

MENTALITIES, MATRIX OF MEMORY

by

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Opsomming

Mentaliteite, matriks van geheue

In die opstel word oorweging geskenk aan die manier waarop die belangstelling van historici uit 'n vorige geslag op die terrein van die geskiedenis van mentaliteite, die weg voorberei het vir die huidige tendens om van die geskiedenis van geheue kennis te neem. Daar word verduidelik hoe studies deur historici van mentaliteit oor onderwerpe soos oraliteit/geletterdheid (Walter Ong), die dinamika van tradisie (Philippe Ariés) en die verdere uitbreiding op vorme van geheue/herinnering (Michel Foucault) die inspirasie was vir nuwe rigtings van navorsing in die aard en gebruike van geheue: die interpolasie van mondelinge tradisie van die geskrewe woord (soos dit manifesteer in die onlangse navorsing oor die historiese Jesus); die verkenning van die kultus van private geheue (byvoorbeeld, die geskiedenis van private lewe in die negentiende eeu); en die analise van die politiek van openbare geheue (soos dit na vore gekom het in die historiese bewaringsbeweging). Die opstel sluit af met enkele waarnemings oor die implikasies van die historiografiese oorgang van mentaliteite na geheue sodat ons opsluit historiese tyd kan verstaan.

Mentalities as a memory problem: some preliminary observations

I would like to offer an interpretation of the way in which the history of mentalities considered as an historiographical project served as a prelude to the historians' current interest in the relationship between memory and history. There is a connection, I would propose, between their preoccupation

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with collective mentalities in the 1960s and 1970s and with collective memory in the 1980s and 1990s.

From the standpoint of historiography, the history of mentalities is best appreciated as a stage in the changing fashions of cultural history. The term “mentalities” is not invoked much today, and is in some ways dated. It came out of French historical scholarship and was closely tied to the particular concerns of the *Annales* historians during the 1960s. Scholarly work in mentalities complemented the earlier investigations of social historians during the 1950s into a “history from below”, and it served as an alternative to the long-standing interest in the history of ideas, with its stress on intellectuals. Historians of mentalities redirected attention from the high discourse of this elite to the popular attitudes of ordinary people. They developed a new repertoire of topics little studied before: changing attitudes toward childhood and family life, growing up, growing old, and dying; eccentric, deviant, criminal, and non-conformist behavior; manners and social mores; religious piety and devotional practices.¹

By the 1980s, however, the term “history of mentalities” was beginning to yield place in French scholarship to that of the “history of private life”. The changing terminology is, I think, significant, for it suggests a historiographical retreat from the public sphere in which the meaning of history had always been sought. In mentalities, the notion of historical destiny was being domesticated, as the expectations of ordinary people received from historians an unprecedented attention.

The rapid historiographical evolution of this new approach to cultural history suggests that the interest in mentalities was too ephemeral to sustain an historiographical tradition. But it prepared the way for the historians’ rediscovery of the topic of memory itself.² In this respect, I shall argue that the current interest in memory is closely linked to the provocative philosophical argument about the “end of history”, which for its proponents concerns not the coming of the apocalypse but the eclipse of a way of ordering historical time that privileges the future.³ With the waning faith of historians in the vision of progress inspired by the Enlightenment, memory

Philippe Ariès, “L’Histoire des mentalités,” in *La Nouvelle Histoire*, Edited by Jacques Le Goff, revised edition (Editions Complexe, Paris, 1988), pp. 167-90.

See the discussion concerning memory as the stuff of history by Jacques Le Goff, *Memory and History*, (Translated by Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman, Columbia University Press, New York, 1992), pp. xi - xii, 50, 95.

3. See especially Lutz Niethammer, *Posthistoire; Has History come to an End?* (Translated by Patrick Camiller (1989). Verso, London, 1992).

has come to reassert its claims to the present as the primary reference point of historical time.

Memory was not a topic that historians of mentalities addressed directly in the heyday of their studies of everyday life. But it was implicit in much of what they said about the customs and tacit understandings woven into the fabric of popular traditions. The issues they raised tell us a lot about our changing understanding of the relationship between memory and history. With that in mind, I would make three preliminary observations about the way mentalities opened historiographical pathways that made of memory the prominent topic of historical investigation that it has become today:

1. *The relativity of historical time.* In studying memory as a mentalities problem, we must consider its pace of historical time. Mentalities occupies a middle range of time --- time as it is measured in centuries, not millennia or aeons.⁴ This is worth mentioning because some of the modern interest in memory has been in deep time --- in primordial memories of the sort that the Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung identified with archetypes, or the biological memory that students of genetics currently investigate.⁵ The time of mentalities lies closer to us. At issue is the question: what powers of memory do you and I hold, and have these powers changed in recent time --- say over the last 3000 years, or better 300 years? Did people living in antiquity have greater powers of memory than we do? Or did they simply use their memories in a different way?

