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Author(s): Susan A. Crane

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MEMORY, DISTORTION, AND HISTORY IN THE MUSEUM

SUSAN A. CRANE

ABSTRACT

Museums are conventionally viewed as institutions dedicated to the conservation of valued objects and the education of the public. Recently, controversies have arisen regarding the representation of history in museums. National museums in America and Germany considered here, such as the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum, the Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the German Historical Museum, have become sites of contention where national histories and personal memories are often at odds. Contemporary art installations in museums which take historical consciousness as their theme similarly raise contentious issues about public knowledge of and personal interest in the past. When members of publics find that their memories of the past or their expectations for museum experiences are not being met, a kind of "distortion" occurs. The "distortion" related to memory and history in the museum is not so much of facts or interpretations, but rather a distortion from the lack of congruity between personal experience and expectation, on the one hand, and the institutional representation of the past on the other. This essay explores the possibilities for a redefined relationship between personal memory and history that is experienced in contemporary museums.

Those who insist only on their own memories of the past are condemning the rest of us to avoid it.

—Martin Sherwin¹

What kind of service [can] historians, or people with an education in history . . . perform to support the subjectivity of individuals in their historical perception of themselves[?]

Lutz Niethammer²

I have become an inveterate reader of museum guestbooks. Whenever visitors are invited to write their comments at the end of an exhibit in a blank book, I flip through the pages to see what kinds of remarks have been made. Generally, one finds school groups' scribbles and drawings, inscriptions of names and hometowns, often only single words of approval or disapproval. Occasionally an exhibit will provoke stronger responses. A few years ago I visited an

1. Quoted in Edward Linenthal, "Anatomy of a Controversy" in *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past*, ed. Edward Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt (New York, 1996), 60.

2. Lutz Niethammer, *Posthistoire* (London, 1992), 149.

exhibition of “the masterpieces” of Pacific Northwest Native American jewelry and art, both contemporary pieces and historical artifacts, in The Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia. The visitor book was crowded with complaints. One visitor angrily recorded, “I expected to learn something from this exhibit, not be confused by it.” This response was echoed throughout the book. Visitors complained about tags in each display case which asked them to think about why that artifact was being included in a “masterpieces” exhibit.

Since my own reaction to this strategy had been quite positive, the memory of the disaffection in the guestbook has lingered with me. Surely individual museum-goers have the right to expect to be educated, since this is part of their desire to visit the museum. And yet, just as surely, it cannot be assumed that education has not transpired, even if the visitor exits angry or feels defrauded. Part of the educational intention of the curators (students, in this case, in a cross-listed art history and anthropology course at the University of British Columbia) was to ask visitors to think about how knowledge is constructed, both by curators and by the audience. By challenging visitor expectations, and therefore the memories associated with previous museum visits, the exhibit offered visitors the opportunity to create new meanings for themselves. The disgruntled visitor has indeed reflected on what his/her museum expectations were, ironically enough, and in this sense the curator's goals were achieved. But the visitor left confused and possibly angry, disappointed in the expectation of education or entertainment. These expectations had been distorted at the museum; like a radio signal distorted in transmission, what the visitor expected was not what was received. What effect does this distortion have on the experience of history, of knowledge about the past in its effects on the present, for the visitor in the museum?

At stake is the trustworthiness of the museum as a memory institution. If a museum “messes with your mind,” is memory—particularly historical memory—fundamentally at risk? These anxieties about today's museum discourse—from the battles over the Enola Gay exhibit at the Smithsonian to the deliberately artificial “historical” exhibits appearing in contemporary museums—will be explored here. We are more familiar with concerns and complaints about the distortion of history or memory by interpretation; but it may be that the distortion of expectation is what characterizes recent public debates about museums. And although the manifest content of history is often the explicit core of the debate, it is historical consciousness—a personal awareness of the past as such and a desire to understand experience with reference to time, change, and memory—which has emerged as the unmentioned key term in a changing museal discourse.

The sites most associated with historical consciousness have been studied as “*lieux de mémoire*,” but the process of making historical consciousness exceeds any single combination of place or time, and occurs as “locally” as a

person's private thoughts.³ Historians can describe the history of historical consciousness, the places and times where the people who cared about the past spoke about it or acted on that caring, and yet the phenomenon of historical consciousness continually exceeds those documentable moments which result in texts and narratives, precisely because it refrains from or resists incorporation in institutions, texts, and practices. Some historians may have anxiety about, or disdain for, the unincorporated realm of personal historical memory, seeing it as evidence of ignorance, willful prejudice, emotional needs, or lack of understanding of the knowledge and interpretations available from competently performed historical study. This "excess" of memory, personal and yet publicly formed, complicates historical practice and creates a new object of historical study at the intersection of the personal and the public. I want to pursue this unusual notion of "excess" in relation to the distortions of expectation that visitors experience in museums by looking at specific installations which highlight an awareness of these phenomena.

The museum is not the only site where subjectivities and objectivities collide, but it is a particularly evocative one for the study of historical consciousness. A museum is a cultural institution where individual expectations and institutional, academic intentions interact, and the result is far from a one-way street. A range of personal memories is produced, not limited to the subject matter of exhibits, as well as a range of collective memories shared among museum visitors. Visits to museums—whether of history, art, ethnography, or technology—are ordinary, everyday events in modern western societies; they place museums within the living memory of many people, the majority of whom do not consider themselves professionally responsible for the contents or existence of the museum, much less for historical memory.

Museums are sponsored by governments and privately, and figure in the education of millions of children, including myself. Busloads of school groups form some of the most regular audiences, and the museum visit is a token of childhood, whether the visit is experienced as a singular and unusual event, or just another field trip. Museums can be crowded as a token of their importance, or empty and neglected, but the idea of a museum disappearing or closing does not even occur to most visitors: so clearly do they seem to be a fixed aspect of the cultural landscape, so certain does their purpose seem to be. In these mundane ways, museums become familiar to us. We learn how to behave in museums, what to expect from them, what to buy, and how to remember the occasion. Our museum experiences instruct us in social codes of behavior, condition a sense of cultural literacy, and instill the value of art, the past, and science. I can assume that there exists a public or set of collectives to whom I may speak of museums with an expectation of shared understanding—your own museum memories being different from but related to mine. Such is the

3. The term "*lieux de mémoire*" is drawn from the collective project conducted under the supervision of Pierre Nora and published as *Les lieux de mémoire* (Paris, 1984–1992); and selected translations published as *The Realms of Memory* (New York, 1996).

prevalence of this institution in modernity, and this is precisely why it plays such a large role in the experience of historical consciousness. We approach museums with certain well-founded expectations, even on the first visit, and thereafter museums exist as much in our memories as on their sites.

