1 Introduction

The topic of memory is now ubiquitous. Heritage, together with its French and German equivalents, *le patrimoine* and *die Musealisierung*, museology, ethnohistory, industrial archaeology, retrofitting, retrochic, Holocaust memorials, counter-monument, counter-memory, *lieux de mémoire*: all allude to a common constellation of interests. The shape of that constellation stands out in contrast to the way in which memory emerged as something crucial to individual identity, with its fissures and fractures, when it became a central issue in philosophical thinking with Bergson, in psychoanalytic thinking with Freud, and in autobiographical literature with Proust. At the opening of the twentieth century memory was psychologised; at the close of the century the turn was to cultural memory. For the moment the investigation of cultural memory has become a culture industry in its own right.

How can we explain the frequent discussion of and the apparently high value ascribed to memory in recent years? There can be no doubt that the accumulated repercussions of the holocaustal events of the last century have played a vital role in these current preoccupations; but I want to argue that a crucial reason, if not indeed the fundamental explanation, is that modernity has a particular problem with *forgetting*.

To say this is not to claim that modernity has a monopoly of cultural amnesia, for there are demonstrably different types of structural forgetting specific to different social formations, as anthropologists and classicists were among the first to point out when they investigated the peculiarities of transmission in preliterate societies. Nor is it to claim simply that a cloud of forgetting has descended upon the contemporary horizon; any such assertion would be patently

absurd. To cite three examples only: in Central and Eastern Europe, national memories were reappropriated in the wake of 1989, and the legacy of fascism and Stalinism remains to be confronted; since the 1970s the rehabilitation of ethnic memories has been perceived in North America to be a vital part of personal identity, one of the most remarkable early signs of this recognition being the resonance accorded Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior*; and North American Indian communities, calling for the repatriation of their artefacts, have established their own museums, sought out their own National Museum grants, and hired their own anthropologists on contract.

Yet, while forgetting has not in fact descended like an all-enveloping blanket on the contemporary world, and while different social formations prior to the onset of modernity exhibit characteristic forms of forgetting which are peculiar to themselves, it remains the case that there are types of structural forgetting which are *specific* to the culture of modernity.

A number of thinkers have suspected as much. Fredric Jameson has argued that 'our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past'.[1] Eric Hobsbawm believes that 'the destruction of the past, or rather of the social mechanisms that link one's contemporary experience to that of earlier generations, is one of the most characteristic and eerie phenomena of the late twentieth century. Most young men and women at the century's end grow up in a sort of permanent present lacking any organic relation to the public past of the times they live in.'[2] Andreas Huyssen has pointed to 'a major and puzzling contradiction in our culture. The undisputed waning of history and historical consciousness, the lament about political, social and cultural amnesia, and the various discourses, celebratory or apocalyptic, about *posthistoire* have been accompanied in the past decade and a half by a memory boom of unprecedented proportions.'[3] Jacques Le Goff joins him in linking the valorisation of memory to cultural forgetting when he says that 'the public at large … is obsessed by the fear of losing its memory in a

kind of collective amnesia – a fear that is awkwardly expressed in the taste for the fashions of earlier times, and shamelessly exploited by nostalgia-merchants; memory has thus become a best-seller in a consumer society'.[4] Commenting on the three-part, seven-volume collective work *Les lieux de mémoire* which Pierre Nora edited over the course of the years 1984–92, Tony Judt remarks that 'to judge from the virtual disappearance of narrative history from the curriculum in many school systems, including the American, the time may soon come when, for many citizens, large parts of their common past will constitute something more akin to *lieux d'oubli*, realms of forgetting – or, rather, realms of ignorance, since there will have been little to forget'.[5] Richard Terdiman focusses the problem in a longer perspective when he writes that 'beginning in the early nineteenth century, we could say that disquiet about memory crystallized around the perception of two principal disorders: *too little memory*, and *too much*'.[6] Ulrich Beck focusses the question of forgetting in a future perspective; though the word forgetting is never mentioned in his discussion of humanly produced future risks, for example those issuing from nuclear or chemical contaminants and pollutants in foodstuffs, forgetting is a subtext to his discussion; for even as conjectures or prognoses, as hazards which may not be at present visible and in some cases may take effect only within the lifespans of the children of those now becoming preoccupied by risks, 'the centre of risk consciousness lies not in the present, but *in the future*', with the consequence that 'in the risk society, the past loses the power to determine the present. Its place is taken by the future, … as the "cause" of current experience and action.'[7] Antoine Compagnon, finally, implies that we should think of our current spatial mobility as issuing in forgetting; shuttling back and forth between New York and Paris, as he has been doing for some years, he confesses to losing all sense of feeling at home in either language or culture, of having a strange sense of distance from whatever 'here' he is in, so that, closing up shop on one side of the ocean and opening up shop on the other side, 'You instantly forget all the numbers and names but those of your two or

three closest friends. When you come back the curtain lifts and you remember it all again. Without this unnatural capacity to forget, you would never really be anywhere.'[8]

Yet, telling though they certainly are, most of these observations are intuitive suggestions. They whet the appetite and leave us longing for more. The subject of how modernity forgets has not so far been subject to systematic scrutiny. This it evidently merits.

