*pamięć zbiorowa*]; an earlier description was 'living history' or, somewhat later, 'historical awareness'. This tradition was discussed or referred to many a time, at most various occasions. It should suffice to state in brief here that what it meant is the research current represented for years now by scholars such as Barbara Szacka, Piotr T. Kwiatkowski and Andrzej Szpociński, in the first place. The series of studies headed 'Współczesne społeczeństwo polskie wobec przeszłości' [Polish Contemporary Society Viewing the Past], published by the Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar publishers, may be regarded as the most recent presentation and review of the current's major research studies. The first three volumes are worth referring to in this context, in particular: vol. 1 – *Przeszłość jako przedmiot przekazu* [The past as the object of

messaging];¹⁶ vol. 2 – *Pamięć zbiorowa społeczeństwa polskiego w okresie transformacji* [The Polish society's collective memory in the transition period];¹⁷ and, vol. 3 – *Czas przeszły – Pamięć – Mit* [The past time – Memory – Myth].¹⁸ The volume called *Między codziennością a wielką historią* [Between everyday life and grand history]¹⁹ complements the research on collective memory undertaken within this tradition, rendering them more precise and detailed.

I have enumerated all these studies together since, in spite of the differences between the individual researchers, common to all of them is the understanding of memory as, in the first place, a social, supra-individual phenomenon, as is the conviction that memory is graspable with use of questionnaire – the basic research tool used by sociologists. Notable is the quite unobvious tangle of what is ontologically supra-individual and epistemologically individual, to make use of a philosophical vocabulary. Barbara Szacka, whose aforementioned book is an excellent summary of research into the so-comprehended social/collective memory carried out in Poland over the last few dozen years (and whose large portion was contributed to, and subsequently directed, by this author), defines memory as

a collection of ideas shared by members of a collectivity about its past; of the characters populating it, and the events having occurred in it; and, the ways of commemorating them and of conveying the knowledge about them, the knowledge that is considered the obligatory equipment of members of such collectivity. To put it otherwise, as all the conscious references to the

¹⁶ Andrzej Szpociński and Piotr T. Kwiatkowski (eds.), *Przeszłość jako przedmiot przekazu* (Warsaw, 2006).

¹⁷ Piotr T. Kwiatkowski, *Pamięć zbiorowa społeczeństwa polskiego w okresie transformacji* (Współczesne Społeczeństwo Polskie wobec Przeszłości, 2, Warsaw, 2008).

¹⁸ Barbara Szacka, *Czas przeszły – Pamięć – Mit* (Warsaw, 2006). The other books in the series include: Andrzej Szpociński (ed.), *Pamięć zbiorowa jako czynnik integracji i źródło konfliktów* (Współczesne Społeczeństwo Polskie wobec Przeszłości, 4, Warsaw, 2009) – distinct from the remainder with its multitude of theoretical, methodological and research perspectives; and, Golka, *Pamięć społeczna*, offering an autonomous and original theoretical proposition, synthesising a variety of approaches.

¹⁹ Piotr T. Kwiatkowski et al. (eds.), *Między codziennością a wielką historią. Druga wojna światowa w pamięci zbiorowej społeczeństwa polskiego* (Gdańsk and Warsaw, 2010), published on initiative of the Museum of the Second World War, under development in Gdańsk.

past, those that appear, at various occasions and in a variety of forms, in the ongoing collective life.

And, as she specifies further on, the object of concern is

the ideas about the past of one's own group, constructed by individuals based upon their remembered information – what they can remember in line with the rules discovered by psychologists – originating in various sources and reaching them via a variety of channels. Such pieces of information are understood, selected and transformed in accord with the individual's own cultural standards and worldview beliefs. Such standards are produced socially and, as such, are shared by members of a given community, which leads to a standardisation of the ideas and concepts about the past, thereby enabling references to a collective memory of the history of one's own group. Collective memory, in my present understanding, is not static but variable and dynamic. It is, also, a field of ceaseless meetings, clashes, blends and interferences of images of the past constructed from various perspectives and built of a variety of elements. With regard to the most recent past, three types of elements come into play. The first is the individuals' memories regarding their own experiences. The second, the memory of the community, rooted in common, personal experiences of a number of individuals and a collectively determined symbolical language with which they are conveyed. The third is the officially communicated image of the past and official celebrations commemorating the events that occurred in the past.²⁰

Collective memory is, therefore, in a distinct simplification, whatever people have in their minds that refers to the past. Obviously, what they (we) have in their (our) heads informs the way the questionnaire is filled out as well as forms a variety of behaviours, choices, involvements, social practices. Let us observe that, if so defined, collective memory appropriates (the) individual memory, belittling the individual experience of the remembering – the element that could at least potentially make individual memory discernible.