A few years ago at my university, we had a visit from a man who made it his hobby to recite the ancient epics of Homer from memory before amazed audiences. A member of our classics faculty called at random for chapter and verse from a text in hand. Our visitor then recited verbatim long passages of the epic in Greek. It was an impressive, if odd accomplishment. The problem is that his recitation of a text had nothing to do with the way the Homeric rhapsodes once sang these epic tales. The rigidity of our guest's fundamentalist reading of a Homeric epic was far removed from the pliability

I am referring here to the famous explication of the relativity of historical time formulated by Fernand Braudel in the preface to his *Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, (Translated by Sian Reynolds (1966); Harper, New York, 1972), pp. 1:20-21.

The most interesting recent formulation is that of Rupert Sheldrake, *The Presence of the Past: Morphic Resonance and the Habits of Nature* (Times Books, New York:, 1988), esp. pp. 3-17, 159-77, 308-24. Building on an intellectual tradition that includes C.S. Peirce, Samuel Butler, Henri Bergson, and C.G. Jung, he postulates the power of repetition as an innate property of nature.

for living memory from the rhapsodes who recited it in a culture of primary orality.

The breakthrough scholarship on the problem had come through investigations of the changing uses of memory in the shift from orality to literacy, notably by the classicist Milman Parry early in this century.⁶ A student of the epics of Homer, he explained how rhapsodes remembered. The Homeric rhapsode fitted poetical formulae to the plot of a basic tale type. Plot is a simple form of time-factoring. It is a mnemonic structure easily remembered, and in epic its episodes are often interchangeable. The poetical language used was rhythmic and full of stock phrasing. Homer, Parry concluded, was not the name of a single author but a collective term used to identify all the rhapsodes who sang the epic tales. These were never rendered in exactly the same way. Much depended on mood and audience. Parry and his successor Albert Lord confirmed their thesis by observing the living rhapsodes of Serbia and Croatia, who employed the same techniques. Certainly they must have possessed prodigious memories. But singing the Homeric tales was more a matter of method than of rote memory. Indeed, Lord noted how rapidly the rhapsodes' skills declined once literacy intervened.⁷ We might suppose that our uses of memory have often been modified across the centuries while our natural powers of memory have changed very little.

2. *The politics of tradition.* My second observation concerns the political implications of the interest of historians of mentalities in the workings of tradition. The topic of tradition had been the focus of the French *Annales* historian Lucien Febvre, mentalities' earliest pioneer. He claimed that his interest was primarily historiographical. For too long, he contended, historians had concentrated upon the political forces that promote historical change, and had left unexamined the cultural heritage of our everyday lives. Febvre was especially interested in the inertial power of received tradition to shape the cultural conceptions of later generations, even as they faced new historical realities. He noted the power of collective memory to retard innovation and improvisation. Tacit understanding was the sustaining element of immemorial tradition, confirming the wisdom of well-established ways.⁸ To this day, *Annales* historians stress mentalities as a non-political approach

6. A. PARRY (Ed.), *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collective Papers of Milman Parry*, (Clarendon, Oxford, 1971), esp. pp. 325-61, 408-13, 439-64.
A. LORD, *The Singer of Tales* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1960), pp. 124-38.
L. FEBVRE, "Psychologie et histoire," *Encyclopédie française* 8 (1938 ed.), 8:12/3-7.

to history. They attribute its rising popularity during the 1960s to the growing sophistication of research techniques, a “third level” of quantification.⁹

Still, a political motivation may have inspired Philippe Ariès, who by the 1960s had become one of the most widely read practitioners in this field. A political conservative, he offered mentalities as a critique of modernity — of what he perceived to be a decline in the quality of everyday life in the modern world. Modern western society offered affluence, but also conformism to mass culture, an insatiable consumerism, and an isolating individualism. For Ariès, the history of mentalities, particularly as it focused on pre-industrial society, provided nostalgic insight into a largely forgotten traditional society, a “world that we have lost”. What he had in mind were such qualities as sociability, personalism in relationships, civility in commercial dealings, and loyalty in friendships, all of which he believed had eroded in modern culture.¹⁰

