Archives and constructing the act of forgetting in political transitions

In situations of political transition following a period of violence or repression, the State can choose between refusing a difficult past or constructing the act of forgetting through several institutional means. Amongst these means, archives hold an essential place as they crystallise several functions: a probationary function in criminal proceedings against offenders of human rights and the process of awarding compensation to victims, and a function of witnessing history (the history of a nation and also myriad individual histories). The stakes are high and dictate their fate (destruction, manipulation, restricted access). As such control of the archives is necessary. Such control is a delicate matter on a national level due to the heterogeneous nature of internal legislation, and is taken up within emerging international standards, linked to transitional justice, such as the right to know and the right to truth.

Forgetting the “refusers”

The question put forward in this article is to know why so little is said about those who have refused to carry out orders in situations of mass crimes and genocide. Although several authors have observed the phenomenon which we shall here call the “refusers” in their researches, we find very few works – or none at all – on the subject and it is surprising that this issue should have been more or less systematically left by the wayside. This article discusses the potential reasons for forgetting what is nonetheless a category of key figures.

Monuments to the dead in Alsace, between remembering and forgetting

The emotions aroused by the 2 million dead in the 1914-1918 War has led to various actions aimed at perpetuating remembrance. A widespread movement to build monuments to the dead started from 1921 and the date of 11 November was retained to commemorate this sacrifice. Within this context, Alsace holds a unique position due to the fact that it belonged to the German Empire from 1871 to 1918. Most Alsatian soldiers fought under the German flag. This is why its monuments to the dead, which are mostly of a religious and funerary nature, pay homage to victims rather than heroes and attempt to reanimate each soldier in his place within the community of the dead and the living. Every year the ceremony of 11 November is characterised by a strict Republican ritual, and speeches cannot avoid the ambiguity of this very particular commemoration.

Continuity and anchoring – coping with absence in a transnational situation

Nowadays, spatial mobility is more conditioned by social, cultural, economic, networks and enclaves (generating territoriality, archipelagos and enclaves) rather than by geographical distances or enclaves. Examples of research works on transnational life situations are ever more numerous but few authors since A. Sayad have addressed a problem which is inherent to the situation of our “archipelagians”, namely absence on one of the islands and the management of their presence. This article describes the types of difficulties encountered so that absence can be coped with on different meanings in the potential variations inherent in expecting the presence of oneself and others, and in the management of one’s own absence.
the resources of people experiencing this situation.

ALEXANDRA GREVILLOT-CASTEX
The benefit of a collective act of forgetting at the end of the 19th century. The monument of a “martyred” priest in Val d’Orbey

For over a century, a monument erected to the memory of a “martyred” priest in Val d’Orbey, has continued to communicate a remembrance built up on the sorrow generated by the 1870 Franco-Prussian War. This monument can be found in Grosmagny, on the site of battle in what was to become the new district of Territoire de Belfort after 1871. This article examines how this collective memory has contributed to the identity of Catholic French-speaking Alsatians and how it was instrumentalised by the Catholic right to legitimise its power in the new political tug-of-war under the Third Republic. Taken from an ethno-historical viewpoint, it focuses on an individual case to observe what can be revealed about a more general functioning. It targets a cultural group, Catholic French-speaking Alsatians. Finally, it uses different ethnographical material, notably a memorial, a newspaper and an oral history.

PHILIPPE HAMMAN
Constructing the act of forgetting in the Reichsland of Alsace-Lorraine. Annexed Lorraine, between Germanification and Souvenir français (beginning of 20th century)

This article examines the processes involved in consolidating the act of forgetting and their direct links with memorial dynamics, i.e. the tension between erasure and conservation, through the case of the Reichsland (Imperial Land) of Alsace-Lorraine. More precisely, it questions the policies of enhancing/detracting from memorial resources by focusing on two correlated entries: collective memory and national identities. Based on a few landmark episodes, in particular in the early 20th century, the act of forgetting is analysed as a selective and dynamic process which is not diametrically contradictory, but accompanied by potential recall that may fluctuate depending on patterns that are never totally stabilised and competing players-cum-holders. This enables us to shed light on the broader stakes of territorial production processes and claims to identity.

