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After the  
High/Low Debate  
**Andreas Huyssen**

# After the High/Low Debate\*

## Andreas Huyssen

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The high-low debate is history. It was a stage in the evolution of modernism in Europe and the US after mid-century, when a codified and narrowly canonized 'high' modernism morphed into what has come to be called the postmodern. At that time, the struggle to create a more porous relationship between high and low revitalized a late modernism that had become increasingly stale and was running on empty. The result was postmodernism in all its complex and contradictory variants in architecture, music, literature, and the visual arts as a new American international.

But then the world changed in 1989-90, and postmodernism, like the concern over high and low culture, was swallowed up by a new set of social, political, and economic configurations. The vast expansion of cultural markets, globalization, and the electronic media have shown the extent to which the high/low debate was still predicated on the stability of print as the dominant medium, and the nation state as the guarantor of high culture in Western societies.

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To revive this debate today would be futile. In the US context – market triumphalism, lifestyle revolution, the victorious march of pop cultural studies through the institutions – low has won the battle and high has been relegated to the margins, the American culture wars notwithstanding. But it's a pyrrhic victory, marred by continuing resentment of the vanquished. The academic left decries high culture as elitist and Eurocentric, denounces aesthetics as totalitarian, and refuses to debate cultural value. The right ossifies traditional culture before modernism, but rejects contemporary high culture in much of the arts, as well as in the literary and theoretical fields where European imports, especially from Germany and France, are blamed for the closing of the American mind. The outcome is thus not the creative merger of high and low, as was imagined in the postmodernism debate of the 1970s and early 1980s: a new democratic culture that would couple aesthetic complexity with mass appeal, abolish hierarchies of taste and class, and usher in a new age of cultural pleasure beyond the entropies and minimalism of late modernism on the one hand, and the numbing hegemony of Cold War mass culture on the other. Instead we may have a new version of what sociologist Herbert Gans in the 1970s described as middlebrow taste (upper, middle and lower-middle culture). But middlebrow today is not as clearly circumscribed in terms of class as it was for Gans 25 years ago. It is, rather, fragmented by niche marketing and ever more diverse consumption patterns. In terms of style, design, and sophistication, middlebrow operates at a higher level now than it used to, which has led some to speak of a 'high pop', in contrast to 'low pop'. Sure, there has been some upward mobility, if not in people's real status in life, then certainly in general levels of taste and consumption. But it is the result of world market developments and new immigration patterns, not of cultural production *per se*. For consumerism is more and more inevitably the common denominator of all culture, making illusions about the autonomy of 'high' ever harder to sustain. We have elite consumerism; various kinds of middlebrow consumerism, differentiated by generation, income levels, and lifestyles; and an imaginary counter-consumerism as celebrated by cultural studies.

Counter-consumerism is the 1990s' US version of Marcuse's great refusal. It is embodied in the notion of the rebel consumer, who transgresses and subverts the cultural commodity in the act of consumption. The rebel consumer, typically associated with the identity politics of a marginal group or minority, has taken the place of the avant-garde artist, who in turn has become superfluous. It is not the artist as producer who offers a new collective and a new mode of reception, as Benjamin and Brecht once imagined, but the consumer as *bricoleur* of meanings that permit escape from the iron cage of the market. Thus academic cultural studies, whose theoretical discourse is of course anything but popular, has simply reversed the old high/low hierarchy. The legitimate critique of outdated notions of high culture as the cement that provides social and national cohesion has entered into an unsavory brew with a methodologically limited ethnography of cultural reception and a politically limited identity politics. The end of the subversive, avant-garde work of art has

given rise to the transgressive consumer. If the first turned out to be a delusion in the end, the second is certainly a delusion from the very beginning.

A second methodological point needs to be made. To frame the discussion in terms of high versus low always suggested too much solidity of the two poles, today more than ever. Cultural sociologists have always preferred to introduce further distinctions in terms of taste or habits, and cultural historians know that subterranean linkages between high and low were always present. And yet, there was a time when high and low were indeed defined fairly clearly in their dichotomy – high as a circumscribed body of European, American, and museum-based culture, codified by the museum, the academy, the gallery system, the art film; low as popular entertainment, spectator sports, rock and country music, pulp novels, detective stories and science fiction, Hollywood films, television. High enjoyed the solidity of the archive: ambitious and original works worthy of being incorporated into the tradition and promising eternity; low representing the fleeting productions for the day, subject to the rule of fashion and secured by a system of repetition and reproduction. The production of high culture was characterized by the low turnover velocity of the archive, based on slow accumulation and even slower erosion rather than perpetual replacement and planned obsolescence; the products of low or mass culture, on the other hand, were always subject to the high turnover velocity of a consumer society, its fleeting pleasures and its need to renew constantly the promises it inevitably failed to fulfill. But as a stark dichotomy, the high/low divide reflected a political and social vision of the world as much as it had to do with elusive criteria of aesthetic judgment and quality.