As a young man in prewar Paris, Ariès had been a militant in the royalist inspired Action Française. During the war he taught a course in the history of history at a Vichy sponsored training school. The school, with its collaborationist directors, dashed his hopes for the decentralized, traditionalist regime he believed Vichy might have been. So he sought a refuge for his royalist politics in his historical inquiries into the mores of old France. Shortly after the war, he wrote a series of historiographical essays later published as *Le Temps de l'histoire* (1954). Therein he explored the way in which modern history had come to obscure traditions of popular culture that lived on in popular memory. The task, he proposed, was to disassemble modern historiography so as to identify the sources of those traditions — the stuff for a new history of private life, and through it a different perspective on the notion of human destiny.¹¹

3. *Michel Foucault and the deconstruction of memorial forms.* One hesitates to say anything more about him, now that we are several books beyond the “final Foucault”.¹² Because of our preoccupation with his

M. VOVELLE, “L’Histoire et la longue durée,” in *La Nouvelle Histoire*, 79.

10. P. ARIES, “Confessions d’un anarchiste de droite,” *Contrepoint*, 16 (1974), pp. 87-99. The articles that comprise his political journalism have recently been compiled by Jeannine Verdès-Leroux, (Ed.), *Le Présent quotidien, 1955-1966*, by Philippe Ariès (Seuil, Paris, 1997).

P. ARIES, *Le Temps de l'histoire* (Rocher, Monaco, 1954), pp. 257-62, 313-25.

12. J. BERNAUER and D. RASMUSSEN (Eds.), *The Final Foucault* (MIT Press, Cambridge, 1988).

methodological originality, we do not usually group him with historians of mentalities. But his historical studies are coeval with the rise of mentalities as a new field of historical inquiry, and he shares their interest in the boundaries of acceptable behavior in everyday life, as exemplified in his studies of attitudes toward asylums.

In this respect, it is worth noting that Ariès was the editor who decided to publish Foucault's history of madness when others had turned it down. As academic outsiders, they led parallel lives.¹³ Both were suspicious of the conformist demands of the welfare state, and both wrote searchingly about those private domains of human experience where one might still pursue a particular conception of one's destiny. Both conducted their investigations with an eye to the historical significance of the present, and its differences from the past. Their interests converged toward the end of their lives in studies of attitudes toward sexuality on the boundary between secrecy and disclosure. Together they contributed to the attenuation of the conception of destiny that had sustained modern historiography since the Enlightenment: Foucault by subverting the notion of continuity and progress; Ariès by transposing it to the private sphere.

Despite their mutual admiration, they brought opposing perspectives to the memory question. Whereas Ariès had been interested in the enduring presence of living traditions, Foucault redirected attention to the forms of tradition from which living memory has receded. He spoke of his project as one in "counter-memory", by which he meant a discrimination among the myriad forms with which we have sought to memorialize the past. It was Foucault's version of an end to history, a genealogy of the ruins of our past efforts to justify the civilizing process. In this respect, he treated cultural history as if it had always been a commemorative enterprise.

Foucault himself never wrote about commemorative rites and monuments in the way we ordinarily think of them. But for him all of the "words and things" that we create become monuments to the way we have fashioned our human world. He taught us to bracket recollection and to focus instead on the commemorative leavings that have over time given shape to our cultural identities. His exploration of the past, he explained, was an attempt to understand the endless diversification of the rhetorical strategies that we have in the past vainly employed to enshrine our present for the future. Memory

13. For Ariès's view of Foucault, see his "A Propos de 'La Volonté de savoir,'" *L'Arc* no. 70 (1977), pp. 27-32; for Foucault on Ariès, "Le Souci de la vérité," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 2 February 1984, pp. 56-57.

for Foucault was not about mere remembering. It was about mobilizing power through representation.¹⁴

With these observations in mind, permit me to connect them to three major directions of historical research into memory that mentalities has inspired: 1) studies of the interpolation of visions of the future in memory's passage from oral tradition to literate culture; 2) studies of the cultivation of private memory that underscore the power of formative origins; 3) studies of the uses of collective memory to serve present needs. Separate currents that would seem to favor different moments of historical time, they flow into a common historiographical stream that draws our attention to the presence of the past.

