



History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory

By Dominick LaCapra

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History in Transit comprises Dominick LaCapra's explorations of relationships he believes have been insufficiently theorized: between experience and identity, between history and various theories of subjectivity, between extreme events and their representation, between institutional structures and the kinds of knowledge produced within them. Taken together, these discussions form a dialogical encounter, posing the links among epistemological questions, historicist ones, and issues pertaining to disciplinary and institutional politics.

Reacting against the antitheoretical bias of some prominent historians, LaCapra presents an alternative model of historiographical practice—one in which emphases on plurality and hybridity are combined with the concept of historical experience. For LaCapra experience emerges as a category both theoretically determined and anchored in the facticity of the everyday. LaCapra tests the assumptions and implications of the way one approaches the past by looking to psychoanalysis to render more self-aware the relationship between the historian and his or her material. He offers criticisms of assumptions held by practicing historians and theorists, placing the study of history at the center of a larger argument about the role of the contemporary university.

Contesting both corporatization and claims that the university is in ruins, LaCapra writes, "It is paradoxical that the demand to make the university conform to an ever-increasing extent to a market or business model seems oblivious to the fact that the American university has probably been the most successful of its type in the world, that students from other countries disproportionately desire to study in it."

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Editorial Review

Review

"History in Transit contains ingeniously interrelated explorations of sometimes discussed but insufficiently theorized relationships. While each chapter can stand on its own as a major contribution to its particular subfield, together they constitute the sort of 'dialogical encounter' that the author examines throughout the text."?Scott Spector, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor

"This book provides careful and brilliant readings of important debates in contemporary theory and is a powerful contribution to these debates. Negotiating the tensions between theoretical methods that focus on the sign and marginalize the referent, and those that emphasize the material, non-textual, and traumatic elements of history, Dominick LaCapra astutely delineates 'experience' as a basic and undertheorized concept. In so doing, he shows how experience can enrich existing notions of alterity, transcendence, trauma, ethics, and much of the remaining lexicon of contemporary literary studies."?James Berger, author of *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse*

About the Author

Dominick LaCapra is Professor Emeritus of History at Cornell University. He is the author of many books, including *History, Literature, Critical Theory*; *History and Its Limits: Human, Animal, Violence*; and *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*, all from Cornell.

Users Review

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