

Robert Belot

# Memory and Heritage as Geopolitical Actors and Markers



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## Presentation

### The Polysemy and Mutability of Heritage

Heritage is no longer simply the art of integrating what remains of history into the present day.<sup>1</sup> It has become a massive global phenomenon in which a multitude of political, economic, touristic, and ideological issues intersect. Heritage has limitless reach and application, integrating material as much as immaterial realities. A good barometer of this trend is the increase in requests to have sites inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List, which has led to the organisation imposing limits: only 45 new sites can be added each year and states that are part of the World Heritage Convention can submit a maximum of two requests per year.<sup>2</sup> The 1990s saw a 'patrimonial explosion'<sup>3</sup>, which coincided with a 'veritable discursive explosion'<sup>4</sup> and a 'fever for authenticity'.<sup>5</sup> The increased attention paid to heritage has emerged from different and often contradictory sources including but not limited to: a need for reference points in response to the homogenising effects of globalisation;<sup>6</sup> the development of collapsology theories against a backdrop of history's 'teleology pessimism';<sup>7</sup> the strengthening of minority identities;<sup>8</sup> an awareness of a slower temporality (reflecting the rise of

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- 1 Octave Debary, *La fin du Creusot ou L'art d'héberger les restes*, Paris, éditions du CTHS, Series 'Le regard de l'ethnologue', 2002.
  - 2 The World Heritage List has recently passed the symbolic threshold of 1200 sites.
  - 3 Pierre Nora, 'The Era of Commemoration' in *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, vol. 3, ed. by Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Krizman, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer, Columbia University Press, 1998, p. 630.
  - 4 'There has been a veritable discursive explosion in recent years around the concept of identity, at the same moment as it has been subjected to a searching critique.' Stuart Hall, 'Who needs "identity"?', in Stuart Hall, Paul du Gay (eds), *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London, Sage, 1996, p. 1.
  - 5 Gilles Lipovetsky, *Le sacre de l'authenticité*, Paris, Gallimard, 2021, p. 9.
  - 6 Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Cult of Identity Politics', in *New Left Review*, n° 217, 1996
  - 7 Perrine Simon-Nahum, *Les déraisons modernes*, Paris, éditions de l'Observatoire, 2021, p. 94.
  - 8 Decolonisation, resistance to globalisation, global migration and culture shocks, phenomena of communitisation, identitarian movements.

ecology);<sup>9</sup> and the development of world-wide travel and tourism as an economic manna.<sup>10</sup>

As heritage became an increasing social reality from the 1980–90s onwards, it was established as legitimate subject of research in the humanities and social sciences, as Pierre Nora's seminal *Lieux de mémoire* shows.<sup>11</sup> The rise in studies on heritage and collective memory is in line with what is called the 'cultural turn' and the discipline of Cultural History, which addresses 'the dimension of the symbolic and its interpretations'.<sup>12</sup> In the future, it will be necessary to look back at this movement and examine whether the approaches in the humanities and social sciences were influenced by the era of 'total heritage'.<sup>13</sup> Were researchers able to resist the memorial and identity-based pressures of contemporary society? How did their work manage to avoid being governed by 'the tyranny of memory'<sup>14</sup>, 'the unreserved lauding of memory'<sup>15</sup> and 'of the inversion of the historical into the commemorative'?<sup>16</sup>

'Total heritage' has resulted in a weakening of the boundaries between individual and collective memory, often defined as an affective and spontaneous reality within identity-based logics, and history, which is an aca-

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9 It would be interesting to analyse the concomitance between two major phenomena: the emergence of an awareness of heritage with the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972), now the World Heritage Convention, and the birth of an ecological consciousness with the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, the first 'Earth Summit'.

10 The threshold of a billion tourist was surpassed in 2013.

11 Pierre Nora's *Lieux de mémoire* comprises 7 parts published by Gallimard across 3 volumes: *La République* (1984), *La Nation* (1986) and *Les France* (1992). The work was published in English in 3 volumes by Columbia University Press as *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past* (edited by Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman, and translated by Arthur Goldhammer): *Conflicts and Divisions* (1996); *Traditions* (1997); *Symbols* (1998). When the original French version is used as the basis for translations in this book, the citations refer to the 3-volume 1997 republication. The following translations of 'lieux de mémoire' are available: 'places of memory', 'sites of memory' or 'realms of memory'.

12 According to Hervé Mazurel in his forward to the French edition of Peter Burke's *Qu'est-ce que l'histoire culturelle*, trans. by Christophe Jaquet, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2022, p. 11.

13 François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité. Présentisme et expériences du temps*, Seuil, 'Points-Histoire', 2012, p. 243.

14 Pierre Nora, 'The Era of Commemoration', *op.cit.*, p. 637.

15 Tzvetan Todorov, *Les Abus de la mémoire*, Paris, Arléa, 1995, p. 13.

16 Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2001, p. 91

demical discipline with a required objectivity, regulated methods, and an ethos. This blurring can be observed in a 1993 French law on listed heritage buildings, which states 'Our heritage is the memory of our history and the symbol of our national identity'.<sup>17</sup> Such declarations raise the question of whether the triad of heritage-memory-history should be devoted to celebrating national identity.<sup>18</sup> Does heritage 'make history', or at the very least recount it, memorialise it, and ensure its presence in everyday life? If that were to be the case, it would mean forgetting the fact that the history of historians,<sup>19</sup> with its foundations in a critical and detached search for knowledge, is very clearly distinguished from 'heritage' and from 'memory'. Heritage, however, is of interest to historians since it cannot be considered outside of the (complex) relationship that it establishes to the past and thus to history and its memory.<sup>20</sup>

This past does not exist in and of itself: 'patrimonialisation',<sup>21</sup> the process of creating heritage, selects, valorises, and transforms elements from history at a given time (the moment of patrimonialisation). Above all, it is a testament to that moment and the contemporary needs of a society or of a community. Heritage becomes heritage creation through the shift from the 'exceptional' object to be preserved to the strategies and processes of recognition, which involve institutions (groups, states, European institutions, UNESCO). The result is that, contrary to popular opinion, heritage is anything but a stable and unchanging reality, a sanctuary or refuge. As part of history, heritage evolves according to political and geopolitical contexts and new ways of thinking. It is subject to continual re-readings and challenges that can even bring about its destruction.