What transpired in the guestbook of the Vancouver museum was a collision between personal expectations, based on memories of museums past, and the present museum's intentional obliteration of the line demarcating institutional authority from visitor experience. The exhibit responses revealed a lingering excess of memory from other times, other museums, and other knowledge which neither I, as the peruser of the guestbook, nor a curator would otherwise have access to, an excess of memory which is the trace of a historical consciousness that exceeds the immediate exhibit and yet is intimately connected to the conceptual entity "museum." This excess of memory need not be related to the literal content of the exhibit (Native American artifacts): it may also derive from the memory of museums as historical institutions known and experienced over time. What I am calling an "excess" is neither extra nor supplementary to a fictive whole of collective or historical memory; it is what characterizes individual experiences at museums and individual memories of "the museum" which then shape the public discussion of what museums are, and what they could or should be.

This excess has been most visible at the sites where modern western cultures construct public domains for memory, such as monuments, the media, and museums.⁴ Visitors' expectations, shaped by consumer culture and tradition, have been recognized as valuable resources for museum educators and curators, visible in the use of guestbooks for feedback and documentation of a particular exhibit, and studies of museum attendance and education. An awareness of the audience's expectations and a desire to meet them have had a profound influence on museum exhibition practices in the later twentieth century.⁵ This attempt to create a dialogue between museums and their publics reflects a change in attitudes since the nineteenth century. One hundred years ago, museum professionals began to replace connoisseurs as the shapers of collections, and established an ethic of professionalism which led visitors to expect a pedantic approach to exhibitions: museums were providers of instruction, first and foremost.⁶ What had begun as an elite undertaking to save,

4. Marita Sturken's *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Memory* (Berkeley, 1997) provides a framework for discussion of media, memory, and history as "entangled, conflictual, and co-constitutive" (43). The extensive literature on monuments and museums is noted as appropriate further on.

5. See Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, *Museum, Media, Message* (London, 1995); Susan Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections* (London, 1992) and *Objects of Knowledge* (London, 1990); Kenneth Hudson, *A Social History of Museums* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1975) and *Museums of Influence* (Cambridge, Eng., 1987).

6. Neil Harris charts this change as being significant particularly in the past twenty-five years; see his "Museums and Controversy," *Journal of American History* 82 (December 1995), 1102–1111. On nineteenth-century German art museums, see *Museumsinszenierungen: Zur Geschichte der Institution des Kunstmuseums. Die Berliner Museumslandschaft 1830–1990*, ed. Alexis Joachimides et al. (Dresden/Basen, 1995); Walter Grasskamp, *Museumsgründer und Museumsstürmer: Zur sozialgeschichte des Kunstmuseums* (Munich, 1981).

record, and produce the cultural heritage of the past and the present in the Romantic era (begun by but not limited to the intellectuals and artists of the time) had exploded into a popular public project.⁷

Public controversy over museum collections, displays, and the role of museums was not and is not confined within the discourse of intellectuals. People who otherwise might not worry about the content or purpose of a museum may come to care quite passionately when their expectations, based on their own experience and memory, are thwarted, and they will express those passions publicly. Whether expectations are thwarted deliberately (as may be the case when museums attempt to educate the public to see things “differently” than has been common practice) or not, visitors to museums, like members of any public or collective, will express their disappointment or disapproval as readily as if they were in fact responsible for the meanings produced by the exhibit. Personal feelings and memories, whether accurate or appropriate or not, indeed are always a factor in the contexts in which historical consciousness is made, because they shape how an experience is remembered.

Visitors are interlocutors without discussion partners in the museal conversation: they usually have only objects and text to respond to, rarely curators, historians, or experts. The interrogatory text of the Vancouver exhibit unsettled visitor expectations and placed them in virtual discussion with absent curators; some found this experience unnerving, suited neither to past experience nor current expectations. Indeed, since visitors could have no expectation of a reply, only their own or their companions’ thoughts to engage in conversation, the explicit reference to a curator’s presence may ironically have reinforced the sense of distortion, confounding both expectation and experience by offering an absent presence where there had previously been an absent, but apparently omniscient and reliable, narrator. Such “pathetic” exhibits, according to Ralph Rugoff, are not to be confused with sorry attempts at good exhibits, but are instead deliberate attempts to mangle conventional notions of display or museum orthodoxies real and imagined.⁸ The more curators or historians make themselves visible to museum visitors, the more the visitors react warily, unsure if they are really being asked to engage in discussion (which would necessarily involve opinion), or whether they are simply being instructed in a new way. The appearance of conversation may lead visitors, like the angry one in Vancouver, to voice expectations or beliefs that curators do not want to hear; it may also lead a museum public to believe that they have a right to a voice in determining how exhibits are staged.

7. On Romantic museum practice, see Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clío: A Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France* (Cambridge, Eng., 1984); Bann, *Romanticism and the Rise of History* (New York, 1995) and his “History as Competence and Performance: Notes on the Ironic Museum” in *The New Philosophy of History*, ed. Hans Kellner and Frank Ankersmit (London, 1994). See also Susan Crane, “Collecting and Historical Consciousness: New Forms for Historical Consciousness in Early 19th-Century Germany” (PhD. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1992).

8. Ralph Rugoff, “The Nintendo Holocaust” in his *Circus Americanus* (New York, 1997).

What happens when an ordinary visit to the museum produces distortion—when not only are expectations not met, but they are unpleasantly, disturbingly confounded? when an institution such as the Smithsonian Museum of Air and Space is reported to be presenting World War II in a way that is unrecognizable, that does not confirm personal memories? when the Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles presents a book whose provenance is uncertain? when a historic house in San Francisco fabricates a historical personage, claiming that this person lived in the house which now contains his artifacts? I've been confounded by museums several times since 1990, and it delights me, frustrates me, makes me tired, and makes me want to write; overall, I see this as a positive response. But I am aware of others, who have left their traces in museum visitor books and in conversations, in publications and in the press, who resent being, as they see it, duped. And they are not alone. Scholars, particularly historians, have expressed similar distaste or outrage at what they perceive to be distortions of the (arti)fact-providing and scholarly-veracious functions of the museum's educational goals and duties. Members of both the general public and interested professionals have serious objections to having their expectations thwarted. Although visitors may fully expect and desire to be educated, instructed, to learn "something new," as soon as that knowledge conflicts with memory and experience, trouble begins. At this juncture, the confounding which occurs when museums are called upon to mediate different registers of memory, experience, and knowledge is the same in both actual historical museums and in historically conscious art installations.