Of course, transitions between high and low, based on exchanges of the two spheres, always existed (high culture going slumming, or the occasional low breakthrough into high), but such border crossings, which have accompanied modernist culture since its beginnings in the mid-19th century, served mostly to maintain the binary rather than to abolish it.

Today, however, the binary in its emphatic sense has been abolished by a new logic of cultural circulation brought about by media technologies, new patterns of marketing and consumption, and their radical effects on both cultural tradition and the structures of fashion and entertainment. The high turnover velocity of low culture has by now engulfed even the production of traditionally low-velocity high culture. Once solid cultural traditions (high) are being liquified in the rapid turnover of museum blockbusters, theater spectacles that become media shows, festivals of classical music organized on the basis of the star system, with the global mobility of international actors, directors, orchestras and artworks matching that of global capital flows.

None of this is to claim that the distinction between high art and mass culture no longer exists. It does. Very much so. There always will remain differences in quality and ambition between cultural products, differences in complexity, different demands on the attentiveness

and knowledge of the consumer, differently stratified audiences. But what used to be a divide has become in the last few decades a borderland of exchanges and pillagings, of travels back and forth, and all kinds of hybrid interventions. The largely national bases of high and low cultures have been dissolved by the increasing globalization and the cultural flows accompanying waves of migration and diasporas. Therefore, the high/low divide can no longer provide the field of battle for an alternative social or political imagination as it did earlier in this century. To see low as a threat to social and cultural cohesion is a conservative phantasm deployed for the purposes of political maneuvering, but this phantasm of course feeds the mirror phantasm of the rebel consumer and American populism. How to get out of this dead-end? My tentative answer would be

1. To abandon high/low distinction, but reintroduce issues of aesthetic quality into our analysis of specific cultural practices and products.
2. To abandon the notion that a successful attack on elite culture can play a major role in a political and social transformation, but to pay close attention to the ways in which cultural practices and products are linked to the discourses of the political and the social in specific local and national constellations.
3. This requires a combination of the disciplines of cultural history (including a sociological and economic dimension) and literary/artistic criticism. It can best be achieved by a sustained focus on the operations and functioning of public cultures and the changing role of critique within them.

A brief historical digression may help us reframe the problem in a more international horizon.

The 20th century witnessed two major attacks on high culture in the name of low or popular culture, everyday life, mass culture. The first was the assault mounted by the historical avant-gardes – the expressionist scream, the semiotic anarchism of Dada, the constructivist ethos of the Berlin and Moscow vanguards of the 1920s, the surrealist revolt against bourgeois Ratio – all directed against a bourgeois high culture that had proven its moral and political bankruptcy in the Great War and its aftermath. The second was the radical critique of consumer capitalism and Cold War imperialism mounted in the 1960s in the shape of an international youth revolt: civil rights struggles, anti-Vietnam protests, and counter-culture in the US, Situationists and Paris '68 in France, the New Left in Western Europe, the Third Way movements in Eastern Europe, Montoneros and Tupamaros in Argentina and Uruguay, etc. At the level of artistic production and intellectual articulation, the 1960s had strong connections back to the historical avant-garde, just as politically, at least in Europe, the decade lived off a reinvention of radical left politics of the 1920s, which gave shape to the new social movements of the 1970s, and drew energies from its identification with anti-colonial liberation struggles.

