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Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*

THE ACCELERATION OF HISTORY: let us try to gauge the significance, beyond metaphor, of this phrase. An increasingly rapid slippage of the present into a historical past that is gone for good, a general perception that anything and everything may disappear—these indicate a rupture of equilibrium. The remnants of experience still lived in the warmth of tradition, in the silence of custom, in the repetition of the ancestral, have been displaced under the pressure of a fundamentally historical sensibility. Self-consciousness emerges under the sign of that which has already happened, as the fulfillment of something always already begun. We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left.

Our interest in *lieux de mémoire* where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn—but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists. There are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory.

Consider, for example, the irrevocable break marked by the disappearance of peasant culture, that quintessential repository of collective memory whose recent vogue as an object of historical study coincided with the apogee of industrial growth. Such a fundamental collapse of memory is but one familiar example of a movement toward democratization and mass culture on a global scale. Among the new nations, independence has swept into history societies newly awakened from their ethnological slumbers by colonial violation. Similarly, a process of interior decolonization has affected ethnic minorities, families, and groups that until now have possessed reserves of memory but little or no historical capital. We have seen the end of societies that had long assured the transmission and conservation of collectively remembered values, whether through churches or schools, the family or the state; the end too of ideologies that prepared a smooth passage from the past to the future or that had indicated what the future should keep from the past—whether for reaction, progress, or even revolution. Indeed, we have seen the tremendous dilation of our very mode of historical perception, which, with the help of the media, has substituted for a

memory entwined in the intimacy of a collective heritage the ephemeral film of current events.

The "acceleration of history," then, confronts us with the brutal realization of the difference between real memory—social and unviolated, exemplified in but also retained as the secret of so-called primitive or archaic societies—and history, which is how our hopelessly forgetful modern societies, propelled by change, organize the past. On the one hand, we find an integrated, dictatorial memory—unself-conscious, commanding, all-powerful, spontaneously actualizing, a memory without a past that ceaselessly reinvents tradition, linking the history of its ancestors to the undifferentiated time of heroes, origins, and myth—and on the other hand, our memory, nothing more in fact than sifted and sorted historical traces. The gulf between the two has deepened in modern times with the growing belief in a right, a capacity, and even a duty to change. Today, this distance has been stretched to its convulsive limit.

This conquest and eradication of memory by history has had the effect of a revelation, as if an ancient bond of identity had been broken and something had ended that we had experienced as self-evident—the equation of memory and history. The fact that only one word exists in French to designate both lived history and the intellectual operation that renders it intelligible (distinguished in German by *Geschichte* and *Historie*) is a weakness of the language that has often been remarked; still, it delivers a profound truth: the process that is carrying us forward and our representation of that process are of the same kind. If we were able to live within memory, we would not have needed to consecrate *lieux de mémoire* in its name. Each gesture, down to the most everyday, would be experienced as the ritual repetition of a timeless practice in a primordial identification of act and meaning. With the appearance of the trace, of mediation, of distance, we are not in the realm of true memory but of history. We can think, for an example, of the Jews of the diaspora, bound in daily devotion to the rituals of tradition, who as "peoples of memory" found little use for historians until their forced exposure to the modern world.

Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic—responsive to each avenue of conveyance or phenomenal screen, to every censorship or projection. History, because it is an

intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism. Memory installs remembrance within the sacred; history, always prosaic, releases it again. Memory is blind to all but the group it binds—which is to say, as Maurice Halbwachs has said, that there are as many memories as there are groups, that memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual. History, on the other hand, belongs to everyone and to no one, whence its claim to universal authority. Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects; history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things. Memory is absolute, while history can only conceive the relative.

At the heart of history is a critical discourse that is antithetical to spontaneous memory. History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it. At the horizon of historical societies, at the limits of the completely historicized world, there would occur a permanent secularization. History's goal and ambition is not to exalt but to annihilate what has in reality taken place. A generalized critical history would no doubt preserve some museums, some medallions and monuments—that is to say, the materials necessary for its work—but it would empty them of what, to us, would make them *lieux de mémoire*. In the end, a society living wholly under the sign of history could not, any more than could a traditional society, conceive such sites for anchoring its memory.

Perhaps the most tangible sign of the split between history and memory has been the emergence of a history of history, the awakening, quite recent in France, of a historiographical consciousness. History, especially the history of national development, has constituted the oldest of our collective traditions: our quintessential *milieu de mémoire*. From the chroniclers of the Middle Ages to today's practitioners of "total" history, the entire tradition has developed as the controlled exercise and automatic deepening of memory, the reconstitution of a past without lacunae or faults. No doubt, none of the great historians, since Froissart, had the sense that he was representing only a particular memory. Commynes did not think he was fashioning a merely dynastic memory, La Popelinière merely a French memory, Bossuet a Christian and monarchical memory, Voltaire the memory of the progress of humankind, Michelet exclusively the "people's" memory, and Lavisse solely the memory of the nation. On the contrary, each historian was convinced that his task consisted in establishing a more positive, all-encompassing, and explicative memory. History's procurement, in the last century, of scientific methodology has only intensified the effort to establish critically a "true" memory. Every great historical revision has sought to enlarge the basis for collective memory.