The traditional concept of heritage has expanded well beyond notions of protection, restoration, and conservation to become a mirror of contem-

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17 Cited in François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité*, op.cit., p. 205.

18 Nora's *Les lieux de mémoire* does not address, for example, the memory of slavery. The memory of victims was a less significant concern in the 1980s and 1990s.

19 The German language distinguishes between history that is written (Geschichte) and history as an analysis of the history that is written (Historie).

20 Sébastien Ledoux, « La mémoire, mauvais objet de l'historien? », *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, vol. 133, no. 1, 2017, p. 113–128.

21 A term invented by Nora. In this book, I'll use the terms 'patrimonialisation' and 'heritagisation' interchangeably. According to the Collins dictionary, 'A country's patrimony is its land, buildings, and works of art'. Olivier Givre, Madina Regnault, « Du patrimoine comme objet à la patrimonialisation comme processus ». In *Patrimonialisations croisées*, ed. by Olivier Givre et Madina Regnault. Lyon, Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pul.22815>.

porary societies and a geopolitical issue. Through its designations ('World Heritage List', 'Memory of the World Register'), UNESCO is an excellent lens through which to assess how states can turn both heritage and the organisation itself into instruments for political and geopolitical ends. The significant challenges that UNESCO's universalist and cultural mission has faced attest to the symbolic importance that heritage occupies in the world today. The phenomenon of 'monumental hatred,'<sup>22</sup> which goes against UNESCO's core mission<sup>23</sup>, dramatically emerged at the turn of the twenty-first century.<sup>24</sup> Examples include the attacks on heritage sites during the Yugoslav Wars and the world-wide shock provoked by the destruction of the Timbuktu mausoleums (Mali) and the Monumental Arch of Palmyra (Syria).

Whilst UNESCO still maintains that heritage is a source of 'resilience', the reality is that it divides societies as much as it unites them. It can even lead to geopolitical conflicts. In 2011, the announcement that Palestine was becoming a UNESCO member caused a diplomatic crisis: the United States, along with Israel and Canada, decided to suspend their financial contribution to the organisation (representing 22 % of its budget), thereby endangering UNESCO's role and prestigious status. The inscription of Hebron/Al-Khalil Old Town on UNESCO'S World Heritage List in Danger in 2017 led the American government to transfer its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and then, on 6 December 2017, recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.<sup>25</sup> Other cases that reveal the geopolitical importance of cultural heritage include the toppling of statues as a result of the Black Lives Matter movement, started in the United States in 2013, which reflects a desire to re-examine existing heritage monuments in public spaces. Similarly, a movement emerging from countries that were formerly colonies aims

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22 François Chaslin, *Une haine monumentale, essais sur la destruction des villes en Ex-Yougoslavie*, Paris, Descartes & Cie, 1997.

23 Following the Hebron affair in 2017 described below, the Director-General of UNESCO Irina Bokova deplored this radical challenge to heritage, which was viewed as a form of attack against universalism: 'Universality is critical to UNESCO's mission to strengthen international peace and security in the face of hatred and violence, to defend human rights and dignity'. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/statement-irina-bokova-director-general-unesco-occasion-withdrawal-united-states-america-unesco>

24 Robert Belot, 'Heritage abuse and geopolitical disorder at the dawn of the third millennium', *Ethnologies*, vol. 39, n°1, 2018, p. 27-49.

25 Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, declared 'Unesco has become a theatre of absurd. Instead of preserving history, it distorts it'.

to recover stolen artefacts. European museums have been confronted with such requests since the start of the 2000s.<sup>26</sup> We will explore the question: Did European countries steal non-European heritage?

Within this context, it is legitimate to ask whether heritage appears as 'just a province of history',<sup>27</sup> on the same level as memory? Or if it is progressively establishing itself as a competitor to the history of historians and even, in certain cases, as a denier or forger of history, or at the very least as having an influence on historians? Is heritage the memory of history or, in fact, a mirror of geopolitical issues? Under the pressures of social and international demands, heritage would become the main provider of the past's presence in the present, no longer on the peripheries but at the centre of our relationship to history. Even when there are interactions and overlap between the approach of historians and the memory-heritage approach, the outcomes are not the same. The dynamic of heritage draws on 'collective' memory and the symbolic narrative that a group tells itself for reasons of identification, rehabilitation, cohesion, and perpetuation: 'imagined communities'<sup>28</sup> creating 'founding imaginaries'<sup>29</sup>. Whether material or immaterial, heritage is only created, appropriated, and valorised by a group for its value as a historical witness and for identity-based purposes. This dynamic is thus instrumental, legitimate, and normative. In other words, it is moral and political. Its result is an over-legalisation of the past<sup>30</sup> and 'memory laws'<sup>31</sup>, which transform memory into an instance of 'truth' by making the state or the justice system the guarantor of a historic 'norm'.