Memory in the museum operates at several levels; as a resource and a product in perpetual stages of flux, memory is no more static in the fixed space of a museum than it is in the fertile depths of our brains. In his recent book, *Searching for Memory*, psychologist Daniel Schachter describes the multiple ways in which memory functions within the brain, and the multiple sites and interactions which are required for memories to be created and revived.⁹ He emphasizes the "cues" for memory, that is, the context in which memories are recalled, as well as the contexts in which the previous memories were shaped. Each memory, rather than being a single artifact of the past or unique imprint, Schachter describes as a production that emerges over time and in the present, in response to and through the integration of memory cues and memories. While the Freudian notion that memories are not trustworthy and that their unreliability has to do with an individual's emotions and desires has become a commonplace, the notion that memory is actually a positive process of distortion has not. Some psychologists and others continue to hold onto the possibility that the "real" memory of the past, whether of trauma, joy, or something more prosaic, is accessible. And yet for museums, it may be more useful to look beyond the notion of mnemonic veracity and look instead at the interactions which produce, reduce, and conflate memory.

9. Daniel Schachter, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind and the Past* (New York, 1996).

If we assume that the nature of memory is change and distortion over time, rather than expect memory to be a distorting faculty which abuses the historical past, then memory can be seen as a historical process which is frequently interrupted by interpretation to create the present. Thus we have a model of memory which functions rather like a museum: one which confounds as much as it synthesizes information, by bringing together “cues” or artifacts and historians or rememberers to interact in the production of memory.

One such confounding exhibit appeared in 1993 at the Haas-Lillienthal House in San Francisco, an architectural historic landmark from the late nineteenth century, where Fred Wilson created an installation entitled “An Invisible Life: A View into the World of a 120-Year-Old Man.” My sister, a neighbor of the house, visited it and described her delight at the consternation it caused.¹⁰ Waiting for her tour, she overheard two women docents, volunteers from the Heritage Society, complaining in hushed and bitter tones that “their” tour was being undermined. “Their” tour included a historical overview of the Haas family, German emigrants and grocers, and the architectural features of the quintessentially San Francisco house. The “counter-tour,”¹¹ conducted by a young man wearing a plastic-coated name tag—a reassuring indication of normalcy—began on the second floor and introduced Baldwin Antinous Stein, a.k.a. Baldy, “a guest of the Haas family from 1906–90” who had arrived on the most inauspicious date in San Francisco history, that of the 1906 earthquake. He stayed for what by any measure was a rather long visit (in a rather long life), remaining until his death. The new docent noted Baldy’s personal effects “left the way he wanted it” in each room, including a copy of Proust on the table (described as evidence of Baldy’s personal relationships with authors of the period). The ashes of Baldy’s parents, killed in the fires of the earthquake, resided with him in his (unusually but not implausibly) old age. Baldy’s innovations in the bathroom, photographed by *Architectural Digest*, were described and viewed, as well as his activities as a photographer. Included in his photography collection was the famous series by Edward Muybridge depicting motion over time; they were said to admire each other’s work. Baldy’s collection also contained sepia-colored images primarily of male figures. The original docent now returned and the counter-tour docent receded as the woman resumed her description of Arts and Crafts furniture and refused to comment on or answer questions about Baldy.

Baldy was the creation of Fred Wilson, and the artifacts attributed to him were installed by Wilson to create the effect of historical presence. In a handout available after the tour, the artist’s work and biography were detailed,

10. Elizabeth E. Crane, private communication, 4 October 1993. Fred Wilson, “An Invisible Life: A View into the World of a 120-year-old Man,” August 20–October 3, 1993; presented at the Haas-Lillienthal House, San Francisco by Capp Street Project. All further quotations are taken from her report.

11. The term “counter-tour” is derived from James Young’s influential discussion of Holocaust “counter-monuments” in Europe, Israel, and America. See James Young, *The Texture of Memory* (New Haven, 1995).

opening with the statement, “You may or may not be aware that the tour you have just taken included a contemporary art installation,” and continuing: “Using the format and language of museum presentation, the installation raises questions about how history gets told, what gets left out, and how we as audience members interact with institutions such as art and history museums.”

The nametag on the counter-tour docent and the display labels offered authenticity where none existed. All of the objects in this part of the house were as well-marked, professionally labeled, and carefully displayed as those in the rest of the house. The reference to Proust, obligatory in memory discourse, was presented as merely period-specific, and the allusion to the technological breakthrough of depicting motion over time in Muybridge’s work was couched as a “personal effect” of someone interested in photography. Personal historical consciousness also came through in the form of Baldy’s “queer” identity, as the counter-docent noted later, framed in the photography collection and specifically intended to refer to San Francisco’s gay history and its reputation for tolerance. His (imaginary) affiliation with historical personages also lent credibility to the installation for an audience who can be presumed to have heard of Proust, if not of Haas; history was personalized for the viewer through Baldy. Those most upset by this shift in perspective were the docents, whose routines had been interrupted. The counter-tour docent admitted that some regular docents were willing to work with the artist, creating their own “Baldy-faced lies,” but most were not. The docents’ role was key to the visitors’ historical experience: only the narrative told by the docents created a context in which the real objects on display took on (false) historical meaning. Objects, visitors, docents, and narrative “cues” interacted to produce a memory of a nonexistent person—a memory which persists in different forms in my sister, in me, and now in my readers.