In a country such as France the history of history cannot be an innocent oper-

ation; it amounts to the internal subversion of memory-history by critical history. Every history is by nature critical, and all historians have sought to denounce the hypocritical mythologies of their predecessors. But something fundamentally unsettling happens when history begins to write its own history. A historiographical anxiety arises when history assigns itself the task of tracing alien impulses within itself and discovers that it is the victim of memories which it has sought to master. Where history has not taken on the strong formative and didactic role that it has assumed in France, the history of history is less laden with polemical content. In the United States, for example, a country of plural memories and diverse traditions, historiography is more pragmatic. Different interpretations of the Revolution or of the Civil War do not threaten the American tradition because, in some sense, no such thing exists—or if it does, it is not primarily a historical construction. In France, on the other hand, historiography is iconoclastic and irreverent. It seizes upon the most clearly defined objects of tradition—a key battle, like Bouvines; a canonical manual, like the *Petit Lavisse*—in order to dismantle their mechanisms and analyze the conditions of their development. It operates primarily by introducing doubt, by running a knife between the tree of memory and the bark of history. That we study the historiography of the French Revolution, that we reconstitute its myths and interpretations, implies that we no longer unquestioningly identify with its heritage. To interrogate a tradition, venerable though it may be, is no longer to pass it on intact. Moreover, the history of history does not restrict itself to addressing the most sacred objects of our national tradition. By questioning its own traditional structure, its own conceptual and material resources, its operating procedures and social means of distribution, the entire discipline of history has entered its historiographical age, consummating its dissociation from memory—which in turn has become a possible object of history.

It once seemed as though a tradition of memory, through the concepts of history and the nation, had crystallized in the synthesis of the Third Republic. Adopting a broad chronology, between Augustin Thierry's *Lettres sur l'histoire de France* (1827) and Charles Seignobos's *Histoire sincère de la nation française* (1933), the relationships between history, memory, and the nation were characterized as more than natural currency: they were shown to involve a reciprocal circularity, a symbiosis at every level—scientific and pedagogical, theoretical and practical. This national definition of the present imperiously demanded justification through the illumination of the past. It was, however, a present that had been weakened by revolutionary trauma and the call for a general reevaluation of the monarchical past, and it was weakened further by the defeat of 1870, which rendered only more urgent, in the belated competition with German science and pedagogy—the real victors at Sadowa—the development of a severe documentary erudition for the scholarly transmission of memory. The tone of

national responsibility assigned to the historian—half preacher, half soldier—is unequalled, for example, in the first editorial of the *Revue historique* (1876) in which Gabriel Monod foresaw a "slow scientific, methodical, and collective investigation" conducted in a "secret and secure manner for the greatness of the fatherland as well as for mankind." Reading this text, and a hundred others like it, one wonders how the notion that positivist history was not cumulative could ever have gained credibility. On the contrary, in the teleological perspective of the nation the political, the military, the biographical, and the diplomatic all were to be considered pillars of continuity. The defeat of Agincourt, the dagger of Ravaillac, the day of the Dupes, the additional clauses of the treaty of Westphalia—each required scrupulous accounting. The most incisive erudition thus served to add or take away some detail from the monumental edifice that was the nation. The nation's memory was held to be powerfully unified; no more discontinuity existed between our Greco-Roman cradle and the colonies of the Third Republic than between the high erudition that annexed new territories to the nation's heritage and the schoolbooks that professed its dogma. The holy nation thus acquired a holy history; through the nation our memory continued to rest upon a sacred foundation.

To see how this particular synthesis came apart under the pressure of a new secularizing force would be to show how, during the crisis of the 1930s in France, the coupling of state and nation was gradually replaced by the coupling of state and society—and how, at the same time and for the same reasons, history was transformed, spectacularly, from the tradition of memory it had become into the self-knowledge of society. As such, history was able to highlight many kinds of memory, even turn itself into a laboratory of past mentalities; but in disclaiming its national identity, it also abandoned its claim to bearing coherent meaning and consequently lost its pedagogical authority to transmit values. The definition of the nation was no longer the issue, and peace, prosperity, and the reduction of its power have since accomplished the rest. With the advent of society in place of the nation, legitimation by the past and therefore by history yields to legitimation by the future. One can only acknowledge and venerate the past and serve the nation; the future, however, can be prepared for: thus the three terms regain their autonomy. No longer a cause, the nation has become a given; history is now a social science, memory a purely private phenomenon. The memory-nation was thus the last incarnation of the unification of memory and history.