Following the typology proposed by Aleida Assmann, we could say that collective memory so defined is close to what this German scholar would call social, or communicative, memory. Communication and social interaction are its main carriers; reinforced by cultural (memory-related) signs, symbols, messages, they are brought up to date and become graspable on an individual level.

²⁰ Szacka, *Czas przeszły*, 44–5.

Analyses of memory, so defined, are done at various levels of generality: the most general ones refer to memory of Polish society, the most detailed, family memory and its intergenerational communication. This is well illustrated by the most recent research in the memory of WWII, as summarised by the aforementioned book *Między codziennością a wielką historią*. On the one hand, we deal with texts discussing an averaged, as if resultant, image of the war, formulating conclusions such as:

figures and phenomena we can be proud of today find much better ways for functioning within the popular collective memory; the Poles tend to know much less about what is subject to a negative opinion today;²¹

or those showing, for instance, a detailed ranking of war heroes and antiheroes (for anyone interested, the list of twenty-six historic figures related to the war is topped by Fr. Maksymilian Kolbe and Irena Sendler; Witold Pilecki and Stanisław Mikołajczyk appear somewhere in the middle of the ranking; the list is concluded by communist leaders Marcei Nowotko and Bolesław Bierut).²²

On the other hand, we can learn thereupon quite a lot about a regional differentiation of the WWII memory in various parts of Poland, which is clearly related to a dissimilarity, quite often radical, of wartime vicissitudes of the local (or, 'extraneous') dwellers of these territories.²³ A yet-another depiction of collective memory, understood as above, reveals its relations with family memory or, to put it otherwise, 'little' and 'great' history – or, to be more specific, the ideas and concepts of both – on the family level.²⁴

This cursory review makes it plain that the content of collective memory is whatever people think and say about the past. Individual experience gets blended with stories told by the grandparents, memorised school reading-list items and commemorative rallies, movies once watched on TV, all-Polish and local anniversaries and commemorations. Reminiscences intermingles with knowledge, pieces

²¹ Piotr T. Kwiatkowski, 'Wprowadzenie. Doświadczenie II wojny światowej w badaniach socjologicznych', in Kwiatkowski *et al.* (eds.), *Między codziennością*, 53.

²² *Idem*, 'II wojna światowa jako doświadczenie narodowe', in *ibidem*, 164–5 (chart).

²³ Lech M. Nijakowski, 'Regionalne zróżnicowanie pamięci o II wojnie światowej', in *ibidem*, 200–38.

²⁴ Barbara Szacka, 'II wojna światowa w pamięci rodzinnej', in *ibidem*, 81–132.

of knowledge with a myth, the myth with belief. The differentiating factor for the content of such thinking and speaking (and, acting) may be the family or local context, or, the way one partakes in what Andrzej Szpociński postulates to call (a) historical culture; he defines it, most generally, as:

the ideas, norms, behavioural patterns, and values, in their entirety, that regulate any and all forms of referral to anything which in a given culture is considered past, bygone, historical, regardless of what the actuality may be.²⁵

This formula offers us a good introduction to evoke those currents of studies on collective memory which detach it completely from individual, family, or even social memory – understood and researched into as in the above-quoted examples – while focusing on the most general, cultural, dimension of memory. In the typology of Jan and Aleida Assmann, this type of memory is described as cultural memory. Polish descriptions of their theory, getting increasingly popular in this country, usually emphasise the difference between communicative memory – which roughly extends to three generations backwards and encompasses everything which is conveyed in direct communication and what remains within the spectrum of individual experiences and autobiographical memory of the oldest generation of the remembering – and cultural memory, reaching far back, to the most remote historical facts, myths and legends evoked in a given culture. A memory of this sort gets detached from any individual experiences or recollections.