In retrospect, it is clear that both these earlier truly international attempts to couple the attack on bourgeois high culture with an attempt to bring about radical social change that might give rise to a politically progressive mass culture and a radical reorganization

of everyday life, founded. The first attempt ended with the mass spectacles of Nazi Germany and Soviet-style socialist realism, the second with the triumphant march of marketing at each and every level of culture by ever more global enterprises. Thus it has become all too facile and popular either to denounce the historical avant-garde as the trailblazer for what Boris Groys called *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin* or, more pertinently to us, to dismiss it as the Research & Development arm of the Western culture industry. If it was that, it was also always something else; something like the locus of a utopian social imagination that seems entirely absent today. The only trace of a utopian promise in our culture is the promise of cyberspace and the market, but there is no social imagination to back it up in an age of a widening gap between rich and poor, of massive social injustice that, even at a time of nearly full employment in the US, is reminiscent of the worst aspects of Manchester capitalism in the 19th century. The social imagination that energized those earlier debates about high and low will have to be reinvented. Clearly the famous double-edged post-1989 question 'What is L/left?' does not yet have a compelling answer.

In the US context, therefore, I would argue that it may be best for now either to ignore the high/low question altogether or to sidestep it. I don't think we'd lose all that much. On the contrary, getting engaged in the high/low question now is either a losing proposition, because it pulls one into a fruitless and boring academic debate about the canon and the subversive thrust of the popular; or it is simply irrelevant, because high culture, apart from curricular discussions in elite universities, has lost most of the political and hegemonic *cachet* that used to make attacks on it somehow pertinent. Instead of focusing on high/low, then, I would suggest that we focus our attention on the notion of public culture, the function of cultural practices in civil society, and their cultural potential for the life of democratic institutions. Public culture encompasses high art as high art and mass culture as mass culture both, to the extent that they trigger or participate in public debate. Public culture provides the space in which both high and low can make their impact. This focus on public culture would allow us to zero in on cultural phenomena that are very much in the public eye at any given time, and can be registered at different levels in a variety of discourses that overlap or network with each other. And what could be more central to public culture today than the issue of memory, commemoration, imagining the past, marketing the past and obliterating or forgetting the past? It seems to me that a topic such as the culture and politics of memory lends itself quite well to illuminating the scene in which we ourselves are the players.

## II

In the 1990s, the concern with issues of memory, historical trauma and temporality has emerged as key to understanding our cultural and political present. At issue is not only the way in which Germans, Jews, or Americans remember or do not remember the Holocaust, but also the ways in which present pasts have come to occupy ever larger segments of contemporary public cultures in many parts of the world. The concern with present pasts the world over stands in stark contrast with what one could call the present futures that energized modernist culture and politics for most of the 20th century, from the apocalyptic myths of the breakthrough and the new man and the murderous phantasms of racial or class purification, all the way to liberal American modernization paradigms. But the contemporary focus on memory and temporality also stands in stark contrast to so much other innovative work that is currently being done in the fields of space, maps, geographies, borders, trade routes, migrations, displacements, and diasporas. Not so long ago, there was a widespread consensus that in order to understand postmodern culture, the focus had to shift from the problematics of time and memory, ascribed to an earlier form of high modernism, to that of space as key to the postmodern moment. But, as the work even of geographers such as David Harvey has shown, we separate time and space only at great peril of missing a full understanding of either modern or postmodern culture. Time and space as fundamentally contingent categories of perception are always bound up with each other, and the intensity of border-crossing memory discourses that characterize so much of contemporary culture in so many parts of the world today proves the point. The Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington gave rise to the debate about the Americanization of the Holocaust. I would like to raise the question to what extent one can now even speak of a globalization of Holocaust discourse, and to ask what that would imply for Holocaust history and memory, and indeed for the very concept of globalization itself, which is of course far too frequently being used in globalizing ways. The high/low dichotomy, at any rate, is not a useful tool to get into issues of cultural globalization, and it would be interesting to explore in more detail why it is not (issues of nationalism and high culture, European anti-Americanism, etc). The issue of memory and public culture, however, resonates strongly with the current rush to history and memory in so many different parts of the world.

Some future cultural historian with a broader outlook than is currently available to us will inevitably ask the question: what was it that produced this culture of memory from the 1980s on? Clearly historical trauma has played a major part in it, and here especially the historical trauma of the Holocaust, its reverberating second- and third-generation aftershocks, and all the epistemological, psychological, aesthetic and political problems associated with it. But why is it, our future historian would have to ask, that the Holocaust only emerged into full public consciousness over 40 years after the fact, with television series, full-length feature films, historical museums, memoirs (fictional and non-fictional), testimony,

