THE PAST WITHIN US: MEDIA, MEMORY, HISTORY

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:o Hiroshi and Patrick; and to Hokari Minoru, for some particularly perceptive comments and suggestions, and for always daring to ask the :eally *big* questions about history. Even though I can't share this final version with you, I still want to say: Mino, this one's for you.

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The Past is Not Dead

The Independence Hall of Korea, a massive edifice celebrating the triumph of nationhood, stands at the foot of a forested mountain some two hours drive south of Seoul. In front, a white marble monument to the sufferings and achievements of the Korean people soars skyward in the shape of two extended wings. Behind, a military radar station perched on top of the mountain provides a sharp reminder of the realities of nationhood in this still-divided land. Inside the cool cavernous museum, an array of national treasures (some real, some reproduced) unfolds before the eyes of the visitor. A reproduction of a wall-painting from seventh-century Samarkand depicts the arrival of travellers from the Kingdom of Silla in the south of the Korean peninsula, reminding viewers of the Silk Route connections which linked the ancient Korean kingdoms to the wider world. An array of beautiful celadon china recalls the country's long artistic and technological heritage.

But the Independence Hall, like most museums today, also utilizes more modern artistic and technological skills to bring the past to life. Huge wall-paintings and dioramas filled with waxwork figures depict

the struggle of Korean patriots against Japanese colonialism. Vivid black-and-white photographs and reproductions of old newspapers record events like the uprising of March 1, 1919, which was fiercely suppressed by the Japanese authorities. The younger visitors to the museum queue with goggle-eyed curiosity to gaze at waxworks of the colonial period prisons where nationalists were tortured and killed – the grim scenes behind the keyholes enhanced by the recorded sounds of unearthly screams. Video monitors show grainy clips from films depicting the abduction of young women who were forced to satisfy the sexual demands of the Japanese military, and young men charging remorselessly to their deaths on the battlefields of the Korean War, while a 'Circle Vision Theatre' surrounds the viewer with more hopeful images from high-growth years of the late twentieth century and the 1988 Olympic Games. The Independence Hall also maintains a sophisticated web site in Korean, Chinese, Japanese and English, complete with 'cybergalleries', which give virtual visitors the illusion that they are walking through the museum room by room (http://www.independence.or.kr/).

The Crisis of History

Our visions of history are drawn from diverse sources: not just from the narratives of history books but also from photographs and historical novels, from newsreel footage, comic books and, increasingly, from electronic media like the Internet. Out of this kaleidoscopic mass of fragments we make and remake patterns of understanding which explain the origins and nature of the world in which we live. And doing this, we define and redefine the place that we occupy in that world. Often, in fact, it is the snippets of vision and sound – seconds of newsreel, stark caricatured faces – that continue to frame our picture of the past even when the details of the accompanying narratives have

been forgotten. This book seeks to explore some of these varied encounters with history, and to reflect on the ways in which different media influence our understanding of the past. In writing it, I am impelled by the sense of a crisis in our relationship with the past – a crisis of history.

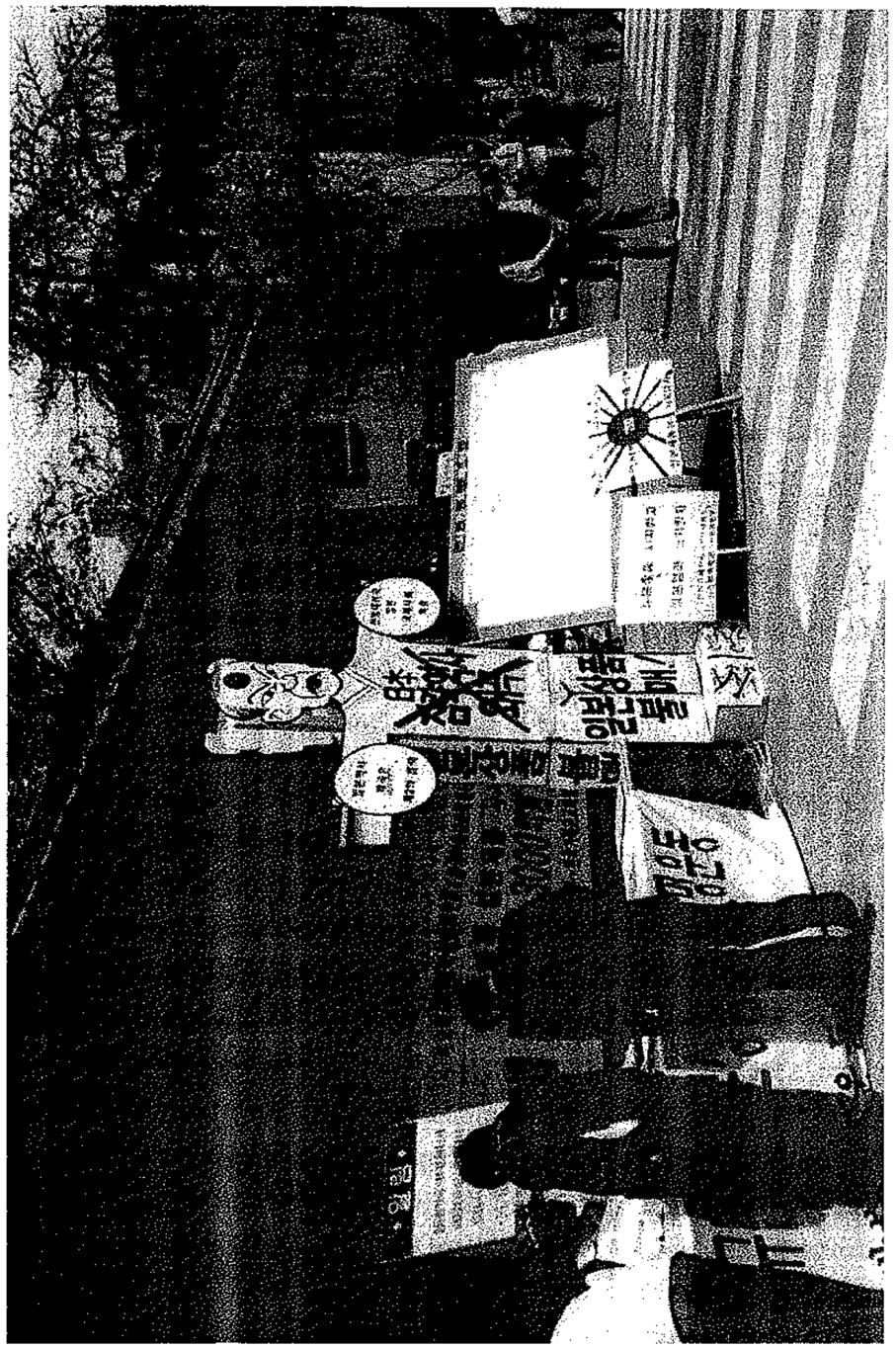
This crisis expresses itself in a paradox. On the one hand, our age is one of immediacy and constant change. New knowledge has economic value, while old knowledge sinks unvalued into the depths of the 'public domain'. Education increasingly stresses the relevance of contemporary topics and practical skills – assets which students (it is believed) will be able to convert into instant earning power. In this context, it is not surprising that history is in decline in the curricula of many countries. This loss of historical consciousness is the theme of repeated laments. More than three decades ago, in his essay the 'The Death of the Past', J. H. Plumb was already suggesting that 'the strength of the past in all aspects of life is far, far weaker than it was a generation ago; indeed, few societies have ever had a past in such galloping dissolution as this' (Lowenthal 1985, 364). More recently, David Marc's *The Bonfire of the Humanities* has specifically blamed the spread of mass media like television for contemporary society's 'stunning problems of shrinking attention span and lack of historical consciousness' (Marc 1995, 49).