All the same, in spite of widely-held interpretations, it is perhaps not the time horizon that is resolutely decisive for singling out a cultural memory: the key factor is that its basic centre is neither an individual neuronal system (as is the case with autobiographical memory) nor social communication (as with collective memory), but instead, externalised cultural objectivisations: signs, symbols, rituals, practices, and institutions.²⁶ Obviously, these become updated in social interaction and communication too. They call for being deciphered, interpreted – and thus, require cultural competence. They too have their 'awareness correlates', to use a phenomenological language. And still, within a given culture, they remain rather resistant to temporary changes, to various variants of decoding and interpretation. For they

²⁵ Andrzej Szpociński, 'II wojna światowa w komunikacji społecznej', in *ibidem*, 55.

²⁶ Assmann, *Der Lange Schatten*, 33.

are, so to speak, radically de-subjectivised (one may add, much more than collective-memory figures). Thus, they are comprehensible and researchable as cultural artefacts whose meanings are rather stable. Which is obviously not to say given-once-for-ever, invariable, ahistorical; such are nonexistent, most probably.

The most distinct and spectacular research venture which I would include in this current of Polish memory studies is the research project on Polish-German realms of memory, implemented for a few years now in the Centre for Historical Research, Polish Academy of Sciences in Berlin.²⁷ Given the methodological perspective I have assumed, the fact that the history of reciprocal Polish-German interrelatedness (*Beziehungsgeschichte*) is at the project's centre is not particularly important. Most importantly, so-called history of the second degree is concerned there – with history being viewed from the standpoint of cultures of memory and through the prism of symbolic sites, or realms, of memory (which, to add perhaps just to be reassured, do not have to have anything to do with topographically definable sites of commemoration, memorial sites).

This Berlin-based, Polish-German project is the broadest in terms of reach and swing, but is not the only example of research on (Polish) cultural memory. Many individual studies offer a cultural-studies-based approach in memory research – albeit not necessarily in a pure form; instead, as one of alternative solutions, not always clearly discerned. Among the important, in-depth monographic studies analysing the phenomenon of memory based upon objectivised cultural artefacts, I should like to recall Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska's book *Spotkania czasu z miejscem* [Time encountering place].²⁸ Let me select this book as a good representative of the increasingly popular cultural-studies-oriented analyses of memory, as I can find in it an extremely clear methodological declaration (a glorious exception, rather than rule, in the memory studies area). This author undertakes an analysis of cultural memory based upon the experience of the war, and its traces, in Gdańsk and Wrocław, in the cultural artefacts she has selected – that is, feature films and literary works. This is how she explains her choice:

²⁷ See in this present issue of *Acta Poloniae Historica*, pp. 155–67.

²⁸ Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska, *Spotkania czasu z miejscem. Studia o pamięci i miastach* (Communicare: historia i kultura, Warsaw, 2011).

Nor do I compare the events described in books and films to the versions regarded by historians as the 'true' ones. Central to my interest is the question: How, in what ways, is the past of the towns remembered, taking WWII as the basis, and how, in what ways, is it communicated in literature and film? Such an approach comes as a consequence of the elected cultural-studies perspective. Asking the same question, a sociologist, psychologist, or anthropologist, would most probably make use of questionnaires, interviews or talks.²⁹

The above-outlined superficial and methodologically profiled review of Polish memory studies produces a picture of an interdisciplinary, multidirectional, dynamically and harmoniously developing research field. The transitions from analyses of individual memory, through collective memory research, till interpretation of memory-based cultural artefacts seem soft and fluent. These transfers and flows are very often undertaken as part of individual studies, not to say teamwork research projects.

It therefore seems that Polish memory studies (and students) fare quite well, and increasingly better indeed. More interdisciplinary projects are implemented and planned, large international scholarly conferences held; this particular research field is visibly getting institutionalised. However, if we sensitised our analytical view, it could soon turn out that there still remains a lot to be done in Polish memory studies – at the very basic, theoretical level.

As Jeffrey Olick persuades in his excellent, though not most recent, essay, neither the transition between individual and collective memory is as soft as it often seems to us (the memory researchers), nor the so much popularised (and banalised) Halbwachs's concept of social memory framework offers unambiguous tools for fundamental theoretical settlements. The tension between the *collected* and *collective* memory perspective is not relaxed; in itself, the said tension is implied not only by a terminological chaos but by a collision of two different visions, or concepts, of culture.