The formative future: the interpolation of oral tradition

Following the model of Parry and Lord, the techniques of orality/literacy have recently been employed to provide a new perspective on the teachings of the historical Jesus. It was a subject that had long since been set aside as beyond the historian's ken. From the late nineteenth until the mid-twentieth century, liberal biblical scholars such as Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann had argued that the quest for the historical Jesus was futile, inspired by a misguided fundamentalism. These scholars focused on the evangelical message of Jesus as the avatar of faith in the coming of the Kingdom --- the end of history in a cataclysmic event. They analyzed the gospels of the New Testament for their spiritual meaning, and explained the resurrection of Jesus in symbolic terms.

Only in the 1980s did a new generation of scholars, armed with new research techniques for distinguishing orality from literacy, return to the question of the historical Jesus. Gathering annually as the Jesus Seminar under the leadership of Robert Funk, they engaged in a close reading of the gospels in an effort to ferret out what may have been the teachings of Jesus from those subsequently attributed to him.¹⁵ In other words, they sought to identify the oral sayings of Jesus embedded in these literate texts composed some forty-five to sixty years after his death. In the process, they redirected attention from his eschatological mission to his role as a religious teacher, as exemplified in his aphorisms and parables. Their point is that the Jesus of faith is an imaginary reconstruction based on the memories of his disciples, revised during the two generations that intervened between his death and the

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14. M. FOUCAULT, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Harper, New York, 1972), pp. 3-17, 135-40.
 15. R. W. FUNK and R. W. HOOVER, "Introduction," in R.W. FUNK and R.W. HOOVER (Eds. and trans.), *The Five Gospels; The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (Macmillan, New York, 1993), pp. 1-38.

transcription of the synoptic gospels. In effect, Funk and his colleagues argued, early Christian teachers made of Jesus a cult figure, and recontextualised his role within the prophetic tradition of John the Baptist.

To understand Jesus's message, Funk contends, one must appreciate his role as a teacher within an oral tradition, even though posterity's appreciation of him as a savior is derived from the writings of the Evangelists. The scholars of the Jesus seminar, therefore, tried to discern within these writings residues of the oral tradition in which Jesus actually expressed his ideas. Their premise is that the passages that are the closest to the teachings of the historical Jesus are those sayings that bear the most pronounced hallmarks of orality: short, provocative, often-repeated phrases and stories. From this perspective, the role of the historical Jesus is analogous to that of "Homer" the rhapsode, and that of the Evangelists to "Homer" the scribe in that both gave fixed form to what had been an evolving legend.

The work of the Jesus Seminar, therefore, has recast scholarship on the New Testament. These scholars treat the gospels as narratives in which the memory of Jesus has been embellished by mythical elements that express his followers' faith in him, and by plausible fictions that enhanced the telling of the story of his life for first-century listeners. Within these texts --- composed out of diverse sources, filled with so many memories superimposed upon his actual teachings, revised in collective memory over time, and edited by the Evangelists who wrote after living testimony about him had disappeared --- they would identify those scattered passages that may have some claim to historical veracity. One might say that they are looking for the truth of Jesus's orality amidst the inventions of the Evangelists' literacy. The shift of scholarly interest from the symbolic to the historical Jesus marked a shift from his future influence to his present role. In this study of the interpolation of oral tradition, the presence of the past renews its claims upon historical interpretation.

The formative past: the cultivation of private memory

Such scholarship on orality/literacy also prepared the way for research into the rising distinction between public and private memory in the eighteenth century. Here I would mention the remarkable synthesis by Walter Ong. In his *Orality and Literacy* (1982), he offered a stage-theory of the correspondences between innovations in the technologies of communication and modifications in mentalities across the ages, from the primary orality of antiquity to the electronic revolution of our own times. The crux of his argument, however, concerns the democratization of print literacy in the eighteenth century, which altered the organization of knowledge in

fundamental ways. For Ong, the key was the shift from ear to eye in our perceptions, permitting the interiorisation of memory.¹⁶ In this respect Ong identifies the point of rupture in which the uses of memory were reconceived --- from rhetorical art to technique of introspection. His demarcation of the boundary between manuscript and print literacy has become the locus of burgeoning historical studies on the psychological effects of the rise of a culture of privacy, one deeply invested in extensive reading.¹⁷

Ong has his critics, who claim that he reduces mentalities to the problem of technologies of communication. They contend that it is too easy to say that the mode of communication we use shapes the way we remember.¹⁸ But it is probably no coincidence that memory as a problem for historical scholarship should have emerged now, when it has attracted so little attention for the last three hundred years. The present revolution in electronic communication is surely a factor in our current interest as historians in the workings of memory. There is a way in which the internet has revived the spatial technique of the classical art of memory. We click onto memory sites, then proceed in our exploration by further clicking onto the images located there to guide us.

