

Introduction

TWO THINGS DISTINGUISH THIS ASSEMBLAGE of articles from our previous special issues on the subject and perhaps also from other collections.¹ First, it is not primarily about monuments, memorial practices, pictures, or texts but about space, often empty space that bears little sign of the history it has witnessed. Our authors are engaged with how there comes to be, or not to be, a site of memory. Implicitly this makes manifest the tension between memory and history that also informed the articles in our previous collections. The spatial is set in contrast to the temporal: a place that at one moment was the venue for something—horrible, magnificent, world-historical—that cries out to be remembered, exists in time, which inexorably washes it of the marks it bore. Moreover, the authors in this issue are all to some degree suspicious of what space seems to demand: memory. Better, some would say, if we had to choose, far better to choose history over memory, and at the very least we ought to be wary of the sacral, transcendental demands that spaces increasingly seem to be making.

There was once a time—before the disenchantment of liberalism, before Henri Bergson and Marcel Proust made memory the boon companion of the soul, before memory was claimed by the heretofore silenced and oppressed as the gateway to a past that history had closed, well before the death camps created a horror so monstrous that ordinary accounts of its depredations seemed impotent to capture its essence and were perhaps even guilty of minimizing them by trying—when history and memory seemed unproblematically cozy with each other. Among the strongest ties of nationality, J. S. Mill writes is “the possession of a national history, and consequent community of recollections,” an assemblage of feelings “connected with the same incidents in the past.” Whether Mill here means history as the events themselves or history as what we have written about them is less interesting than the sequence of terms—“history . . . recollections”—and the easy assumption that they would be benignly joined in “consequent community.”² And even the reverse sequence—memory, history—aroused no suspicion. Memory is an implication, not the definition of historical consciousness, thought R. G. Collingwood, and to be aware of a fact meant being aware of previous facts.³ But memory was also, he thought, implicit in perception. It was not a distinct faculty and certainly not an alternative to history as a way of knowing about the past. Memory was, as it had been for Thucydides, a sort of limit on history that written sources, archives, and increasingly sophisticated source criticism allowed one to get beyond. The stuff of history has increasingly since antiquity become precisely that which no one “remembered,” that which had been forgotten or which was beyond living memory

and had to be extracted from the records. In any case, no one seemed to worry very much about the relationship between memory and history and certainly no one thought that the stakes in maintaining a distinction were very high. We live in a less innocent age. Now their relationship is intensely political. History has been the history of the triumphant, of the literate, of those who survived, and it has been at the nub of their identity. It has, of late, broken its levees. "Collective memory . . . overflowing history as both a form of knowledge and a public rite . . . is one of the great stakes of developed and developing societies, of dominated and dominating classes, all of them struggling for power or for life, for survival and for advancement."⁴ So wrote the great French medievalist Jacques Le Goff, writing in the late 1980s. Memory as a public enterprise, the collection of memoirs, the making of oral histories, the mining of folklore for nuggets of a useable past, the preservation and study of the material culture, the stuff of everyday life are all part of an impulse to make the past more democratically accessible, to make it more inclusive. Memory, Le Goff points out, is at one and the same time an instrument and an objective of power. It is an object of struggles, and in many cases worthy struggles, that progressive scholarship would want to support. But in any case memory is not history.

Their differences matter. Pierre Nora famously stakes out the turf in the first essay of *Representations* 26: "Memory takes root in the concrete . . . ; history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities. Memory is absolute, while history can only conceive the relative." But most important, history is critical, "suspicious of memory," and fundamentally out to "suppress and destroy it" (9). The editors of that issue, Randolph Starn and Natalie Davis, are themselves more irenic and decidedly less committed to such taxonomic rigidities than Nora's essay would imply, but they are acutely aware of how tense and politically charged relations between history and memory have become. For each history there is a counterhistory, for each memory a countermemory, "a private fetish or a public injunction to forget" (2). Not opposites, to be sure; they are interdependent, but they are not quietly symbiotic either: "It is the tension or outright conflict between history and memory that seem necessary and productive" (5).