The study of *lieux de mémoires*, then, lies at the intersection of two developments that in France today give it meaning: one a purely historiographical movement, the reflexive turning of history upon itself, the other a movement that is, properly speaking, historical: the end of a tradition of memory. The moment of

lieux de mémoire occurs at the same time that an immense and intimate fund of memory disappears, surviving only as a reconstituted object beneath the gaze of critical history. This period sees, on the one hand, the decisive deepening of historical study and, on the other hand, a heritage consolidated. The critical principle follows an internal dynamic: our intellectual, political, historical frameworks are exhausted but remain powerful enough not to leave us indifferent; whatever vitality they retain impresses us only in their most spectacular symbols. Combined, these two movements send us at once to history's most elementary tools and to the most symbolic objects of our memory: to the archives as well as to the tricolor; to the libraries, dictionaries, and museums as well as to commemorations, celebrations, the Pantheon, and the Arc de Triomphe; to the *Dictionnaire Larousse* as well as to the Wall of the Fédérés, where the last defenders of the Paris commune were massacred in 1870.

These *lieux de mémoire* are fundamentally remains, the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it. They make their appearance by virtue of the deritualization of our world—producing, manifesting, establishing, constructing, decreeing, and maintaining by artifice and by will a society deeply absorbed in its own transformation and renewal, one that inherently values the new over the ancient, the young over the old, the future over the past. Museums, archives, cemeteries, festivals, anniversaries, treaties, depositions, monuments, sanctuaries, fraternal orders—these are the boundary stones of another age, illusions of eternity. It is the nostalgic dimension of these devotional institutions that makes them seem beleaguered and cold—they mark the rituals of a society without ritual; integral particularities in a society that levels particularity; signs of distinction and of group membership in a society that tends to recognize individuals only as identical and equal.

Lieux de mémoire originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize bills because such activities no longer occur naturally. The defense, by certain minorities, of a privileged memory that has retreated to jealously protected enclaves in this sense intensely illuminates the truth of *lieux de mémoire*—that without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep them away. We buttress our identities upon such bastions, but if what they defended were not threatened, there would be no need to build them. Conversely, if the memories that they enclosed were to be set free they would be useless; if history did not besiege memory, deforming and transforming it, penetrating and petrifying it, there would be no *lieux de mémoire*. Indeed, it is this very push and pull that produces *lieux de mémoire*—moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned; no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded.

Memory Seized by History

What we call memory today is therefore not memory but already history. What we take to be flare-ups of memory are in fact its final consumption in the flames of history. The quest for memory is the search for one's history.

Of course, we still cannot do without the word, but we should be aware of the difference between true memory, which has taken refuge in gestures and habits, in skills passed down by unspoken traditions, in the body's inherent self-knowledge, in unstudied reflexes and ingrained memories, and memory transformed by its passage through history, which is nearly the opposite: voluntary and deliberate, experienced as a duty, no longer spontaneous; psychological, individual, and subjective; but never social, collective, or all encompassing. How did we move from the first memory, which is immediate, to the second, which is indirect? We may approach the question of this contemporary metamorphosis from the perspective of its outcome.

Modern memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image. What began as writing ends as high fidelity and tape recording. The less memory is experienced from the inside the more it exists only through its exterior scaffolding and outward signs—hence the obsession with the archive that marks our age, attempting at once the complete conservation of the present as well as the total preservation of the past. Fear of a rapid and final disappearance combines with anxiety about the meaning of the present and uncertainty about the future to give even the most humble testimony, the most modest vestige, the potential dignity of the memorable. Have we not sufficiently regretted and deplored the loss or destruction, by our predecessors, of potentially informative sources to avoid opening ourselves to the same reproach from our successors? Memory has been wholly absorbed by its meticulous reconstitution. Its new vocation is to record; delegating to the archive the responsibility of remembering, it sheds its signs upon depositing them there, as a snake sheds its skin.

What we call memory is in fact the gigantic and breathtaking storehouse of a material stock of what it would be impossible for us to remember, an unlimited repertoire of what might need to be recalled. Leibnitz's "paper memory" has become an autonomous institution of museums, libraries, depositories, centers of documentation, and data banks. Specialists estimate that in the public archives alone, in just a few decades, the quantitative revolution has multiplied the number of records by one thousand. No society has ever produced archives as deliberately as our own, not only by volume, not only by new technical means of reproduction and preservation, but also by its superstitious esteem, by its veneration of the trace. Even as traditional memory disappears, we feel obliged assiduously to collect remains, testimonies, documents, images, speeches, any visible signs of what has been, as if this burgeoning dossier were to be called upon to

furnish some proof to who knows what tribunal of history. The sacred is invested in the trace that is at the same time its negation. It becomes impossible to predict what should be remembered—whence the disinclination to destroy anything that leads to the corresponding reinforcement of all the institutions of memory. A strange role reversal has occurred between the professional, once reproached for an obsession with conservation, and the amateur producer of archives. Today, private enterprise and public administration keep everything, while professional archivists have learned that the essence of their trade is the art of controlled destruction.

In just a few years, then, the materialization of memory has been tremendously dilated, multiplied, decentralized, democratized. In the classical period, the three main producers of archives were the great families, the church, and the state. But who, today, does not feel compelled to record his feelings, to write his memoirs—not only the most minor historical actor but also his witnesses, his spouse, and his doctor. The less extraordinary the testimony, the more aptly it seems to illustrate the average mentality.