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26 Elwin Sarr, Bénédicte Savoy, « Restituer le patrimoine africain : vers une nouvelle éthique relationnelle ». Report delivered President Emmanuel Macron on 23 November 2018.

27 Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, *op.cit.*, p. 385.

28 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso, 1983.

29 Vincent Descombes, *Les embarras de l'identité*, Paris, Gallimard, 2013, p. 250.

30 Henry Rousso and Éric Conan, *Vichy, un passé qui ne passe pas*, Paris, Fayard, 1994.

31 To date, there are four such laws in France: the law of 13 July 1990 aimed to crack down on all acts of racism, antisemitism, and xenophobia and made denying the holocaust a crime; the law of 29 January 2021 recognised the 1915 Armenian genocide; the law of 21 May 2002 recognised the slave trade and slavery as a crime against humanity; the law of 23 February 2005 addressed colonialism. See: <https://www.vie-publique.fr/eclairage/18617-lois-memorielles-la-loi-le-politique-et-lhistoire>

The legal recognition of ‘rights relating to cultural heritage’<sup>32</sup> and of the ‘duty of memory’ (which often goes hand in hand with ‘the rhetoric of denunciation’)<sup>33</sup> confirms the existence of this phenomenon: the progressive hegemonisation of the couple heritage/memory. The historian Pierre Laborie examines the notion of what he calls ‘memorially correct’ and casts doubt on the ‘legitimacy of a reading of the past established as the norm and upheld as the only right and possible memory’.<sup>34</sup> In some cases, the relationship between history and memory can even lead to collectives and communities with interests in memorialisation confronting and questioning the work of historians. During a high-profile legal case in France following the publication of Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau’s *Les Traités négrières* (2003) on the trans-Saharan slave trade,<sup>35</sup> a group of historians issued a reminder of how historians approach their work:<sup>36</sup> history is not ‘a religion’, history is ‘not morality’, history is not a ‘slave to present times’, history is not ‘a legal subject’; and, finally, ‘history is not memory’.<sup>37</sup> And yet, memory, including heritage, has become a subject of history.

The effects of this confusion can be analysed from a case study on the internationally renowned Franco-Swiss architect and urban planner Le Corbusier.<sup>38</sup> A leading figure in the modern architecture movement, Le Corbusier was the subject of a grassroots memory war campaign, of the

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32 Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention, 2005) <https://rm.coe.int/1680083746>

33 Sébastien Ledoux, *Le devoir de mémoire. Une formule et son histoire*, Paris, CNRS éditions (Biblis), 2016–2021, p. 129.

34 Pierre Laborie, *Le chagrin et le venin. La France sous l’Occupation, mémoire et idées reçues*, Paris, Bayard, p. 2011, p. 11, p. 39.

35 Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau was accused of putting into historical perspective and downplaying the transatlantic slave trade (which primarily concerned European traders), and denying its genocidal nature. Deemed to be ‘racist’ and ‘reversionist’, Pétré-Grenouilleau was subject to legal action in 2005 brought about by a collective from French overseas departments. In an article published on 12 June 2005, the historian denied that the slave trade constituted a crime against humanity, contrary to the law of 23 May 2001 which recognised it as such. In February 2006, the collective withdrew their complaint.

36 Following the complaint against Pétré-Grenouilleau, historians reacted strongly against what they saw as a violation of their freedom. They published an appeal on 13 December 2005 entitled « Liberté pour l’histoire » [Freedom for history].

37 « Liberté pour l’histoire », *Libération*, 13 décembre 2005.

38 Robert Belot, *Le Corbusier fasciste? Dénigrement et mésusage de l’histoire*, Paris, Hermann, 2021. Many of the activities for the DYCLAM+ Masters programme took place in the former school at the Unité d’Habitation built by Le Corbusier as part of the creation of the new urban area Firminy-Vert. I received invaluable support

type that is widely-reported in the media and is freed from the constraints that govern the slow work of historians. An attempt was made to block the inscription of a series of his buildings on the World Heritage List to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of his death in 2015. The proposed serial inscription of Le Corbusier's works was met with accusations of the architect being a 'fascist', a Vichy 'collaborator', and even a 'Nazi sympathiser'. This case presents a blurring of the boundaries that separate opinion from knowledge, denigration from criticism, judgement from analysis. As the then-French Culture Minister André Malraux's eulogy to his 'old master' on 3 September 1965 attested, there has long been contention towards Le Corbusier, which even existed in his own lifetime. Today, Le Corbusier is attacked for his role under the Vichy regime (1940–1944) following the defeat of France. UNESCO, supported by historians, resisted this denunciation campaign, which is in line with the worldwide trend of deposing 'heroes' but may ultimately be to the detriment of history. Since 17 July 2016, 17 buildings or sites designed by Le Corbusier have been inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

The duty of the historian and anthropologist of memory<sup>39</sup> is to attempt to show the outcomes of the mechanisms of heritage. As part of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters programme DYCLAM+ (2017–24), I organised classes, seminars, and lectures with external speakers for my students during which heritage was examined through three key questions: 1) how is heritage created? This initial question allowed for a reading of the social, political, and geopolitical processes through which an event, a historical figure, an idea, a community, or a phenomenon is honoured, all the while attempting to identify the transformations that are visible in the 'items' chosen to create heritage from. These choices can evolve according to geopolitical changes (for example, world wars or the end of the Cold War) as well as the evolving socio-ethical paradigms that have come to establish our relationship to the past on a 'victim-memorial regime'.<sup>40</sup> In the West, celebrating the figure of the national hero has given way to resituating the

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from Jean-Louis Cohen, who was professor at the Collège de France and a prominent architectural historian, and greatly benefitted from his advice.