ANNA JOLIVET
The fragmentary study of Venetian painting: an example of the mythicisation of the history of art in France in the 19th century

In 19th century publications on the Venetian School of painting at a time when Venice was standing out as a key intellectual centre, painters were seen as men who were solely interested in the know-how required to handle colours to the detriment of any knowledge. Furthermore, the school was scarcely studied beyond the 16th century because of its supposed decadence. From the writings on the Louvre in the First Empire to the texts of recognised authors such as Charles Blanc and Théophile Gautier in the second half of the 19th century, this deficient conception of Venetian painting remained. Certain mechanisms defined in psychoanalysis, in particular isolation and repression, can help us to understand that the omissions by historians in their discourse are determined by the artistic and moral principles that governed thought in the 19th century and cannot be called into question.

DOMINIQUE MERG-ESSADI
The reciprocal functions of forgetting and memory. The example of perinatal mourning

This article gives an account of a clinical observation of perinatal mourning. Men and women affected by the loss of a child express their feelings in discussion groups set up to help them. Traditional, paternalistic medicine tended to ignore this event. However, in the 1990s, the discourse on care focused on reifying the stillborn child. There are therefore contradictory trends either in favour of forgetting or its contrary, remembering. What the participants say in the discussion groups enables us to highlight the psychological phases involved in renouncing the object and in particular guilt associated with forgetting. Indeed, forgetting can be seen as abandoning before it is really considered as the moment when loss is accepted. The work of remembering turns out to be a phase which encourages the integration of loss and therefore the possibility of forgetting in the meaning of “no longer thinking about it”.

DJEMAA MAAZOUZI
Returning to Algeria and the impossible return to Algeria. Forms of forgetting and figures of absence in Exils by Tony Gatlif

In Exils (2004) by Tony Gatlif, a film account of returning to one’s origins and recalling the past during the Algerian war, direct, individual encounters between heroes and Algerians are filmed meticulously either using conventional cinematographic aesthetics, or a very intimate technique in close company with the protagonists. The images representing the Algerian crowd reiterate a topos of vacant looks and are accompanied by music which seems to tell a different story from what we are seeing on screen. An in-depth reading of the film’s incipit allows us to come back to various forms of oblivion (Augé 1998) sketched in the narration. Considering that these images of vacant-looking Algerians symbolise an obsessive and worrying representation of the country’s origins for the characters, we shall attempt to demonstrate that these very images are figures of absence (Vernet 1988) for the filmmaker. For Gatlif, it would be a way of saying how difficult, if not impossible, this return to Algeria is, as the mind still works so intensely on the memories of the past.
Tania Mujica

Conjuring up the “past” and illustrating the act of forgetting in German cinema: Schonzeit für Füchse (No shooting time for foxes, 1966)

This article analyses the film Schonzeit für Füchse (No shooting time for foxes, 1966) by Peter Schamoni. It identifies the strategies used by the director to illustrate his reproaches towards Germans at that time, when they tried to forget the Nazi period. The analysis underlines the use of evocative visual metaphors to illustrate attitudes of denial. The conclusions are in line with the theses of Norbert Elias regarding the traumatic nature of the Second World War period, and Sigmund Freud who asserts that although a “traumatic event” can be forgotten, it still leaves its mark.

Elise Müller

Ethnic tattoos – motivations for a practice among young adults

For the past 10 years or so, young French people have been increasingly interested in tattooing. The motifs most largely chosen are undoubtedly ethnic. This article focuses on the major motivations which lead young people to borrow signs from other cultures, which they display as key features of their identity. Placing the spotlight on five broad types of motivation which are interwoven, the floor is given to individuals bearing these ethnic marks in an attempt to understand the role of the “poetic savages” in the quest to find one’s self. In spite of the approximations that this poetry engenders, young French people, whether they are of foreign origin or not, appear to find other viewpoints by which they identify themselves and through which they can express both their individuality and their open-minded attitude to diversity in the world.