Museums are not supposed to lie to us; this act seems a breach of faith. Assuming that our own memories are fallible, we rely on museums as well as on historians to get the past “right” for us. Even if we don’t remember every museum experience, we know that that “straight” version of the past is available to remedy our “queered” or distorted memories. But perhaps we can also enjoy museums which confound and confabulate. David Wilson’s Museum of Jurassic Technology (MJT) in Los Angeles, founded in 1989, playfully combines real and imaginary natural-historical objects which defy expert analysis.¹² Part installation art-performance, part curiosity cabinet, part testimony to the fact that truth is stranger than fiction, and purely David Wilson’s creation, the museum is housed in a nondescript building on a busy street far from other Los Angeles cultural centers. Inside, the museum provides

12. On the Museum of Jurassic Technology, see Lawrence Wechsler, *Mr. Wilson’s Cabinet of Wonders* (New York, 1995); Ralph Rugoff, “Beyond Belief: The Museum as Metaphor” in *Visual Display: Culture Beyond Appearances*, ed. Lynne Cooke and Peter Wollen (Seattle, 1995), 68–81; Mario Biagioli, “Confabulating Jurassic Science” in *Technoscientific Imaginaries: Conversations, Profiles, and Memoirs*, ed. George Marcus (Chicago, 1995), 399–432; see also my “Curious Cabinets and Imaginary Museums” in *Museums and Memory*, ed. Susan Crane (forthcoming).

an eclectic selection of professionally-designed, interactive displays (Mr. Wilson's other business is special effects design) of natural history, historical objects, and visiting exhibitions drawing on such sources as the Mt. Wilson Observatory and the Mutter Museum of Philadelphia. In another museological tribute to that icon of memory work, Proust, Wilson suggests the powers of olfactory stimulus in an exhibit which allows the visitor to inhale the essence of a madeleine. An entire hall is dedicated to the "famous memory researcher" Geoffrey Sonnabend whose theory of the decay of memory is conveniently encapsulated in a museum-produced pamphlet, "Obliscence: Theories of Forgetting and the Problem of Matter."¹³

One of my favorite MJT memories is of watching the video presentation at the entrance to the exhibits, its narrative tongue firmly in cheek as it presents the historical antecedents of the MJT, from the *Ur*-collector Noah (a replica of his ship lies just beyond) to Wilson. One barely has time to wonder what technology could have existed even metaphorically in the Jurassic world imagined by Steven Spielberg, much less the Jurassic period. The museum pays homage to the prehistory of museums and yet I felt confounded by the museum precisely because I was in the midst of a project on the history of modern museums and my professional sense of expertise was in jeopardy: even I couldn't tell immediately where the history ended and the imagination began. It is not impossible to separate fact from (arti)fact at the MJT, but the distinction is beside the point. The MJT represents one man's fascination with museums and history, made visual and palpable, and fans of the museum revel in its sleights of hand, its hints and hidden sources.

Numerous art exhibits and performances which "played" with history and historical consciousness were produced in the 1980s.¹⁴ David Wilson's museum is perhaps a superlative example of the ironic museum produced by such self-consciousness. Part of Wilson's collection now resides at the Karl-Ernst-Osthaus Museum in Hagen, Germany, where director Michael Fehr has oriented the museum of contemporary art towards the theme of historical consciousness, particularly regarding the recent history of Germany.¹⁵

13. The word may be related to "obliscence," which is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "the fact of forgetting or state of having forgotten." The Sonnabend/Delani halls have been described in greater detail in Rugoff, "Beyond Belief"; Crane, "Curious Cabinets"; Biagioli, "Confabulating Jurassic Science." The exhibit and others may be visited at <http://www.mjt.org>.

14. Jean-Hubert Martin, "The Musée Sentimental of Daniel Spoerri" in Cooke and Wollen, *Visual Display*, 51–66, describes some of the forerunners of this movement, particularly those which addressed both the museum as institution and historical consciousness. See also *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine (Washington, D.C., 1991); Jon Elsner and Roger Cardinal, *The Cultures of Collecting* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995); *Museum/Culture*, ed. Daniel Sherman and Irit Rogoff (New York, 1995); *Geschichte sehen: Beiträge zur Ästhetik historischer Museen*, ed. Jörn Rüsen, Wolfgang Ernst, and Heinrich Theodor Grütter (Pfaffenweiler, 1988); *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays in Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle, 1983).

15. See Michael Fehr, "Text and Context: Developing a Museum by Reflecting its History," in Crane, *Museums and Memory*.

Art which comments on historical consciousness is never merely creative and fictional: such art deliberately references a body of knowledge and experience shared by historically conscious viewers. Never quite completely separate from historical scholarship despite its lack of scholarly apparatus, historically conscious art is in fact competent for a performance of history in the museum, thus further complicating the interactions between the personal and the public, the historical and the historically conscious, the excess of memory and the experience of the museum.

The Karl-Ernst-Osthaus Museum collection also includes a work by Hamburg artist Sigrid Sigurdsson entitled “Vor der Stille: ein kollektives Gedächtnis” (Before the Silence: A Collective Memory).¹⁶ Sigurdsson created an archive which is installed as floor-to-ceiling shelves around an entire room, filled with oversize, handmade bound books which resemble the archival materials found in German state archives, and clear glass containers which hold other artifacts. Her artifacts are found objects, recovered from trashbins and attics: photographs, letters, labels, and military memorabilia from World War II; odd bits of household materials and everyday objects, mostly dating from the 1920s-1950s and of German provenance. She filled both the bound books and glass cases with artifacts and her own drawings or plastic work in response to them.

The exhibit provoked hostile criticism from the Hagen public not so much for its emphasis on historical consciousness, or its invention of a format for the detritus of the past, as for choosing to foreground the memory of a particular historical era, namely the Third Reich. The exhibit opened in 1989, and rather than celebrating the present and the potential for German unification, it apparently reopened old wounds never completely healed and losses never mourned. Public response in the press and in the guestbooks of the museum, while often supportive, questioned the artist’s choice of topics; anonymous postcards accused her of “dredging up the past” and indeed of being a “Jewish pig” for bringing up associated memories of the Holocaust.