The imperative of our epoch is not only to keep everything, to preserve every indicator of memory—even when we are not sure which memory is being indicated—but also to produce archives. The French Social Security archives are a troubling example: an unparalleled quantity of documents, they represent today three hundred linear kilometers. Ideally, the computerized evaluation of this mass of raw memory would provide a reading of the sum total of the normal and the pathological in society, from diets to lifestyles, by region and by profession; yet even its preservation and plausible implementation call for drastic and impossible choices. Record as much as you can, something will remain. This is, to take another telling example, the conclusion implied by the proliferation of oral histories. There are currently in France more than three hundred teams employed in gathering "the voices that come to us from the past" (Philippe Joutard). But these are not ordinary archives, if we consider that to produce them requires thirty-six hours for each hour of recording time and that they can never be used piecemeal, because they only have meaning when heard in their entirety. Whose will to remember do they ultimately reflect, that of the interviewer or that of the interviewed? No longer living memory's more or less intended remainder, the archive has become the deliberate and calculated secretion of lost memory. It adds to life—itself often a function of its own recording—a secondary memory, a prosthesis-memory. The indiscriminate production of archives is the acute effect of a new consciousness, the clearest expression of the terrorism of historicized memory.

This form of memory comes to us from the outside; because it is no longer a social practice, we interiorize it as an individual constraint.

The passage from memory to history has required every social group to redefine its identity through the revitalization of its own history. The task of remembering makes everyone his own historian. The demand for history has thus largely overflowed the circle of professional historians. Those who have long been marginalized in traditional history are not the only ones haunted by the need to recover their buried pasts. Following the example of ethnic groups and social minorities, every established group, intellectual or not, learned or not, has felt the need to go in search of its own origins and identity. Indeed, there is hardly a family today in which some member has not recently sought to document as accurately as possible his or her ancestors' furtive existences. The increase in genealogical research is a massive new phenomenon: the national archives reports that 43 percent of those doing archival research in 1982 were working on genealogical history, as compared with the 38 percent who were university researchers. It is striking that we owe the most significant histories of biology, physics, medicine, and music not to professional historians but to biologists, physicists, doctors, and musicians. Educators themselves have taken charge of the history of education, from physical education to instruction in educational philosophy. In the wake of attacks on established domains of knowledge, each discipline has sought validation in the retrospective perusal of its own origins. Sociology goes in search of its founding fathers; anthropology undertakes to explore its own past, from the sixteenth-century chroniclers to the colonial administrators. Even literary criticism occupies itself in retracing the genesis of its categories and tradition. As for history, positivism, long since abandoned by professional historians, has found in this urgent need a popularity and necessity it never knew before. The decomposition of memory-history has multiplied the number of private memories demanding their individual histories.

An order is given to remember, but the responsibility is mine and it is I who must remember. One of the costs of the historical metamorphosis of memory has been a wholesale preoccupation with the individual psychology of remembering. Indeed, the two phenomena are so intimately linked that one can hardly avoid comparing them, down to their exact chronological coincidence. At the end of the last century, when the decisive blow to traditional balances was felt—in particular the disintegration of the rural world—memory appeared at the center of philosophical thought, with Bergson; at the core of the psychological personality, with Freud; at the heart of literary autobiography, with Proust. We owe to Freud and to Proust those two intimate and yet universal sites of memory, the primal scene and the celebrated *petite madeleine*. The transformation of memory implies a decisive shift from the historical to the psychological, from the social to the individual, from the objective message to its subjective reception, from repetition to rememoration. The total psychologization of contemporary memory entails a completely new economy of the identity of the self, the mechanics of memory, and the relevance of the past.

In the last analysis, it is upon the individual and upon the individual alone that the constraint of memory weighs insistently as well as imperceptibly. The atomization of a general memory into a private one has given the obligation to remember a power of internal coercion. It gives everyone the necessity to remember and to protect the trappings of identity; when memory is no longer everywhere, it will not be anywhere unless one takes the responsibility to recapture it through individual means. The less memory is experienced collectively, the more it will require individuals to undertake to become themselves memory-individuals, as if an inner voice were to tell each Corsican "You must be Corsican" and each Breton "You must be Breton." To understand the force and appeal of this sense of obligation, perhaps we should think of Jewish memory, which has recently been revived among many nonpracticing Jews. In this tradition, which has no other history than its own memory, to be Jewish is to remember that one is such; but once this incontestable memory has been interiorized, it eventually demands full recognition. What is being remembered? In a sense, it is memory itself. The psychologization of memory has thus given every individual the sense that his or her salvation ultimately depends on the repayment of an impossible debt.

In addition to archive-memory and duty-memory, a third aspect is needed to complete the picture of this modern metamorphosis: distance-memory.