But the past refuses to go away. Indeed, in recent years there have been moments when historical consciousness has seemed to well up like magma from between the shifting tectonic plates of an unstable world order, threatening to overwhelm us. Again and again we have been forced to confront the fact that (as William Faulkner once put it) 'the past is not dead; it isn't even past'.

Visiting the Independence Hall of Korea in April 2001, for example, I found myself thinking rather wryly about laments for the passing of the past. South Korea and Japan were at that point embroiled in a diplomatic incident which had just prompted the recall of the Korean ambassador

from Tokyo. At several prominent points on the streets of Seoul, protestors had set up stalls with banners calling for a boycott of Japanese goods (Picture 1.1). The negative turn in relations between Japan and South Korea was a serious political embarrassment for President Kim Dae-Jung, whose achievements included an energetic and (until then) largely successful policy of improving relations with Japan. And all of this political and diplomatic turmoil was generated, not by the usual causes – trade friction, military concerns, border disputes and so on – but by a single history textbook, which the Japanese government had just approved for use in junior high schools. The Chinese and Korean governments and various protest groups argued that the text grossly distorted East Asian history, and in particular whitewashed the history of Japanese expansionism and colonialism in the region. In the weeks that followed, the escalating dispute was to lead to the temporary freezing of trade liberalization measures between Japan and South Korea, as well as to an incident in which a group of incensed Koreans publicly cut off their own fingers with meat cleavers as a gesture of protest.

East Asia's 'textbook wars' are just one instance of the way in which the spectre of history seems more than ever to intrude on public life, as questions of commemoration, historical responsibility and history education become focuses of impassioned national and international controversies. Historian Henry Reynolds poses the rhetorical question, 'Was there ever a time in the past when history was so central to the political debate, when Clio was consulted so readily?' (Reynolds 2000, 3). Reynolds is referring particularly to Australia, where political leaders increasingly mobilize history to support contending visions of the national identity, and where the question of responsibility for injustices inflicted on the Aboriginal community remains a sensitive political issue. But elsewhere too questions of commemoration, apology and historical responsibility have been just as politically salient. In recent years Czech and German governments have apologized to one another for prewar



and wartime misdeeds; the Norwegian King has apologized for wrongs done to the nation's minority Saami population; the Queen of England has signed a statement of regret to New Zealand's Maoris for their dispossession by the British; US Secretary of State Colin Powell's return to Vietnam, where he once served as a military officer, revived debate over US responsibility for events like the My Lai massacre; and some American politicians and activists have taken up the cause of the descendants of the victims of the Atlantic slave trade to demand reparations.

The issue is not simply one of judging the 'guilt of nations' for past wrongs (see Barkan 2000). History is also becoming a matter of public debate in other ways. In Southeast Asia, the start of the twenty-first century has seen a boom in the popularity of movies depicting formative moments in national history – particularly those events that involved conflicts with neighbouring countries. Thai historian Charnwit Kasetsiri points to the curious dichotomy between, on the one hand, the lack of interest in history within the formal curriculum and, on the other, mass public enthusiasm for these popular representations of historical consciousness.

The crisis of history, then, is not a simple matter of amnesia. Rather, it reflects a profound dilemma: in an age of global mobility and multiple, rapidly changing media, how do we pass on our knowledge of the past from one generation to the next? How do we relate our lives in the present to the events of the past? Which bits of the past do we claim as our own, and in what sense do they become our property? My concern with these questions has been stimulated by involvement in the history textbook debate in East Asia. Like disputes over apology and historical revisionism in other parts of the world, the Japanese textbook controversy highlights key problems of the intergenerational communication of historical knowledge, and the closely associated problems of historical responsibility. Here, I want to use some brief comments on

this particular controversy as a point of departure for entering into a discussion of the more general crisis of history, and of the challenges that it creates for contemporary historians worldwide.

The 'Textbook Wars' and the Historiography of Oblivion

In Japan as elsewhere, the so-called age of globalization has been a time of fluidity, uncertainty and insecurity. Although the Cold War has lingered on in East Asia longer than anywhere else, the region is deeply affected by shifts in the global order. At a time of growing cross-border flows of finance and ideas, Japan has experienced a stagnating economy and a widespread sense of social malaise. For some sections of Japanese society, the response to such insecurities (replicated in many other parts of the world) has been to retreat behind the barricades of nationalist rhetoric – an effort to ward off the forces of global change by shoring up imperilled imagined communities. Interpretations of the past become a central feature of these strategies because, as Eric Hobsbawm once trenchantly put it, 'History is the raw material of nationalistic or ethnic or fundamentalist ideologies, as poppies are the raw material of heroin addiction' (Hobsbawm 1997, 5).