To begin with the concept of modernity itself: by modernity I mean the objective transformation of the social fabric unleashed by the advent of the capitalist world market which tears down feudal and ancestral limitations on a global scale, and psychologically the enlargement of life chances through the gradual freeing from fixed status hierarchies. Chronologically, this covers the period from the mid nineteenth century accelerating to the present. Although this is a worldwide process, the examples I shall offer of forgetting are specific and much of the time located in the United States and Europe, on the assumption that these are the sources that produce the forgetting.

To say that modernity is characterised by a particular type of forgetfulness is to presuppose a conception of remembering. Remembering, therefore, needs to be delineated to make clear the meaning of forgetting. There are, of course, different kinds of memory; but there is one particular type to which I shall return repeatedly in a kind of circling insistence in what follows. This is place memory.

That memory is dependent on topography is an ancient insight. The so-called 'art of memory' was located within the great system of rhetoric that dominated classical culture, was reborn in the Middle Ages, flourished during the Renaissance, and only entered upon its demise during the period from the invention of printing to the turn of the eighteenth century.[9] Cicero gave a succinct statement of its operative principle. 'Persons desiring to train this faculty of memory', he writes, 'must select places and form mental images of the things they wish to remember and store those

images in the places, so that the order of the places will preserve the order of the things.'[10] Accordingly, this 'art of memory' was described as a 'method of loci'. A locus is definable as a place easily grasped by the memory, such as a house, arch, corner, column, or intercolumnar space. The loci or places in question can be actually perceived or they can be simply imagined. The real or imagined place or set of places functions as a grid onto which the images of the items to be remembered are placed in a certain order; and the items are then remembered by mentally revisiting the grid of places and traversing them step by step. The premise of the whole system is that the order of the places will preserve the order of the things that have to be remembered.

Two features of the art of memory should be emphasised here. One is that it depends essentially upon a stable system of places. The other is that remembering relates implicitly to the human body and that acts of memory are envisaged as taking place on a human scale; some practitioners of the art speak of the rhetorician as walking around his memory-building as he seeks to imprint upon his mind the long sequences of thought which he wishes to remember.

These two features of the art of memory give us vital clues, I believe, for understanding the type of forgetting which is characteristic of modernity. A major source of forgetting, I want to argue, is associated with processes that separate social life from locality and from human dimensions: superhuman speed, megacities that are so enormous as to be unmemorable, consumerism disconnected from the labour process, the short lifespan of urban architecture, the disappearance of walkable cities. What is being forgotten in modernity is profound, the human-scale-ness of life, the experience of living and working in a world of social relationships that are known. There is some kind of deep transformation in what might be described as the meaning of life based on shared memories, and that meaning is eroded by a structural transformation in the life-spaces of modernity.

NOTES

1. F. Jameson, 'Postmodernism and consumer society', in H. Foster, ed., *Postmodern Culture* (London and Sydney, 1985), p. 125.
2. E. Hobsbawn, *Age of Extremes*: *The Twentieth Century* (London, 1994), p. 3.
3. A. Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York and London, 1995), p. 5.
4. J. Le Goff, *History and Memory* (New York, 1992), p. 162.
5. T. Judt, 'The past is another country: myth and memory in postwar Europe', in I. Deak, J. T. Gross and T. Judt, eds., *The Politics of Retribution in Europe*: *World War 2 and its Aftermath* (Princeton, 2000), pp. 293–324.
6. R. Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca and London, 1993), p. 14.
7. U. Beck, *Risk Society* (London, 1992), p. 34.
8. A. Compagnon, *The 5 Paradoxes of Modernity* (New York, 1994), p. vii.
9. See F. A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago, 1966); M. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1990); P. H. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover and London, 1993).
10. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, p. 2, quoting Cicero, *De oratore*, II, lxxxvii, 351–4.

2 Two types of place memory

Many acts of remembering are site-specific, but they are not all site-specific in the same way. Consider, for instance, the following two cases.

My first example comes from the experience of contemporary Palestinians, for whom the primal event in their collective memory is the catastrophic uprooting of 1948, the dispossession and occupation brought about by the establishment of the state of Israel. Hundreds of their villages were destroyed, virtually all their homes and buildings demolished, and the sites reshaped by the new occupiers. In documents, in short stories, in paintings and in memory maps the fate of trees yields a condensed image for the catastrophe of uprootedness and the longing for rootedness. The emblematic status of trees is grounded in the actual fate of trees. The booklet *Olive Trees under Occupation* documents the experience of the village of Midya in 1986 when, after more than 3,300 olive trees were uprooted, black banners were raised at the entrance to the village and on individual homes, as when mourning the death of a person. In Ghassan Kanafani's short story 'Land of Sad Oranges' of 1987, the narrator, a young boy, on seeing his uncle's pain when he thinks of the orange trees 'abandoned to the Jews', recalls that a peasant back home once told him that the orange trees would shrivel and die if left in the care of strangers. In a painting by Amin Shtai of 1977 the combined figure of an olive tree and a man are represented, marked as Palestinian with traditional headgear; the arboreal trunk and the human torso merge into a single gestalt, with one tree leg and one human leg forming the lower part of the trunk. When Palestinians try to reconstruct memory maps of their destroyed villages, trees provide the leitmotif of their mnemonic quest; indeed, Palestinian

pilgrims to these sites have little else but trees with which to do the work of memory and mourning.