The exhibit does not overtly address either the Holocaust or the Nazi regime; no accompanying narratives, no labels on the walls, direct the visitors’ interpretations or provide a historical guideline. Instead, visitors select bound books or boxes from the shelves and look at them as they choose. Some books and boxes, open on the tables placed for reading at the center of the room, are most readily available, but by leaving the visitors the choice of objects, the artist ensured that each visitor’s experience must be as different from another’s as their memories would be. Equally, any visitor could make multiple visits and never visit the same exhibit in exactly the same way twice—which

16. Sigrid Sigurdsson: *Vor der Stille. Ein kollektives Gedächtnis*, ed. Michael Fehr and Barbara Schnellewald (Cologne, 1995). See also Monika Wagner, “Sigrid Sigurdsson und Anselm Kiefer: Das Gedächtnis des Materiells” and Stefan Grohe, “Erinnern als Handlung” in *Gedächtnisbilder: Vergessen und Erinnern in der Gegenwartskunst*, ed. Kai-Uwe Hemken (Leipzig, 1996), 126–134; 156–168. Sigurdsson’s exhibit and others may be viewed virtually at <http://www.hagen.de/KEOM/welcome.html>.

simply highlighted a fact Heraclitus stated long ago, that no one ever duplicates an experience exactly—that time, memory, and change intervene to produce different people at different moments in the same individual's life. Thus Sigurdsson made explicit the way that museum experiences build over time to create expectations and memories in visitors. Additionally, Sigurdsson illustrated some pages in the “visitors’ books” but left others to be filled by exhibit visitors or schoolchildren, whose teachers received the books and were instructed to let the children fill them as they pleased.

These kinds of meditations on history lead to mediations in history, requiring the audience to draw on their own memories and knowledge and affirming what they bring with them to the exhibit. Rather than providing them with new information or reinterpreting the past, and rather than insisting on one interpretation or directing response towards feelings of guilt or culpability, Sigurdsson opens a door and invites visitors to furnish the archive with their memories, whether good or bad, whether from that time or about that time. The controversy about this exhibit arose because all of its artifactual references inexorably led the viewer to one particular past and forced the memory-aspects of museum work to become active and participatory. The exhibit called upon personal historical memory—but the audience was hesitant to focus their memories on an era whose history is so emotionally and politically charged.

As is by now well-known, the Germans have a particular term for this failure to come to terms with the Nazi past, “*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.” The word functions as a shorthand for speaking about repression. The term has also come to express the complications of collective memory at local historical sites such as Buchenwald, where descendants and interested parties compete for commemoration of the victims of multiple traumatic events of the twentieth century.¹⁷ The discourse on memory is particularly fraught in Germany, and apparent in the public media forums which track the *Zeitgeist* of the recombined German states. The slogan of 1990, “bringing together what belongs together,” belies the vast differences of experience and memory which people of the same generations bring to the new state from east and west. Sigurdsson’s work might represent one way to create a public forum for discussion of repression, national identity, and historical consciousness across the formerly divided Germanies. Given the historical importance of museums in Germany, from the “museum island” of Berlin to the collections of art in Dresden, Munich, and Nuremberg and the smaller historical museums around the country, could museums take advantage of their special status as mediators

17. See James Young, *The Texture of Memory and Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust* (Bloomington, Ind., 1988); *In Fitting Memory: The Art and Politics of Holocaust Memorials*, ed. Sybil Milton (Detroit, 1991); Sarah Farmer, “Symbols that Face Two Ways: Commemorating the Victims of Nazism and Stalinism at Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen,” *Representations* 49 (Winter 1995); Rudy Koshar, “Building Pasts: Historic Preservation and Identity in Twentieth Century Germany” and Claudia Koonz, “Between Memory and Oblivion: Concentration Camps in German Memory” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John Gillis (Princeton, 1994).

of historical consciousness to offer exhibits which might take the lead in dealing with the memory crisis?

In fact, two new historical museum projects had been underway prior to the fall of the Wall, both of them controversial. In Bonn, a "House of the History of the Federal Republic" had been founded in 1982, as a pet project of Chancellor Helmut Kohl. Discussion of another historical museum had begun in the 1970s, and in 1987 the German Historical Museum (DHM) was founded in West Berlin. Critics had questioned the necessity of history museums in the Federal Republic, fearing that such museums would be sources for resurgent nationalism. When "*Wir sind das Volk*" (we are the people), the rallying cry of the Leipzig demonstrations in the fall of 1989, was quickly transposed to a new key in 1990, "*Wir sind ein Volk*" (we are one people), in a rhetorical attempt to deny the separations that remained after the wall came down as well as opening up the possibility of a "safe" new nationalism, the two museums followed suit. The Bonn museum quickly adapted itself to the new political reality and made arrangements for exhibits on the history of the German Democratic Republic to be presented in tandem with that of the Federal Republic, culminating in reunification; it opened in 1994. The DHM, still in the planning stages when the Wall fell, changed its venue from the western bank of the Spree River and decommissioned an elaborate museum plan from architect Aldo Rossi in favor of annexing an existing historical building in the old center of the city, the former arsenal on Unter den Linden in east Berlin. This arsenal, not coincidentally, had housed the Museum of German History since 1967, and many critics of the earlier DHM project had argued that it was intended simply as an ideological counter to the East Berlin museum.¹⁸ The former East German museum's exhibits featured narrative texts which changed according to the party's needs over the years and was ideologically offensive to the west, but its artifacts effectively represented an emphasis on social history. Exchanging titles with the new DHM, the old museum's exhibits were dismantled (although some effort was made to document the old exhibits and to preserve their contents), and a series of new floating historical exhibits was installed, beginning with a giant retrospective on the career of Otto von Bismarck.

Historical museums were now "safer" for Germany, but it remains to be seen whether the discourse on historical consciousness and memory will become any more open and fruitful. The Cold War, now enclosed in chronological brackets, presented a more recent past in need of reconciliation and museum representa-

18. On the Museum of German History, see H. Glenn Penny, "The Museum für Deutsche Geschichte and German National Identity," *Central European History* 28 (1995), 343-372. On the DHM, see Charles Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust and German National Identity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 121-159; *Deutsches Historisches Museum: Ideen—Kontroversen—Perspektiven*, ed. Christof Stöckl (Frankfurt am Main/Berlin, 1988); Hartmut Boockmann, *Geschichte im Museum? Zu den Problemen und Aufgaben eines Deutschen Historischen Museums* (Munich, 1987); Ekkehard Mai, *Expositionen* (Munich, 1986), 89-90. See also the museum's web site: <http://www.dhm.de/>.