This is because two radically different concepts of culture are involved here, one that sees culture as a subjective category of meanings contained in people's minds versus one that sees culture as patterns of publically available symbols objectified in society. Each of these culture concepts entails different methodological strategies and produces different kinds

²⁹ *Ibidem*, 223.

of knowledge. In order to be as clear as possible about the sensitivities of the term collective memory, we need to understand exactly how these two culture concepts play out.³⁰

If Olick is right and if we are willing to speak more clearly of Polish memory (Polish memories), then a basic intellectual effort still remains to be done.

III

ON THE SIDE OF HISTORY:

INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY VERSUS HISTORY

When discussing above the Polish memory research from a memory-studies perspective (or, the standpoint of memory studies-*in-spe*), I made almost no reference to history or historiography. I would not be surprised, then, if the reader, being a historian (this being, actually, my primary projected reader), approaches the argument developed by far as a little useful curiosity which would not do much for his or her research work. If anything at all, to be frank and honest.

Let me, however, use a few label examples to prove (as we have known since long ago, based on what Jacques Le Goff expounded in his classical work *Histoire et mémoire*³¹) that memory and history are very closely related, albeit their relationship is complex; also, that memory research and historical research cross each other in at least a few important places. Thus, they are not necessarily approachable – as a frequent tendency has it – as completely independent, if not competitive or simply mutually hostile strategies of referring to the past.

Halbwachs's concept probably hangs over this sharp separation of collective memory and history; this is the case for memory studies on the whole. But this dichotomy is built upon a very traditional, positivistic apprehension of historiography. Today, following several theoretical turns in twentieth-century humanities, this historiographic model is hardly sustainable unreservedly. Polish philosophy and methodology of history have done much over the last two or three

³⁰ Jeffrey K. Olick, 'Collective Memory: The Two Cultures', *Sociological Theory*, xvii, 3 (1999), 336.

³¹ Polish edition: Jacques Le Goff, *Historia i pamięć*, trans. Anna Gronowska and Joanna Stryczyk (Communicare: historia i kultura, Warsaw, 2007).

decades, after all, to make it subject to revision, if not to reject it.³² Let me leave unanswered the question about the relations between the theory of history and historiography and its practice or, to be more precise, about the reception of the former in the latter (and, the former's rootedness in the latter), which imposes itself here.

Albeit among Polish collective memory researchers, especially in its sociological current, the position whereby collective memory (and research thereof) is different from history as a scholarly discipline remains strong,³³ this view is defensible, to my mind, mostly on a theoretical and postulative level rather than based upon analysis of historiographical practice. In particular, though not limited to, the one referring to the most recent history, let us say, roughly, twentieth-century history, one whose horizon more or less overlaps the horizon of communicative memory.

Having methodologised the associations between collective memory and history as a science, and attempting not to blur the differences between them, Krzysztof Pomian thus concludes his considerations in *Historia. Nauka wobec pamięci* [History: Science facing memory],³⁴ a study of importance in the given context:

Albeit history, in some of its most recent manifestations, deliberately recedes from collective memory, at times openly defying it, history considered in its entirety does not even try to get separated from it. Collective memory, in turn, is exposed to influences of learned, research-founded history, particularly wherever the state takes over the communication and transmission of it. What it means is that there is no unpenetrative partition between history and memory. ... Writing school textbooks and book for broad reading public by historians; their participation in programming anniversary celebrations, in radio and television broadcasts – all these actions are encountered at the intersection of learned history and collective memory; or, better still, in a space belonging sometimes to one of them and some other time to the other, and at times, to both simultaneously.³⁵

³² The most recent study in this critical current of Polish meta-historical (and historiographical) reflection is Ewa Domańska, *Historia egzystencjalna. Krytyczne studium narratywizmu i humanistyki zaangażowanej* (Klio, Warsaw, 2012). For a review of this book, see this present issue of *Acta Poloniae Historica*, p. 189–91.

³³ See e.g. transparent, tabular breakdown of differences between history and collective memory, in Piotr T. Kwiatkowski, *Pamięć zbiorowa*, 31–2.

³⁴ Krzysztof Pomian, *Historia – nauka wobec pamięci* (Lublin, 2006).