My second example comes from the traumatic experience of agoraphobia reported by a number of European women in cities in the late nineteenth century. The term agoraphobia, together with the first coherent case studies of the illness, was first coined by Westphal in 1872. His patients, all men as it happens, reproduced with inexplicable personal anxieties the social taboos on movement in public places imposed on bourgeois women. In subsequent studies of agoraphobia, women constituted a large majority of the patients treated; they complained of an intense anxiety which rendered them incapable of moving around as everyone else did – unable to leave their house, to cross a deserted street or square, to enter a crowded concert hall. In fact they were experiencing as hysterical misery an everyday unhappiness of the nineteenth century. To the bourgeois mind of the time the street was a dangerous space; the social war, latent in the capitalist relations of production, was blatantly revealed on the street. When Engels described the condition of the working class in England in the 1840s he showed that the conditions of the working class and the conditions of their streets were the same. He described streets in Manchester, but also in London, Dublin and Glasgow, in Leeds, Bradford and Edinburgh. The streets were symptomatic. Since trade had become a man's job while the woman had her work within the domestic sphere, a man's presence on the street was legitimate, but women on the street were assumed to have gone there to work of necessity since their husbands could not provide for their family single-handedly. Hence men felt permitted to commit impertinences towards women who appeared on the street unaccompanied. We learn about the limitations imposed on the appearance of bourgeois women in the public sphere above all from manuals of etiquette. In her book on good manners, Mrs Van Zutphen van Dedem devotes a chapter to the 'act of avoiding and excluding'. A number of places were to be avoided: slums, local trains, streetcars, third-class pubs, cheap seats at movie theatres, crowds and celebrations in the streets.

Beyond this, the more refined person would be careful to avoid, as far as possible, the slightest contact with the bodies and garments of other people, because, even greater than the hygienic danger of contamination, was the ever present danger of contact with the spiritually inferior who might swarm into one's vicinity in densely populated city centres. The street was a threatening space.

By the last decade of the nineteenth century the limitations imposed on the appearance of women in public were beginning to disappear. Though there were ladies' compartments on trains and separate coffee houses for women, these segregations were gradually abandoned and women began to appear more freely in more places. And yet, precisely at a time when the social restrictions imposed on their movements in West European cities were decreasing, psychiatric journals began documenting case studies of agoraphobia suffered by women patients. The restrictions on the movement of bourgeois women prompted by a concern for their safety and status, which acquired added implications of respectability, chastity and dependency, now lived on in the form of fantasies about the street as a scene of potential violence and possible erotic encounters. Actions that had previously been socially prohibited, but were now permitted, remained unfeasible or problematic for at least some women, who became a prey to fantasies which, having withdrawn from the sphere of public discourse, found expression in agoraphobic anxieties as a problem to be treated by psychiatrists. At a time when the earlier restrictions on the movement of bourgeois women in public places were being relaxed, an agoraphobic relationship to public spaces continued to reproduce such restrictions in the form of hysterical compulsions while denying any grounds for their existence other than an inexplicable anxiety. This now inexplicable anxiety was the site of a collective memory. The memory that a particular locus was threatening took up residence not in etiquette manuals but in psychiatric symptoms.

For these two examples I am indebted to Carol Bardenstein and Abram de Swaan.[1] As it happens, both concern traumatic memories,

but this is not the feature to which I wish to draw attention. They serve my present purposes by indicating two quite different ways in which the act of remembering may be related to or dependent upon a particular place. In order to register this difference I suggest that we distinguish between the *memorial* and the *locus*.

I

Taking this distinction as a cue, it becomes possible to survey a number of places according to whether they fall into one or the other of these two categories. As examples of the *memorial* we might consider the place-name and the pilgrimage. As examples of the *locus* we might consider the house and the street.

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Memorial places can be as spare as place-names. For it is a simple but universal attribute of places that, like persons, they have individual names. Place-names can be more than markers and delimiters of place, more than tokens used to mark out and negotiate positions in social interaction. When they are semantically transparent, as they are for the Western Apaches, they are so powerfully evocative of incidents in well-known stories, they act so effectively as the mnemonics of a moral geography conjuring up exemplary behaviour, that the mere mention of a place-name encapsulates a well-known narrative.[2] More usually, place-names are semantically opaque: they cover the past of a place, half-hide a history. Often the history they hide will be about the capacity to exercise power over land and over others; the testimony remains when the power has gone. This is so of many English place-names, which track the itineraries of invasions and colonialism. The Scandinavian conquest of much of England from the late ninth century onwards resulted in old English villages being taken over and a great number of new villages founded, many hundreds of which bear pure Scandinavian names, most easily recognisable by the suffix *-by*. The names of Norwegians who settled in the north-western counties of England in the tenth century left traces