The history textbook dispute in East Asia is a vivid example of this process. Disputes between Japan and its neighbours over the teaching of history have surfaced intermittently over the past couple of decades, but the most recent and impassioned dispute originated in 1996, when a group of nationalist Japanese academics and others formed an association called the Society for History Textbook Reform [*Atarashii Rekishi Kyôkasho o Tsukuru Kai*]. The aim of the association was to combat the 'masochistic' view of Japan's past which, they believed, had been imposed on Japanese schoolchildren ever since the Pacific War (Ienaga 2001; McCormack 2000; Nozaki and Inokuchi 2000). The Society expressed particular outrage at the fact that junior high school

textbooks in Japan now included references (albeit very brief ones) to the so-called 'comfort women' issue: the institutionalized rape and other sexual abuses of women (many of them from Korea and China) in 'comfort stations' established to serve the Japanese military during the war. A large part of their campaign has been devoted to denying that the 'comfort women' were victims of a deliberate military policy of institutionalized sexual exploitation, and to minimizing the significance of other instances of aggression such as the 1937 Nanjing Massacre, in which large numbers of Chinese civilians and prisoners of war were killed by Japanese forces.

In this sense, the work of the Society can been likened to the writings of European Holocaust revisionists such as Robert Faurisson and David Irving, and to the work of writers like Keith Windschuttle, who seeks to deny the reality of extensive massacres of Aborigines by European colonizers (Faurisson and Barnes 1985; Irving 1990; Windschuttle 2000). It is, in other words, part of a late twentieth-century 'historiography of oblivion', whose purpose is not simply to 'revise' understandings of the past, but specifically to *obliterate* the memory of certain events from public consciousness.

The Society for History Textbook Reform drew on the contributions of several prominent members to produce a series of publications expounding its view of the Japanese past and present: publications ranging from cartoons by comic-book writer Kobayashi Yoshinori (whose work is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5) to a stunningly turgid 774-page *History of the Nation's People* by Nietzsche scholar Nishio Kanji (Nishio et al. 1999). Then in 2001 the Society made its first bid for a direct role in the Japanese school curriculum by launching two junior high school texts: one on history and one on civics.

Textbooks in Japan are chosen by local education committees from a relatively restricted list of works approved by the Ministry of Education. The texts prepared by the Society were approved only after the Ministry

had demanded numerous revisions, but their content still evoked an outcry from within Japan and abroad. In the case of their *New History Textbook*, which became the main focus of debate, controversy focused particularly on the inclusion (alongside more conventional historical material) of myths about the heroic deeds of early emperors, an emphasis on the unique glories of Japanese civilization, generally positive assessments of the impact of Japanese colonization on other parts of Asia, and the minimization of the oppressive aspects of Japan's prewar and wartime political regime (Nishio et al. 2001).

Within Japan the Society's textbooks prompted condemnation from many historians and other scholars. Nationwide campaigns to discourage education committees from adopting the texts were largely successful: in the end, less than 0.1 percent of Japanese junior high schools adopted the texts in 2001. However, the Society has since continued to campaign for their wider use, particularly in the rural regions of Japan. In a sense, then, the textbook affair highlights the continuing presence of a vigorous opposition to nationalist revisionism within Japanese society. But at the same time, the controversy revealed some underlying dilemmas facing those who – not only in Japan but also elsewhere – seek to resist and reverse the encroaching influence of historiographies of oblivion.

In Search of Historical Truth

Most of the intense criticism of the Society's history textbook, both within Japan and overseas, has focused on factual errors or omissions. The desire to point out the book's shortcomings was natural enough, but this strategy of criticism had some unintended consequences. Since the textbook covered a vast sweep of Japanese history, with blithe disregard for inconvenient facts, there were a very large number of points at which the authors' selection and presentation of events could

be questioned. In concentrating on particular errors and omissions, however, the energies of critics were often dissipated into a host of divergent channels, and debate readily fragmented into detailed disputes about particular events or documentary sources, rather than addressing underlying issues of historiography.

More fundamentally, critics of the Society for History Textbook Reform faced a philosophical dilemma shared with many others around the world who seek to combat, in Pierre Vidal-Naquet's words, 'the assassins of memory' (Vidal-Naquet 1993). As US-based historian Yang Daqing observes, history writing in Japan, China and Korea is still strongly influenced by positivist notions of scientifically verifiable 'historical facts'. In China, this approach draws on materialist conceptions of history, but also in part reflects a reaction to the ideological passions of the Maoist era, when the notion that 'theory precedes history' exercised a powerful sway over Chinese images of the past. In Japan too, the study of history has been influenced by notions of dialectical materialism, but in both Japan and Korea there is also a strong tradition of positivist history derived from nineteenth-century Rankean ideas (Yang 2002).

More recently, though, postmodern and poststructuralist concepts have had a growing influence on intellectual life in Japan and South Korea (and also to a lesser extent in China). Indeed, many of the most outspoken opponents of the new nationalist historiography in Japan have been deeply influenced by these ideas. They have read their Foucault, Derrida and subaltern studies. They are conscious of the fact that all narratives are constructed and contestable, and wary of the contests for power concealed within claims to universal scientific truth. The dilemma they thus face is this: how can one mount an effective critique of the Society for History Textbook Reform without reverting to a simple positivism which seeks to replace the Society's 'incorrect' narrative of the national past with an authoritative, but still dubious, 'correct' alternative?

This problem is accentuated by the fact that some (though not all) of the Society's members use a kind of ersatz postmodernism to add substance to their nationalist view of the past. Nishio Kanji, for example, observes that 'history is not science ... history is a world which is brought into being only by words. It is a world of human interpretations: an uncertain accumulation of human wisdom formed from the fluid substance of language, and inseparable from the hopes and fears and desires that we, in the present, feel towards the future' (Nishio 1999, 41; see also Sakamoto 1994). These reflections provide the basis for the proposal that each 'nation' or 'ethnic group' or 'cultural zone' (the three terms being used interchangeably in Nishio's work) has its own distinct form of historical consciousness. A meaningful exchange of historical ideas between Japan and other places (such as China or 'the West') is thus precluded, since Japan's understanding of history is, according to Nishio, based upon a unique national consciousness which is 'remarkably different in type from both the European and Chinese versions', and is characterized by an 'unconscious sense of continuity' with the past (Nishio 1999, 42).