39 The history of memory has developed precisely within this movement obsessed with heritage.

40 Johann Michel, *Gouverner les mémoires. Les politiques mémorielles en France*, Paris, PUF, 2010, p. 69.



victim, the defeated, the outsiders of memory and history.<sup>41</sup> For example, in 2017, a monument dedicated to the victims of homophobia was inaugurated in Lisbon. National memory appears in competition with the rising power of ‘contemporary victim identity’.<sup>42</sup> The emergence of the values ‘resilience’, ‘empathy’,<sup>43</sup> and equity have allowed for the consideration of memories of suffering and heritages of dispossession.<sup>44</sup> 2) How did the forms, techniques, and functions of heritage evolve between the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries? From stone monuments to artificial intelligence, from tangible to intangible forms of heritage, society’s relationship to heritage has undergone major transformations. When exploring this question, it is apt to distinguish between monuments that were conceived as such and ‘involuntary’<sup>45</sup> sites of heritage, those that later became monuments (e.g. ruins). This question is addressed through the case study of the inscription of the Genbaku Dome in Hiroshima on the World Heritage List in 1996. These transformations have an impact upon the very meaning of the word and the concept of ‘heritage’,<sup>46</sup> as well as its usages and social impact. 3) In which ways can societies intervene and respond to the inscription of heritage narratives in public spaces and collective memory? As a group, we sought to understand anti-heritage behaviours of individuals and collective hostile to the conservation of heritage sites that bear witness to a history that is no longer or not yet compatible with the expectations of contemporary society. My students and I worked on a socio-political phenomenon that has not yet been documented and perhaps represents an exception

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41 Paul Ricœur mentions ‘the claim of our contemporaries to place themselves in the position of victim, to assume the status of victim’ that ‘engenders an exorbitant privilege, which places everyone else in the position of owing a debt’. Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, *op.cit.*, p. 86.

42 Esther Benbassa, « La concurrence des victimes », in Pascal Blanchard, Sandrine Lemaire, Nicolas Bancel (eds), *Culture coloniale en France. De la Révolution française à nos jours*, Paris, CNRS éditions, 2008, p. 587. See also Iannis Roder, *Sortir de l'ère victimaire. Pour une nouvelle approche de la Shoah et des crimes de masse*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 2020.

43 Jeremy Rifkin, *The Age of Resilience: Reimagining Existence on a Rewilding Earth*, St. Martin's Press, 2022.

44 Didier Fassin, « La souffrance du monde. Considérations anthropologiques sur les politiques contemporaines de la compassion », *L'Évolution psychiatrique*, October-December 2002; *La raison humanitaire. Une histoire morale du temps présent*, Paris, Hautes Études-Gallimard-Seuil, 2011.

45 Françoise Choay, *L'Allégorie du patrimoine*, Paris, Seuil, 1992–1999, p. 14–15.

46 Tim Winter, ‘Clarifying the critical in critical heritage studies’, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 19/ 2013, p. 532–545.

in France: the refusal to erect memorials in the Loire department in the aftermath of the Great War. The results of this research are outlined in our essay. Whilst this episode from history might seem incredible today, it offers insight into the influence of and paradoxes within the region's pacifist and trade unionist movement that developed in the armoury industry. Heritage is increasingly presented as a tool destined to create connections, consensus, and 'resilience', yet, in this example, dissensus produced instances of conflict.

These three heuristic questions mirror a more general, longstanding reflection in my research on the complex relationships that are continually woven between history (the history of historians), social memory, and heritage. These relationships sometimes highlight the logics of instrumentalisation (political, ideological, as much as economic) because they touch upon issues of identity and power. From this perspective, Vladimir Putin's justification for the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 through reference to historical heritage presents an illustrative contemporary example. The arguments he has presented in public primarily point to Ukraine's politics of 'de-patrimonialisation' or 'de-heritagisation', the undoing of heritage, through its dismantling of Soviet era monuments following independence.<sup>47</sup> Ukraine is not its only target: Russia intends to pursue justice against the European leaders accused of 'insulting History' (Baltic countries and Poland). Culture is also a battlefield. UNESCO's vocation is thus questioned. On the entry gate to UNESCO headquarters in Paris, a large sign presents the organisation's mission:

*'UNESCO World Heritage. A source of resilience, humanity and innovation'*

One of the first tangible public reactions in Europe relating to Ukrainian heritage was an outdoor exhibition at the Palais-Royal in Paris, which could be viewed from 16 April 2022 onwards, just two months after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Entitled 'Ukraine éternelle' (Eternal Ukraine), the

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47 Robert Belot, *Vladimir Poutine ou la falsification de l'Histoire comme arme de guerre*, Lausanne, Fondation Jean Monnet pour l'Europe, series 'Debates and Documents Collection', 2024. This work expands upon the classes I gave from the start of 2022 onwards and a conference organised by DYCLAM+ consortium at Babeş-Bolyai University in Romania (4 November 2023) on 'Revisiter les récits sur le patrimoine culturel dans les États candidats à l'UE dans le contexte de la guerre de la Russie contre l'Ukraine'. My paper was titled: 'Justifying War through History and Heritage: The Example of Russia's Aggression against Ukraine'.

exhibition was a collaboration between the Ukrainian Embassy in Paris, the Permanent Delegation of Ukraine to UNESCO, and the Centre des monuments nationaux. On the railings of the Palais-Royal gardens, a selection of large-scale photographs offered ‘a voyage through little-known heritage sites in Kharkiv, Kyiv, Lviv, and Odessa, which are now under threat’. From my own visit, it was clear that the exhibition aimed to demonstrate, contrary to the theories of its invader, that Ukraine, with its own history, culture, and heritage, very much existed. The exhibition reveals one of heritage’s fundamental functions as a marker of identity. The organisers specified that ‘these images of monuments, witnesses to the Ukrainian nation’s past and constituting its identity, allow for the public to see the diversity of Ukraine’s heritage’.