This is because our relation to the past, at least as it reveals itself in major historical studies, is something entirely different from what we would expect from a memory: no longer a retrospective continuity but the illumination of discontinuity. In the history-memory of old, accurate perceptions of the past were characterized by the assumption that the past could be retrieved. The past could always be resuscitated by an effort of rememoration; indeed, the present itself became a sort of recycled, up-dated past, realized as the present through such welding and anchoring. True, for there to be a sense of the past there had to be a "before" and an "after," a chasm had to intervene between the present and the past. But this was not so much a separation experienced as radical difference as it was a lapse experienced as a filiation to be restored. Progress and decadence, the two great themes of historical intelligibility at least since modern times, both aptly express this cult of continuity, the confident assumption of knowing to whom and to what we owe our existence—whence the importance of the idea of "origins," an already profane version of the mythological narrative, but one that contributed to giving meaning and a sense of the sacred to a society engaged in a nationwide process of secularization. The greater the origins, the more they magnified our greatness. Through the past we venerated above all ourselves.

It is this relation which has been broken. Just as the future—formerly a visible, predictable, manipulable, well-marked extension of the present—has come

to seem invisible, unpredictable, uncontrollable, so have we gone from the idea of a visible past to an invisible one; from a solid and steady past to our fractured past; from a history sought in the continuity of memory to a memory cast in the discontinuity of history. We speak no longer of "origins" but of "births." Given to us as radically other, the past has become a world apart. Ironically, modern memory reveals itself most genuinely when it shows how far we have come away from it.

We should not believe, however, that this sense of discontinuity finds only unfocused and vague expression. Paradoxically, distance demands the *rapprochement* that negates it while giving it resonance. Never have we longed in a more physical manner to evoke the weight of the land at our feet, the hand of the devil in the year 1000, or the stench of eighteenth-century cities. Yet only in a regime of discontinuity are such hallucinations of the past conceivable. Our relation to the past is now formed in a subtle play between its intractability and its disappearance, a question of a representation—in the original sense of the word—radically different from the old ideal of resurrecting the past. As comprehensive as it may have wished to be, in practice such a resurrection implied a hierarchy of memory, ordering the perspective of the past beneath the gaze of a static present by the skillful manipulation of light and shadow. But the loss of a single explanatory principle, while casting us into a fragmented universe, has promoted every object—even the most humble, the most improbable, the most inaccessible—to the dignity of a historical mystery. Since no one knows what the past will be made of next, anxiety turns everything into a trace, a possible indication, a hint of history that contaminates the innocence of all things.

Representation proceeds by strategic highlighting, selecting samples and multiplying examples. Ours is an intensely retinal and powerfully televisual memory. We can link the acclaimed "return of the narrative" evident in recent historical writing and the omnipotence of imagery and cinema in contemporary culture—even if, to be sure, this narrative is very different from traditional narrative, with its syncopated parts and formal closure. How can we not connect our scrupulous respect for archival documents, themselves fragments put before our eyes, and the unique frame we give to oral literature, quoting informants to render intelligible their voices—are they not clearly connected to the sense of directness that we have become accustomed to elsewhere? How can we but see in our taste for everyday life in the past a resort to the only remaining means for restoring the flavor of things, the slow rhythms of past times—and in the anonymous biographies of ordinary people the understanding that the masses do not allow themselves to be measured as a mass? How can we fail to read, in the shards of the past delivered to us by so many microhistories, the will to make the history we are reconstructing equal to the history we have lived? We could speak of mirror-memory if all mirrors did not reflect the same—for it is difference that we are seeking, and in the image of this difference, the ephemeral spectacle of an unre-

coverable identity. It is no longer genesis that we seek but instead the decipherment of what we are in the light of what we are no longer.

Strangely, this alchemy of essentials contributes to making the practice of history—from which the relentless drive toward the future ought to have excused us—a repository for the secrets of the present. This thaumaturgical operation is accomplished more by the historian than by history. The historian's is a strange fate; his role and place in society were once simple and clearly defined: to be the spokesman of the past and the herald of the future. In this capacity his person counted less than his services; his role was that of an erudite transparency, a vehicle of transmission, a bridge stretched as lightly as possible between the raw materiality of the document and its inscription in memory—ultimately, an absence obsessed with objectivity. But with the disintegration of history-memory, a new type of historian emerges who, unlike his precursors, is ready to confess the intimate relation he maintains to his subject. Better still, he is ready to proclaim it, deepen it, make of it not the obstacle but the means of his understanding.

Imagine a society entirely absorbed in its own historicity. It would be incapable of producing historians. Living entirely under the sign of the future, it would satisfy itself with automatic self-recording processes and auto-inventory machines, postponing indefinitely the task of understanding itself. By contrast, our society—torn from its memory by the scale of its transformations but all the more obsessed with understanding itself historically—is forced to give an increasingly central role to the operations that take place within the historian. The historian is one who prevents history from becoming *merely* history.

In the same way that we owe our historical overview to a panoramic distance, and our artificial hyper-realization of the past to a definitive estrangement, a changing mode of perception returns the historian, almost against his will, to the traditional objects from which he had turned away, the common knowledge of our national memory. Returning across the threshold of one's natal home, one finds oneself in the old abode, now uninhabited and practically unrecognizable—with the same family heirlooms, but under another light; before the same *atelier*, but for another task; in the same rooms, but with another role. As historiography has entered its epistemological age, with memory ineluctably engulfed by history, the historian has become no longer a memory-individual but, in himself, a *lieu de mémoire*.