At the end of the day, however, Le Goff, Starn, and Davis are sanguine that some sort of reconciliation is possible, and that it will be on the common ground of secular reason. There are "ways of negotiating" the "gap": both history and memory "can be periodically checked against the record and called into account" (6), write Starn and Davis. "Professional specialists in memory," among whom Le Goff includes historians, journalists, anthropologists, and sociologists, need to and by implication can "make of the democratization of social memory one of the primary imperatives of their scientific objectivity" (99). At bottom there is some sort of ordinary garden-variety truth, however difficult it may be to come by, and both history and memory can be brought to order by good old-fashioned critical research.

What is forgotten can be brought to mind. In a Welsh mining village a memorial to the 63 men from that village who had died in the Great War was erected with public subscriptions in 1921. The 413 men who died on one October day in

a mine explosion eight years earlier or the 79 who had died twelve years before that in the same mine had to wait until 1981 before they would be memorialized.⁵ Texas has twelve thousand historical markers but not a single one that reminds its citizens of the state's melancholy record of lynchings and race riots; more generally, the whole sad story of slavery might be better and more fully told in juxtaposition to the "Better Homes and Gardens" tours we now get of plantations or the sanitized and often neo-Confederate interpretations we are offered at Civil War battle sites. What is wrongly remembered can be righted—Jean Nicolet did not discover or name the lakes for which he is credited on roadway signs; Native Americans had done so before him.⁶ And, of course, history can be confronted with counterhistory: this problem, this body of evidence, this set of interpretations with the problem reconceived, with other evidence, with alternative interpretations. The authors in this issue would not dispute the possibility of a critical relationship between history and memory nor would those most hostile to memory begrudge others their research on the history of memorial practices as represented in this issue by the articles by Barbara Mann and Stuart Semmel. But that said, Kerwin Klein and Idith Zertal unabashedly regard memory as a threat within the academy and, more distressingly, without. For Klein it is a quasi-religious, metahistorical category that insidiously undermines critical history and is all the more worrisome because it hides its true, premodern, colors behind the mask of postmodernism and the promise of progressive critique. Memory, he argues, has become hypostatized; it has become "structural" in that it is "no longer a property of individual minds" but something that encompasses events, places, objects. A history of tombstones becomes a history of memory; memory has motives; archives remember. How this happened during the last twenty years is a complex story, and the Holocaust as a purportedly transcendent, unrepresentable event stands at its center. But whatever one's views are on that issue, the debates that it has engendered have done much to make of memory a quasi-metaphysical category. Memory has become re-enchanted, and, as Klein argues, some recent work "goes to the edge, and sometimes over, of explicit religiosity." The evidence: a leading postmodern theorist has suggested that "we should consider adding 'ritual' to 'aesthetic' and 'scientific criteria' for evaluating historical scholarship." *Trauma, mourning, apocalypse, fragment, redemption, identity, catharsis, soul*—all very much part of contemporary discussions of memory—are not "the vocabulary of a secular, critical practice." So, rather like Gilbert Ryle who famously exposed "mind" as the "ghost in the machine," Klein outs "structural memory." It is the hypostatization of a quite ordinary human practice. Without its overlay of religion and/or a heavy dose of Hegel, it could do none of the work of re-enchanting our relationship with the past some people seem to want it to do. And worse, it stands as a "therapeutic alternative to historical discourse." No "necessary or productive tension" on the edge of Klein's abyss. Zertal is as critical as Klein of the emergence of various recent categories of memory in modern life. But "traumatic memory" and "existential Holocaust discourse" are dangerous not only because they suffuse historical thinking with metaphysics but also because they led directly to a war in which Israel captured East Jerusalem and transformed the

Wailing Wall “into the biggest outdoor orthodox synagogue in the world.” Memory is not only a “fashionable commodity,” a sort of *doppelgänger* of “identity”—that would be bad enough—but also the mantra of an age “obsessed with memorialization and commemoration rituals,” as well as the agent of “a concerted, immense assault on our very ability truly to remember the past.”

