



Revisiting Memory

Revisiter la mémoire

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Revisiting Memory is hopefully a catchy title. Perhaps even more so in French – Révisiter la mémoire – where the language itself seems to add a touch of evocative gravitas, but the essential is what lies behind the title in these five short words chosen to represent the 10th Anniversary Issue of the journal *Leaves*.

There are many ways in which to celebrate such a milestone. A selection of the finest or most pertinent articles published over the years. A retrospective on the changes on the editorial or academic landscape over the course of a decade. An analysis of the overall content of the twenty-one issues was envisioned, in which editorial tools which didn't exist just a short time ago facilitate the identification of recurrent words, themes, or constructions and perhaps thus render visible a current, or multiple currents, of thought in our publication. A non-event is also an option; in which the not-so-simple act of carrying on with publication is, in and of itself, a form a celebration and commemoration. As this issue was conceived, each of those options were discussed before focusing on our theme of Revisiting Memory – a theme which would allow each contributor to explore the way in which memory has, and continues to play out, in their own research and disciplinary fields.

The term memory itself can be problematic. The Online Oxford Dictionary begins with a straightforward “The faculty by which things are remembered” but one is quickly drawn in by the following 139 declinations of the term, from the much-studied collective memory to episodic and then folk memories, among others. The subtle distinction is made, for example, between “the act of remembering” and “an act or instance of remembrance”. Historian Amos Funkenstein beautifully portrays the inherent complexity of memory study in the first pages of his article “Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness.” In a few short lines, and drawing from Hegel, Funkenstein evokes both collective and individual memories, and the frequent shortcomings and frustrations associated with their study.

We naturally ascribe historical "consciousness" and "memory" to human collectives - family and tribe, nation and state. Nations are meant to remember their heroes "forever"; to perpetuate the memory of a person means to embed it in the collective memory, which forgets only failures and sins. In some languages - including Hebrew - there is a special expression for this act (verewigen, immortaliser, lehantsiach). This is confusing, as consciousness and memory can only be realized by an individual who acts, is aware, and remembers. Just as a nation cannot eat or dance, neither can it speak or remember. Remembering is a mental act, and therefore it is absolutely and completely personal (5-6).

When the limitations of the term are clearly acknowledged, the richness of the term becomes rather than a restraint, an opening, an invitation. In collecting the contributions to this issue, freedom was given to the authors to explore the notion in accordance with their own subjects, their own disciplines, and their own sensitivities. This in no way undermines the value of specific debate and criticism. Anna Green's academic work on memory in her article "Individual Remembering and 'Collective Memory': Theoretical Presuppositions and Contemporary Debates" comes to mind as pertinent when she discusses "the dominance of memory and commemoration as the prism through which we negotiate the past" (36). By definition, memory and memorial do indeed negotiate the past, but they do so in the present and in doing so form the basis for future remembering. Among the guidelines for our contributors was the expressed desire to revisit this process in relation to their subjects of study. Founded as a multi-disciplinary journal whose intent was to reflect the breadth and depth of Anglophone studies, this issue of *Leaves* provides a snapshot of the constantly evolving relationships between object, analysis, and narrative.

This interplay, between subject and study, between past and present representation, is a fascinating one as it demands consciousness not only of one's analysis but of the place of that analysis in a chain of representations. Much like the author/narrator Richard Henry Dana in his 1869 epilogue to *Two Years before the Mast* entitled *Twenty-Four Years After*, in which he both comments on his earlier voyage and work, and continues a narrative which largely contributed (and continues to contribute) to the mythology of and social construction in California. The author's voyage is nostalgic, sometimes melancholy with the awareness of the changes his narrative helped to enact, and yet there is something to be found which is akin to the theme underlying this issue. Amidst revisiting the principal sites of his earlier narrative, the author stumbles upon a pile of dry hides near the port of Yerba Buena.