tion. Within days if not minutes of the fall of the Berlin Wall, I remember from my time there in 1990, comments began to emerge about the former East Germany being perceived as a virtual museum of itself and of the West German 1950s (since East Germany seemed to many idealizing West Germans to have remained at the economic, social, and moral level of those *Heimat*-film days). This sort of wayward nostalgia among West Germans was met by a wariness on the part of East Germans, as the disappearing wall eliminated the last excuses for a lack of communication between two peoples who had learned very different lessons about the Third Reich. Wolfgang Ernst suggests that the now-absent Wall “represents both the lessons of history and the emptiness of history simultaneously” (“*Geschichtslehre und -leere*”); the simultaneous paucity and superfluity of historical consciousness that had been figured in the Berlin Wall now constituted an empty space which needed to be filled with real historical work.¹⁹ As the former East German history exhibits were removed and temporary DHM exhibits moved into the Arsenal building, the emptiness of history stood in bold contradiction to the lived experience of people immediately outside. Regardless of whether visitors to the former Museum of German History had received its message skeptically or enthusiastically, the terms of their museum experience had been erased. From an American perspective, for those who had been to the museum and would come again, it was as if an institution such as the Smithsonian had closed down over the Christmas holidays and reopened with an entirely new collection, exhibitions, and narrative tags. The memories of the old exhibits lingered, but one felt that they were to be discarded as unworthy of the new institution, which was in fact new to both east and west and therefore stood an optimistic chance of successfully redirecting memory discourse.

If critics had questioned the need for an institution representing national identity prior to the opening of the DHM, some now saw an opportunity to integrate east and west through a common history and a joint effort at coming to terms with the past. The DHM commissioned photographs of eastern Germans by the west German photographer Stefan Moses, who created an exhibit of his work featuring eastern Germans posed simply against bare backdrops in their everyday work clothes and bearing tokens of their work—cooks with food, intellectuals with horn-rimmed glasses. In Barbara Ann Naddeo’s study of public response recorded in the guestbooks of this transitional exhibition, she notes that none of the visitors commented on what was missing from the museum, focusing instead on the new exhibit and its typological portraits.²⁰ Eastern Germans tended to react more favorably than westerners; indeed, where westerners saw the photographs as demeaning or stereotypical, the

19. Wolfgang Ernst, “Keine Frage: Musealisierung der DDR” in *Musealisierung der DDR? 40 Jahre als kulturhistorische Herausforderung*, ed. Ernst and Katharina Flügl (Leipzig, 1992), 13.

20. Barbara Ann Naddeo, “If Angelus Novus were a Geo-photographer: The Reception of ‘Abschied und Anfang’—The German Historical Museum’s Inaugural Exhibition in the Zeughaus Berlin,” *Radical History Review* 60 (1994), 88–131.

easterners embraced the stereotypes or thought that the “feel” was right. One visitor wrote, “The chaos is depleted; it was the most wonderful time.”²¹ Memory work here could quickly and too easily be dismissed as mere nostalgia. Historians may be skeptical of this too-easy transition from past to present, but it was precisely in response to the sudden emptying of east German history from the museum and its replacement with images of the rememberers as they might remember themselves, which allowed a recognition of the presence of their own memories to slip into place, with both its positive and negative influences.

Theodor Adorno wrote, “The German word ‘museal’ has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying.”²² An inverted sense of the term “museal” has come into use recently, referring now to a process in which the awareness of the museum’s functions is internalized. The “*musealisierung*” or museumification of both Germanies and the new Federal Republic took place not only in state-sponsored institutions but in the minds of individuals for whom museums were a naturalized site for memory cues and memory work.²³ Metaphorically, the museal process occurred in the minds of individuals who continued to visit new museums, but scripted their own memory narratives to go along with those of national identity. This kind of understanding of history through memory—that is, through an excess of memory that appears to be counter-historical and distorted by the lens of personal interest—is precisely what causes historians so much anxiety.

At stake, then, in the current politically charged arena of museums and memory is distortion: distortion of “the past,” distortion of the museum experience, memory distortions, and the negative charge associated with “distortion” in cultural discourse on memory and identity. To return to Daniel Schachter’s presentation of memory as distortion process, we can suggest now that the understanding of history through memory represents the combined influences of personal experience and education in a mirroring activity of *musealisierung*. The museum-site, located in the mind rather than in geographical space, reproduces the memory experiences by working through expectations for museums, memories, knowledge, and experience. We may tend to assume that distortion in the museum must refer to misappropriated facts or ideologized interpretations. I am looking instead at the distortion process of *musealisierung* as a means of achieving a constructive, interactive museal experience even in the face of explicit resistance and controversy.

If this sounds too abstract to be either practical or serviceable to historians in rethinking the relationship between memory and history via museums,

21. *Ibid.*, 105.

22. Theodor Adorno, “The Valéry Proust Museum,” in his *Prisms* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 173.

23. See Ernst and Flügel, *Musealisierung der DDR?; Zeitphänomenon Musealisierung*, ed. Wolfgang Zacharias (Essen, 1990); Gottfried Korff, “Musealisierung Total?” in *Historische Fasziination: Geschichtskultur heute*, ed. Klaus Füssmann et al. (Cologne/Weimar/Vienna, 1994); Andreas Huyssen, “Escape from Amnesia” in his *Twilight Memories* (New York, 1995), 13–36.

consideration of the battles over the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum and the foundation of the Holocaust Memorial Museum may yet shed light on the complex of museum/distortion/memory. America's own experience with coming to terms with the past of World War II in the debates over the Enola Gay exhibit was every bit as stunning (and unsuccessful) for those involved as it has been for Germans.

If Germany is a country fraught by an inability to come to terms with the past, it is because the past in question, the one referenced by Sigrid Sigurdsson, is the era of World War II, the Third Reich, and the Holocaust. This single largest event-complex/complex event in the living memory of our eldest generations, of world-shaping significance, continues to figure most prominently in public memory work. Public interest in popular and scholarly work on this era remains high; perhaps more so in regard to this historical topic than any other, a risk of offense to public sensibilities is ever present. It should have come as no surprise that Daniel Goldhagen's recent book *Hitler's Willing Executioners* became a bestseller. No one who has studied German history in this country is unfamiliar with the charge that the Germans are an exceptionally anti-Semitic people and natural perpetrators of the Holocaust, however much we may want to explain our own more nuanced approaches to the issue, because that argument appears to be what many Americans think anyway; what was unusual was to hear it from an academic who professed to have no "personal" relationship to the subject. Historians have bemoaned the fact that the public still wants to hear what it wants to hear, and not what historians could tell it. Historians' dislike of Goldhagen's book contrasted sharply with public perceptions, and the resultant dichotomy epitomized the difficulties historians face when treating subjects so close to the personal memories of the public. Was Goldhagen's message in fact closer to popular and personal memory than what historians had concluded based on decades of ever more complex research?

