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Introduction

Stacey Meeker

Pour exercer avec tous les Français leur droit à la longue mémoire.

Marc Fumaroli
Directeur de l'Académie Française
Président de l'Institut

It was in a distinctly French climate of retrospection and remembrance that *Sites of Memory* was chosen as the subject for the UCLA French Graduate Students' Third Annual Interdisciplinary Conference in the fall of 1997. The French *Institut*, the plenary body of the five Académies, had officially dedicated October 21, 1997 to *la mémoire*, reaffirming that for the French, memory is a matter of national import. Pierre Nora's monumental study, *Les lieux de mémoire*, had demonstrated its popularity and influence by appearing in paperback form in May, and the second volume of its English translation had just crossed the Atlantic. Hanoi, erstwhile "Paris of the Orient," had just hosted the seventh Francophone summit, reminding us once again of the global reach of things French. Finally, October 1997 saw the opening—after fifteen years of preparation, longest in French history—of the trial of Maurice Papon, General Secretary of the Gironde region under Vichy and later a prefect in Algeria and Paris, accused of "crimes against humanity" for having deported over 1500 Jews to Nazi concentration camps. (On April 2, 1998, just two weeks before our conference, France's continuing ambivalence toward the Vichy years was demonstrated as Papon was found guilty, then left free on appeal.)

Both a scholarly achievement and a cultural event, *Les lieux de mémoire* insists on the centrality of memory to French national self-consciousness at all levels of the social order, from the individual to the state. While emphasizing the distinction, even the opposition, between history and memory, *Les lieux* also points to the uncontrollably fluid nature of any such distinction. The ongoing struggle between history and memory has not diminished the enduring seductive power of French culture's paradoxical claim of universality—*au contraire*. By examining chosen Sites of Memory, we hoped to discover the means by which memory *à la française* undermines, mourns, or reinforces sentiments of collective identity, a crucial issue for those engaged in French Studies in the age of globalization.

Our participants' contributions map the variety of media in which memory manifests itself, in sites ranging from the traditional art forms—ballet under Louis XIV, Viollet-le-Duc's naturalism-informed architecture, the canonical literature of Chateaubriand and Proust—to the popular—post-

war film, the *néo-polar* and the contemporary novel, the patchwork of posters and *BD* surrounding the Algerian War. In our undergraduate exhibit, students transformed their personal experiences of *francisation* into poetry of their own creation or explored the accruals of memory around the figure of Salomé in late nineteenth-century decadent painting and literature. The open discussion of *Francité et mémoire sur "la Toile"* ventured onto the new terrain of the Internet and its role in the creation and/or deconstruction of both memory and "Frenchness" in centers multiplied far beyond the Hexagon.

The selection of articles contained in this volume represents the breadth and subtlety of the reflection imposed by memory. They range across the historical spectrum but frequently choose the still unhealed wounds of Vichy as the point of origin both for the divergent paths of French history and memory and for the emerging self-awareness of this divergence. The preoccupation with the "Vichy syndrome" puts into question the very bases of national identity and identification.

In *Sites, Sights, and Silences of Memory*, UCLA's Eugen Weber, an eminent French historian and himself a contributor to Nora's *Lieux de mémoire*, reminds us that the French create national memory "by teaching, and by the accumulated teaching of their monuments." Yet silence and forgetting are as important to memory as remembering. Weber suggests that French history, built upon rifts and resurrections, may be likened to Jewish history in its creation of "mythology, liturgy, and the demanding God of the *patria*." Weber's argument points to a form of collective identity older than that of the modern nation-state and reminds us that nation and memory cannot be reduced to partners in hegemonic hoodwinking but must be considered in the broader context of a communal faith, a *re-ligio* without which no society can survive.

Jean-François Fourny's *Oublier l'avant-garde?* explains the paradox of how Guy Debord and the Situationists disappeared from sight and apparent memory only to form a unique site in the history of French twentieth century avant-gardes. Fourny argues that Situationism, by the very fact of having been largely forgotten, has emerged as the most authentic and durable avant-garde movement where the more visible Surrealism and *Tel Quel* have become institutionalized memories, commodified and turned into spectacle by the very culture to which they were opposed.

If spectacle dominates questions of memory in Debord's case, Regina Sadono's *Details and Reproducing Domination: The Birth of the Ballet School, the Prison, and Other Correctional Facilities* builds on spectacle as

a defining element of Louis XIV's *pouvoir absolu*. Coincident with the beginning of the modern nation-state, the *Roi-Soleil*'s conception and institutionalization of ballet imposes a new form of memory on the subject by reassembling and dominating the body. This institutionalized *corps de ballet* remains a site of memory yet today.