³⁵ *Ibidem*, 185–6.

If we quit a quest for ‘materialness-related’ arguments confirming – or, conversely, undermining – the differences between memory and history, and simply take a look, following Pomian’s conclusive suggestion, at the professional *and* related jobs performed by Polish historians, it will turn out that many of them are working to the benefit of a collective memory, at times perhaps a cultural one too, than history as a scholarly discipline. In any case, to the benefit of both (if we are still willing to differentiate between them). This observation is most simply confirmed by the number of research historians employed with the Institute of National Remembrance (true to its name), or with any of the historical museums, so numerous appearing in Poland in the recent years, or, involved or engaged in some other way in historical, or history-based, politics, profiled in one way or another – and which does not really have to be pursued under this particular, ambiguously characterised, label.³⁶ In an opening essay published in one of the issues of *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* dealing with memory topics, Marcin Kula remarked (clearly and limpidly, without referring to any memory-related semantics; quite telling and instructive a case in point) that history, approached as a totality of, seeking for, and dispute on, knowledge – has recently sneaked out of the historians’ ateliers and fled into the streets.³⁷ It might be added that Polish historians, a great number of them, have followed it. This view seems to hold no less valid today than at the time it was formulated, even if politics oriented toward or rooted in history has perhaps ceased to be a catchy headline-maker.

But let us leave aside this general level of Polish discussions on history, memory, and their reciprocal relations. All the more that their underlying philosophical and outlook-related positions (including those regarding views of science) augur no lasting findings or conclusions. Hence, reference made to a few exemplary works of historians – not necessarily even defining themselves as such – who have made memory, defined in a variety of ways and at various levels, the subject of their historical research, will definitely be more useful, even if not more interesting.

³⁶ For a concise, theoretically grounded, and critical (though not most recent) discussion of various Polish ‘historical policies’, see Lech M. Nijakowski, *Polska polityka pamięci. Esej socjologiczny* (Pejzaże Społeczne, Warsaw, 2008).

³⁷ Marcin Kula, ‘Historia wyszła na ulice’, *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, liii, 3 (2009), 4.

This is all the more worth doing that sociological, anthropological, and culture-related research on memory almost readily offers a generalised critical attitude toward historical writing as such. Such criticism, not infrequently assuming an indulgent tone, is usually built upon the opposition: critical thinking, represented by memory researchers, versus naive thinking, represented by historians. The notion of truth, based upon its classical, correspondential definition, or simply understood in commonsensical terms, is the favourite whipping-boy. That such a view is quite simplified and unjust, if not, at times, very simple-minded, historians do not have to be persuaded.

Let us, therefore, refer to the studies that, while opposing these generalisations and simplifications on history and memory, research into the latter with a good result, extending to individual as well as collective memory, in a historical perspective.

I will perhaps start with those approaching records of individual memory as historical sources. Before then, I pointed out to the tradition and to present-day, increasingly swift, current of biographical studies in Polish sociology. It is not just sociologists and anthropologists, however, that take records and analyse interviews regarding individual experiences from their interlocutors' past. Not all of these are biographical-narrative interviews; there also appear thematic ones, focused on very specific reminiscences, experiences, and occurrences from the past.

This research method, known for a few dozen years now as oral history, has recently gained a much more reassured position in Poland – including among historians, particularly those of a younger generation. A few years ago, on the initiative of Marta Kurkowska-Budzan and a group of Cracow-based researchers, a Polish Society for Oral History was established; the Wrocław-based 'Memory and Future' Centre has lately started publishing an oral history annual, *Wrocławski Rocznik Historii Mówionej*; conferences, seminars, workshops are organised. First publications have appeared which from a historical standpoint offer an orderly selection of sources, whilst forming, from the standpoint of an average reader, an autonomous polyphonous story.³⁸ For a few years now, there have existed oral history archives,

³⁸ A good, though so-far-isolated, example is Katarzyna Madoń-Mitzner (ed.), *Ocaleni z Mauthausen. Relacje polskich więźniów obozów nazistowskich systemu Mauthausen-Gusen* (Historia Mówiona, Warsaw, 2010, 2nd edn, 2011), awarded in 2011

of which use is made also in historical research. The largest one, kept at the History Meeting House [DSH] in Warsaw, renders accessible, as of today, more than five thousand audio and video interviews recorded as part of KARTA Centre's and DSH's documentary-research projects, along with over 50,000 video-recorded interviews with Holocaust survivors, recorded within a documentation project initiated by Steven Spielberg (Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation).