Print literacy certainly fostered more private uses of memory. So too did family life. Here I would point once more to the significance of the French historian Philippe Ariès. Ariès studied changing attitudes toward childhood and family life, and subsequently toward death and commemoration. The cultural trend that underpins both of these studies, however, is the rising distinction between public and private life from the sixteenth century into modern times. Ariès was interested in the way the family became an intimate milieu apart that fostered a culture of privacy in two ways: first it nested the mores of what had once been public traditions in this private sphere; second, it served as an asylum of affection designed to nourish the personal ambitions

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16. W. ONG, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (Methuen, London, 1982).
 17. Here I would mention particularly the essay by Robert Darnton on the way Jean-Jacques Rousseau taught his generation to read. His novel *Emile* stimulated a new self-awareness on the part of his Eighteenth century readers. This highly personal tale made them more conscious of their own emotions, and ultimately more introspective about their personal lives. Robert Darnton, "Readers Respond to Rousseau: The Fabrication of Romantic Sensitivity," *The Great Cat Massacre* (Random House, New York, 1985), pp. 215-56.
 18. M. WARNER, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in eighteenth-Century America* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1990), p. 5; J. GOLDBERG, *Writing Matter* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1990), pp. 16-18, 21, 27.

of its children. The modern family created a private world that permitted its members to cultivate a personal sense of destiny.¹⁹

Ariès's last project was to edit a multi-volume *History of Private Life* from antiquity to the present. He did not live to see it published. But his guiding influence had a heuristic effect upon the scholars, mostly of the younger generation of Annalists, who contributed to it.²⁰ Consider for example the volume on the early modern era edited by Roger Chartier.²¹ Therein contributors inventory the many ways in which humans came to cull the past in privacy at the dawn of the modern era. They tend to highlight two developments. The first concerns the creation of private spaces, such as the designation of sequestered rooms within the home, the creation of private gardens for solitary reflection, and the further refinement of the boundary between public and private compartment in the code of civility. The second concerns the interiorisation of privacy through the collection of personal souvenirs, newly attentive devotional practices that emphasized private prayer, the widening practice of diary writing as a literature of intimacy, the vicarious emotional identification with the characters of popular novels, and more exaggerated styles of personal mourning and commemoration.²²

The privatization of memory during the nineteenth century intensified, and was closely allied to a growing preoccupation with self-evaluation and personal expectations.²³ Private memory provided the substance of the modern genre of autobiography, which nurtured the new, more reflective way of evaluating one's own life. In autobiography, the uses of memory were

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19. P. ARIÈS, *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (Seuil, Paris, 1973). See also the more recent discussion by Jacques Gélis, "The Child: From Anonymity to Individuality," in R. CHARTIER (Ed.), *A History of Private Life: Passions of the Renaissance*, (Belknap/Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1987), 3: pp. 309-25.
 20. See esp. P. ARIÈS, "Introduction," in *A History of Private Life*, 3: pp. 1-11. Coincidentally, the German historian Jurgen Habermas developed a like thesis in his *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Berger (1962) MIT Press, Cambridge, 1991), a text which is receiving more attention today than it did when it was first published.
Begin with the overview by R. CHARTIER, "The Practical Impact of Writing," in *History of Private Life*, 3: pp. 111-59.
 22. *Ibid.*, 3: Orest Ranum, "The Refuges of Intimacy," pp. 207-31; Jacques Revel, "The Uses of Civility," pp. 169-205; Madeleine Foisil, "The Literature of Intimacy," pp. 327-61; Jean-Marie Goulemot, "Literary Practices: Publicizing the Private," pp. 363-95.
A. CORBIN, "The Secret of the Individual," in M. PERROT (Ed.), *A History of Private Life: From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, pp. 4:457-547. See also P. GAY, *The Naked Heart* (Norton, New York, 1995).

reconceived in light of rising personal expectations about life's possibilities --- the notion that individual development has meaning, and so is worthy of being examined and commemorated. This conception of the life cycle as a developmental process became more elaborate over time. By the mid-twentieth century, it was being presented as an eight-stage mnemonic scheme by the psychologist Erik Erikson.²⁴ As notions of the life cycle were reconceived, so too were the defining moments that marked the stages of this process. These memories structured what were recognized as successive stages of growth in an ongoing search for the meaning of personal destiny.