In part, Zertal’s piece is an attack on the tendency in both Jewish and non-Jewish scholarship and writing to conflate a history of many millennia into remembrance of one enormous catastrophe. As scholars such as Michael Bernstein and Esther Benbassa have recently argued, all paths do not end or begin in the death camps.⁷ But more specifically, Zertal’s essay is an attack on the politics of Holocaust commemoration in Israel: the right gets the memory and the commemoration of Auschwitz, and in its name the Jewish people have expelled, in the words of Emile Habibi, “another Semite people out of its home.” The suffering of six million Jews is measured also, Zertal concludes, quoting Habibi, “‘by the terrible price the Jewish people have paid in losing their glorious Jewish tradition and in the damage it has caused to what is called the “Jewish heart.”’” Commemoration has, in Zertal’s view, obscured the past and thus also the present. The ordinary and perfectly mundane threats of Middle Eastern politics and the real but limited aspects of Arab anti-Semitism are transformed into the stuff of memory, into a sort of antihistory. Remembering the Holocaust becomes remembering Amelik and recalling the duty to avenge past wrongs; Arabs become Nazis; the ’67 war becomes a religious experience. None of this simply happened; the Holocaust was on the back burner of Israeli consciousness when David Ben Gurion was engaged in negotiations for reparations with Germany. And then came the Adolf Eichmann trial, which mobilized “the utter political power of the Holocaust and its victims” for a new sort of national unity. The dead were exhumed, so to speak, to make the army and its work sacred. Even if one does not subscribe to Zertal’s views of the nature of the Arab threat to Israel in 1967, there can be no question that memory, and not critical history, translated real politics into holy politics. “Getting Auschwitz” meant speaking the voice of the Old Testament prophets and chroniclers. Animating both Klein’s and Zertal’s self-consciously polemical pieces is the claim that memory has been appropriated by a discourse of sacrality, that it has become so imprecise a concept because it is in the service of the false gods of hurt—of trauma and its recuperation, of identity based on a particular construal of past wrongs, of victimhood. Memory in this all too prevalent form, they argue, has little to do with any sort of past as it might be objectively reconstructed and a great deal to do with something transcendent and beyond the reason of history.

Barbara Mann and Ulrich Baer do not regard memory as quite so treacherous, but they nevertheless periodically acknowledge that there is a problem here. In fact, Mann seems poised to succumb to precisely the dangers Klein warns against: how, she asks, does one contextualize images that refer to a historical event that “consisted in the lasting destruction of explanatory referential frames and contexts for understanding?” Baer describes the particular aesthetic of Dirk Reinartz’s and Mikael Levin’s photographs of the spare, empty, and seemingly innocent spaces of

Treblinka and of Nordlager Ohrdruf, respectively, as “forc[ing] us into a position of seeing that something in the catastrophe remains inassimilable to historicist or contextual reading.” The photographs “silently question the reliance on a historical context as an explanatory frame. . . . they situate us in relation to something that remains off the maps of historicist readings.” Indeed, Baer seems to be arguing that the “devastation of massive trauma [the Holocaust] consists not merely in the ensuing difficulties of commemoration and forgetting” but in an erasure “so complete that it never entered either memory or forgetting at all.” Viewing the space of the death camp or viewing its representation is a sort of religious experience. Then the essay retreats from the brink of a claim for transcendence. The images are “inassimilable to historicist or contextual readings,” yes, but without “attaining spiritual significance.” The photographs of Reinartz and Levin are evidence that there is closure in history, in time: the sites themselves are bare and “will sink into oblivion once the last survivors have passed away.” The “reflection and investigation” of the past that was once fueled by enormous, shared, and increasingly vanishing trauma “is now prompted by an aesthetic representation.” Pain inevitably lapses, and with it, as Friedrich Nietzsche suggested, real memory. Landscape art, Baer argues, forces us to confront this disappearance and possibly halt it; it will put us in a “position of having to face the *Shoah* as a watershed event in history.” Whether this is possible or even desirable remains an open question. But, the essay is an exploration of the dilemma itself, of our position in viewing this art as a history of subjectivity in relation to landscape painting and to the photographs of these landscapes in particular. The essay takes as its theme the chasm between what we know, what we see, and what we feel.

We have been taught since the Romantics to view landscape and landscape painting with ourselves, our subjectivity, as its “true point of reference.” Baer takes this insight of Joseph Koerner and suggests that it is precisely this aesthetic that forces us into a position in which this subjective reference becomes impossible. We can not subsume into ourselves what we see. Levin’s and Reinartz’s pictures exclude us from what they depict by their “irretrievable otherness.” Because there is in fact nothing of the Holocaust in them, it is all the more difficult to situate ourselves in relation to what we know happened there. We are thus faced, as viewers, with “an absence that cannot be undone.” It is difficult to historicize these pictures of death camps precisely because they do not depict the instruments or results of actions in time: they are pictures not of naked, decayed, tortured bodies, crematoria, mass graves, gas chambers, or *Einatzgruppen* but of the empty woodlands and clearings—the stages—where horrible things transpired. But as landscapes they are also hard to assimilate. Nordlager Ohrdruf is not a Caspar David Friedrich landscape of a forest clearing nor a George Morland painting of the English poor to whose formal aesthetic they adhere. Friedrich and Morland do not resist history in quite the same way that the images of Reinartz and Levin do. They do not leave us with the feeling that we cannot quite absorb what this landscape in all its blankness means. One wonders how long these images will leave us with the recognition that they defy understanding. We now look quite peacefully at the quarries where thou-