This revival of oral history in Poland, identified by some as carrying hallmarks of a social movement,³⁹ creates a shared space between various social initiatives (often embedded within non-governmental organisations) and the academic field. In the latter, oral history is situated at the contact-point of several scholarly disciplines: history, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies.

There are, lastly, completely separate, original projects, formally belonging to none of those fields, shifting oral history toward (good) literature. A piece of such literature is Anka Grupińska's book *Ciągle po kole. Rozmowy z żołnierzami getta warszawskiego* [Round the circle, over and over: Interviews with Warsaw Ghetto soldiers] (Warsaw, 2000), based entirely on interviews, as is the recent, excellent study by Joanna Wiszniewicz, *Życie przecięte. Opowieści pokolenia Marca* [A life cut through: Stories of the March (1968) generation] (Wołowiec, 2008). Similarly, Svetlana Alexievich's book *The Unwomanly Face of War* (published recently in Polish), resembling those two in terms of methodology and literary qualities, is identifiable within such literature.⁴⁰

Regardless, however, of this invigoration around oral history, and its institutionalisation, historical works of importance have been published in Poland, whose authors made a successful use of interviews with 'witnesses of history' in their research technique. In most cases, the interviewers are the authors themselves, while references

with a prestigious *Polityka* weekly's Historical Prize in recognition of 'Source Edition'. The book contains assembled fragments of some 100 interviews with former inmates of the Mauthausen-system camps, recorded as part of the Mauthausen Survivors Documentation Project – one of the international oral-history documentary/research projects carried out in Poland by KARTA Centre.

³⁹ Kaja Kaźmierska, 'Biographieforschung in Polen', *BIOS. Zeitschrift für Biographieforschung, Oral History und Lebensverlaufsanalysen*, xxiii, 1 (2010), 160.

⁴⁰ Polish translation: Swietłana Aleksiejewicz [Svetlana Alexievich], *Wojna nie ma w sobie nic z kobiety*, trans. Jerzy Czech (Wołowiec, 2010).

to accounts from oral history archives, approached on equal footing with other historical archives, are gradually appearing.⁴¹

Studies of this kind include, e.g., Andrzej Friszke's books on political opposition in the People's Republic of Poland; for a younger generation, some of the books published by Trio publishing house in the series 'W Krainie PRL', managed by Włodzimierz Borodziej, Jerzy Kochanowski and Marcin Kula. Within a dozen-or-so years of its existence, a few dozen important books have been issued, many of which are localisable on the borderline of social history, sociology, historical anthropology, or, history of collective ideas or 'mentalities'.

Among the series' authors, Adam Leszczyński, Małgorzata Mazurek, Zofia Wóycicka, to name just these three, have based their historical, sociological, or anthropological analyses (not necessarily insisting on their unambiguous labelling, of a sort).⁴² Each of these authors is perfectly aware of the methodological and technique-related difficulties a historian is doomed to face if s/he is willing to use the sources as 'subjective' and 'ahistorical' as interviews, in view of any reliable – let alone 'objective' – historical (re)construction. Each of them, however, provides convincing grounds for his or her epistemological position and subsequently considers his/her research, not without objection, to be part of the oral history current and embarks on a nuanced analysis of the interviews s/he has recorded, along with the other accessible sources. Individual 'memory-related' testimonies appear to be decent historical sources, and the basis for speaking not only, and even not so much, of individual experiences, but rather of broader historical and social processes that – apparently an obvious thing, but still worth being reminded – have their subjective, awareness-related, or conceptual/notional 'facet'.

⁴¹ The most recent publications include, e.g., Marcin Zaremba, *Wielka trwoga. Polska 1944–1947. Ludowa reakcja na kryzys* (Cracow, 2012).