The formative present: the construction of public memory

But private memory is not the major preoccupation of scholars in our times. Today the historians' interest has shifted from private to public memory, from the formative past to the formative present, from the experiences of individuals to the contexts of social groups. Most of this scholarship deals with collective memory as a social construction.

Here is where Foucault has had his heuristic effect. In light of their appreciation of Foucault and like advocates of deconstruction, historians rediscovered the work of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who had formulated the theoretical justification for this line of inquiry a half-century before.²⁵ Halbwachs had been suspicious of private memory and argued that it can survive only when it has strong social props. Hence he became interested in the way social groups place and eventually idealize particular memories within social contexts. Although he appears never to have had any dealings with Sigmund Freud, he saw himself engaged in an *agon* with the great psychologist, and he specifically repudiated Freud's attempt to make a science of the soul searching involved in private memory. For Halbwachs, memory is not retrieved out of the experiences of our past, but rather is reconstituted by the social groups in which we presently participate. We frame memory differently depending upon the social context in which we find ourselves. In each milieu --- our families, our religious communities, our work, and our play --- we localize a different set of memories. For Halbwachs, we do not evoke an objective past; we place its remembered imagery within the many

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24. E. H. ERIKSON, *Childhood and Society*, (2nd ed. (1950), Norton, New York, 1963), pp. 247-74.
 25. M. HALBWACHS, *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925), Arno Press, New York 1971), and *The Collective Memory* (1950), (trans. Francis J. and Vida Y. Ditter Harper & Row, New York, 1980). See also N. Wachtel, "Memory and History," in *History and Anthropology* 2 (1986), pp. 211-14.

social contexts of our present world. Such an approach, we might say, is characterized by its relativity. What matters are present circumstances and the groups to which we give our allegiances. We think memory is about reminiscence. In fact, it is about social power.²⁶ In his way, Halbwachs uncoupled the connection between commemoration and the belief in destiny, a strategy that has become a signature of postmodern scholarship.

Halbwachs's inquiry into the nature of collective memory has since been recognized as the prototype of today's studies of the political uses of memory.²⁷ Much of this work has focused on commemoration as a political act of constructing identity. For many historians this approach makes the history of public memory possible in a way that private memory cannot. Whether we can remember the experiences of our particular past accurately is problematic. But we can reconstruct with some precision what historical actors have claimed the past represented to them in their writings and in their commemorative sites and monuments. We can see how the representations of particular personalities or events have changed over time, and so reconstruct the history of how they have been remembered. Such a history of commemoration, we might say, tells us not what was but rather what was imagined.²⁸

The most popular recent book of this genre is Eric Hobsbawm's and Terence Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), which makes a strong case for the way we impose our commemorative imprint on the past. We represent the past in images that are useful to us in the present, they contend, and that

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26. P. HUTTON, "Sigmund Freud and Maurice Halbwachs: The Problem of Memory in Historical Psychology," *The History Teacher*, 27 (1994), pp. 145-58.
 27. Halbwachs's most important historical study about collective memory is his history of the invention of the Holy Land as a commemorative landscape. In his *La Topographie légendaire des Évangiles en Terre Sainte*, ed. Fernand Dumont (1941) Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1971), he explains how its monuments were constructed between the fourth and the thirteenth centuries, as first European Christian pilgrims and later crusaders made their way to Palestine to locate the places of the life of Jesus. Those that the historical Jesus may actually have frequented had long since disappeared and it is highly unlikely that they could ever be recovered. But in the churches and shrines erected to his memory there throughout the Middle Ages we have certain evidence of the way he was remembered.
 28. Excellent examples of this genre are Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1995) and Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (Knopf, New York, 1991).

reflect our bias and current concerns. Hobsbawm especially stresses the way tradition served the purposes of the nationalist and socialist mass movements that were emerging in the late nineteenth century.²⁹ These authors have their critics, who point out that they do not pay sufficient attention to the power of tacit understanding in the making of tradition. Still, they make a good case for the way the reformers of the modern age had become conscious of the political power of commemoration. They understood that commemorative celebrations are effective ways to mobilize people, and to incite their emotions in the name of a political cause.³⁰

