

EDITORIAL

All culture has an intrinsic relation to history, as the medium in which it is formed and the theatre of its operations. But culture does not move along the axis of history like a ship over the sea, its past an ever-receding horizon; events stick to it, their 'pastness' becoming an element of form rather than content or relative location. While much of what we call culture appears as something contemporaneous, some of it emerges only as something recalled or remembered, as 'past' in its style as well as in its substance. If culture, like the language which carries it, has moods and tenses, 'cultural memory' is its past tense.

Its past tense, not just its past: for the point of describing culture's appropriation of the past as 'memory' is to focus on how 'pastness' is registered and felt, on the distinctive qualities and force of that which must be remembered. The obvious alternate term, 'history', typically refers to a formalized recording of the past which, to be sure, is important, but is not exclusive. The past emerges, or is invoked, in many different forms, and we use the term 'memory' to remind us of this variety, and of the fact that much of what we remember depends less upon a conscious decision to record than upon our inability to forget. To say that cultures have memories is therefore not merely metaphorical, but a reminder that cultures, to do their job, must preserve the past in a form every bit as powerful as 'personal' and intimate recollection. In the pages that follow we explore some of the ways in which memory makes its appearance, and some of the social and psychic motives bound up with the need to remember or forget.

In his book *History and Memory*, Jacques Le Goff defines 'history' as a modern form for the recording of the past, dependent on literacy and the written and printed word.¹ At the conference on Cultural Memory (University of Southampton, April 4-5 1995) from which the papers below were drawn, this relationship between formal history, memory and cultural texts was a primary, if contested focus. The diversity of the contributions collected here reflects well the internationalism of the 1995 event - participants arrived from the US, the Caribbean, the European and African continents - as well as its interdisciplinary commitment. Memory, it seems, has become as pivotal a critical category in literary and cinematic analysis as it is in archaeology, social history, cultural theory and psychoanalysis. There is however a vital tension that reverberates throughout discipline-specific debates on memory and history. Though the wish to recapture in memory the ghosts of forgotten pasts may find its most explicit articulation in oral history, the same desire is registered, for instance, in the literary study of autobiographical form, or in film studies analyses of film in its articulation with history.

1. Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, trans. Steven Rendell and Elizabeth Claman, Columbia University Press, New York 1992.

The status of the memory-texts thus recovered - the taped interviews, the literary fragments, the ephemera of everyday lives now past - remains, however, ambiguous. When the social historian James Fentress asserts that 'there is nothing text-like at the foundation of our common life', he is referencing the central controversy that, though it simmered only imperceptibly below the surface of the Southampton event, has seemed to us worth more explicitly foregrounding through our selection of contributions below. Social history has rendered an incalculable service to contemporary culture in its retrieval of hidden histories and marginal identities: Tony Kushner's article below on the obscuring of Jewish ethnicity from histories of Bergen-Belsen is exemplary here. But since the 'linguistic turn' in social history itself, as well as the engagement in some corners of oral history with psychoanalysis (as for example in Anna Vidali's discussion of political identity and trauma in this volume), whether historical enquiry - in contrast to the vagaries of memory - can deliver authentic experiences and real identities has itself become an issue. Thus for many contributors to this volume, the first question posed by an encounter with memory-texts is not what they reveal, but how - and what are the historically appropriate strategies of textual reading? Michael Rowlands deliberates the uses of anthropological writing as a methodological source for the analysis of contemporary war memorials; Nicola King and David Vilaseca, by contrast, turn to psychoanalysis (in King's case to Freud's account of *Nachträglichkeit*, in Vilaseca's, to Žižek's writings on the Lacanian Real), in an effort to identify historical methods that will do justice to the complexities of autobiographical remembering. Susan Taylor's photo essay uses juxtapositions of the female nude (her own naked body) with incongruous images and props to foreground the mobility of meanings that surround naked femininity; thus she too, like King and Vilaseca, challenges notions of self-imaging as a process productive of autobiographical truth and full identity.

However one stands on this question, it is clearly not enough to contrast written, literate history with image-dependent memory. By calling attention to the range of media which can be engaged in acts of remembering (oral discourse, the built environment, recorded sound, the audio-visual media), the category of cultural memory tells us that the interpretation of the past can never be reduced to the achievements of the written word. The articles in this issue are thus concerned with a variety of cultural forms, including written narrative, personal memory, built memorial, and contemporary cinema. Imruh Bakari and Sylvie Lindeperg's articles foreground the key role of the moving image as an embodiment of the memories that organise identity. While Bakari - in a discussion interestingly counterbalanced by Mamadou Diouf's account of colonial hybridisation in Senegal - focuses on three films that shaped the contours of a shared identity for the Caribbean islands, Lindeperg looks instead at how the power of images of the World War II defeated one filmmaker's attempt to use them allegorically (to discuss the Algerian War). Mike Rowlands looks to memories, and

concepts of memory, embodied in the physical facts of war memorials, Erica Burman explores the status of psychotherapy as a key 'repository of meanings around narratives of the past', and James Fentress recovers memories which depend on the rituals and elaborate symbolic codes of freemasonry. The memories discussed in this issue rely on all the senses for their transmission, and they are invoked in locations secret and public, private and official. Their complexity and diversity demonstrate that 'pastness', however distinctive, is not an homogeneous category within culture, and that its form, tonality and medium are inevitably caught up in the struggles of our time and the investments that attend every act of remembrance.

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