sands were starved to death in Syracusee without that moment of uncomprehending self-awareness Baer identifies. To be sure, what happened there was not Holocaustal, but still it was terrifying enough when we read of it in Thucydides. Whether and how history will reassert itself over the empty grounds that once witnessed the *Shoah* we cannot say. Some emptiness will simply disappear: a supermarket thrives on the site of Sachsenhausen, and it cannot be long before other stores follow. Elsewhere, I suspect, the camps and fields of National Socialist murder, like so many landscapes, will come to subsist in that twilight between the auratic and the quotidian that other places of memory occupy. There commemoration and critical history can each offer its story.

For Barbara Mann, a particular place of memory, the Old Cemetery in Tel Aviv, is quite specifically uncanny, “*unheimlich*,” “unhomely.” That is, to quote Sigmund Freud, it evinces an effect “easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes.” The uncanniness of a culture without a place, Hebrew/Yiddish culture in Europe, was transplanted, she argues, to the Land of Israel. Hebrew culture in Palestine was “fundamentally foreign,” and an enormous amount of aesthetic work in fiction, in poetry, and in landscape had to be done to depict Jewish life there “as both natural and redemptive, in contrast to the diaspora’s unhealthy rootlessness.” “‘Unhomeliness’ . . . had to be overcome.” Mann thus renders a particular episode in the history of the uncanny historical through an analysis of various pieces of fiction, through poetry, and through photography. It is a modern uncanny. And she shows how the Old Cemetery, the place of the dead where modern Hebrew Tel Aviv began, became both an example of the “architectural uncanny” (for Anthony Vidler a place that feels “unhomely,” both “disorienting and familiar”) and an entry into history. The space of the cemetery and, for example, the poems of Avot Yeshurun and Dalia Rabikovitch gesture toward Europe and the forgotten diasporic past that is redeemed in homecoming. At the same time they are fully aware “of what Tel Aviv effectively effaced from the Palestinian landscape.” There was the trauma of migration; there was the repression and recovery of what was destroyed. The builders and poets destabilize a putative history as the story of redemption. In terms of the relationship between memory and history there is no question where Mann stands. She is perhaps not as suspicious as Klein and Zertal, but she is critical. The Old Cemetery is, like Tel Aviv, both new and a home, and it serves in this essay as an entry into history, into “Tel Aviv’s troubled relation to history and to the idea of home.” Its literary history gives us a look backstage into “how memory is produced and meaning invested, a process necessarily informed and circumscribed by cultural context,” an exercise in disenchantment. It is the task of the historian, she suggests, to scrutinize memory, to coach the present in what not to forget. Thus, Mann writes, “if the Old Cemetery is to become a true site of memory . . . it would entail remembering, for example, Abdal Nabi, the Muslim cemetery founded together with the Old Cemetery in 1902, and upon which the Tel Aviv Hilton now stands.” A history of the city of

Tel Aviv and of Israel depends on excavating what is forgotten and scrupulously examining what is remembered.

Stuart Semmel's essay is the only one in this issue that is not written from within the shadows of the Holocaust. (To be sure, Mann does not deal with it explicitly either, but perhaps after reading Zertal it is impossible not to construe the repression of a Palestinian past or a diasporic uncanny as out of its orbit.) He is also the least defensive about memory largely because he writes, as a historian, so straightforwardly about a particular aspect of its history. Nothing religious here except the story of how a space became sacral. William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Walter Scott, the young John Ruskin, the painter Benjamin Haydon were by no means the first to think about the inexorable passing of the present into the past—think of Saint Augustine—nor were they the first to imagine a time when the great deeds of today would be forgotten. Old English verse is full of such themes. But Semmel is right in subscribing to Georg Lukács's and Stephen Bann's views that the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century evinced a remarkable sensibility to the pastness of the past. It was not simply a matter of "mere costumery." In this context Britons confronted Waterloo as a place where a world-historical event had taken place but one whose traces would soon vanish. It became a *lieu de mémoire* less because true memory, deeply embedded in everyday life, had disappeared than because history taught that the past was elusive and its tangible remains were thus precious.

