

Note

This text constitutes the theoretical introduction to a vast collaborative work on the national memory of France that I titled *Les Lieux de mémoire*. The work is divided into three parts: *La République* (1 vol., 1984), *La Nation* (3 vols., 1986), *Les France* (3 vols., forthcoming).

My intention was to substitute case studies for general historical developments. Thus, the method used consists of a concentrated analysis of the specific objects that codify, condense, anchor France's national memory. These can be monuments (the *château* of Versailles or the cathedral of Strasbourg); emblems, commemorations, and symbols (the tricolor of the French flag, the Fourteenth of July, the Marseillaise); rituals (the coronation of the kings at Reims) as well as monuments (such as the *monuments aux morts* in every French village or the Pantheon); manuals (a textbook used by all French children, a dictionary); basic texts (the Declaration of the Rights of Man or the *Code civil*); or mottos (for example, "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité").

Each subject was given to a specialist. In order to show how the subjects, to all appearances diverse, could be brought together under the same category of analysis and interpretation, I used a term, *lieux de mémoire*, which did not exist in French. The entire work consists in the elaboration of this idea, its classification, hierarchy, and typology.

The term has no English equivalent. It owes its origin to the admirable book by Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (1966), which traces a long tradition of mnemotechnia. As codified by Cicero and Quintilian, the classical art of memory taught orators to remember their speeches by associating each topic to be covered with some part of a real or imagined building in which the oration was to be delivered—the atrium, columns, furniture, and so on. The art of memory was founded on an inventory of memory places, *loci memoriae*. The term *lieu de mémoire* has profound connotations in French: historical, intellectual, and emotional, often subconscious. These are due, on the one hand, to the specific role of memory in the construction of the idea of the nation as well as in recent changes in the attitude of the French people to their national past. It is this role the work in question attempts to shed light on; it is this change in attitude it attempts to illustrate; and it is precisely the term *lieu de mémoire* that this introduction attempts to explain, elaborate, and justify.

I therefore thank *Representations* and my excellent translator for conserving the term in French, while occasionally using *site* as an English equivalent.