Aron Vinegar's *Memory as Construction in Viollet-le-Duc's Architectural Imagination* demonstrates that a similar principle of dissection and reconstruction dominates Viollet-le-Duc's use of memory as an "imagination technology" in his nineteenth-century restoration of "Gothic" French monuments. Viollet-le-Duc's creative reconstruction, however, follows the naturalist's anatomical model rather than an autocrat's corrective mechanics. Cathedrals and chateaux are reconstituted as organic wholes in the spirit of Georges Cuvier's reconstruction of prehistoric vertebrates from fossil bone fragments.

Joseph Jenkins's *Swann, Vinteuil et Marcel, et la mémoire involontaire* tackles Proust, the writer whose *petite madeleine* springs to mind at the very mention of the word *mémoire*. Jenkins demonstrates through close textual analysis how the Proustian text exceeds in sophistication its narrator-protagonist's professed theory of *mémoire involontaire*. The reader who encounters Vinteuil's *petite phrase* as a memory trace in the context of Swann's love for Odette must await its release from this role in the Sainte-Euverte *soirée* before he can savor its particularity as an esthetic moment liberated from Time.

In Proust's novel, history as narrative is performed through the medium of memory. In *Clichés of Unity: History and Memory in Postwar French Film*, Marc Siegel describes the New Wave's revolt against the "tradition of quality" as reflecting a consciousness of social and psychological rifts that could not be integrated into the "Resistancialist" narrative of French national unity that de Gaulle attempted to impose after World War II. For Siegel, the spatio-temporal coordinates of traditional narrative, which implicitly assert the continuity of postwar with pre-war France, are disrupted by the New Wave's snapshot images of personal memory that reduce history to *cliché*.

Mary Wiles also links personal memory to the (re)writing of history in her *French Folie: Memory and Madness in Buñuel's "Belle de Jour,"* which explores the productive interplay between the film's implied psychoanalytic and Surrealist readings of protagonist Séverine's difficulty in reconciling herself to her personal history. For Wiles, Séverine's story is an allegory of postwar France, which too found itself traumatized by repressed memories of its past. In contrast with the psychoanalytic intertext that reveals the

need to obliterate memory in a return to historical normalcy, the surrealist subtext points to the liberation of memory from history figured by the trope of blindness.

Finally, Naomi Davidson's *Naming "la Guerre sans nom": Memory, Nation, and Identity in French Representations of the Algerian War, 1963-1992*, examines nationhood in its colonial context by exploring the dichotomies between the official history of the French-Algerian War and the subversive personal memories of the conflict that have emerged in cultural products ranging from comic books to films and novels. Davidson shows how institutional France's long refusal to recognize and commemorate the war reflects the challenge that its richly ambivalent memories pose to the very notion of "Frenchness." The broad conclusion suggested by Davidson's article as well as those of our other participants is that, however much our perspective on History becomes fragmented and problematic, our drive to narrativize remains intact.

We would like to thank our sponsors and the graduate students whose work made this conference possible. Bendi Benson, Brian Brazeau, Helen Chu, Diane Duffrin, Sheila Espineli, Vanessa Herold, Heather Howard, Daniel Johnson, Vera Klekovkina, Madeleine La Cotera, France Lemoine, Julie Masi, Martha Moore, Marcella Munson, Alison Rice, Michael Stafford, and Lena Udall deserve special mention. Jean-Claude Carron, Chair Patrick Coleman, conference advisor and web site designer Eric Gans, and Nicole Dufresne were particularly helpful at crucial moments. Finally, we wish to extend our very special thanks to Professor Weber for his gracious participation in our own Site of Memory.

Sites of Memory

Tracing France's Cultural Self-Consciousness



Paroles Gelées

Special Issue

Volume 16.2 1998

*Selected Proceedings from
UCLA French Graduate Students'
Third Annual Interdisciplinary Conference*

Sites of Memory

Tracing France's Cultural Self-Consciousness

Selected Proceedings from
The UCLA French Department Graduate Students'
Third Annual Interdisciplinary Conference
April 17-18, 1998

*Ce serait le moment de philosopher et de
rechercher si, par hasard, se trouvait ici
l'endroit où de telles paroles dégèlent.*

Rabelais, *Le Quart Livre*

PAROLES GELÉES

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