An interesting meeting ground between history and the politics of commemoration today is to be found in the historical preservation movement. I mention it because it is a crossroads between the professional and popular interest in history. As venerable traditions weaken, the desire to incorporate the values they idealize into the present grows stronger. Invested with nostalgia, historical sites have in our times become destinations of mass tourism. Here I would note a new book by the American sociologist Diane Barthel, *Historic Preservation: Collective Memory and Historical Identity* (1996).³¹ She remarks upon two tendencies in present-day tourism to historical places: one toward idealization, the other toward commercialization. Each distorts the reality of the past - idealization leads toward utopian thinking; commercialization into sentimental journeys. Pushed to either extreme, she explains, these tendencies thwart the historians' effort to represent the past with some measure of accuracy.

With respect to idealization, Barthel's modern tourist is often motivated by nostalgia. Nostalgia is sweet, and it inspires curiosity. But it also evokes representations of the past that are clean, harmonious, and serene, whereas the stuff of history is dirty, chaotic, and full of passion. The problem at the other extreme, that of commercialization, is closely attuned to our postmodern times. Ours is a society caught up in the affluence of a consumer culture, and places of historical memory have become magnets for tourists at leisure. In such circumstances, preservationists and curators of historical monuments are caught between the desire to educate and the need to entertain, for historical tourism has become big business and those who design commemorative sites must accommodate the tastes of a mass culture. So enters consumer-orientated banalization, colloquially referred to as Disneyfication --- the transformation of heritage into kitsch that tugs at

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29. E. HOBSBAWM and T. RANGER (Eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983), esp. pp. 1-14, 263-307.
 30. G. MOSSE, *The Nationalization of the Masses* (New American Library, New York, 1975).
 31. D. BARTHEL, *Historic Preservation: Collective Memory and Historical Identity* (Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1996).

human emotions in sentimental ways. Today it proceeds on a global scale. Critics of the commercialization of preservation may rail against Disneyfication. But Barthel cautions us against taking this caricature as representative of the preservationists' project. Like Halbwachs, she maintains that even the most authentic commemorative representations involve some negotiation, as preservationists have become beleaguered arbiters of our "culture wars" over what we should remember.

One might also contend that commemoration is always negotiated in light of the temporality of the human condition. For the timeful beings that we are, a given past recedes continually from our present, and the meanings its sites of memory once conveyed inevitably become dated. As time passes, commemorative sites are often invested with new, sometimes opposing meanings.³² The tendency among preservationists sensitive to these trends, therefore, has been to recontextualise the places of historical memory in ways that make manifest tensions previously denied --- an acknowledgment of groups excluded, conflicts that raged, issues left unresolved.

Such pressures have also pushed preservationists toward minimalist representations. As notions of destiny that once sustained bedrock traditions lose their appeal, the past we would commemorate becomes open to multiple, even personal interpretations. As the politics of memory becomes more complex, the commemorative task is to create monuments so open to personal interpretation that each individual can locate therein the particular significance he wishes to remember. Such was the ambition behind the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C., self-consciously designed to enable each visitor to locate the meaning he desires to invest in the site.³³

How the history of memory has unsettled the history of history

I would consider finally how the new history of memory has unsettled the history of history. It is another way of asking the question: why has memory become such an imposing topic for historians now? As in the case of the preservation movement the answer relates to the attenuation, or better the dissipation, of our modern sense of historical destiny. In such historiographical circumstances, memory once more becomes a pressing

32. B. SCHWARTZ, "The Reconstruction of Abraham Lincoln," in D. MIDDLETON and D. EDWARDS (Eds.), *Collective Remembering*, (Sage, London, 1990), pp. 103-04.

33. J. M. MAYO, *War Memorials as Political Landscapes* (Praeger, New York, 1988), pp. 201-05.

issue. We appeal to the past today in no particular sequence but rather randomly as it serves our present needs.