and the building of ever more monuments in ever more countries? Does memory of historical trauma need a time lag before it can be articulated in literary, biographical or cinematic works? Too many counter-examples would seem to disprove that point, and the projection of the delayed memory of individual trauma onto the historical screen seems problematic. Which in turn leads to another question: what are the broader political and cultural parameters not only for the late emergence of this discourse in the main affected countries (a question for which specific answers are available), but for its translatability into other forms of real or imagined historical trauma and for its travelling across borders? Holocaust discourse has attached itself to very different kinds of political trauma: to the memory discourses in post-dictatorship Argentina or Chile, and in post-apartheid South Africa, or to the recent debate in Australia about the stolen generation of aboriginal children, which is occasionally referred to as a cultural holocaust; in the US, to AIDS, the abortion debate, slavery and drug distribution in the black ghettos. How do we gauge the ubiquity of Holocaust discourse in the contemporary world? Does it just banalize the historical event and lead to amnesia, or does it have salutary functions that need to be studied in their own right? And then there is an even broader dimension: how is it that the Holocaust could have become a cipher for the 20th century, if not for modernity in toto? Can we relate such an argument to the later events in Bosnia, Rwanda, Kosovo or East Timor? Does it function to screen memory, or does it enable new forms of cultural and political self-understanding? Or does it perhaps do both? Is it, as it were, a zero point of cultural, critical, and creative work today, in high culture as much as in mass culture?

Too many questions, I know. As a cultural critic I am of course interested in the ways in which literary, cinematic and artistic representations, the design of monuments and memorials, and the proliferation of Holocaust discourse in the media, have incrementally contributed to shaping an intellectual and political climate in which historical trauma could become a major public concern (from the docudramas of the 1960s – Hochhuth, Peter Weiss, Vis Ophuls, *The Sorrow and the Pity* – to the Holocaust TV series *Shoah*, *Schindler's List*, Benigni's *La vita e bella*, etc.). High/Low distinctions resurfaced in relation to some of this work, but remained largely academic or irrelevant, with the Lanzmann/Spielberg constellation representing perhaps most clearly the death mask of the old modernist high/low constellation. Nevertheless, much of the most ambitious work revolved around issues of the past in the present and on the difficulties of representation. But then during the 1990s the issue of crimes against humanity, first articulated at Nuremberg, but not vigorously pursued at the time, re-emerged powerfully in any number of human rights cases brought before international and national courts. This new memory discourse is no longer limited to the question of the possibility or impossibility of representation that dominated the Holocaust debate of the early 1990s. It has now become a discourse of justice and accountability in ways scarcely imaginable even 10 or 20 years ago. But justice poses difficult problems of interpretation (such as the appropriateness of applying retroactive law), and of the reliability of representation (testimony, witnessing), in ways hard to disentangle

and reduce to positive law. How to deal appropriately with the past has become one of the major conundrums of our public world today.

Of course, we knew that the structures of social memory, like those of time and space, more broadly speaking, are subject to change in history. A whole new subdiscipline of historiography called mnemohistory now dedicates itself to analysing the ways in which societies remember, and embodied artifacts play a major role in this process, as representing 'cultural memory' (Jan Assmann). Cultural memory in this usage is distinguished from communicative memory (largely oral and intergenerational), but it is clear that while only individuals HAVE memory, all individual memory is shaped by cultural memory and its archive. We might call this the Halbwachsian paradox. Neuroscience furthermore tells us that individual memory exists only in its temporal practice; spatial models of storage and retrieval, such as existed, say, in classical rhetoric, or as they informed earlier brain research, give a false sense of continuity and security about structures of memory. So does a sociological approach that works with stable group memories, which it used to call (with Maurice Halbwachs) 'collective'. The lament about the disintegration of allegedly stable memories, group or collective, is of course as old as modernity itself, and we may read it as articulating the fear of communal or social disintegration. And one could argue further that what Pierre Nora has called *milieux de mémoire* is itself nothing but a *lieu de mémoire* in the sense of a linguistic trope (such as Rousseau's noble savage, Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft*, or Lukács's integrated civilization) that has accompanied modernity since its very beginnings.

Indeed, much is known about the ways in which memory works, but not enough has been written about what has made memory one of the central obsessions in the present world – one that cuts across the hierarchical high/low distinction. People may complain about the memory epidemic or celebrate the commemorative practices of our culture, but there are few attempts to understand it. To understand it is not just about adding another chapter to the untold mnemohistorical enterprises currently being undertaken in academe and in the public world, but an attempt to understand why the narrative of remembrance and memorialization, the monument and the museum, have become so central in recent years in so many different parts of the world. It is not understanding present pasts, but the perhaps more frivolous attempt to understand the present as past, to historicize it. My assumption, based on the history of modernity and its changing perceptions of time and space, is simple: today the structures of memory themselves are under siege. They are undergoing a historical transformation which has consequences for the ways we negotiate our relation to past, present and future. Let me briefly indicate what I have in mind.