This historical relativism is carried over into the *New History Textbook* (of which Nishio is the chief author). Here students are instructed that

> different people, different ethnic groups and different ages have entirely different ways of thinking and feeling. Thus we can see that it is difficult to define a certain fact as simply being real. George Washington was commander-in-chief at the time when the US won its independence from Britain in the War of Independence (1775–1783), and was the first US president. In America he is regarded as a great founder of the nation. However, to Britain, which was defeated in the war, and thus lost its American colony, he is not necessarily a great figure at all. Even today, some British history textbooks exclude

> Washington's name, or treat the independence forces as a rebel army. It is indeed perhaps obvious that history varies from one people to another. There is nothing really strange about the fact that there are as many histories as there are nations (Nishio et al. 2001, iii).

It is not difficult to demonstrate that Nishio's relativist view of the past, as well as being based on a fairly idiosyncratic reading of foreign textbooks, is also internally inconsistent. For example, while firmly admonishing students not to 'judge the past by the standards of the present', Nishio and his colleagues unhesitatingly use contemporary globalized aesthetic standards as a basis for asserting that various examples of early Japanese Buddhist art are 'on a par with the works of the great Italian sculptors Donatello and Michelangelo' (Nishio et al. 2001, 5). And, though he differentiates between Japan's unique unconscious historical identity and that of all other nations, Nishio evidently does not regard this national consciousness as equally shared by the entire Japanese population, since he proceeds to castigate all Japanese historians of 'the past half century or so' for being 'enmeshed in unbelievable superstitions and immured in ignorance and blindness' (Nishio 1999, 483).

Yet at the same time, this radical relativism does pose an intellectual and moral challenge to those who acknowledge the limitations of language, the constructed nature of narratives and the impossibility of a 'God's eye view' of the past. For if we are prepared to accept that all historical narratives are partial and contextual – that (to cite the powerful example used by Dipesh Chakrabarty) the account given by nineteenth-century Indian farmers who attributed their rebellion to the will of god is as much a valid historical narrative as the account given by a modern historian who attributes the same event to class conflict – how can we criticize the nationalist account of the Japanese past which, Nishio Kanji tells us, arises in his mind from its unconscious connectedness to his ethnic heritage (Chakrabarty 2000)?

As Eric Hobsbawm points out, the challenges of such relativism intensify as one approaches the large historical issues which still cast their shadow on our lives in the present: 'Few relativists have the full courage of their convictions, at least when it comes to deciding whether Hitler's Holocaust took place or not' (Hobsbawm 1997, viii). A relativist approach to atrocities such as the Holocaust (or to the Nanjing Massacre or the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki) seems grotesque for many reasons, not least of which are the material consequences of those deeds for the present. In other words, different narratives have different implications for the way in which we now take responsibility for addressing the legacies of past wrongs.

Analysing diverse narratives of the Holocaust, for example, Saul Friedländer observes that each narrative offers a distinct perspective on responsibility. The conventional 'liberal interpretation', which focuses on the political and ideological dimensions of the rise of Nazism, emphasizes the guilt of political leaders, while also to some degree acknowledging the responsibility of the mass of German bystanders who failed to resist the Nazis. Friedländer contrasts this to a 'structuralist' narrative, which 'puts a much greater stress on the continuity of social structures, rooted in nineteenth-century Imperial Germany, that offered the necessary breeding ground for Nazism in its rise and development, structures that, more often than not still exist within the [then] West German republic' (Friedländer 1988, 69). This approach at once broadens the social range of responsibility for the Holocaust, and in some respects makes the location of specific guilt more difficult to pin down. A third, 'symmetric' narrative focuses on parallels between the crimes of the Nazis and those of others, particularly the Soviet Union. This approach, exemplified by the work of writers like Andreas Hillgrüber, suggests a symmetry of responsibility between Germans and their enemies, while tending to emphasize a division within German society between a small group of 'evildoers' and the mass of ordinary

soldiers and civilians, who are depicted as victims rather than aggressors. Lastly, a fourth narrative (which Friedländer identifies with the writings of Ernst Nolte) presents Soviet atrocities as pre-dating and, in a sense, providing a model for Nazi atrocities, and thus seeks to shift the focus of responsibility away from the German nation altogether (Friedländer 1988; Nolte 1993a; Nolte 1993b; Hillgrüber 1993).

In the same way, the narratives of the Japanese past presented by the Society for History Textbook Reform are clearly intended to relieve a contemporary generation of Japanese from any sense of responsibility for pre-1945 colonialism and military expansion in Asia. They are in this sense diametrically opposed to the approach of historians like Yoshimi Yoshiaki, who uses careful archival research to document Japanese military and state involvement in crimes such as institutionalized rape (for example, Yoshimi 1995). They are also in stark contrast to the postcolonial narratives of scholars like Tomiyama Ichirô, Komagome Takeshi and Kang Sangjung, who, in different ways, explore both the complexities of Japanese colonialism and the structural and intellectual continuities linking prewar empire to the postwar Japanese state (Tomiyama 2002; Komagome 1998; Komagome 2001; Kang 2002). Each of these approaches, it may be noted, has slightly different implications for our understanding of historical responsibility. Yoshimi's work places greater emphasis on the specific guilt of particular individuals and institutions, while the postcolonial approach (rather like Friedländer's 'structuralist' approach) sees historical responsibility as deeply embedded in enduring social structures. Though both draw attention to the need to address historical responsibility for wartime aggression and colonial expansion, the first directs that attention primarily towards the need for the punishment of wrongdoers and the payment of compensation, while the second highlights the need to think how we might undo the legacies of past violence and discrimination which survive in contemporary political and social institutions and

modes of thought. It points, in other words, towards that sense of connection to history which I shall (later in this chapter) describe as 'implication' in the legacies of the past.

In relation to events like the Holocaust or Japanese military expansion in Asia, treating all narratives as equally valuable – denying that one may be 'better history' than another – implies that we forgo the possibility that anyone should take responsibility for the past. If all narratives are equally true/untrue, it becomes impossible to determine who should redress the legacies of past wrongs, and therefore impossible to act in ways that address that responsibility. This problem of language, truth and responsibility is one which many historians and other scholars have recently considered (for example, Appleby, Hunt and Jacobs 1994; Takahashi 2001). Yet it remains a central dilemma of contemporary historical thought. Later in the chapter I shall return to this dilemma, but first I want to highlight another inherent limitation of the textbook debate.

Beyond the Text

A second key problem of the textbook debate is that it is all about textbooks. In other words, it focuses on the content of formal school history education, and in so doing often conveys the impression that this is what determines historical consciousness. But today, more than ever, we learn about the past from a multiplicity of media. To understand the conflicting views of the past that exist, for example, in Japan, Korea and China, or to understand the changing ways in which the Holocaust is remembered within Europe and worldwide, it therefore seems vitally important to look beyond textbooks, to the ways in which images of the past are framed by popular culture.

