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The Sublime Triplets of Historical Consciousness

On the Future of History: The Postmodernist Challenge and Its Aftermath, by Ernst Breisach. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. Pp. ix + 243. $41.00 cloth, $16.00 paper.

Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History, by Peter Fritzsche. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004. Pp. 288. $27.95 hardcover.

Déjà vu: Aberrations of Cultural Memory, by Peter Krapp. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. Pp. xxviii + 218. $59.95 cloth, $19.95 paper.

History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory, by Dominick LaCapra. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004. Pp. ix + 274. $49.95 cloth, $19.95 paper.

Lethe: The Art and Critique of Forgetting, by Harald Weinrich. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004. Pp. vi + 254. $35.00 cloth.

One of my favorite childhood memories revolves around a campfire story written in the early twentieth century, "Tajar Tales." The Tajar is something like a badger, something like a jaguar, and something like a tiger, and he lives in and around the camps that children attend each summer. The Tajar possesses magical qualities: "If you should see him once, you would forget what he looks like. But if you should see him twice, you would forget to forget what he looks like, and that would be quite fatal." The precise form of this fatality is never spelled out, and the children hanging spellbound upon the Tajar's many follies, such as a penchant for dancing in the moonlight in compromising fashion, are left with the admonition that although they may "know" what a tajar is, they may never "see" him. To see is to endanger memory by lapsing into forgetfulness.

Reading this story to my preschooler at bedtime, and concurrently reading the books under review here, enhanced the theme of dangerous memory, the

kind that threatens the existence of a beloved entity. Deliberate forgetting to forget, after all, is the choice made by any historian who cares enough about the past to desire its memory—it is hardly "fatal." Only Friedrich Nietzsche would go so far, in his *Untimely Meditations,* as to suggest that "monumental" history allows the "dead to bury the living," permitting the folly of fatality to strike at the heart of civilization. Most historians regard the compulsion toward memory as salutary, and forgetting as abomination. With respect to the traumas of the twentieth century, in fact, "never forget" has become a mantra of the sacred nature of memory. What is the lesson of the Tajar? What magical knowledge is lost when we forget to forget?

The relationship between memory and forgetting, between history and the past, is complicated and fraught. The terms do not simply negate each other as opposites, either in antithesis or in dialectical overcoming. For the modern historian and *Annaliste* Marc Bloch, it follows that "Forgetting is not the opposite of recollection, for its opposite would be complete breakdown, one that no longer concerns anyone, that offers no admonishment, and to which no consideration can lead" (qtd. in Krapp, 63). The existence of forgetting, as epiphenomenon, persists in admonition and caring; it remains connected to ethical relationships such as that between debt and credit, forgiveness and the "unforgiven," as will be explored below. The true opposite of memory would be oblivion, a nothingness that denies memory's Being. As Harald Weinrich's richly detailed survey reminds us, the river Lethe figured in Greek mythology as the place where forgetfulness found its shape, because true oblivion literally transcended expression. The river offered a reflection of all that was wrong about forgetting, all the harm and misery caused, in the mirror surface of its waters. Indeed, the Greek word for "truth" (*aletheia*) can be semantically construed as "unforgotten or the not-to-be forgotten": "In fact, for hundreds of years Western philosophical thought, following the Greeks, sought truth on the side of not-forgetting and thus of memory and remembrance; only in modern times has it more or less hesitantly accepted to grant forgetting a certain truth as well" (4). The ethical or moral imperatives of memory have shaped modern insistence that forgetting is bad, or wrong: a sign of error, terror, or both. But it was not always so. Weinrich's book reminds us that within the Western tradition there has continually been space for forgetfulness.