Ali Recham

The experience of illness and disappropriation of the body

In cases of organ transplants, the frontier between inside and outside, the familiar and the foreign, self and non-self, and identity and otherness tends to be shifted or erased. Do sick people feel that their body, the organ affected and the transplant belong to them? Illness takes away the very essence of someone’s dignity: using one’s body, enjoying freedom and being free to manage time. With the return of the lost function, the transplant gives back part of this ownership to the patient. Yet, due to constraints and uncertainty, the patient does not exclusively enjoy possession or have confidence in total recovery since all depends on the transplant, which itself is threatened by rejection and so the patient cannot do as he or she wishes with his or her body. The malfunctioning of the organ illustrates the utilitarian conception of the body in modern times. On an individual level it shows a process which is played out on the level of society: just as the patient may reject an organ, or even a body which seems useless, so does society exclude an ill person perceived as being unproductive. An organ is only useless in the eyes of the patient: this vision reveals serious personal suffering just as the exclusion of a sick person signifies a malaise within society.

Régis Schlagedenhausen

From oblivion to commemoration of homosexual deportation victims in France

This article looks at the strategic uses of memory. The author analyses the phases of building a remembrance of the deportation of homosexuals in France between 1975 and 2005. It examines how the argument of oblivion has been used with regard to three key figures: gays and lesbians, former deportees and the State. An analysis of the strategic uses of memory shows that for homosexual militants fighting for remembrance, the struggle against the act of forgetting is coupled with the fight for visibility. This struggle is part and parcel of the continuity of the non-heroic model of deportation memories and is also set against groups fostering the remembrance of the resistance magnified by the State.

Hatice Soytürk

Collective memory and constructing the act of forgetting among Alevi Kurds of Dersim origin

In host countries, Turkish immigration has given rise to ethnic and cultural particularities which were eclipsed during the genesis of the Turkish state. This article more specifically focuses on the history of migrant Kurds, who were political refugees, and their successors in France. It is based on more than 5 years of an ethnographical undertaking by Kurdish and Alevi families originally from Dersim but now living in France, and their associations, with a view to understanding not only social and cultural practices, but also the different features and usages of their memories, which reveal how the act of forgetting is constructed in the Diaspora. It explores...
the link between remembering and forgetting centred around a description of events in Dersim (1937-38) which have long been forgotten in Turkey. It demonstrates that forgetting is linked with transmission. Factors forgotten by the Alevi Kurds originally from Dersim are compared with the viewpoints of the Alevi Turks and Sunnites.

**Christian Stein**  
The edict of Galerius (311 A.D.): a story of obliteration

After three centuries of repression, the Edict of Tolerance issued by Galerius made Christianity a lawful religion in the Roman Empire in 311 A.D. Christian historiography has nonetheless tended to diminish the role of Galerius, making his name largely unknown today. In parallel, this historiography has gradually shaped a myth: that of the Edict of Milan of 313 A.D., according to which it was Constantine who freed Christianity from its shackles. The process of forgetting has been a complex one and history had to be rewritten, even if the conscious nature of this process of rebuilding history has not always been clearly demonstrated. The most astonishing fact, however, is that this act of forgetting still persists today, and therefore definitely calls into question the cultural inertia of our societies and the junction between research in human sciences and the rest of contemporary society.

**Nicolas Walzer**  
An introduction to the works of Gilbert Durand. From figurative structuralism to the anthropology of the imaginary

Combining the contributions made by Gaston Bachelard and Claude Lévi-Strauss, Gilbert Durand (1921) founded the anthropology of the imaginary in the 1960s within the context of symbolic anthropology, which spread to around 60 research centres throughout the world. In his seminal book *Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire* (1960), he develops a figurative structuralism which stems from three broad structures in man’s imaginary, separated into two different systems, one diurnal and the other nocturnal. Later, through myth-analysis and myth criticism, Durand updated the ingrained tensions found in the great literary and pictorial works by explaining that their impact on men’s imaginary, in particular their derivatives (the myth of the “blond brute”). This article explains this founding work and puts it in perspective.