Les Lieux de Mémoire: Another History

Lieux de mémoire are simple and ambiguous, natural and artificial, at once immediately available in concrete sensual experience and susceptible to the most abstract elaboration. Indeed, they are *lieux* in three senses of the word—

material, symbolic, and functional. Even an apparently purely material site, like an archive, becomes a *lieu de mémoire* only if the imagination invests it with a symbolic aura. A purely functional site, like a classroom manual, a testament, or a veterans' reunion belongs to the category only inasmuch as it is also the object of a ritual. And the observance of a commemorative minute of silence, an extreme example of a strictly symbolic action, serves as a concentrated appeal to memory by literally breaking a temporal continuity. Moreover, the three aspects always coexist. Take, for example, the notion of a historical generation: it is material by its demographic content and supposedly functional—since memories are crystallized and transmitted from one generation to the next—but it is also symbolic, since it characterizes, by referring to events or experiences shared by a small minority, a larger group that may not have participated in them.

Lieux de mémoire are created by a play of memory and history, an interaction of two factors that results in their reciprocal overdetermination. To begin with, there must be a will to remember. If we were to abandon this criterion, we would quickly drift into admitting virtually everything as worthy of remembrance. One is reminded of the prudent rules of old-fashioned historical criticism, which distinguished between "direct sources," intentionally produced by society with a view to their future reproduction—a law or a work of art, for example—and the indiscriminate mass of "indirect sources," comprising all the testimony an epoch inadvertently leaves to historians. Without the intention to remember, *lieux de mémoire* would be indistinguishable from *lieux d'histoire*.

On the other hand, it is clear that without the intervention of history, time, and change, we would content ourselves with simply a schematic outline of the objects of memory. The *lieux* we speak of, then, are mixed, hybrid, mutant, bound intimately with life and death, with time and eternity; enveloped in a Möbius strip of the collective and the individual, the sacred and the profane, the immutable and the mobile. For if we accept that the most fundamental purpose of the *lieu de mémoire* is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial—just as if gold were the only memory of money—all of this in order to capture a maximum of meaning in the fewest of signs, it is also clear that *lieux de mémoire* only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications.

Let us take two very different examples. First, the Revolutionary calendar, which was very much a *lieu de mémoire* since, as a calendar, it was designed to provide the a priori frame of reference for all possible memory while, as a revolutionary document, through its nomenclature and symbolism, it was supposed to "open a new book to history," as its principal author ambitiously put it, or to "return Frenchmen entirely to themselves," according to another of its advocates. The function of the calendar, it was thought, would be to halt history at the hour of the Revolution by indexing future months, days, centuries, and years to the

Revolutionary epic. Yet, to our eyes, what further qualifies the revolutionary calendar as a *lieu de mémoire* is its apparently inevitable failure to have become what its founders hoped. If we still lived today according to its rhythm, it would have become as familiar to us as the Gregorian calendar and would consequently have lost its interest as a *lieu de mémoire*. It would have melted into our memorial landscape, serving only to date every other conceivable memorial site. As it turns out, its failure has not been complete; key dates still emerge from it to which it will always remain attached: Vendémiaire, Thermidor, Brumaire. Just so, the *lieu de mémoire* turns in on itself—an arabesque in the deforming mirror that is its truth.

Let us consider too the celebrated *Tour de la France par deux enfants*, also incontestably a *lieu de mémoire*; like the *Petit Lavisse*, it trained the memory of millions of French boys and girls. Thanks to it, the Minister of Public Instruction could draw his pocket watch at 8:05 A.M. and declare, "All of our children are crossing the Alps." Moreover, the *Tour* was an inventory of what one ought to know about France, an exercise in identification and a voyage of initiation. But here things get more complicated: a close reading shows that as of its publication in 1877, the *Tour* portrayed a France that no longer existed, and that in this year, when May 16 saw the consolidation of the Third Republic, it drew its seductive power from a subtle enchantment with the past. As is so often the case with books for children, the *Tour* owed its initial success to the memory of adults. And later? Thirty-five years after publication, on the eve of the war of 1914 when it was still a sovereign text, it seemed already a nostalgic institution: despite revisions, the older edition sold more than the new. Then the *Tour* became rare, employed only in marginal areas in the remote countryside. Slipping out of collective memory, it entered historical memory, then pedagogical memory. For its centennial, in 1977, however, just as the sales of an autobiography from the provinces, Pierre Hélias's *Le Cheval d'orgueil*, reached a million copies and when an industrial France stricken by economic crisis discovered its oral memory and peasant roots, the *Tour* was reprinted, and once again entered the collective memory, a different one this time, but still subject to being forgotten and revived in the future. What is the essence of this quintessential *lieu de mémoire*—its original intention or its return in the cycles of memory? Clearly both: all *lieux de mémoire* are objects *mises en abîme*.