Weinrich is a witty, erudite raconteur. He draws on dozens of famous and lesser-known writers to illustrate the arts of forgetting across time. We become reacquainted, for example, with "the Chewer of Paris," Charles Labussiere, who saved Frenchmen during the Reign of Terror by "organizing forgetting" (105). Masticating the evidence, he destroyed lists of aristocrats doomed to the guillotine. In the postwar period, Weinrich highlights Heinrich Boll's antihero, the "thrower-away," a "mentally ill/asocial" employee of a large firm whose job is to detect and destroy junk mail before it reaches its recipients (207). Focusing his attention on European and particularly German writers, Weinrich misses

another "thrower-away"—George Orwell's "memory hole" in *1984*—but his point is nonetheless vividly illustrated. Intentional destruction of memory is a venerable tradition in Western civilization.

An *ars oblivionis,* or art of forgetting, was conceived by the ancient Greeks. Weinrich traces the tradition from Homer, Simonides, and Themistocles, who suffered less from a poor memory than an excessively good memory from which he desired relief (11). Ovid offers the first instance in a long tradition of erotic techniques of forgetting: detailing the beloved's worst characteristics in order to replace fond memories with disgust; traveling in order to be distracted (potentially by newly acquainted lovers); sleeping it off; and most likely to succeed, the tactic of taking a new lover (18–19). Later, Casanova perfected these same techniques. Casanova's literary career blossoms on the ruins of his short-lived ecclesiastical endeavors: on the occasion of his first sermon, which he forgets and is unable to deliver, Casanova discovers his true calling. Born thus of forgetfulness, his literary-erotic impulses became entwined: "Casanova also loved books, and he tried to read each woman like a book; and like a reader, in order to open one book he had to close another one. Thus there was a break between two loves or two readings, and in the erotic language of Casanova's time this break was called forgetting" (81). This period of forgetting does not preclude later remembering, but in the style of ancient philosophical recommendations, he uses sex to distract and forget.

The relationship between literature and forgetting also implicates the process of writing itself. Weinrich recalls the strange case of the elderly Immanuel Kant. Musing on the nature of memory, Kant drew on the Greeks to suggest that "the art of writing had led to the decline of memory (had made it in part unnecessary)" (72). Writing, in externalizing the memory function and creating a record, made memorization superfluous; one did not need to be able to recall what one could look up again (and this is well before the Internet!). One only needed to be able to recall what one wanted to look up. In this regard, Kant's dismissal of his faithful servant, Martin Lampe, troubled Kant's students and biographers. Kant, whose daily habits were so famously regular that the housewives of Königsberg set their clocks by him, had always relied on Lampe to maintain his routines. At the age of seventy-eight, Kant dismissed his servant and left a puzzling note, which later turned up in his papers: "The name Lampe must now be completely forgotten" (68). Why write down a command to forget? Would not inscription reinforce memory, as with so many students' notes? And why the temporal imperative of "now"? Weinrich speculates that this apparent conundrum reflected the elderly philosopher's growing impatience with distractions. Lampe, who had shielded his employer from life's mundane details, had himself become a distraction—or, more precisely, he had become emblematic of a more general deterioration of memory and resultant confusion in ways that we might now recognize as symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. Was the note about Lampe "an

expression of pious resignation with regard to the disaster of forgetting that was overtaking him with fatal necessity, and into whose darkness he now *had* to sink" (77)?

Weinrich raises the specter of Alzheimer's only briefly, but anyone who has lived with the disease will shudder in recognition at those notes. The disease is a thief, stealing memory and forgetting alike, robbing its victims of their own sense of knowing whether they have in fact forgotten. Pathologies of memory such as Alzheimer's, unwilling forgetfulness, shadow the arts of forgetting. Ultimately, forgetting is not something that anyone appears able to control: we may wish to forget, especially experiences of trauma, to push them out of our consciousness, but we can often do so only by pushing it further inside ourselves. After Freud, no one can ignore the realm of the unconscious and repression, and Weinrich considers him as well. Still, unsuccessful forgetting and undesired forgetting resemble twin frustrations.