There are many subplots that make up the memory narrative of the past two decades in its broadest scope, and that distinguish our times quite clearly from earlier decades of this

century. I don't think I need to remind you of the salient phenomena that reach from entertainment, fashion and popular culture via national and international politics to the museum boom and the museumification of the everyday world, and finally to our often arcane debates about history and memory, trauma and witnessing, testimony and representation in high-art practices.

Frequently, such obsessions with memory and the past are explained as a function of the *fin de siècle*, but I think one has to probe deeper to come to terms with what one now could call a culture of memory, which has become pervasive in North Atlantic societies since the late 1970s. What here appears increasingly as a relentless marketing of memory by the Western culture industry, takes on a more explicitly political inflection in other parts of the world. Especially since 1989, or more generally since the late 1980s, the issues of memory and forgetting have emerged as dominant concerns in post-communist countries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union; they dominate public discourse in post-apartheid South Africa; they energize the race debate that has erupted in Australia over the issue of the 'stolen generation'; they burden the relationship between Japan and China, and they determine, to varying degrees, the cultural and political debate about the 'desaparecidos' and their children in 'posdictadura' societies in Latin America. Invariably, memory raises fundamental questions about human rights violations, justice, and collective responsibility. The geographic spread of the culture of memory is as wide as memory's political uses are varied, ranging from a mobilization of mythic pasts to support aggressively chauvinist or fundamentalist politics (Iran, Serbia, Hindu politics in India) to fledgling attempts, in Argentina and Chile, to create public spheres of political memory that will counter the politics of forgetting pursued by post-dictatorship regimes, either through 'reconciliation' and official amnesties or through repressive silencing. But at the same time, of course, the fault-line between mythic past and real past is not always that easy to draw, one of the conundrums of any politics of memory anywhere. The real can be mythologized, just as the mythic may engender strong realistic effects.

An important part of such new public spheres of memory is a plethora of artistic, literary, commemorative and architectural practices in many different countries, addressing the politics of memory in complex representational form, often in transnationally understandable languages of specific media, but always, in their strongest incarnations, with emphatic reference to local and/or national pasts (e.g., Salcedo, DiStefano, Brodsky, Vivan Sundaram). Indeed, I would suggest that while memory discourses appear to be global in one register, at their core they remain tied to the histories of specific nation states. As particular nations struggle to create democratic politics in the wake of histories of mass exterminations, apartheid, military dictatorships and totalitarianism, they are faced, as Germany has been since World War II, with the unprecedented task of securing the legitimacy and future of their emergent polity by finding ways to commemorate and adjudicate past wrongs. What-

ever the differences between post-war Germany and South Africa, Argentina or Chile, the political site of memory practices is natural, not post-national. At the same time, it is clear that such national memory debates are always shot through with the effects of the global media and the prevalence of themes such as the Holocaust and ethnic cleansing, migration and minority rights, victimization and accountability. In sum, memory has become a social, political, and aesthetic obsession of monumental proportions across the globe. However different and site-specific the causes may be, it does suggest that globalization and a strong reassessment of the respective national, regional or local past will have to be considered together. This in turn raises the question whether contemporary memory cultures in general (i.e., including phenomena such as the focus on national patrimony and cultural identity, the preservation of languages, etc.) can be read as reactions to economic globalization. This is terrain on which some new comparative work on the mechanisms and tropes of historical trauma could be pursued.

If the time-consciousness of (high-)modernity tried to secure the future, one could argue that the time-consciousness of the late 20th century involves the no less perilous task of taking responsibility for the past. Both attempts, inevitably, are haunted by failure. Thus a second point must be made immediately about our public culture of memory, and with this I turn more explicitly to the issue of media. The turn toward memory and the past comes with a great paradox. Ever more frequently, critics of very different persuasions accuse this very contemporary memory culture of amnesia, anesthesia or numbing (Jameson, Hartmann, Charlie Maier). They chide its inability and unwillingness to remember, and in many instances their critique is quite persuasive. The amnesia reproach is invariably couched as a critique of the media, while it is precisely these media – from print and television to CD-ROMs and the Internet – that make ever more memory available to us day by day. But what if both observations were true; if the boom in memory were inevitably accompanied by a boom in forgetting? What if the relationship between memory and forgetting were actually being transformed under cultural pressures in which new information technologies, media politics and fast-paced consumption are beginning to take their toll? Psychic and public processes of remembering, repression, and forgetting are writ large in contemporary societies, and they beg to be read historically.