In the past decade or so, a growing number of scholars have examined the presentation of history in various media, including novels,

photography, film, museums and heritage sites. Often, though, these studies are relatively isolated from one another, confined within the boundaries of a particular branch of media studies: the historical novel is studied in the framework of literary studies (for example, Cowart 1989; Moses 1995; Price 1999); the historical film is examined from the perspective of the history of cinema (Grindon 1994; Rosenstone 1995; Sobchack 1996; Fujita 1997; Landy 2001); the museum display is considered from the perspective of heritage studies (Lowenthal 1985; Wallace 1986; Simpson 1996; Hong 1999), etc. But as the media of historical expression multiply, so they increasingly interact with one another. Historical novels are made into films and TV mini-series; historical dramas on television generate accompanying museum displays; Internet web sites are developed to accompany historical documentaries. In this context, there is much to be gained from exploring the ways in which a variety of popular media of historical expression coexist and relate to one another. How do images presented in one medium echo or amplify those presented in others? How do historical stories change when they are transferred from one means of communication to another?

Popular conceptions of the past are swayed by certain mass-marketed narratives of history. Thus, for example, substantial groups of people in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain understood the 1745 Rising in Scotland in terms of a narrative shaped by Scott's Waverley novels, just as generations of Americans (and others) have perceived the history of the Civil War though lenses coloured by the lush imagery of Hollywood's *Gone With the Wind*. Many people today recall the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in ways influenced by Oliver Stone's movie *JFK*, while many members of the current young generation of Japanese people perceive the events of the Asia-Pacific War through imagery influenced by Kobayashi Yoshinori's comic books. Examining the form and power of these individual mass-media narratives is therefore profoundly important.

But, in exploring popular representations of history, I also want to go beyond an analysis of how specific mass-marketed narratives impact on perceptions of the past. I am particularly interested in the subtle ways in which popular media, by their silences as much as by what they present, shape our imaginative landscape of the past. Popular culture tends repeatedly to return to certain events and images, making particular parts of history familiar and vivid, while rendering others distant or unknown.

To understand how these imagined landscapes are created, reinforced or transformed, we need to look both at the political and at the aesthetic economy of mass media. In other words, in choosing to represent specific historical events, novelists, publishers, filmmakers and others are constrained by the economic rules of the market in which they operate. In the competitive world of cultural capitalism, they tend to produce works that they think will sell to a reasonably wide and affluent audience, and are therefore influenced by their preconceptions of what that audience knows and is interested in.

But they are also constrained by aesthetic conventions. Novels and feature films, for example, generally conform to a fairly standard format in terms of length and structure. Popular culture works its effects by drawing on deep reservoirs of shared memory: we can readily make sense of the plot of a Hollywood western or a courtroom drama because it follows the pattern of already familiar narratives; we are moved by photographs because they remind us of other images already seen elsewhere; semi-conscious stores of musical memory teach us instantly to recognize, in a few notes of theme music, whether this ushers in a moment of triumph, tenderness or terror.

To understand how a knowledge of the past is communicated in an age of mass media, it therefore becomes necessary to understand something of the way in which these conventions have been formed, and the way in which they shape the stories that can be told about the past. Each medium has its own history, its own conventions, its own

store of memories. Our understanding of events like the rise of Hitler or the outbreak of the Korean War depends, not just on who is telling the story, but also on whether we encounter the story in a history textbook, a historical novel, a collection of photographs, a TV documentary or a feature film. In the pages that follow, we will explore some of the ways that media and memories shape one another as new forms of popular culture emerge and evolve.

Fractured Images and Anti-Narratives

The two central problems of the East Asian textbook debate – the problem of confronting historical responsibility in a 'postmodern' world and the problem of going beyond a narrow focus on textbooks – are closely interrelated, and lie at the heart of dilemmas faced by historians in many parts of the world. Hayden White, for example, points out that the rise of modern historiography was deeply connected to the authority and logic of the written narrative. But today, more than ever, a knowledge of the past is conveyed through media which do not follow conventional narrative forms: through film, TV 'docu-dramas', CD-roms, comic-books, Internet web pages and so on. Citing the example of Oliver Stone's film *JFK*, White argues that such media often intercut the 'real' and the 'imaginary' (documentary footage and dramatization, for example), so that the distinction between the two dissolves: 'Everything is presented as if it were of the same ontological order, both real and imaginary – realistically imaginary or imaginarily real, with the result that the referential function of the images of events is etiolated' (White 1996, 19). The style of a film like *JFK* also breaks up the narrative form in other ways: through repeated cross-cutting, frequent and deliberately disorienting flashbacks and flash-forwards, and the use of blurred or disturbingly close-up shots. As a result it becomes more and more difficult to conceive the historical 'event' as a coherent story.

At the same time, White argues, the events of recent history themselves, events like the Holocaust or the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, have acquired an immensity – an indescribable quality – which threatens to overwhelm the possibilities of narrative history. He therefore concludes that 'not only are *modern* post-industrial "accidents" more incomprehensible than anything earlier generations could possibly have imagined (think of Chernobyl), the photo and video documentation of such accidents is so full that it is difficult to work up the documentation of any one of them as elements of a single "objective" story' (White 1996, 23). The only solution, White suggests, may lie in abandoning the narrative and adopting varying forms of 'anti-narrative non-story' as a way of representing key events of the recent past.

I have some reservations about White's emphasis on the unprecedented nature of the changes he describes. White suggests, for instance, that the blurring of the line between history and fiction in a docu-drama like *JFK* is radically different from anything found in nineteenth- or early twentieth-century historical novels (White 1996, 18). But as early as the 1820s a novelist like Alessandro Manzoni was already interweaving the romance of his novel *The Betrothed* [*I Promesi Sposi*] with long quotations from convincing (though invented) seventeenth-century 'historical documents', while, as we shall see in the next chapter, a novel like Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, in its struggle to confront the causes of the Napoleonic War, eventually slides from fiction into the non-fictional form of a historiographical essay.