Weinrich draws on literary figures and philosophers, but one might as well ask about the other psychologists, historians, and scientists who studied memory and forgetting and how that research has shaped what we can know or hope to achieve through memory. In an odd epilogue, Weinrich entertains the notion that scientists practice their own form of forgetting: by adhering to international protocols for research and publication, most forget (discard) their native language in favor of English, as well as anything published outside of a few preferred journals in the past five years, and live by the paradoxical rule, "follow the mainstream of research—you can forget the rest. . . . Mainstream research, which everyone follows—you can forget that" (217). Forgetting here takes the form of disciplinary norms and competitive structures of research: in the realm of neglect, what is not referred to is lost or forgotten.

Homogenization through specialization also concerns Dominick LaCapra, who devotes a chapter of *History in Transit* to "the university in ruins," assessing Bill Readings's book of the same name. Late-twentieth-century universities, he argues, overemphasize the production of "mini-me" academics, teaching undergraduates to ignore their own proclivities in favor of preprofessional training and "sky-high" theory (156). Forgetting the liberal arts tradition, according to LaCapra, produces students who read only the latest journal articles by the hippest theorists or those who are conditioned to expect a "fee-for-credit educational service industry that sells 'McNuggets' of knowledge" (203). Scientific praxis and educational experience falter on the same forgetfulness of the power of individual, intellectual critique.

LaCapra's book culminates with his reading of Readings in order to rescript the role of the intellectual. Both the student and the professor need to have room to become "public intellectuals" in the Sartrean sense of the term: the intellectual must again become "someone who does not simply mind her or his own business" (248). He rightly points out that the 1990s backlash against the academy

replicates a well-worn and familiar charge: that the academy has forgotten its "true" purpose—not just in the 1990s but in the 1950s, 1920s, 1900s, nineteenth century, eighteenth century, and so on. As the role of the university changed in modernity and it began to produce civil servants and replenish its own support staff of academics, its critics have constantly complained on behalf of students and professors, and society at large. LaCapra calls for graduate students and undergraduates alike to free themselves of those critical expectations as well as from faculty who would have them merely mimic academic freedom. The model for this recovered/remembered freedom, presumably, is LaCapra's method of critical reading. Each of his books (and there are many) in the past decade has pursued readings of recently published work—intellectual history as historiographical critique. In these books (references to which repetitiously stud the footnotes of *History in Transit*), LaCapra presents himself in the persona of the instructor, the first-person voice emanating from within the institutional authority of the university. He conducts an ongoing dialogue with scholars and his own previous writing. Reading and engaging cultural theorists such as Giorgio Agamben, LaCapra interrogates both the text and others' reading of his own work (which invariably emerges unscathed from the encounter).

LaCapra's main critical themes have persistently included psychoanalytical frameworks, especially the concepts of transference, trauma, and "working through." He insists on their relevance not only for individuals under analysis but for historical collectives as well (73). He redefines transference in terms of historical consciousness, as "one's implication in the other or the object of study with the tendency to repeat in one's own discourse or practice tendencies active in, or projected into, the other or object" (74). The crux of his concern lies in the "limit case" of historical trauma, the Holocaust. LaCapra reaches beyond the "limits of representation" to focus on a specific aspect of the interaction between the past and the present: an experience of the sublime. "Understood as a displacement of the sacred or a transfiguration of the traumatic" (11), the moment of sublime ecstasy or empathy can be experienced through reading trauma testimonies. LaCapra wonders whether such an experience can or should be "sought in politics, collective action, or even commentary on the extreme or traumatic experience of others" (11). This notion of the sublime relies upon Romantic as well as spiritual notions of revelation; within modernity, the sublime figures as a moment of rapture and/or rupture, when experience baffles comprehension and hints at greater knowledge just beyond one's grasp. The appropriate, and only, response is temporary silence, followed by a desire to replicate the experience and communicate it, to get beyond silence. Displaced to the secular realm, the sublime's semi-sacred character is revealed in the extremities of human experience. The "Shoah becomes a cypher for the sublime" (155). Readers who encounter genocide at the removes of historical distance and literary figuration are nonetheless empathically compelled; while they do not reenact or experience

the historical trauma as event, they experience the trauma of acquiring knowledge about the limits of experience, and the dawning awareness that what might be beyond might also be within: "enabled by internal alterity (or the unconscious)" (77). It might be possible, LaCapra speculates, along with Saul Friedlander, to conceive of a radically new sublimity, experienced "through the suffering of others" (147).