⁴² Adam Leszczyński, *Anatomia protestu. Strajki robotnicze w Olsztynie, Sosnowcu i Żyrardowie. Sierpień–listopad 1981* (W Krainie PRL, Warsaw, 2006); Małgorzata Mazurek, *Spółczesność kolejki. O doświadczeniach niedoboru 1945–1989* (W Krainie PRL, Gdańsk and Warsaw, 2010); for a review of this book, see *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 103 (2011), 199–203; Zofia Wóycicka, *Od Weepers do Wieprza*, in Agnieszka Nowakowska and Zofia Wóycicka, *Etniczna polityka komunistów. Dwa casusy* (W Krainie PRL, Warsaw, 2010). For a review of this book, see *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 104 (2011), 190–6.

A completely different option of historical analysis of memory is represented by two other books issued in the same series. These are Zofia Wóycicka's *Polskie spory wokół pamięci nazistowskich obozów koncentracyjnych i zagłady 1944–1950* [Polish disputes around the memory of Nazi concentration camps and the annihilation, 1944–1950] and Joanna Wawrzyniak's *ZBoWiD i pamięć drugiej wojny światowej 1949–1969* [Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy and the memory of World War II, 1949–1969].⁴³ I mention these two books one alongside the other not because both concern the memory of war (or rather, its 'fragments') and are very well readable as two chronologically ordered parts of a single story but because their approach to memory is similar. Subject to analysis there is, namely, not some external, static, reified collective memory, or individual memory of witnesses to history, but a dynamic, historically variable process of remembering and commemorating very specific historical experiences by very specific social actors, forming a variety of groups of memory (and interests) and producing (and, in a sense, being produced by) a group memory.

Based on an enormous source documentation, Zofia Wóycicka reconstructs a peculiar battle for collective memory and methods of commemorating the camps, including handling their material remnants, which was fought in Poland in the earliest post-war years, or, to be more specific, as from the moment the first camp at Majdanek was liberated, in 1944. The fighting parties were associations of former political prisoners, organisations grouping Jewish Holocaust survivors, local and central authorities (whose some representatives had a camp experience behind them), or intellectuals – former inmates, in their literary or journalistic interpretations of the recent wartime experiences. It is an exquisite study of dynamically emerging collective memories – and, subsequently, a single dominant 'state-owned' memory – overshadowed (or, for some, added-glamour-to) by very vivid, and very diverse, wartime and camp-bound individual memories.

⁴³ Zofia Wóycicka, *Przerwana żałoba. Polskie spory wokół pamięci nazistowskich obozów koncentracyjnych i zagłady 1944–1950* (W Krainie PRL, Warsaw, 2009); for a review of this book, see *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 101 (2010), 328–9; Joanna Wawrzyniak, *ZBoWiD i pamięć drugiej wojny światowej 1949–1969* (W Krainie PRL, Warsaw, 2009), for a review of this book, see *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 102 (2010), 273.

Joanna Wawrzyniak's study concerns, in turn, the subsequent phase(s) of collective remembering of the war by the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy (commonly known under the Polish abbreviation ZBoWiD) – the key institution of the communist Poland in establishing the framework of this remembering. Again, the proposed analysis extends not to a single Polish collective memory but a dynamic, historically altering, process of establishing and changing the meanings of various wartime experiences, their mythologisation, forming group and national memories out of them, and the latter's influence on interpretations of collective and individual experiences. It is easy to say – a piece of mainstream knowledge today – that collective memory feeds on myths (as, allegedly, opposed to history-the-science); a rather difficult task, for a change, would be to prove that these myths have their identifiable producers; can rival against one another – which takes place in social interactions and communication processes; are changeable in time, that is, historical. Wawrzyniak's work easily overcomes all these difficulties, the foundation being reliable historical research.

Both of these books, along with the studies authored by historians referred to above and numerous others I have not mentioned,⁴⁴ have shown that memory, uncovered in a variety of ways and aspects, and, in particular, remembering, better graspable as it is, proves excellently researchable with use of a decent and open-ended historical technique.

trans. Tristan Korecki

⁴⁴ The book by Marta Kurkowska-Budzan, *Antykomunistyczne podziemie zbrojne na Białostoczczyźnie. Analiza współczesnej symbolizacji przeszłości* (Cracow, 2009) is worth mentioning in this context. Formally, it is a historical treatise (in fact, a postdoctoral thesis in history), but actually, a sociological-anthropological study of collective (local) memory and remembering, interpreted by this author along the lines of discourse analysis, symbolic interactionism theory, and so-called grounded theory.