Given public sensitivities to representations of World War II, museum exhibits about this period carry an extraordinary burden of responsibility. The aborted Enola Gay exhibit at the National Air and Space Museum created controversy by confounding memory as well as expectations without ever coming to fruition in anything like its proposed form.²⁴ The public controversy in 1993–1994, conducted through media and government forums, touched raw nerves as the nation approached the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II. Veterans became incensed, congresspeople demanded revisions, historians defended their right to interpret the past, and the result was that curators pro-

24. The plight of the exhibit and the extent of the controversy are amply documented. See the special issue of the *Journal of American History* (December, 1995); *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past*, ed. Edward Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt (New York, 1996); Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia, 1996); "Remembering the Bomb: The 50th Anniversary in the United States and Japan," special issue of the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 27:2 (1995) also includes the best sampling of editorial cartoons on the subject.

duced an exhibit all but devoid of content, prompting cartoonist Dan Wasserman's pithy depiction of a museum spokesman standing in an empty hall, announcing that "we're returning to our original mission as the Air and Space Museum." At stake was an issue of national pride: did the Enola Gay, a B-29 bomber, represent the triumph of technology over tyranny and the end of a brutal war? Or did this airplane signify the beginning of the nuclear age, a new use of technology for mass destruction and the obliteration of a civilian population? Further: was the crew of the plane somehow being put on trial by the scripted presentation in the National Air and Space Museum? Were individuals being held accountable not only for the decisions of their superiors, but for the "politically correct" historical interpretations developed without their knowledge? Regardless of the moral issues surrounding "acting under orders," is it possible to separate the actions of soldiers under orders from the policies of governments at war in displaying the historical objects which necessarily reference both these things at once? Veterans and their representatives were offended by these implications, speaking as survivors and eyewitnesses. Personal historical memory met institutional memory head on, and the collision was catastrophic.

The distortion perceived by opponents of the exhibit thwarted their historical memories of victory and expectations for a heroic, commemorative story line about the victorious American forces in the Second World War. Americans, wrote military historian Richard Kohn, were used to experiencing the Smithsonian as a "celebratory institution."²⁵ Proponents of the exhibit were deliberately challenging that norm, and they in turn felt thwarted by public resistance to education: they perceived a distortion of history in the persistence of public misinformation.

Not coincidentally, another museum on the Mall had been facing the same issues and was struggling with decisions which pitted commemoration against education and interpretation: the newly opened Holocaust Memorial Museum.²⁶ Both museums worked with representatives of concerned public groups in shaping their exhibitions, and both faced serious difficulties in aligning or co-presenting survivor testimonies and memories along with historical interpretations. As Sybil Milton noted in regard to Holocaust memorials in general, there is "a universal willingness to commemorate suffering experienced rather than suffering caused."²⁷ Historians and curators of the Holocaust Memorial Museum were concerned about limiting the amount of space dedicated to Nazi memorabilia and the historical context of the Third Reich (evidence of "suffering caused"), because of its dangerous allure and because of their

25. Richard Kohn, "History and the Culture Wars: The Case of the Smithsonian Institution's Enola Gay Exhibit," *Journal of American History* 82 (1995), 1038.

26. See Edward Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York, 1995). Linenthal was a member of the advisory councils for both museums, and his commentaries on the coincidence and similarity of the issues facing the museums in 1993 appear in this book as well as his article, "Anatomy of a Controversy" in *History Wars*, 9–62.

27. Quoted in Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 199.

preference for honoring the dead and survivors ("suffering experienced"). The original Enola Gay exhibit, with its images of Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombing victims and artifacts from "ground zero," would have transgressed the bounds of acceptable American memory by emphasizing "suffering caused." This suffering is not what the crew of the Enola Gay saw, and it is therefore not part of the excess of memory held by these historical actors or by the generations that subsequently heard about them. The feelings of other visitors, whose personal experience of World War II might be limited to popular memory and some historical instruction, had to be respected as well. Exhibit opponents feared that the Enola Gay exhibit "could provoke feelings of guilt and shame among American visitors, including veterans" for suffering caused not only by the bombing of Hiroshima but by the nuclear age and Cold War in general.²⁸

Historians and curators at both museums had paid attention to public opinion by actively consulting, from the beginning of the process, with survivors, veterans, and succeeding generations who wanted to pay tribute to them. In addition, survivors and veterans were included among the historians and curators: Martin Harwit of the National Air and Space Museum, for example, had both lost family in the Holocaust and participated in atomic testing in the South Pacific; the advisory council of the Holocaust Memorial Museum included several survivors of the Holocaust. Regardless of personal experience, however, Enola Gay exhibit organizers tended to discount the emotional validity attached to survivors' and veterans' beliefs. As Preble Stolz wrote in a review of the Enola Gay exhibit development process, "It is probably asking too much of people who have thought for fifty years that they owed their life to President Truman's decision to drop the bomb to reflect objectively about whether his decision was morally justified. At its core that asks people to consider the possibility that their life was not worth living."²⁹ Historical reevaluation (which is not what senators refer to when they denounce "revisionism"³⁰) affects not only what later generations think they know about the past, it also affects the historical actors themselves, when contemporary history is at stake. Historians may hope that the effect is always one of positive, beneficial education, but as we see here, personal memory may reject historical information. Who wants to tell Holocaust survivors that their memories are "wrong"?