LaCapra chides Derrida for reading Heidegger's silence about Nazi atrocities during and after the Third Reich as an appropriate, even honest acknowledgment of incapacity, in the old schema of Romantic responses to the sublime (which would be to credit Heidegger both with acknowledging the atrocities and accepting some responsibility, at least as fellow-traveler, for their occurrence—which would require a leap of faith; see 152). But if silence is no longer an appropriate way to respond to perceptions of apophatic sublimity (literally, an experience beyond words), LaCapra is equally critical of Agamben's attempts to respond to the Holocaust from the "postapocalyptic Auschwitz-now-everywhere hyperbole" (166). Agamben overstates his identification with the abjection of the *Muselmänner,* as described by Primo Levi. Those "walking corpses," who had given up on themselves and made not even a minimal effort to survive, fascinated and frightened Levi, who feared becoming one of them. Levi learned the meaning of resistance in the simple act of washing oneself daily with the not-soap provided: survival in Auschwitz was always uncertain, no matter what one did, but the daily ritual offered the only available form of hope. Themselves a "limit case" of witnessing and transference, the passive *Muselmänner* become for Agamben both the "bereft witness" and "the Gorgon" on whom we must gaze (161). But LaCapra is quick to point out that Agamben effectively replicates the Nazi gaze in his depiction of these voiceless victims. Relying heavily on Primo Levi's account, Agamben reproduces Levi's curious erasure of the perpetrators: the camp system appears to operate autonomously, from external, intangible forces, and very few visible Nazis (162). While this may have been Levi's perception of the camp reality, it cannot be sustained as the informed view of a post-Holocaust scholar. With numb, passive victims and absent, lethal perpetrators, the camps begin to appear ethereal, dangerously sublime in their fascination and in the hint of what power may lie beyond: a forgetting—which otherwise would be so ignorant as to be entirely absurd—of Nazi praxis. LaCapra insists forcefully, and correctly, that to view the *Muselmänner* in this way is to ignore the real, intentional application of power by Nazis and Nazism: "The *Muselmänner* did not simply 'move' into a zone of abjection; they were kicked, whipped, and beaten into it. And the SS and their affiliates were the ones who conducted the 'experiment' that Agamben seeks to replicate in his own way" (190).

A new sublimity achieved at the cost of others' suffering—the category of experience that can comprehend the Holocaust, without ever fully "understanding"—is potentially exploitative. In his critique of Agamben, LaCapra

attempts a redemption by highlighting what for him is the crucial concern: the opposition between immanence (Being-within-the-world) and transcendence (19). He suggests that this opposition has displaced the sacred or the divine from the sphere of religion and into the immanent realm of post-traumatic life. The sublime may well figure as the ultimate connection between past and present. Like its conceptual cousin, the uncanny, it delimits the boundaries of certainties about identity and experience. A shiver or shudder accompanies each: tremulousness characterizes the momentary awareness, as brief as it is unrepeatable. Peter Krapp's survey of the phenomenon of déjà vu completes the triptych of uncertain sensations. One experiences a brief disorientation, a sense of experiencing repetition, and almost immediately, an uncertainty or distrust of one's knowledge. Déjà vu inverts assumptions about time and space (32); it "eludes recall," cannot be shared, and cannot be repeated at will (xx). As a marker of uncertainty, déjà vu points to a repetition whose origin is unknown, perhaps forgotten. From here, however, Krapp's deployment of the term will engender its own confusion and distraction, as he relates it to media studies, psychology, and cultural studies.