I found a pile of dry hides lying by the side of a vessel. Here was something to feelingly persuade me what I had been, to recall a past scarce credible to myself. I stood lost in reflection. What were these hides—what were they not?—to us, to me, a boy, twenty-four years ago? These were our constant labor, our chief object, our almost habitual thought. They brought us out here, they kept us here, and it was only by getting them that we could escape from the coast and return to home and civilized life. (Dana 348)

Recently rereading this passage, Dana's object of focus – the hides central to the California trade which made its first voyage possible – appears not too dissimilar to our own objects of study. Without succumbing to excessive nostalgia, as researchers or impassioned readers we can all identify with a source of "constant labor, our chief object, our almost habitual thought". And, like the author, a periodic reflection of our relationships – collective and personal – with our objects of study is a welcome opportunity to be "lost in reflection."

Which brings us to the content of this anniversary issue of *Leaves*. Each of the articles in this issue invite us to reflect, to consider how the subject and its relationship with memory, memorialization, or commemoration are interwoven. Covering a wide range of disciplines and historical periods, each of these texts offers new perspectives on their subjects while maintaining a focus on the multiple spheres of remembrance.

Nathalie Jaëck's article explores the relationship between memory and truth in Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, forming a key element in the construction of both the narratives and their reception by the reader. Only a few years earlier, and on another continent, other narratives were being written by Ambrose Bierce in the form of his journalistic writings. As shown by Christophe Chambost, greater understanding of both historical context and creative process in these works provides a new element in better revisiting the author's well-known fictional short stories. From an author best known for his insights in the U.S. Civil War, the issue moves into another conflict in the form of the suppression of the 1971 India-Pakistan War within the Pakistani national culture and memory as represented in Kamila Shamsie's 2002 novel *Kartography*. In this article, Paul Veyret explores the subject of how silence or omission can form active parts in inherited and shared memory.

Visual representations are an integral part of many forms of memory, and Helena Lamouliatte-Schmitt allows us to delve into the Hart Island Project in which photographic memorial is combined with administrative and journalistic sources by the artists Joel Sternfeld and Melinda Hunt in a process of representation, identification, and sensibilization concerning the mass graves on Hart Island. In another article merging visual and textual commemorations, Jean-Paul Gabilliet presents an analysis of how American newspaper comic strips depicted the 1976 U.S. Bicentennial. Informed contextual framing combines with a closely developed interpretation of the iconographic images and subjects depicted in these comic strips, revealing as much about the mid-seventies' American national identity as about the celebrated historical event. In a timely prolongation of this analysis, you're invited to read a commented selection of comics on this theme on the site of Angoulême's Cité internationale de la bande dessinée et de l'image, at the following link : <https://www.citebd.org/neuvieme-art/les-comics-du-bicentenaire-dossier>

In another examination of discourse and memory, Remy Duthille's article on Lord Cockburn and the Cockburn Association's work presents the complex interplay of reality and representation over a prolonged period. A special insight is given to the shifting priorities in memorial discourse, inducing inclusion and omission, silences alternating with emphasis over time. The notion of silence is again evoked, albeit in a different form, in Lena Pallier's work on the Scott Thomas Braidwood, an intriguing figure in Deaf Studies and History, and whose shifting representation speaks to the possibility of change in memorialization.

In a distinctly commemorative addition, a selection of articles is then devoted to the Native American poet Joy Harjo. A member of the Muscogee Nation, among her numerous distinctions are that of being the 23rd Poet Laureate of the United States (2019-2022), along with being the recipient of the 2024 Frost Medal and Yales 2023 Bollingen Prize for American Poetry. Further honored by the attribution of a Honoris Causa Doctorate at the Université Bordeaux Montaigne in 2025, the articles in this selection are drawn from that tribute. An introduction by Margaux Valensi evokes both the social and historical context of this award and the intense personal sensitivity of the writer in her introduction. Anne Pélabon then reminds us that, in the words of the poet, "memory is always moving" with an article on souveraineté mémorielle. The blurred lines between resistance and restoration are then explored in Franck Miroux's article "Coming home through stories": Joy Harjo's *An American Sunrise*. A traditional vector of memory, the anthology, is then revisited and reimagined by Aurore Clavier in her article on Joy Harjo's work as an anthologist through the examination of three works co-edited by the poet. Lionel Larré continues the section with an homage to Joy Harjo, tracing her role as one of few women and the only Native American in the pantheon of personalities granted this honorific degree, her importance in the collective memory and memorialization of Native American cultural history, indeed her singular place in a "story matrix [that] connects all of us." The notion of homage is continued with the transcription of Margaux Valensi's closing ceremonial speech which places the poetry of the honoree at the center of a wider commentary on social constructions and their legacies.