It may be too early to tell that story in its fullest scope and genealogy. Inevitably, it will have to be composed of many local substories, innumerable smaller narratives of differing range and depth, that may or may not one day be woven together into some salient historical narrative about these exit years from the 20th century – years haunted equally by terrifying images of a past modernity, their traumatically delayed replaying in contemporary events, and the fearful intimations they project of an amorphous, threatening future.

Wherever one looks, however, the contemporary obsession with memory in public debates clashes with an intense public terror of oblivion, and one may well wonder which comes

first. Is it the fear of forgetting that triggers the desire to remember, or is it perhaps the other way around? Could it be that the surfeit of memory in our media-saturated culture creates such overload that the memory system itself is in constant danger of imploding, thus triggering the fear of forgetting? After all, it is mostly the media which are blamed when it comes to the lamented loss of historical consciousness in Western consumer societies. The critics of late capitalist amnesia doubt that our culture has anything left resembling 'real' memory or a strong sense of history. Drawing on the standard Adornean argument that commodification equals forgetting, they argue that the marketing of memory generates nothing but amnesia. Ultimately, I do not find this argument convincing. It leaves too much out. It is too easy to blame the dilemma we find ourselves in on the machinations of the culture industry and the proliferation of the new media. Something else must be at stake, something that produces the desire for the past in the first place and that makes us respond so favorably to the memory markets: that something, I would suggest, is a slow but palpable transformation of temporality in our lives, essentially brought on by the complex intersections of technological change, mass media, and new patterns of consumption, work, and global mobility. There may be good reasons to think that the memorializing drive has more beneficial and generative sides as well. However much our concerns with memory are a displacement of our fear of the future, however much the focus on traumatic memory yields an obsessive re-enactment of the past rather than a working-through of it oriented toward a post-traumatic future, and however dubious may seem the proposition that we can learn from history by incanting the ritual of 'never again', memory culture fulfills an important function in the current transformation of temporal human experience in the wake of the new media's impact on our perceptions of place and time.

In earlier works, I have suggested some ways to think about the relationship between our privileging of memory and the past on the one hand, and the potential impact of the new media on perception and temporality on the other, which I won't repeat here. Except, perhaps, in their (inevitably somewhat speculative) conclusion as regards primarily Western consumer societies. Whatever their specific occasion or cause, the ensemble of intense memory practices today articulates the fundamental crisis of an earlier structure of temporality that marked the age of high modernity with its celebration of the new as utopian, as radically and irreducibly other, and with its hegemonic belief in progress or some historical purpose. As our historical imagination has shed an earlier reliance on teleological master-narratives and grown more skeptical of the national framings of cultural and political identity, today's memory cultures, with their emphases on human rights, on minority and gender issues, and on reassessing various national and international pasts, go a long way toward countering the modernist notion that 'history is bunk' (Henry Ford) and its transformation in a world of short-term memory. The shrinking horizon of the past, after all, is accompanied by an equally shrinking horizon of the future. Alexander Kluge called it the attack of the present on the rest of time.

Undoubtedly, the line between serious commemoration and the for-profit memory vogue is not always easy to draw. But in the best-case scenario, commemorative practices are intimately linked to processes of democratization and struggles for human rights, to expanding and strengthening the public spheres of civil society. In the process notions such as human rights, public culture, civil society, are themselves inflected by local histories and take on new connotations. And yet there is something that binds many of these memory practices together. In the face of the globalizing acceleration of time and fracturing of space, slowing down rather than speeding up, expanding the nature of public debate, trying to heal the wounds inflicted in the past, nurturing and expanding livable space rather than destroying it for the sake of some future premise, seem to be unmet needs in contemporary societies the world over, and memory is intimately and invariably linked to their articulation.

