

UCLA

Paroles gelées

Title

INTRODUCTION

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2mb2h6h0>

Journal

Paroles gelées, 27(1)

ISSN

1094-7264

Author

Flood Segeral, Chris Nathalie

Publication Date

2012

DOI

10.5070/PG7271012789

Copyright Information

Copyright 2012 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

Subversion of History and Desire for Memory: Introduction

Nathalie Ségeral and Christopher M. Flood
University of California, Los Angeles

The ambiguous relationship between memory and history has long occupied a unique place in human thought. In ancient times, the Greeks posited it along mythological bloodlines; it was through union with Zeus that Mnemosyne, Memory's titanic incarnation, gave birth to all of the Muses, including Clio whose inspiration governed History. Thus conceived, all artistic creation, history included, is born of memory. Such a naturalistic account seems reasonable within the relatively limited confines of a single human life; however, the relationship becomes more problematic as capricious social conditions sort, select, and almost sanctify inherently subjective memories, according them the revered status of *history*. This history then forms the foundations of future generations' memories and current realities, which inevitably echo that imperfect underpinning's contours, its inclusions and omissions. Nonetheless, history and memory are frequently opposed on theoretical grounds; this is particularly noticeable in French, where the distinction between supposedly objective History and unabashedly subjective stories is ensconced in the deceptively fluid substance of language. This was the starting point for the conference that gave birth to this volume of *Paroles Gelées*.

The *Robert* dictionary defines the word *history* as "knowledge and recounting of past events judged worthy of remembering," thus simultaneously invoking the French distinction between *histoire* (spelled with a lower-case 'h' referring to a story) and *Histoire* (spelled with an upper-case 'H' indicating History) and specifically emphasizing the latter. Such a reductive approach ignores numerous unique writings and experiences outside the norm: the marginalized voices relegated to the forgotten corners of our collective memory.

The 15th Annual French and Francophone Graduate Student Conference at UCLA proposed an investigation of this double sense of the word *histoire* / *Histoire* in the tradition of thinkers who sought to reformulate these concepts, methods, sources, and intellectual currents, overturning

what had formerly been considered *given*; thinkers like Michel Foucault (*Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*), François Furet (*Le Passé d'une illusion*), Pierre Nora (*Les Lieux de mémoires*), even Edouard Glissant (*Le Discours antillais*), and Paul Ricœur (*La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*). As these revolutionary, and one could rightly argue, subversive approaches to history spread to works in every genre (tragedies, novels, memoirs, autobiographies, correspondence, etc.) the revered and monolithic status of traditional history was broadly questioned and the social sciences reinvigorated as a voice was given to the other hi/story, the lower-case *histoire*.

This phenomenon is manifest in numerous and diverse disciplines and periods, many of which our conference sought to explore. Some topics explored in this conference and volume include: how French language functioned as an instrument and repository of memory (from Du Bellay to modern times); the prominence of historical fiction in the 19th century and the line between truth and fiction (specifically regarding writers like Hugo and Dumas); how historical traumas, such as the Holocaust, are expressed in individual and collective memory, and how more recent ideas like trauma studies have enriched their study; the writing of history from the margins of colonialism; the extent to which autobiography can subvert both personal history and History; the gendering tropes of historical narratives; and cinema's role in the establishment and transmission of the collective memory.

The first series of presentations culminated in a roundtable discussion moderated by UCLA French professor Malina Stefanovska and featuring Nicolas Weill (journalist for *Le Monde* and respected author in history and philosophy), the celebrated Mauritian author and filmmaker Ananda Devi, and renowned postcolonial scholar and expert on Francophone Southeast Asia, Panivong Norindr. Building on the presentations throughout the conference, this distinguished panel attempted to look beyond the paradigms of traditional history, and the editors of this issue of *Paroles Gelées* have carefully constructed the contents to continue that conversation. In her article "Subversion, fragmentation et mixité – structures de la mémoire dans *C'est maintenant du passé* de Marianne Rubinstein," Noémi Kila explores the interplay of image and text, as well as that of space and language, in the construction of identity through techniques of vacillation, suspense, and integration; thereby proving these to be narrative necessities in a context (Holocaust memories) wherein traditional narration can only be ineffective. In an interview entitled *Un univers d'émotions et de sensations*, Mauritian writer Ananda Devi discusses with Kumari Issur the extent to which recurring themes of trauma and exclusion give a voice to the marginalized Other in her novels as she works to overcome all forms of historical injustice and intolerance.