Krapp considers an eclectic assortment of writers (and screenwriter/producers) in his effort to distinguish among a variety of forms of forgetting associated with déjà vu: Walter Benjamin, Sigmund Freud, Heiner Müller, Andy Warhol, Clint Eastwood, and Jaques Derrida. Of all these, the discussion of Eastwood's revisionist Western, *Unforgiven* (1992), is the most unpredictable and coherent. Film theorists have suggested that déjà vu and cinema are twins: "in film . . . everything is recorded (as a memory trace which is immediately so, without having been something else before). . . . a past that was never present before it came to consciousness as past" (97). In this sense, déjà vu is the awareness of temporal structures as they "flash" before you. Following the ubiquitous Agamben, Krapp argues that cinema itself enacts déjà vu: "where photography meets the motor . . . it operates 'in this interstice'" of past and present (98). In *Unforgiven* Eastwood plays a mercenary who is reluctantly drawn back into the game of murder and revenge when a prostitute is attacked and her coworkers offer a bounty on her attacker. The nominal "law man," played by Gene Hackman, is corrupt, and the entire gunslinging action is being recorded by a dime novelist whose loyalties are defined by who will pay him. In this atypical Western, which both acknowledges and revises the genre, Krapp sees a version of Benjamin's eternally deferred Last Judgment, presaged by a "storm of forgiveness" (which in *Unforgiven* appears in the soggy, muddied, and monochromatic imagery throughout, and particularly in the climactic scenes) (115). Redemption, time (or eternity), and forgiveness operate within a stormy matrix. What's past is prologue; or as Krapp refers back to Nietzsche, Eastwood's antihero "forgets most everything in order to do one thing, he is unjust against what is behind him, and knows only one right—the right of that which is to come" (116).

Déjà vu, in these terms, is not always recognizable as one of the triplets of uncanniness. In media studies' appropriation of Derrida's *Glas,* Krapp sees a repetitive claim to finding hypertext avant la lettre, in Freudian screen memories, Champollion's hieroglyphic deciphering, Hegel's and Wittgenstein's philosophy, Talmud studies—it appears, "in short [that] everybody already knew" what would become the modern media revolution in technology. In this way, déjà vu occurs defensively, when either something old is encountered that had been forgotten, assimilating all predecessors in Borg fashion, or when something is so extraordinary (sublime?) as to defy immediate comprehension (128). In a cute but perhaps not entirely useful way, Krapp suggests that "WYSIWYG" (computer programming jargon for "what you see is what you get") should be rendered "WYSIWYF" (what you see is what you forget) (129). You can forget it, because it can be endlessly repeated, in much the same banal way that Warhol created his art. The relentless repetition of Warhol's images and recordings function as "screen memories" in much the same way that the literal computer screen, displaying redundant information whenever you want it, distracts viewers from questioning how it got there, much less what it means.

Unwillingness to interrogate the screen/memory has historical antecedents. Krapp integrates Heiner Müller into the discussion of déjà vu by focusing on Müller's role as quasi-Antigone in postwar East German and reunified German society. For non-Germanists, Krapp's translation of Müller's project will be a useful introduction to this pivotal thinker. Müller maintained that postwar German cultures perpetually deferred the necessary dialogue with the dead: not only with their own dead leaders but also with the victims of the Third Reich. No amount of memorial culture or official statements about the past could ever "come to terms" with the totality of totalitarian horror. In his autobiographical as well as his poetic and dramatic writings, Müller conducted his own interrogation of the past. "Müller's memories must function as obituaries, summoning all available models of death management between mourning and melancholia" (62). Deliberately refusing both psychoanalytic closure and monumental "fixing" of the meaning of the past, Müller offered a "countermemory, a motivated modification of cultural forgetting" (54). It was his unique, solitary task; and in this regard he is an Antigone, refusing to accept state strictures, insisting on acknowledging his relationship to the dead. The East German state long maintained its mythic origins as "first victim" of the Third Reich. Voices of conscience like Müller's are therefore all the more valuable.