This exhibition also points to the importance that societies attribute to the issue of heritage in the context of war and to the threat of diminishing or destroying the foundations of identity. The collection of sites represented (Saint-Sophia Cathedral, Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, the Historic Centre of L’viv, and the Residence of Bukovinian and Dalmatian Metropolitans) are ‘inscribed on UNESCO’s World Heritage list. The Cultural Landscape of Canyon in Kamenets-Podilsk and the Historic Centre of Odesa are inscribed on the Tentative List, which is an inventory of those properties which each State Party intends to consider for nomination’.<sup>48</sup> The exhibition sought to ‘make the public aware of the dangers’ to which cultural heritage is exposed, ‘as a collateral victim and as a target’ and to serve as a reminder of the protective role that UNESCO must play.<sup>49</sup> The exhibition’s title (eternal Ukraine) is problematic in itself: it could be read as a sign of poetic affectation or a marker of empathy, but it also expresses an essentialist point of view both of the nation and of history that is incompatible with the historian’s approach. It suggests heritage is a sort of sanctuary with the vocation of protecting and glorifying an identity considered genetically pure that predates history. The medievalist Marc Bloch encouraged historians to free themselves from ‘the idol of origins’,<sup>50</sup> whilst the philosopher

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48 The Historic Centre of Odesa was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2023.

49 The Grand Palais in Paris welcomed the immersive exhibition « Ukraine: une année de résilience, une culture de résistance » [Ukraine: A Year of Resilience, A Culture of Resistance] in February 2023. Organised by the Ukrainian and Canadian embassies in France, the exhibition has previously been displayed at the Toronto Ukrainian Festival in September 2022.

50 Marc Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft*, trans. by Peter Putnam, Knopf, 1953, p. 29

Paul Ricœur put forward the idea that reality is but a tale of reality, and that memory must be understood as a ‘fiction’ inventing a ‘narrative identity’.<sup>51</sup>

This book seeks to show that heritage, like the past, is a social ‘construction’<sup>52</sup> that reveals more about the moment in which the act of heritage creation is undertaken, than about the history of what it relates to. Studies on the monuments in homage to the American Confederates show that these statues were often erected in two main waves long after the Civil War had ended: 1890–1930 and 1950–1960. These two waves correspond to periods of heightened racial tensions in American politics. This observation allows us to resituate the process of heritage in an ideological perspective to uncover, as the historian Jane Dailey writes, that in many cases, the purpose of these monuments was not to celebrate the past, but to promote ‘white supremacy’.<sup>53</sup> To understand the reasons behind students’ toppling of ‘Silent Sam’ (20 August 2018), a monument that immortalised a confederate soldier and became a symbol of the University of North Carolina, it is necessary to look back to the circumstances surrounding its inauguration. Financed by the United Daughters of the Confederacy, this monument was inaugurated on 2 June 1913, long after the historical event it was supposed to commemorate. The inaugural speeches celebrated the sacred cause that the monument symbolised: the preservation of the ‘Anglo Saxon race’.<sup>54</sup>

When Barack Obama visited Hiroshima on 26 May 2016 (the first American president to do so), he included the following statement in his speech: ‘we have a shared responsibility to look directly into the eye of history’.<sup>55</sup> This phrase might be read as a reference to the way that the Hiroshima Memorial Museum downplays the history of Japan as a hegemonic persecutor

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51 ‘The fragile offshoot issuing from the union of history and fiction is the assignment to an individual or a community of a specific identity that we can call their narrative identity’. Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, The University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 246.

52 Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2008, p. 77.

53 Jane Dailey, ‘Baltimore’s Confederate monument was never about “history and culture”’, *The Huffington Post*, 17 August 2017. On this question, see Olof Bortz, « Les historiens, le déboulonnage des monuments et l’histoire du racisme: États-Unis, Royaume-Uni et France, 2015–2020 », 27 June 2023. <https://www.politika.io/fr/article/historiens-deboulonnage-monuments-lhistoire-du-racisme-etatsunis-royaumeuni-france-20152020>

54 Robert J. Cook, *Civil War Memories: Contesting the Past in the United States since 1865*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017.

55 ‘Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Abe of Japan at Hiroshima Peace Memorial’ <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/05/27/remarks-president-obama-and-prime-minister-abe-japan-hiroshima-peace>

in the first half of the twentieth century by focusing on the atomic bomb, thereby transforming the country into a victim. This process allowed for an exoneration of the crimes Japan committed (for example, against China) so that the country could reappear as an actor on the international stage in 1945. These circumstances raise the question of whether history was the real issue when creating heritage of Hiroshima. Is Hiroshima a 'lieu de mémoire' or 'lieu de dé-mémoire', heritage without memory, even heritage against history? The memory of Hiroshima is explored as a case study in this book.