Conversely, one may question how far a late twentieth-century docu-drama like *JFK* represents a real break from the traditional narrative form. Despite its deliberately fragmented cinematic style, with repeated use of jump cuts, close shots and unexpected camera angles, the dramatic structure of *JFK* faithfully follows the conventions of Hollywood drama, as the lone hero (New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison, played by

Kevin Costner) battles his way to a courtroom denouement where he defends his cause, watched by the wondering eyes of his wife and son, and proclaims his commitment to upholding the American values of freedom and truth. The dramatic climax is reached when Garrison, with shaking voice, quotes to the jury Kennedy's words 'ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country'.

More broadly, postmodern scepticism about the historian's ability to represent the truth is itself less radically original than some of its advocates and critics suggest. Ever since the nineteenth century, after all, historians and philosophers have engaged in intense historical debate about the contentious connection between the infinitely complex lived experience of history itself and the stories we tell about that experience. Writing in the 1830s and 1840s, for example, Alessandro Manzoni, although he criticized the confusion of fact and fiction in the historical novel, also acknowledged the impossibility of a complete representation of 'the truth' in history itself. History, he observed, 'not only openly confesses doubt but, when necessary, promotes it, sustains it, and attempts to substitute it for false convictions.' Where the historical novel creates confusion and uncertainty, history creates doubt as a positive form of understanding. 'History makes you doubt because it intends to have you doubt, quite unlike the historical novel which encourages you to believe while at the same time removing what is necessary to sustain belief. In the doubt provoked by history, the mind comes to rest – if not quite at its goal, at least at the limit of its possibilities' (Manzoni 1984, 74).

The epistemological impossibility of grasping and representing historical facts in their entirety, too, was highlighted in the early decades of the twentieth century by the work of scholars like Benedetto Croce:

> There are no immobile facts nor can such things be envisaged in the world of reality … for example, the perception that the object in front of me is a stone, and that it will not fly away of its own accord like a bird at the sound of my approach makes it expedient that I should dislodge it with my stick or my foot. The stone is really a process under way, struggling against the forces of disintegration and yielding only bit by bit, and my judgment refers to one aspect of its history. (Croce 1949, 32.)

Problems of the relationship between the 'real' and the 'imagined' are, in this sense, long-standing, though constantly reinterpreted by each generation.

Though I would question White's emphasis on the novelty of post-industrial interminglings of the 'real' and the 'imaginary', I want to draw on some of his insights into the formative influence of media on the historical imagination. The structure and conventions of particular media do have significant implications for the way that historical knowledge is communicated. The framing power of media, of course, is not a rigid technological determinism. The inherent characteristics of a CD-ROM or docu-drama can be exploited and developed to quite different effects to tell contrasting historical stories. The inventive novelist, filmmaker or comic-book artist can push the boundaries of the medium, and at times break the mould of convention in ways that expand the limits of historical conceptions. In later chapters we shall encounter some examples of such a redefinition of boundaries, and also consider the ways in which creative *combinations* of diverse media can be used to tell new stories about the past.

Yet it remains true that the everyday practices of the popular media come to embody conventions and characteristics that have a profound influence on the way in which we, as audiences, consume notions of history. In a multimedia age, then, it becomes especially important, not simply to produce better history textbooks, but to encourage students to understand how the visions of the past which they encounter in popular media are moulded by the nature of the media themselves.

Tessa Morris-Suzuki, The Past Within Us: Media, Memory, History 2005,

History as Identification and History as Interpretation

The internal dynamics of different media have a particularly significant bearing on a problem that has been the subject of much recent debate: the problem of the relationship between 'memory' or 'commemoration' and 'history'. Pierre Nora suggests that the past couple of decades have witnessed an explosive multiplication in the number of commemorations, memorials and heritage sites, a 'commemorative bulimia' that has 'all but consumed all efforts to control it' (Nora 1998, 609). Nora relates this explosion to a shift in attitudes to the past 'from the historical to the remembered and from the remembered to the commemorative' (Nora 1998, 626). History as an interpretative 'science of the past' (albeit, in Jacques le Goff's words, a science characterized by an endless process of reconstitution) comes to be replaced by a quest to re-establish a personal connection with a vanishing heritage: 'A search for the one thread in the social fabric of the present that will permit direct contact with the irrevocably dead past' (Nora 1998, 626; see also Le Goff 1988, 190).

Nora's analysis highlights an important tension between two dimensions of history. From one perspective, the study of history is about interpretation: it is a search for knowledge which will enable us to understand the causal relationships between events, the genealogy of ideas and institutions, and the forces which produce change in human societies. But on the other hand, history is also a matter of identification. Our relationship with the past is not simply forged through factual knowledge or an intellectual understanding of cause and effect. It also involves imagination and empathy. Museums, heritage sites, historical novels and films (as well as many academic history texts), invite us to enter into an empathetic relationship with the people of the past: to imagine their experiences and feelings, mourn their suffering and deaths and celebrate their triumphs. Often, this identification with others in the past in turn becomes the basis for rethinking or reaffirming

our own identity in the present. By remembering a particular piece of the past, by making it our own, we create our sense of belonging to a certain group of people – whether a nation, local society, ethnic minority or religious group. In this way we also define our place in a complicated and changing world. Indeed, it is the very act of historical commemoration that calls group identity into being. As Jos Perry puts it, 'We recollect, therefore we are' (Perry 1999).

It could be argued, in fact, that representations of the past have *always* involved both an intimate interconnection and a certain tension between interpretation and identification. Even the most unemotional and 'scientific' of historical texts, in elaborating their explanations of the dynamics of the past, commonly assume some sort of personal connection between their readers and that past. Certainly the nineteenth-century writings of historians like Macaulay and Michelet, as well as the novels of Scott and Hugo, sought not just to explain the past but also to commemorate its joys and horrors, to persuade readers to project their imaginations into the landscapes and experiences of past eras, and thus to form an empathetic link of identity between past and present generations.

The precise relationship between 'history as interpretation' and 'history as identification' (as I shall call them here) has, however, varied over time, and has been influenced by changes in the media through which historical knowledge is created and communicated. Some media (for example, the written text) seem readily adaptable to the tasks of interpretation and analysis; others (for example, the monument, the heritage site, the museum display) seem more readily given to tasks of evoking identification with the experiences of the past. Images like photographs or newsreel footage often possess great power to convey the terror, elation or confusion of particular historical events; but without accompanying scripts or narration they seldom tell us much about causes or effects. A feature film like *Gone with the Wind* or *JFK*

presents a forceful narrative of one particular version of a historical event. The structure of the feature film, however, is not easily adapted to the task of offering the means to assess the reliability of its own narrative in comparison with possible alternative versions of the same event. CD-ROMs and Internet web sites have the power to combine visual images (photographs and snippets of documentary film, for example) with short written documents. They are thus useful means for providing access to historical archives or collections of testimonies. Yet their non-linear structure and their tendency to fragment information into screen-sized pages mean that they provide less scope for extended explanatory narratives relating one piece of the archive to another.