At the same time, of course, the past cannot give us what the future has failed to deliver. Indeed, there is no avoiding coming back to the downside of what some would call a memory epidemic, and this takes me back to Nietzsche's attack on the overbearing historicism of his time. Clearly, our memory fever is not the consuming historical fever Nietzsche spoke of, which could and should be cured by productive forgetting. It is rather a mnemonic fever caused by the cyber-virus of amnesia that at times threatens to consume memory itself. Contemporary memory practices, with all their different causes and motivations, express a need for temporal anchoring at a time when, in the wake of the information revolution and an ever-increasing time-space compression, the relationship between past, present and future is being transformed beyond recognition. Whether and what such present pasts can deliver remains to be seen.

Nevertheless, national and local memory practices contest the myths of cyber-capitalism and globalization and their denial of time, space and place. No doubt some new configurations of time and space will eventually emerge from this negotiation. New technologies have always transformed the human perception of time and space in modernity; this was as true for the railroad, the automobile and the airplane as it will be for cyberspace and cybertime. New technologies and new media are also always met by anxieties that later prove to have been unwarranted or even ridiculous. Our age is no exception.

At the same time, cyberspace alone is not the appropriate model to imagine the global future – its notion of memory as stable and safely stored in databanks is misleading, a false promise. Human memory is active, alive, embodied in the social – that is, in individuals, groups, nations, and regions as well as in objects, texts and artifacts. These are the memories needed to construct differential futures in a global world. There is no doubt that in the long run all such memories will be shaped to varying degrees by the new digital technologies, but they will not be reducible to them. Social memory is always transitory, notoriously unreliable, and haunted by forgetting: in a word, human. As public memory it is subject

to change – political, generational, individual. It cannot be stored forever, nor can it be secured by monuments; nor, for that matter, can we rely on digital retrieval systems to guarantee coherence and continuity. After all, less than 50 years after the first mainframe computers, we already need data archeologists, and we face the possibility that in another 10 months or so, the millennial computer bug may have our digital world go into retro mode, mistaking the year 2000 for 1900. If our sense of lived time is being renegotiated in our contemporary cultures of memory, we should not forget that time is not only the past, and as we are indeed suffering from a surfeit of memory, perhaps it is time to remember the future. Luis Buñuel was certainly right when he said: 'You have to begin to lose your memory, if only in bits and pieces, to realize that memory is what makes our lives. Life without memory is no life at all... Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our action. Without it, we are nothing.' And I would only add: without memory, we will not have a future either. The purpose of the multiple reflections on and cultural practices of memory today must ultimately be some imagination of the future.

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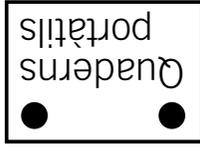
**Andreas Huyssen** is the Villard Professor of German and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, where he served as founding director of the Center for Comparative Literature and Society (1986-1992). He chaired the Department of Germanic Languages from 1986-92 and again as of 2005. He is one of the founding editors of *New German Critique*, the leading journal of German Studies in the United States (1974-) and he serves on the editorial boards of *October*, *Constellations*, *Germanic Review*, *Transit*, *Key Words* (UK), and *Critical Space* (Tokyo). In 2005, he won Columbia's coveted Mark van Doren teaching award. His research and teaching focus on 18th-20th-century German literature and culture, international modernism, Frankfurt School critical theory, postmodernism, cultural memory of historical trauma in transnational contexts, and, most recently, urban culture and globalization.

Huyssen has published widely in German and English and his work has been translated into Spanish, Portuguese, Swedish, Danish, Turkish, Japanese and Chinese. His books include *Drama des Sturm und Drang* (1980), *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (1986), *Postmoderne: Zeichen eines kulturellen Wandels* (ed. with Klaus Scherpe, 1986), *Modernity and the Text: Revisions of German Modernism* (ed. with David Bathrick, 1989), *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (1995), *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (2003), and the forthcoming edited volume on the culture of non-Western cities entitled *Other Cities, Other Worlds: Urban Imaginaries in a Globalizing World* (2008).

In 1999, Andreas Huyssen was invited to give a lecture at MACBA in the context of the seminar *Towards a high popular culture*. This lecture was entitled 'Present Pasts: After the High/Low Debate.'

**Quaderns portàtils** (Portable Notebooks) is a line of publications available free of charge through the Internet. In general, the texts proceed from lectures and seminars that have taken place at the MACBA, as well as from exhibition catalogues. This and other issues of the *Quaderns portàtils* collection are available on the Museum website.