As it is considered a touchstone of identity, the relationship to heritage is connected to the sacred and to myths. For the anthropologist, heritage is above all an illustration of society to study as it is. It then follows that heritage, given that it is part of history and claims to embody history, has its own history. What Charles Péguy called 'historical history' is related to the prosaic nature of the academic approach, which is presented as a permanent and contradictory rewriting of historical fact that fears any instrumentalisation because it is ruled by an ethos of knowledge. On the other hand, heritage is experienced and perceived as a promise and a guarantee of eternity, or at least of durability. It is also indebted to the evolution of ways of thinking and can be subjected to the test of time. To cite the title of Alain Resnais's and Chris Marker's 1953 documentary on colonialism that caused a scandal upon its release, 'statues also die'. Along similar lines, the phrase « Déboulonnons le récit officiel » [Unshackle the official narrative] was graffitied on a statue of Maréchal Joseph Gallieni in Paris on 16 June 2020. Gallieni was a high-profile figure during the First World War, but also an uncompromising actor of colonisation, notably in Madagascar.

This movement of questioning heritage is of particular concern for Europe's former colonial powers who imposed a narrative and constructed a heritage of monuments that, in general, ignored the perspectives of colonised peoples and the realities of colonialism. For these reasons, statues of Leopold II in Belgium have been the subject of lively and recurring contestations by anti-colonialists, and in France, Jules Ferry, who carried out major education reforms, is an increasingly contested figure due to his politics of colonial expansion under the Third Republic. European countries have had to confront their 'contentious statues' following the re-examination of the history of slavery and of colonisation, which has

led to vandalism and destruction.<sup>56</sup> Across the world, a movement is developing that is reconsidering national heroes and deconditioning memory, including figures that one might believe to be beyond suspicion: Abraham Lincoln, Théodore Roosevelt, Victor Schoelcher, Churchill, and Gandhi. European museums are having to respond to the movement for repatriating stolen cultural artefacts. In 2021, France returned 26 works to Benin from the Quai Branly museum's collection. To mark the occasion, a short, week-long exhibition took place in October 2021 that students on the DYCLAM+ Masters programme were able to visit. In the United States, this issue focuses on 'equitable heritage'. The foreword to the exhibition 'Intangible Heritage and Human Experience: Revisiting African Arts' at the New Orleans Museum of Art, which I visited in April 2024, reflects this approach: 'Arts presents opportunities to reassess our pasts, critically engage with history, and create a more equitable heritage for future generations. We invite you to contribute to the interpretation of African arts and watch this space as it grows and changes to incorporate many perspectives.' Beyond the strict question of heritage, the returning of artworks is fraught with the more complex and sensitive issues of reparations of a past that is at odds with the dominant values of today.

These questions emerged when the European Union was developing programmes (notably as part of ERASMUS+) that aim to valorise 'European heritage'. The European Heritage Label was created in 2005 for this very purpose. The Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society framework, drawn up in the same year, mentions 'rights relating to cultural heritage' in its first article.<sup>57</sup> Yet the very idea of 'European heritage', an unavoidable topos of pro-European discourse since the 1950s, is not self-evident and requires examination. Indeed, the creation of the House of European History in Brussels in 2017 was met with criticism. When considering this question, it is worth remembering what Lucien Febvre, one of the twentieth century's leading historians, proposed in a class at the Collège de France in 1944 as a definition of what could be 'European civilisation' and what he called 'shared heritage'.

My own approach could be summarised with this apodictic formulation: it is necessary to study and write the history of heritage, which is an

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56 Jacqueline Lalouette, *Les statues de la discorde*, Passés/Composés-Humensis, 2021.

57 'The Parties to this Convention agree to: recognise that rights relating to cultural heritage are inherent in the right to participate in cultural life, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights'. <https://rm.coe.int/1680083746>

attempt at creating heritage from History. This position leads to admitting that the narrative construction of heritage can also be a deconstruction (or a 'decanonisation'<sup>58</sup>) by a different discourse, which reflects a different moment in time, a different intellectual context, and a different relationship to history.<sup>59</sup> This book does not aim to produce a general theory on the act of heritage, rather it presents case studies in which I attempt to echo the three questions outlined at the beginning of this introduction. This historical-anthropological study on the development of creating heritage from historical fact also offers a reflection on the changes within the relationship of societies to the phenomena of heritage, memorialisation and commemoration.

The relevance of this work today is a reminder that the regime of heritage creation is the product of successive narratives that every society draws up at different times and according to evolving expectations and representations.<sup>60</sup> The hypothesis that sociologist Maurice Halbwachs proposed many years ago thus remains valid: 'collective memory is essentially a reconstruction that adapts the image of ancient facts to the beliefs and spiritual needs of the present.'<sup>61</sup> Heritage carries out an action on the past in the present and aims to instruct the future.<sup>62</sup> Some scholars have called this 'reversed filiation'.<sup>63</sup> Others have identified three dimensions of heritage: 1) retrospective (relationship to the past), 2) introspective (relationship to

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58 Yuliya Yurchuk, « Décanonisation du passé soviétique: abject, kitsch et mémoire en Ukraine », in S. Gensburger, Jenny Wüstenberg (eds.), *Dé-commémoration*, Paris, Fayard, 2023, p.128.

59 Bertrand Tillier, *La Disgrâce des statues; essai sur les conflits de mémoire, de la Révolution française à Black Lives Matter*, Paris, Payot, 2022.

60 Nathalie Heinich, *La fabrique du patrimoine : de la cathédrale à la petite cuillère*, Paris, Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2009.

61 Maurice Halbwachs, *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en Terre Sainte, Étude de mémoire collective*, Paris, PUF, 1941.

62 Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2006.