A short text by Joy Harjo concludes this poetic commemoration. Limited in length but not in scope, this poetic discourse revisits her own history, personal and collective, and makes connections with the celebration of other, shared human experiences.

In a new development for *Leaves*, this issue introduces the "In Focus" rubric in which will appear pieces with another perspective – related to more current events and expositions, short commentaries, and interactions with artists and authors... To begin this new series, the cartoonist and graphic novelist Alison Bechdel who was honored at the Cité internationale de la bande dessinée et de l'image d'Angoulême is showcased through several documents. The first of these is a short biography by Jean-Paul Gabilliet which introduces her life and work. This is

followed by a critique of the graphic novel *Spent* by Nicolas Labarre. The podcast associated with the event in Angoulême is made available with a translation by Mathilde Bertrand, as is a Youtube video of an interview with the author at the IUT Bordeaux Montaigne on March 11th of this year.

The Varia section of this issue is composed of two works which continue to explore our principal themes. The first of these is a commented selection of poems from the Japanese-American poetesse, Amy Uyematsu, translated into French by the collective Passages. In six selected poems drawn from her books *Thirty Miles from J-Town* and *That Blue Trickster Time*, presented in both languages, memory and memorialization are multi-layered. Personal, family, and community identities are poetically deconstructed in a far-ranging and often intimate representation of the author's work.

The scope, variety, and originality of these collected articles treating the revisiting of memory bring to mind a well-known quote frequently attributed to American author Mark Twain.

Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover. (Brown 13)

This quotation seems particularly pertinent to academic research and writing at present. In a period of acute criticism as to the value (and associated economic cost) of research and teaching in the humanities, it is important to remember that our work is a wonderful reflection not only on the precise disciplines and topics undertaken, but on the larger human condition. While that observation may seem perfectly banal, the ability to Explore, to Dream, and to Discover, is precisely what initially drew many of us to our fields. Subsequently sharing those experiences via publication is what renders them both available and valuable to a wider public through what can be seen as a selective process of memorialization. Profound thanks are to be given to the many contributors to this shared experience – the previous editors Pascale Antolin and Trevor Harris, the authors who shared their expertise and their passion, and the readers who make the work on this journal worthwhile.

And the fact that this quotation is not, in fact, from the rich library of actual Mark Twain citations but rather penned by a lesser-known author, H. Jackson Brown, Jr. in his book *P.S. – I Love You*, makes it perhaps all the more pertinent as we question both the how and why of memorialization and remembrance. Shifts in personal and collective priorities, changing

available information and research techniques, even simple mistakes in attribution: multiple factors influence memorial representation and transmission.¹

Looking back on ten years of *Leaves*, the variety and the quality of the contributions certainly don't disappoint but rather provide a site in which memory, both disciplinary and individual, is constructed and periodically revisited. As such, it exists as an active interface between past research, reception, and the subsequent development of new thoughts, new projects. Ten years ago, at the initiative of the Research laboratory Climas, *Leaves* set out to "reflect, but not be limited to, the team's various fields of research, that is to say the study of English-speaking worlds, from a cultural, literary and linguistic perspective."

And that is, without any pretention, precisely what *Leaves* aspires to as we head into our second decade of publication.

Works Cited

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¹ First attributed to Twain in 1990, the origins of this quotation as well as its subsequent large diffusion are explored, for example, in the online site Quoteinvestator (<https://quoteinvestator.com/2011/09/29/you-did/>) or a short article by Matt Ray on The Medium (<https://medium.com/illumination/mark-twain-didnt-say-that-b4848c0cbf43>) among others.