It is this principle of double identity that enables us to map, within the indefinite multiplicity of sites, a hierarchy, a set of limits, a repertoire of ranges. This principle is crucial because, if one keeps in mind the broad categories of the genre—anything pertaining to the cult of the dead, anything relating to the patrimony, anything administering the presence of the past within the present—it is clear that some seemingly improbable objects can be legitimately considered *lieux de mémoire* while, conversely, many that seem to fit by definition should in fact be excluded. What makes certain prehistoric, geographical, archaeological locations

important as sites is often precisely what ought to exclude them from being *lieux de mémoire*: the absolute absence of a will to remember and, by way of compensation, the crushing weight imposed on them by time, science, and the dreams of men. On the other hand, not every border marking has the credentials of the Rhine or the Finistère, that "Land's End" at the tip of Brittany ennobled in the pages of Michelet. Every constitution, every diplomatic treaty is a *lieu de mémoire*, although the constitution of 1793 lays a different claim than that of 1791, given the foundational status of the Declaration of the Rights of Man; and the peace of Nimwegen has a different status than, at both ends of the history of Europe, the Verdun compromise and the Yalta conference.

Amid these complexities, it is memory that dictates while history writes; this is why both history books and historical events merit special attention. As memory's ideal historical instruments, rather than as permutations of history and memory, they inscribe a neat border around a domain of memory. Are not every great historical work and the historical genre itself, every great event and the notion of event itself, in some sense by definition *lieux de mémoire*? The question calls for a precise answer.

Among history books, only those founded on a revision of memory or serving as its pedagogical breviaries are *lieux de mémoire*. In France, there have been relatively few moments that have established a new historical memory. The thirteenth-century *Grandes Chroniques de France* condensed dynastic memory and established the model for several centuries of historiography. In the sixteenth century, during the Wars of Religion, the school of so-called "perfect history" destroyed the legend of the monarchy's Trojan origins and restored Gaulish antiquity: Etienne Pasquier's *Recherches de la France* (1599), by the very modernity of its title (referring to "research" and "France" rather than to chronicling and dynastic rule), is an emblematic example. The historiography of the late Restoration abruptly introduced the modern conception of history: Thierry's *Lettres sur l'histoire de France* (1820) provided the inaugural impulse, and their publication as a volume in 1827 coincided, within a few months, with an illustrious beginner's first book, Michelet's *Précis d'histoire moderne* and with Guizot's first lectures on "the history of European civilization and of France." Next came the advent of national positivist history, whose manifesto was the *Revue historique* (1876) and whose monument is still Lavisse's twenty-seven-volume *Histoire de France*. One could also cite the rise of memoirs, as well as autobiographies and diaries. Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, Stendhal's *Vie de Henry Brulard*, and the *Journal d'Amiel* are *lieux de mémoire* not because they are bigger or better examples but because they complicate the simple exercise of memory with a set of questions directed to memory itself. As much can be said for the memoirs of statesmen. From Sully to de Gaulle, from Richelieu's *Testament* to the *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène* or Poincaré's *Journal*, the genre has its constants and specificities, independent of the uneven value of the texts. It implies an awareness of other memoirs, a superimposition of the man

of letters and the man of action, the identification of individual discourse with collective discourse, the insertion of individual rationality into *raison d'état*: all motifs that, in the broad perspective of national memory, compel us to think of them as *lieux de mémoire*.

As for "great events," only two types are especially pertinent, and not in any way as a function of their "greatness." On the one hand, there are those minuscule events, barely remarked at the time, on which posterity retrospectively confers the greatness of origins, the solemnity of inaugural ruptures. On the other hand, there are those nonevents that are immediately charged with heavy symbolic meaning and that, at the moment of their occurrence, seem like anticipated commemorations of themselves; contemporary history, by means of the media, has seen a proliferation of stillborn attempts to create such events. Thus, on one side, the election of Hugh Capet, an unremarkable incident but one to which ten centuries of posterity, ending on the scaffold, have given a weight it did not possess at the start; on the other side, the wagon of Rethondes, the handshake of Montoire, or the Liberation parade down the Champs-Elysées. The founding event or the spectacular event, but in neither case the event itself: indeed, it is the exclusion of the event that defines the *lieu de mémoire*. Memory attaches itself to sites, whereas history attaches itself to events.

Within the category, however, nothing prevents us from imagining every possible distribution and necessary classification, from such natural, concretely experienced *lieux de mémoire* as cemeteries, museums, and anniversaries; to the most intellectually elaborate ones—not only notions such as generation, lineage, local memory, but also those of the formal divisions of inherited property (*partages*), on which every perception of French space is founded, or of the "landscape as a painting" that comes to mind when one thinks of Corot or of Cézanne's *Mont Sainte-Victoire*. Should we stress the *lieu de mémoire*'s material aspects, they would readily display themselves in a vast gradation. There are portable *lieux*, of which the people of memory, the Jews, have given a major example in the Tablets of the Law; there are the topographical ones, which owe everything to the specificity of their location and to being rooted in the ground—so, for example, the conjunction of sites of tourism and centers of historical scholarship, the Bibliothèque nationale on the site of the Hôtel Mazarin, the Archives nationales in the Hôtel Soubise. Then there are the monumental memory-sites, not to be confused with architectural sites alone. Statues or monuments to the dead, for instance, owe their meaning to their intrinsic existence; even though their location is far from arbitrary, one could justify relocating them without altering their meaning. Such is not the case with ensembles constructed over time, which draw their meaning from the complex relations between their elements: such are mirrors of a world or a period, like the cathedral of Chartres or the palace of Versailles.