63 According to the ethnologist Jean Pouillon, « La tradition : transmission ou reconstruction ? », in Jean Pouillon, *Fétiches sans fétichisme*, Paris, Maspero, 1975, p. 155-173. This notion was taken up by Jean Davallon, *Le don du patrimoine. Une approche communicationnelle de la patrimonialisation*, Lavoisier, 2006, p. 155. Reversed (or inverted) filiation ('filiation inversée') means that it is the heir who choose their heritage and not the other way round. The regime of heritage does not fall under a linear, descending, and mechanical transmission, rather it rests upon the freedom to conserve, destroy, or reconstruct. That is why, contrary to popular opinion, heritage is a constantly evolving social reality and why it is in and of itself historical and can be historicised.

the present), 3) prospective (ultimate aim).<sup>64</sup> The form of history that heritage claims to embody and make eternal is itself subject to confrontation, revision, and interpretative conflicts linked to new and future sensibilities.

This rule also applies to monument-based heritage, to sites of heritage that were originally conceived as heritage. I propose to show that commemorative monuments, contingent upon geopolitical contexts, are caught in this dialectic movement of permanent reinterpretation that results in the public forgetting the event that it commemorates. Subjected to cycles of representation, monuments are destined to be a 'semiological Golem,'<sup>65</sup> an 'unstoppable metaphor'.<sup>66</sup> 'Polysemy and mutability'<sup>67</sup> are the two defining characteristics of the three monuments that form the case study in this book: the Lion of Belfort (1880); the Statue of Liberty in New York (1886); and the Eiffel Tower (1889). Heritage's underlying paradox is that it reveals the present status of societies, their tensions and their divisions, their hopes and their fears, against a backdrop of a quest for identity<sup>68</sup> and issues of power.<sup>69</sup>

This book seeks to introduce some fundamental heuristic questions to students preparing for careers in the heritage industry and to teachers interested in the issue of heritage. Why do we remember? What do we remember? How do we remember? Why, in contrast, do we avoid remembering certain events? These questions and many more were discussed with my students on the national masters programme Histoire-Civilisations-

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64 Stéphane Héritier, « Le patrimoine comme *chronogénèse*. Réflexions sur l'espace et le temps », *Annales de géographie*, vol. 689, no. 1, 2013, p. 3–23.

65 Philippe Roger, « L'édifice du sens », in *La Statue de la Liberté, l'exposition du centenaire*, Paris, Musée des Arts décoratifs, Sélection du Reader's Digest, 1986, p. 282.

66 Roland Barthes, *La Tour Eiffel*, Paris, Delpire, 1964. Text republished in: *Roland Barthes, Œuvres complètes*, vol. I: 1942–1965, edited and presented by Éric Marty, Paris, Seuil, 1993, p. 1400.

67 Here, I adapt the phrase of the historian Maurice Agulhon, who studied the Statue of Liberty and discussed 'the polysemy and mutability of symbols'. Maurice Agulhon, *Les métamorphoses de Marianne. L'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1914 à nos jours*, Paris, Flammarion, 2001, p. 9. Maurice Agulhon encouraged me to work on the sculptor Auguste Bartholdi.

68 Julien Bondaz, Cyril Isnar, Anaïs Lebon, « Au-delà du consensus patrimonial. Résistants et usages contestataires du patrimoine », *Civilisations. Revue internationale d'anthropologie et de sciences humaines*, 61–1, 2012, p. 9–22.

69 Julie Deschepper, « Notion en débat: patrimoine », *Géococonfluences. Ressources de géographie pour les enseignants*, March 2021; online: <http://geoconfluences.ens-lyon.fr/informations-scientifiques/a-la-une/notion-a-la-une/patrimoine>



Patrimoine [History, Civilisations, Heritage]<sup>70</sup> and on the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters degree DYCLAM+ (Dynamics of Cultural Landscape, Heritage, Memory and Conflictualities).<sup>71</sup> Our discussions took the form of courses,<sup>72</sup> seminars, and conferences organised by the consortium of universities, which brought together specialists from different disciplines.<sup>73</sup>

This book's case studies are presented as a reflection of the current theoretical trends which view heritage not as existing in and of itself as an immanent and unchangeable given that only needs to be uncovered or presented; but rather as dependent upon the process of heritage creation, which, in turn, depends on a complex and evolving eco-system.<sup>74</sup> Within this eco-system, I have decided to highlight one parameter that appears as a determining factor and which constitutes the unifying thread of this book, presented here as a double question: What is the role of heritage in international relations and specifically in contexts of geopolitical rupture (decolonisation, wars, conflicts)? How can heritage be an actor and a geopolitical indicator to study as such?<sup>75</sup>

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70 This Master's programme, which I was the director of from 2018 to 2023, is led by the Université Jean Monnet de Saint-Étienne (France) in partnership with the Université Lyon 2, the École nationale des Travaux publics de l'État, and the École nationale supérieure des sciences de l'information et des bibliothèques (ENSSIB).

71 The DYCLAM+ master's programme is financed by the European Commission and brings together a consortium of 4 university partners who deliver teaching and training in research methodologies: Université Jean Monnet de Saint-Etienne (France) is the Academic coordinator and the Administrative manager (I am pleased to express my gratitude to Allison Ceresa Genet), alongside the Polytechnic Institute of Tomar (Portugal), Babeş-Bolyai University (Cluj-Napoca, Romania), and the University of Naples Federico II (Italy). This video offers an overview of the DYCLAM+ programme:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/14hp4-E2qnglEJ9HxXU2L9gpzCsE59rjm/view?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/14hp4-E2qnglEJ9HxXU2L9gpzCsE59rjm/view?usp=drive_link)

72 My teaching courses were often based on my own studies, research, and fieldwork. Some chapters in this book draw on my previous publications, which, as indicated, I have updated.