Although Semmel does not make the point, Waterloo is in fact the first battlefield since Marathon and Thermopylae to bear any great weight of meaning. Most of those in between were simply plowed over; the dead disappeared, if not without trace then without much notice. And compared to Gettysburg and to the millions of graves that mark the western front of the Great War for hundreds of kilometers, Waterloo is relatively unburdened. The most prominent rise from which one today views the scene, the so-called Butte du lion, was not there when the great battle took place; it was built in 1826 to mark where the Prince of Orange had been wounded and is now surrounded by parking lots and souvenir stands. There are a few statues and a marker at the Hotel des Colonnes where Victor Hugo wrote the Waterloo chapter of *Les misérables*. (There is also a monument to Hugo.) The landscape is otherwise more or less as it was in 1815, but in fact those who visited so religiously in the years just after the battle were right: time very quickly erases traces of great deeds and small from space.

Their solution was to regard landscape through the same aesthetic—one might say religious—categories with which one approached nature. Art would capture Waterloo. It did not work for everyone; Coleridge admitted "that the deficiency of memorial places to excite any interest in him unless they possessed some natural beauty" constituted a defect. But it worked for others. Scott had "a deep and inexpressible feeling of awe" from seeing the "identical place" from which Napoleon had seen his troops fight and lose. The painter Haydon had felt that he was standing "in the very midst of Napoleon's soul" when he visited his château at Rambouillet in 1814 and thought that at Waterloo he ought to be reading Homer, so epic did

the landscape seem. Robert Southey thought that nature memorialized history and that each weed and grain and flower that he saw in 1815 was a vestige of slaughter. The language of the apocalypse, of the sublime, of loss is everywhere. Indeed the downfall of Napoleon was read as a sort of historical sublime: the rise and fall of empires, a sort of Ozymandias in Belgium. A brisk trade in relics quickly ensued: teeth, slivers of wood from the tree under which Wellington rested. Memorial practices borrowed from religion and art flourished in the face of a stolid landscape's resistance to history. It and the objects that could be gleaned from it would keep some traces of that heroic, magical moment in 1815 from fading. The glory that was Napoleon could be made to live in the ground he trod and the things he touched or saw.

And so landscape, precisely because it is so resolutely atemporal, so resistant to closure, so open to all manner of reverie, stands in such sharp contrast to history. Space is the ground of remembering—against time. It is there even when representation seems hopeless; what monument other than the thing itself could possibly be adequate to Auschwitz or to the martyred village of Oradour? When images of heroism and sacrifice ring hollow, the field of graves and long lists of names planted in the landscape of battle represent, albeit in an aestheticized form, the thing itself, ever present.

But of all of this we must be careful. Memory is a means of making loss survivable but it is also therefore a means of allowing the past to have closure. Pain slowly fades; and with closure comes one sort of forgetting, that of critical history. Probably in the world today a bit less memory and a bit more history would not be such a bad thing. Or to put it differently, we might want to concentrate on the task of representing temporal contingencies rather than spatial absolutes, on the history of the political and moral failures, for example, that produced the Holocaust rather than the memory of its horrors.

Notes

1. *Representations* 26: "Memory and Counter-Memory" (Spring 1989) (subsequent references appear parenthetically in the text); and *Representations* 35: "Monumental Histories" (Summer 1991).
2. J. S. Mill, "Of Nationality as Connected with Representative Government," in *Considerations on Representative Government* (New York, 1875), 308.
3. R. G. Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis, or The Map of Knowledge* (Oxford, 1924), 212–13.
4. Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, trans. Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Clamen (New York, 1992), 97–98. (Subsequent references appear in the text.)
5. Angela Gaffney, *Aftermath: Remembering the Great War in Wales* (Cardiff, 1998), 99–100.
6. For such a critical exercise on memorial sites and interpretations, see James W. Loewen, *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong* (New York, 1999).
7. Esther Benbassa, *The Jews of France: A History from Antiquity to the Present*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Princeton, 1999); and Michael André Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley, 1994).