If, on the other hand, we were to stress the functional element, an array of

lieux de mémoire would display themselves, ranging from those dedicated to preserving an incommunicable experience that would disappear along with those who shared it—such as the veterans' associations—to those whose purpose is pedagogical, as the manuals, dictionaries, testaments, and memoranda drafted by heads of families in the early modern period for the edification of their descendants.

If, finally, we were most concerned with the symbolic element, we might oppose, for example, dominant and dominated *lieux de mémoire*. The first, spectacular and triumphant, imposing and, generally, imposed—either by a national authority or by an established interest, but always from above—characteristically have the coldness and solemnity of official ceremonies. One attends them rather than visits them. The second are places of refuge, sanctuaries of spontaneous devotion and silent pilgrimage, where one finds the living heart of memory. On the one hand, the Sacre-Coeur or the national obsequies of Paul Valéry; on the other, the popular pilgrimage of Lourdes or the burial of Jean-Paul Sartre; here de Gaulle's funeral at Notre-Dame, there the cemetery of Colombey.

These classifications could be refined ad infinitum. One could oppose public sites of memory and private ones; pure sites, exhaustive of their commemorative function—such as funeral eulogies, the battlefield of Douaumont or the Wall of the Fédérés—and those composite sites in which the commemorative element is only one amid many symbolic meanings, such as the national flag, festival itineraries, pilgrimages, and so on. The value of a first attempt at a typology would lie not in its rigor or comprehensiveness, not even in its evocative power, but in the fact that it is possible. For the very possibility of a history of *lieux de mémoire* demonstrates the existence of an invisible thread linking apparently unconnected objects. It suggests that the comparison of the cemetery of Père-Lachaise and the Statistique générale de la France is not the same as the surrealist encounter of the umbrella and the sewing machine. There is a differentiated network to which all of these separate identities belong, an unconscious organization of collective memory that it is our responsibility to bring to consciousness. The national history of France today traverses this network.

One simple but decisive trait of *lieux de mémoire* sets them apart from every type of history to which we have become accustomed, ancient or modern. Every previous historical or scientific approach to memory, whether national or social, has concerned itself with *realia*, with things in themselves and in their immediate reality. Contrary to historical objects, however, *lieux de mémoire* have no referent in reality; or, rather, they are their own referent: pure, exclusively self-referential signs. This is not to say that they are without content, physical presence, or history; it is to suggest that what makes them *lieux de mémoire* is precisely that by

which they escape from history. In this sense, the *lieu de mémoire* is double: a site of excess closed upon itself, concentrated in its own name, but also forever open to the full range of its possible significations.

This is what makes the history of *lieux de mémoire* at once banal and extraordinary. Obvious topics, classic material, sources ready at hand, the least sophisticated methods: one would think we were returning to long outmoded historical methods. But such is not the case. Although these objects must be grasped in empirical detail, the issues at stake are ill suited to expression in the categories of traditional historiography. Reflecting on *lieux de mémoire* transforms historical criticism into critical history—and not only in its methods; it allows history a secondary, purely transferential existence, even a kind of reawakening. Like war, the history of *lieux de mémoire* is an art of implementation, practiced in the fragile happiness derived from relating to rehabilitated objects and from the involvement of the historian in his or her subject. It is a history that, in the last analysis, rests upon what it mobilizes: an impalpable, barely expressible, self-imposed bond; what remains of our ineradicable, carnal attachment to these faded symbols; the reincarnation of history as it was practiced by Michelet, irresistibly putting to mind the recovery from lost love of which Proust spoke so well—that moment when the obsessive grasp of passion finally loosens but whose true sadness is no longer to suffer from what one has so long suffered, henceforth to understand only with the mind's reason, no longer with the unreason of the heart.

This is a very literary reference. Should we regret it or, on the contrary, suggest its full justification? Once again, the answer derives from our present historical situation. In fact, memory has never known more than two forms of legitimacy: historical and literary. These have run parallel to each other but until now always separately. At present the boundary between the two is blurring; following closely upon the successive deaths of memory-history and memory-fiction, a new kind of history has been born, which owes its prestige and legitimacy to the new relation it maintains to the past. History has become our replaceable imagination—hence the last stand of faltering fiction in the renaissance of the historical novel, the vogue for personalized documents, the literary revitalization of historical drama, the success of the oral historical tale. Our interest in these *lieux de mémoire* that anchor, condense, and express the exhausted capital of our collective memory derives from this new sensibility. History has become the deep reference of a period that has been wrenched from its depths, a realistic novel in a period in which there are no real novels. Memory has been promoted to the center of history: such is the spectacular bereavement of literature.

—Translated by Marc Roudebush