Collective memory, which is shared among the individuals who constitute it, offers a flexible form for remembering, one uniquely suited to memories of shared historical significance—and, as Müller persistently reminded, one vulnerable to collective forgetting. In particular, collective memories form around traumatic historical events, such as war, genocide, and revolution, that, by definition, many people would choose to forget if they could. Collective memories

routinely include and exclude, remember and forget in the process of achieving memory collectively, as individuals find a connection among themselves through experience. Perhaps not coincidentally, collective memory theory grew out of a nineteenth century still reeling from the political and social upheavals of the French Revolution. Peter Fritzsche takes the commonplace notion that the Revolution transformed temporal sensibilities so fundamentally as to constitute "modernity" and explores just how it was that contemporaries experienced the transformation of time and discovered new relationships to the past. The book opens with a telling vignette: a traveler on the Rhine River in 1815 notes in his diaries how the occupants of his boat reflected the general mood and popular opinions of the time. All of them, regardless of class, religion, or heritage, voiced similar concerns about the nature of the times, the suddenness of regime change and wartime instability: "the observer saw people seeing history" (13). The observer in this case had a particularly acute historical consciousness: Sulpiz Boisserée, then thirty-two years old, was a close friend of influential Romantic thinkers such as Dorothea and Friedrich Schlegel, established a major collection of medieval German art, and sponsored the restoration of the Cologne Cathedral. But in Boisserée's observation of his contemporaries, Fritzsche sees a larger trend, a new awareness of time as something that can be ruptured, resulting in displacement and dispossession on an unprecedented scale, and producing an accompanying melancholy and nostalgia.

Stranded in Time offers a sweeping panorama of this new consciousness from the perspective of not only the familiar Romantics, but also from that of ordinary farmers and tradesmen, housewives as well as aristocrats throughout the nineteenth century. Fritzsche argues that all of them came to see themselves as *Zeitgenossen* (contemporaries, or "time comrades, time travelers") specifically as a result of the French Revolution's traumatic temporal earthquake. The very modern idea of "contemporary," he suggests, is rooted in this moment's "remarkable synchronization of nineteenth-century European culture" (53). Collectives form not just around memory, but also around traumatic memories of what only a moment before seemed to be "the present."

This uncanny new present—which paradoxically is coextensive with the lived experience of those who feel displaced—creates "exiles who had become estranged from their own time, that is, stranded in the present, and as a result came to read contemporary history as dispossession" (55–56). In the chapter titled "Strangers," Fritzsche outlines the historical consciousness of French aristocrats, with François-René Chateaubriand providing the most poignant example. Fritzsche relies upon well-known Romantics for their intensely personal responses to their world, expressed in their proclivity for self-reflection and self-examination in memoirs, diaries, and correspondence. Citing Marilyn Yalom, he points out that "the French Revolution generated an outpouring of memoirs equaled only by the survivor literature of World War II" (82). This is a particularly

provocative comparison. While Fritzsche denies any intention to make the experiences of the Holocaust and the Revolution equivalent, he does want to compare responses to trauma and suggest that these two events are bookends of a form of historical consciousness. As the émigrés and their families kept the flames of memory alight (and in print), they contributed to the "mythistory" of the Revolution and its (political and familial) meaning in the present. Survivor testimony, often belated, has nevertheless served a similar function—or been utilized to support numerous agendas, each of them rooted in a collective memory. Estranged, dispossessed, exiled—these are the itineraries of modernity.

Nostalgia for the ancien régime is only one component of a longing for premodern times. Traces of the old resurfaced in the new, as if they had never been seen before: historical artifacts, collected anew in the Museum of French Monuments and elsewhere, became representatives of the material culture of memory not because they were newly ruined, but because their status *as ruin* was now remarked for the first time as being politically significant. "The culture of remembrance became a political force [in modernity]. . . . the perpetual present, the ruin of the ruin, the permanence and preemption of empire, that constituted the real destructive potential of modernity" (128). In terms of the triplets mentioned earlier (the uncanny, sublime, and déjà vu), one can see how the meaning of dispossession and displacement was stimulated by the recognition of ruins in the field of historicized vision. For viewers such as Boisserée, the Cologne Cathedral's incomplete status "suddenly" called for restoration; in England poets responded to the enclosure system with paeans to Nature; and the Brothers Grimm began to collect fairy tales and etymologies before they, too, should fall into ruinous disuse (chs. 3–4). Inspired by (sublime) impressions of what had "suddenly" appeared before them (and yet had been there all along, though undervalued), Romantics led the way for nineteenth-century historical consciousness to experience déjà vu as the return of what they had never noticed before.