Implication in the Past

My argument here is not that 'history as interpretation' is preferable to 'history as identification' (or vice versa). In suggesting that some media may more readily be adapted to tasks of commemoration, and others to tasks of interpretation, I do not mean to imply that this makes some media inherently 'better' at communicating a knowledge of the past than others.

Rather, I want to start by acknowledging that our understanding of history is never just an intellectual matter; any encounter with the past involves feeling and imagination as well as pure knowledge. Since our knowledge of the past is something from which we derive personal identity, it also helps to determine how we act in the world. Indeed, I would argue that academic history has tended to be too wary of emotions, too prone to treat historical knowledge as though it were a form of pure reason existing beyond the sullying realms of passion, fear, hope or sheer pleasure. Part of the power of some of the more alarming forms of popular nationalist historiography, as well as of many

popular media representations of the past, comes from their capacity to touch the emotions which scholarly history often represses.

What matters, then, is from the start to recognize the affective dimensions, as well as the interpretive dimensions, of history. It is important, in other words, to recognize the way that our knowledge of the past engages with our emotions and identity – and influences and is influenced by our actions – while trying to reflect more deeply on the causes and implications of those affects. Why do we feel more involved with some narratives of the past than others? Why do some images of past events move us profoundly, and others leave us cold? How does this affective engagement influence the way that we interpret the causes and consequences of events? How, in other words, are 'history as identification' and 'history as interpretation' intertwined? How is their interaction influenced by the media through which we learn about the past? How do these media thus affect the way in which we understand our personal connection to past events? In posing these questions, we can start to see how our encounters with images of the past in many media mould our sense of historical responsibility; or, as I would rather put it, influence our consciousness of being 'implicated' in the processes of history.

The word 'implication' is intended to suggest that our relationship to the past is one that involves something slightly different from, and rather more far-reaching than, 'historical responsibility' in the commonly used sense of the term. The people who perform acts of violence or oppression clearly have, in the accepted legal and moral sense, responsibility for the consequences of those actions. But, for example, Germans born after 1945 do not bear a direct legal responsibility for the Holocaust in quite the same way: they did not cause this horror to happen. Similarly, Japanese people born after 1945 do not bear a causal responsibility for the Nanjing Massacre, any more than British people born after the 1960s bear responsibility for the violence of

British colonialism in Asia and Africa, or recent migrants to Australia bear responsibility for massacres of Aborigines by colonial settlers.

But at the same time, these later generations are profoundly connected to the events of the past for several reasons. In the first place, later generations, though they may not have been responsible for causing historical acts of violence or oppression, are often beneficiaries of the results of those actions. To take one particularly clear example, recent court cases have highlighted the fact that some of the large German companies whose growth fuelled Germany's postwar economic miracle had derived part of their wealth from the use of Jewish and other slave labour during the Second World War. Leading corporate players in Japan's postwar economic miracle, including such names as the Kajima Construction Company and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, similarly profited from the use of Korean and Chinese forced labour during the Pacific War (Suh and Takahashi 2000, 103–104). In this sense, many of those who have benefited from the economic successes of these corporations are in an indirect way beneficiaries of wealth derived from historical violence. Recent migrants to Australia (myself included) live on land which they could afford to buy, in part, because it was, many decades ago, forcibly seized from Aboriginal occupants whose descendents, in many cases, continue to suffer the material and psychological consequences of that dispossession. We are, in this sense, implicated in the wrongs of the past: accessories after the fact.

But we are also implicated in the past in a wider sense. We live enmeshed in structures, institutions and webs of ideas which are the product of history, formed by acts of imagination, courage, generosity, greed and brutality performed by previous generations. Often we are quite unconscious of the way in which these structures and ideas have come into being. Our lives thus continue to be shaped by the oppressive institutions built on a history of violence, and will continue to be so unless we act to change them. The prejudices which sustained past acts

of aggression also live on into the present, and lodge themselves in the minds of the present generation unless we take active steps to remove them. Though we may not be responsible for such acts of aggression in the sense of having caused them, we are 'implicated' in them, in the sense that *they* cause *us*. Popular media are an important means by which we are drawn into this web of inherited ideas and images: through the mass media, retold stories about the past, with their burdens of pride, compassion, mourning, grief and hatred, live on in our minds, and have subtle but real effects on the ways in which we respond, or fail to respond, to events, including international crises, in the present.

In Search of Historical Truthfulness

Reflecting on our implication in the processes of history does not produce a single authoritative 'historical truth'. But I want to argue that it does require 'historical truthfulness' – an open-ended and evolving relationship with past events and people. In emphasizing the word 'truthfulness' rather than the word 'truth', I am trying to shift debate away from the sometimes arid arguments about the existence or non-existence of historical facts, and towards a focus on the processes by which people in the present try to make sense of the past. Drawing on the tradition of Croce and many others, I accept the proposition that history (like the stone) has a life outside the mind of the observer, but that this life can never fully be captured and expressed by human imagery or language. Rather than debating how far a particular representation of the past is 'true' – in the sense that it approximates closely to an absolute and finite reality – it may be more useful to try to assess the 'truthfulness' of the processes by which people create meaning about the past.

From this point of view, the communication of historical knowledge can be seen as a series of relationships between historical events, the

people involved in recording and representing the events, and the people who subsequently consume an account of the past through various media. Historical truthfulness involves an effort to understand this chain of relationships: to trace, as far as possible, the series of mediations through which narratives and images of the past reach us, and why we respond to them as we do. In doing this we are confronted with the recognition that the stories and images we receive about the past are shaped by the ideas and interests of the people who communicate them, by the nature of the media through which they are communicated, and by our own position in the present. Such chains of relationships may create obscurity as well as clarity, incomprehension as well as understanding, indifference as well as empathy. Almost inevitably, they create diversity: a multitude of differing accounts and images of the past. An examination of varied representations of the same event enables us to understand the forces that shape the communication of historical knowledge, and to draw on a richer range of knowledge as we seek to comprehend our own implication in the processes of history. Historical truthfulness thus involves a kind of ongoing dialogue, through which we listen to an expanding repertoire of voices from the past, tell and retell the stories that we have heard, and so define and redefine our position in the present. In this sense I want to suggest that it provides a possible starting point for combating historiographies of oblivion while accepting the impossibility of any complete and perfectly 'correct' representation of the past.