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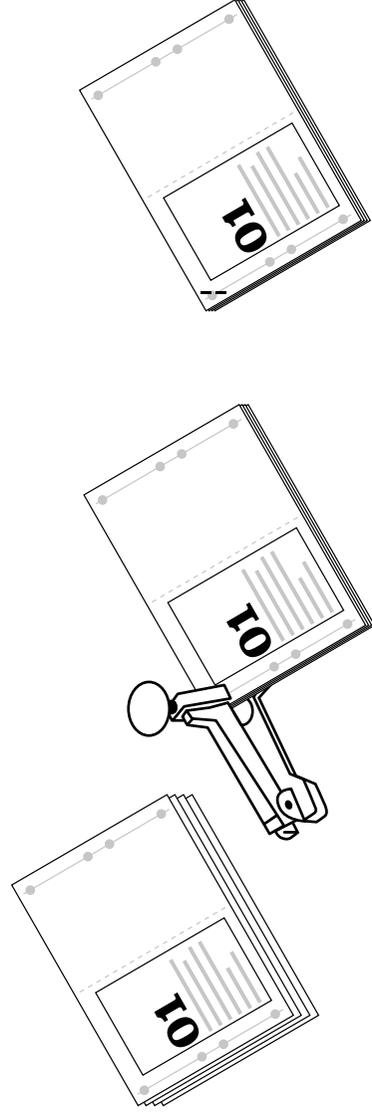


# Tres maneres d'enquadrernar els teus Quaderns portàtils

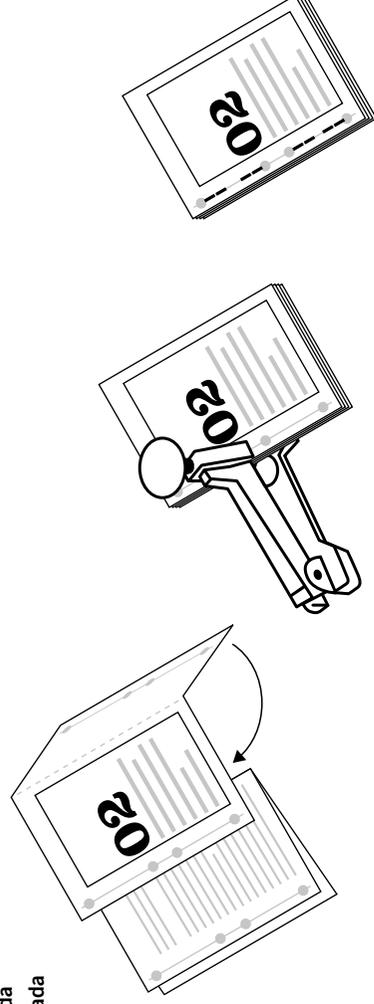
## Tres maneras de encuadrernar tus Quaderns portàtils

### Three ways of binding your Quaderns portàtils

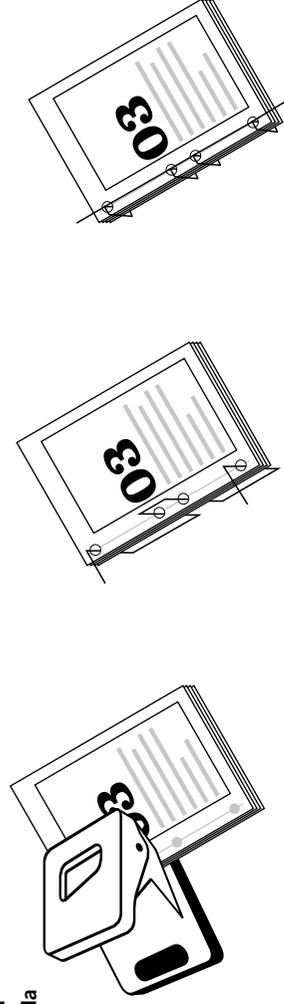
Dossier grapat  
Dosier grapado  
Stapled Dossier



Enquadrernació japonesa grapada  
Encuadrernación japonesa grapada  
Stapled Japanese Binding



Enquadrernació japonesa cosida  
Encuadrernación japonesa cosida  
Sewed Japanese Binding



Llenceu aquest manual d'instruccions una vegada utilitzat (no enquadrernar).  
Desechar este manual de instrucciones una vez utilizado (no encuadrernar).  
Throw away this instructions manual once used (do not bind).