Emotional aspects of memory played another important role in both museums as each made decisions about the types of artifacts of atrocity that should be exhibited. The National Air and Space Museum had been seen primarily as a display site purely for technology, yet in 1990 its V-2 rocket exhibit had included, for the first time, a picture of the body of a rocket

28. Kohn, "History and the Culture Wars," 1046.

29. Quoted in Linenthal, *History Wars*, 39.

30. Senate Resolution 257, Sept. 19, 1994 includes the following: "Whereas the current script for the National Air and Space Museum's exhibit on the Enola Gay is revisionist and offensive to World War II veterans." The entire text is reproduced in the Documents section of *Journal of American History* (December 1995), 1136.

victim.³¹ Holocaust Memorial Museum curators faced an emotional decision regarding the display of human hair from Auschwitz, and worried that visitors would avoid a museum on the Mall which appeared to offer a “house of horrors,” or that visitors would come for the wrong, voyeuristic reasons.³²

Controversy about the appropriateness of a Holocaust museum on the Mall also emerged from fears that the American public would be perceived to be somehow responsible for not having intervened to prevent the destruction of the European Jews.³³ The museum had to decide how to present the historiographical issue of whether strategic bombing could have been used to interfere with the destruction process—while further down the Mall, a strategic bomber’s effectiveness would be all too clearly on view. The issue of American culpability in both cases would play a part in any historically responsible exhibit, and yet the suggestion of moral fault-finding would be an intolerable accusation to an American public which perceived itself to be “the good guys.” Curators at both museums had to be concerned with how a postwar American audience should experience an exhibit which would assault their expectations and memories regarding the history they had learned: would the images at either museum constitute a “physical experience” of horror for viewers?³⁴ How visceral did such an exhibit need to be, before viewers could comprehend genocide? As Elie Wiesel put it, the experience could not possibly be visceral enough, and yet it could have a drastic effect on viewers: “I want those people who go there to come out 2,000 years old.”³⁵

Only a personal, physical, yet distanced experience of the horrors of genocide and atomic bombing could constructively distort the excess personal historical memory carried by postwar generations. Having had no personal experience of either nuclear bombs or the Holocaust, such viewers still had historical knowledge and expectations built into an excess of memory which would be difficult to dislodge without the supplement of a personally meaningful, perhaps visceral experience. Thus the Holocaust Memorial Museum, by making choices regarding the degree rather than the kind of horror which would be exhibited, succeeded in creating a learning site of memory, while the Enola Gay exhibit was purged of horrors to such an extent that the final exhibit contained only a partial fuselage of the plane and minimal information about the crew.

The perspective of veterans was given unique precedence at the Holocaust Memorial Museum: visitors begin by viewing photographs from the liberation of the camps and hear the words of American soldiers who were aghast at the immensity of what they faced, a technique which has the effect of situating

31. Linenthal, *History Wars*, 24.

32. See Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 158ff; 211ff.

33. See *Ibid.*, 63–64.

34. Linenthal argues that the commission for the Holocaust Museum saw itself as a “kind of public health worker” conducting therapy through such contained horrific experiences; *Preserving Memory*, 112.

35. Quoted in Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 122.

viewers among the “good guys” and among those striving to make sense of the historical horror.

The Holocaust Memorial Museum also apparently succeeded in bringing historians’ debates to the public by actively depicting the relationship between survivor testimony and historical analysis. Although both the Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Air and Space Museum had attempted to defer to veterans and survivors wherever possible, the Holocaust Memorial Museum was able to retain a representation of historical analysis which was almost completely discarded from the Enola Gay exhibit.³⁶ Horror devoid of voyeurism is a powerful teaching tool which draws on personal experience and creates memory; insistence on either superior historical knowledge or undistorted personal memory, each to the exclusion of the other, is not.

What the Enola Gay controversy exposed were the scars of memory which historical interpretation and education have not helped to heal. It exposed the gap between public or collective memory, shaped by personal experience and exposure to interpretation over a period of some fifty years, and changing historical scholarship. It exposed scholars’ and museum professionals’ naive disregard for public perceptions of the nature of history and historical scholarship, despite what historians correctly perceived as unfair characterization of their work by journalists who repeated inaccurate information about the exhibit.³⁷ While those involved in historical scholarship and museums may continually hope to educate the public about the past, they may have neglected to demonstrate to the public how they go about this project. Air Force specialists, brought in to review the Enola Gay script at the height of the controversy, noted that “it ‘could lead the viewing public to conclude that the decision to drop the A-Bomb was questionable (perhaps unjustified?) rather than debatable (still open to question).’”³⁸ If so, the script failed to present historians’ real sensitivity to multiple interpretations and the process of historical revision, and public disapprobation was appropriate.

Historians have yet to make their most abstract and theoretical work accessible to a general public. The metahistorical approaches of Hayden White or Jörn Rüsen are not inappropriate ways to present history to the public, particularly with a recognition of what Rüsen calls the “intersubjectivity” of historical memory and public participation in the construction of collective memory; but how can we present such notions to a public which expects to learn “facts” about history? In other words, how can historians share ideas about historical consciousness with similarly interested people, rather than “educate the public” about history? This, it seems to me, is what the historian of everyday life, Lutz Niethammer, meant when he suggested that the challenge facing historians (and by implication, anyone connected with museums) today consists in asking “what kind of service historians, or people with an

36. See *Ibid.*, 127.

37. See Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History*, 278ff.; 297ff. See also Linenthal, *History Wars*, 50.

38. Quoted in Linenthal, *History Wars*, 43.

education in history, can perform to support the subjectivity of individuals in their historical perception of themselves[?]" (quoted in the epigraph at the beginning of this essay).

Even where museums or educators actively depict the process of historical interpretation, they may have discounted active public resistance to this operation. That certain members of the press and the American government chose to denounce the Enola Gay exhibit based on flawed information and inaccurate reporting, receiving considerable support in doing so, only demonstrates the mistrust with which academics are regarded in this era of "culture wars." But this is not only media hype. The sad success of the Enola Gay exhibit was that it brought this public resistance to historians to the foreground of debate, and demonstrated that while historical scholarship is dedicated to the production of knowledge for a larger public, publics continue to harbor and develop their own collective memories which justifiably resist historical re-interpretation and which form an active component of public life. The unfortunate lesson of the Enola Gay controversy was just how little publics know about what historians "really do" despite what they may have learned from historical sources, and just how little-used historians are to having to defend their interpretations before non-academic publics.

Before historians complain about the distortions "out there" among the public, we need to articulate the distortion process that is memory in ways accessible to individuals who have a personal, rather than a professional, interest in history. Historically conscious individuals may turn out to be quite interested in the study of historical consciousness, but it will take time and patience on the part of historians and a willingness to engage personal memories in the production of history.

Museums are flexible mirrors whose convex potential for multiple interpretations and participation (that is, by those who have either kind of personal historical consciousness: as veterans and survivors, or as historians) will continue to make them appropriate venues for active memory work, either "on site" or in the minds of those whose historical consciousness has been activated, nourished, challenged, and revived.

Department of History
University of Arizona