Going to the Independence Hall of Korea in April 2001, for example, was for me an encouraging experience because I went in the company of a group of postgraduate students, who were enthusiastically comparing the version of history presented in the museum with the varied versions they had learnt in school, seen on the cinema screen or read in comic books. Some of the students came from Japan, and were confronted with a depiction of the past which radically

contradicted the narratives with which they were familiar. Some were Korean students, who had visited the hall before on school outings, but were starting to see its version of history presented in its exhibitions with more critical eyes. As one observed, when she and her friends had visited the hall as schoolchildren, they had come away filled with feelings of anger and hatred towards Japan, but returning as an adult researcher in the company of people from other countries, she was more interested in exploring the relationship between signifier and signified in the complex nationalist imagery of the hall's displays and architecture. One student, of South Korean nationality but brought up in Japan, recalled his ambiguous feelings about the contrasting versions of the past which he had encountered in a Japanese school and in the Korean media. Another, from the North Korean affiliated community in Japan, was able to add her comments on the versions of history that she had learnt in her school, with their emphasis on transmitting the ideas of Kim Il Sung. In other words what was valuable was that, in visiting the Independence Hall, we encountered not just its predictable nationalist narrative of the past, nor just two counterposed Japanese and Korean versions of history, but a series of cross-cutting accounts and questions which helped to break up those grand narratives of the nation. Listening to these stories as I walked round the museum, I saw the exhibits in a subtly different light from the way in which I would have seen them had I gone there alone.

There are two ways in which popular media impinge on this process of attending to varied accounts of the past, and thus on the processes of historical truthfulness. First, the media employed shape the memories that are transmitted. To read about the past in a textbook, for example, is different from encountering it in the artifacts, photographs and dioramas of a museum like the Independence Hall. Truthfulness about the past requires reflection on the role that such media play in moulding our understanding of history. Second, popular media have the

potential to give us access to a diverse range of voices and images of past events; to stand in others' shoes, to see the same event from several different angles.

Crossing Borders: History and Globalization

This creative use of different media to communicate history across national borders is particularly important in an age haunted by the sometimes wearisome spectre of globalization. Many writers have reminded us that globalization does not mean the demise of the nation state; but it does mean that people around the world find their everyday lives influenced by forces and institutions whose origins lie outside their national borders. More than ever, we are expected to make judgments about actions which, though carried out by our own governments, have consequences in distant parts of the world. Fleeting televised images of desperate refugees or of the mangled victims of suicide bombings, for example, evoke calls for international intervention in wars whose historical origins most people in the intervening countries have no knowledge of at all.

The study of national history alone is obviously inadequate to provide the understanding needed to make sense of this world. Indeed, I would suggest that we can no longer confidently define the syllabus of historical knowledge which would equip the next generation with the necessary understanding of the forces that have shaped their world. How do we know which parts of the past will seem pressingly relevant in ten years' time? How many Americans, in the early 1990s, would have imagined the relevance of knowing the ethnic and political origins of Afghanistan's factional rivalries? How many Thais would have anticipated a need (arising from their military's leading role in international peacekeeping activities) to understand centuries of Portuguese colonialism and decades of Indonesian occupation in East Timor?

What is important, then, is not simply to learn the history of the other. The problem is how to equip people with the power to use various media creatively in an endless process of relearning and reimagining history. Contemporary mass media give us a greater potential than ever before to transcend the narrow frontiers of national history. But making use of that potential is no simple matter. For media and imagination are intertwined in a complex dialectical spiral. As we shall see in the next chapter, ever since the rise of the historical novel at the start of the nineteenth century, the politics of the imagination and the internal dynamics of media have worked together to shape accounts of the past.

The dynamics governing the interaction between society and mass media are themselves transnational. The novels of Tolstoy and Walter Scott have influenced the historical imaginations of readers in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Images captured by the Japanese photographer Yamahata Yôsuke (see Chapter 3) reappear in Australian history books, New York art museums and San Francisco based Internet web sites. Steven Spielberg's Hollywood movie *Amistad* has been criticized by Sierra Leonian viewers, who note the very different way in which the Amistad story has come to be incorporated into the cultural life of their West African nation (see Chapter 4).

For this reason, it no longer makes sense to examine these forces within the comfortable and familiar bounds of national frontiers. The journey through media and historical imagination which I embark on here is therefore also a journey across borders. It is, of necessity, a somewhat idiosyncratic journey, shaped by the trajectory of my own life experiences and interests. The examples which I draw on are derived from Britain, the United States, Japan, Russia, Australia, the Philippines and to a lesser extent other places as well. I do not want to obliterate the differences between these varied geographical locations. While observing these differences, though, I feel that it is important to address

the dilemmas of twenty-first century historical consciousness, not from the security of a single fixed point on the face of the globe, but from the perspective of that constant mobility which is a key feature of contemporary being. As they participate in this journey, I hope that readers will glimpse some signposts which may help to them make sense of their own multitudinous trajectories through the unfolding landscapes of the ever-present past.

2

Unimaginable Pasts: The Horizons of Historical Fiction

> On the 12th of June 1812 the forces of Western Europe crossed the frontiers of Russia, and war began: in other words, an event took place counter to all the laws of human reason and human nature. Millions of men perpetrated against one another such innumerable crimes, deceptions, treacheries, robberies, forgeries, issues of false money, depredations, incendiarisms and murders as the annals of all the courts of justice in the world could not muster in the course of whole centuries, but which those who committed them did not at the time regard as crimes.

These lines from the opening paragraph of Book Three of *War and Peace* capture the central problem which tears at the fabric of Tolstoy's novel: what is the relationship between individual responsibility and the flow of history? What is the force that can impel multitudes of ordinary people, apparently with little hesitation, to perform deeds which, seen across the narrow divide of a few decades, appear so evil? At the 'infinitesimal' level of our own everyday life we think of ourselves as free and responsible beings, capable of telling right from wrong and able to choose the course of our own actions. But when we look at the 'ocean