The French historian François Hartog interprets this reorientation rather well. He argues that this reevaluation of the present as the privileged moment of historical time marks the end of a particular way of ordering time, the "regime of historicity" that shaped the thinking of the historians of the modern era.³⁴ Hartog points to the waning of faith in progress, a notion that has informed historical thinking since the Enlightenment. Under that modern historicist regime, he explains, the future was a beacon that guided historians in their search for what was most meaningful in the past. They looked to the past to confirm the direction in which they believed change to be tending. What they judged to be memorable in the past, therefore, was quite predictable. But in a history in which the present becomes the interpretative frame of reference, the historians' assessment of what is memorable in the past becomes less certain. Such a history is more open to the infinite ways in which the past might be invoked to serve present needs.³⁵ So conceived, history is more visibly shaped by the politics of memory. This reorientation in the conception of historical time, Hartog suggests, has stimulated much of the current interest in the memory/history problem. Thus what began as an ingenuous inquiry into the history of everyday life as a new domain for research has in the end led to the unraveling of the fabric of modern history, knitted together as it was out of memory's many strands.

From an historiographical standpoint the key change has been the decline of history conceived as a grand narrative moving toward a denouement --- history as a timeline with a beginning, a middle, and an end, the middle punctuated by memorable events that illustrate the movement of history. In modern historiography, historians had plotted the grand narrative with turning points that served as its places of memory. But in the new history of memory, the process is reversed. History is composed around places of memory, from each of which micro-narratives proceed. In a way, this historiographical reorientation marks a return to the spatial models given in the classical art of memory.

The prototype of the new history of memory is the study of the French national identity, *Les Lieux de mémoire* (1984-92), edited by Pierre Nora.³⁶ Nora proceeds from the present backward, from the recent into the deep past,

34. F. HARTOG, "Temps et histoire, 'Comment écrire l'histoire de France,'" in *Annales HSS*, 6 (1995), pp. 1219-36; see also K. POMIAN, *L'Ordre du temps* (Gallimard, Paris, 1984), pp. 123-47.

35. F. HARTOG, "Time, History and the Writing of History: the *Order* of Time," *KVHAA Konferenser*, 37(1996), pp. 95-113.

36. P. NORA, "Entre mémoire et histoire," in P. NORA (Ed.), *Lieux de mémoire*, (Gallimard, Paris, 1984). 1: pp. xvii-xlii.

reversing the conventional direction of historical narrative. At retrogressive stages along the way he locates significant sites of memory. Each has its own self-contained micro-narrative. This history of the making of the national identity might be likened to the branching of a genealogical tree. It underscores the diversity present in the past. Noteworthy in this respect are two recent studies of the history of the culture of memory, one by Matt Matsuda on modern memory in France; the other by Simon Schama on memory and images of nature as they have been reconceived through the ages.³⁷ Their histories, too, are organized around places of memory. Narrative is still important. But in these histories, there are many separate narratives, each self-contained and reduced to the scale of the mnemonic reference point at which it is located. In this rhetorical strategy, the localizing of historical narrative at places of memory becomes an essential aspect of the historian's composition.

To conclude, I might return to my opening theme about the mediating role that mentalities has played between memory and history. Mentalities has been naively presented by some historiographers as only an instance in the expanding realm of the historians' investigations. But in fact work in this field undermined the mnemonic framework that had given shape to the notion of time in modern historical scholarship. In exposing the rising importance of privacy in the life of modern humankind, mentalities made manifest the weakening of the eschatological goals that had informed modern historical writing. As the notion of destiny has been privatized, history has dissolved into a plethora of ways to publicize the collective memories of the many groups that claim a right to be heard. In the presence of the past, memory has come to reign over history, while a privatized notion of destiny has become a consoling memento of the historical vision of the modern age.

Abstract

Mentalities, matrix of memory

This essay considers the way the historians' interest a generation ago in the history of mentalities prepared the way for their preoccupation today with the history of memory. It explains how studies by historians of mentalities of such topics as orality/literacy (Walter Ong), the dynamics of tradition (Philippe Ariès), and the elaboration of memorial forms (Michel Foucault) inspired new directions of research into the nature and uses of memory: the interpolation of oral tradition from the written

M. MATSUDA, *The Memory of the Modern* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996); S. SCHAMA, *Landscape and Memory* (Knopf, New York, 1995); and my review essay, "Mnemonic Schemes in the New History of Memory," *History and Theory*, 36 (1997), pp. 378-91.

record (as exemplified in recent work on the historical Jesus); the exploration of the cult of private memory (for example, the history of private life in the nineteenth century); and the analysis of the politics of public memory (as revealed in the historic preservation movement). The essay closes with some observations on the implications of this historiographical passage from mentalities to memory for our understanding of historical time.