Fritzsche's survey is ambitious, covering not only Germany but France, England, and America (in a discussion of the domestic sphere as a realm of memory, from antiques filled with memorabilia and a newly acquired market value, to quilts and scrapbooks made and preserved by women). He leaves out perhaps the most obvious source for expressions of historical consciousness, the historians themselves, and their amateur or dilettante collaborators, such as the women writers described by Bonnie Smith in *The Gender of History* (1998). But in a project of this scope, leaving out a few obvious suspects does not make the lineup any less compelling. Fritzsche has expanded the narrow scope of Romantic historical consciousness to become emblematic of an entire century, if not a modernity that we still inhabit. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a historical consciousness that does not fit into Fritzsche's Romantic-based mode; even if we looked outside the Western tradition, we could only imagine ourselves outside the modernist

box if we could release ourselves from those entangled longings of nostalgia and melancholy that connect us to our traumatic histories.

We may be stranded in a present of modernity, despite (perhaps even in direct connection to) our postmodernity. Fritzsche and Bruno Latour, among others, have suggested that the postmodern is itself inextricably rooted in the modern. Postmodernism did not "follow" modernity: it revealed an awareness of modernity's self-construction. Ernst Breisach's *On the Future of History* speaks for many in his trepidation about postmodernism's challenge to historical practice, but as he in fact shows quite easily, postmodernism is a construct within modernity; *pace* Latour, "we have not yet been modern" nor have we been postmodern, since we are still operating within the realm of consciousness inspired by the Revolution. Try to define any term, frame any project, without reference to a self, identity, or subject that is not itself a modern project; you cannot. Breisach took on the task of sorting out this conundrum; his presumed audience would be graduate students like some I know who are overwhelmed in their first year of study by references to "ontology," *différance,* "the trace," and other terms that are new to them. While some students may find the book useful, my recommendation to their instructors would be to follow Breisach's own neatly outlined reading list and assign those authors instead. Breisach's initial discussion of the historico-etymological precedents for the term "postmodernism" will dismay and distract those who are trying to work through Derrida, since it has nothing to do with postmodernist theory. The authors Breisach selects are presented without historical context or intellectual biography, which may leave students wondering why, for instance, so many people suddenly cared about Russian formalism in linguistics.

Any effort to positively define theories built on the apophatic triplets is perhaps doomed at the start, however heroic the attempt (LaCapra and Krapp both work within this vein, but neither attempts to portray postmodernism as a whole, which is wise). And it is true, as Breisach modestly states, "that the challenge of postmodernism went to the foundation of life and history also explained why the ensuing debate has proved to be intricate, often opaque, but always fervent" (110). The sublime effect, after all, temporarily stuns those who experience it, who shudder in response and wonder just what that tajar was anyway.

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In Memoriam: Jacques Derrida

In Peter Krapp's *Déjà vu,* I learned that although Heiner Müller and Derrida intended to meet and to speak about each other's work, the proposed meeting was postponed and they were unable to meet before Müller died in 1998. He asked, at his deathbed, that Derrida speak at his funeral. Derrida declined, not

because he intended disrespect, but because he sensed that "this treason remains faithful . . . because this moment remains more unforgettable, more deeply inscribed in my heart, more faithfully turned toward him than if I had pronounced some words in public in the big Berlin theater of solemn mourning" (qtd. in Krapp, 207). He chooses to speak about not choosing to speak, to voice grief and respect. Writing this essay, reflecting on Derrida's work, I learned of his death. For all the future work that now we will not be able to read, as much as for the richness of what we were given, Derrida will be missed.