73 For example, « L'Europe face à la revendication de la restitution des biens culturels mal acquis », seminar organised by Université Jean Monnet and the DYCLAM+ Consortium, Saint-Étienne, 29 January 2021. file:///Users/br78662h/Downloads/Dyclam-s%C3%A9minaire-29%20janvier%202020.pdf

74 Lucie K. Morisset, *Des régimes d'authenticité: Essai sur la mémoire patrimoniale*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2009, p. 18.

75 Unless otherwise stated, translations are by Robert Belot and Stacie Allan.

## 1 Monumentality and European geopolitics in the 19th century

In this age of virtual monuments<sup>76</sup> and intangible heritage, one should remember that there was a time when memory was tangible and enduring, providing public space with a narrative intended to embody what a community held to be essential and worthy of transmission. The trend to ‘tear down’ statues since 2010 has been a stark reminder of this past reality, which knew its finest hours in the 19th century. Yet, as Robert Musil put it, these monuments, such as mute witnesses, were unique in that no one ever looked at them. Some artists set a goal to overcome this indifference and challenge such conformism. They ideated works that would defy the test of time and withstand changing mentalities. Their work had to be made indestructible and irreplaceable by integrating it into space to the point that they would become one with the landscape. To quote the historian Maurice Agulhon, this was ‘argument by feat.’<sup>77</sup>

One sculptor-architect embodies this time in the 19th century when monumental sought to identify with memorial: Auguste Bartholdi. When he died in 1904, the man who had authored one of the world’s most famous monuments, the Statue of Liberty, was consigned to oblivion and the scorn reserved for academism. Thus began a century of solitude. Only at the dawn of the third millennium did the sculptor and his work re-emerge with the presentation, in 2012, of an original model of the Statue of Liberty at the Musée d’Orsay, and in 2020, when the Lion of Belfort was elected ‘Favourite monument of the French.’ Bartholdi had been swept away by a wave of rejection of the edifying and moralising republican statue frenzy<sup>78</sup> dedicated to the celebration of ‘great men’, which had transformed 19th-

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76 Jessica De Bideran, « Du document patrimonial au monument virtuel : les nouvelles mémoires du patrimoine », *Cahiers de la SFSIC*, n°10, juin 2014 (Questions de recherche : mémoire et sciences de l’information et de la communication), p. 66–72.

77 Maurice Agulhon, « Bartholdi et le soleil », *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, t. LXXXIX, mai-juin 1977, p. 188.

78 Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir, l’imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1880 à 1914*, Flammarion, 1989.

century towns into 'open-air pantheons'.<sup>79</sup> However, it may be interesting to examine the sculptor's work nowadays, as he invented a new form of heritage that incorporated the landscape dimension and lent a new impact to the message.

This is the case with the Statue of Liberty, which reinvented a site, and the Lion of Belfort. Flanking the base of Vauban's citadel, the Lion was intended as a 'palladium', visible from all sides, public, secular and compulsory, from which the main communication routes were to be reorganised to facilitate the town's demographic renewal after the French defeat of 1870. Bartholdi sought to take up a challenge that was both architectural and symbolic. He meant to patrimonialise a military defeat that had amputated two 'provinces' from France (Alsace and part of Lorraine), and that would be a source of national remorse until the end of the First World War when these provinces returned to the national fold. Studying the genesis of the Lion is of further interest to historians and anthropologists, as it provides insight into the conditions (political, geopolitical, and financial) governing public statuary in the 19th century and its contribution to the history of political symbolism and republican identity. The Lion of Belfort emblemises the most tragic event to hit France in the last third of the 19th century, as well as the most difficult one to accept, convey and celebrate. Analysing it through the conflicts to which it gave rise and the changes in how it was perceived is an excellent way to approach the processes of heritage protection at the end of the 19th century and the conditions that presided over the creation of public memory.

### *The city that saved the honour of France deserves a monumental tribute*

A quick reminder of the facts, which were tragic and humiliating for France. On 19 July 1870, Napoleon III declared war on Prussia. On 2 September of the same year, France capitulated at Sedan, and Prussia invaded the country, laying siege to Paris. At Versailles, in the Hall of Mirrors, on 5 October 1870, William I (1797 – 1888), King of Prussia, became the first emperor through the proclamation of the German Empire. France had lost the war but the Republic, proclaimed on 4 September 1970 at the Hôtel

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79 Christel Sniter, « La guerre des statues. La statuaire publique, un enjeu de violence symbolique : l'exemple des statues de Jeanne d'Arc à Paris entre 1870 et 1914 », *Sociétés & Représentations*, 2001/1 (n° 11), p. 264.

de Ville in Paris. In Belfort, the siege lasted until 13 February 1871, and it was courageously led by young Colonel Denfert-Rochereau, a Republican and Socialist. Yet the Prussians would not leave until the 5-billion war indemnity had been paid on 2 August 1873. The Treaty of Frankfurt, which ended the war (10 May 1871), stripped France of Alsace and Moselle but confirmed the decision to leave Belfort in French territory. This was an honourable consolation. Yet, in the national imagination, this agreement was viewed as ‘a victory in defeat’. French towns endeavoured to name streets after Belfort, as is evident nowadays.

Dissensus and power issues arose right from the outset of the commemoration process. The projects ‘were unable to symbolise the union of the inhabitants of Belfort in patriotism.’<sup>80</sup> The first monument to be erected—with difficulty and amid controversy between Republicans and clerics<sup>81</sup>—after the siege was the *Monument des Mobiles*, in the Vallon cemetery (known as Pré Gaspard) at the entrance to the town, where 2500 defenders and 262 civilian victims had been buried in a pit during the siege. This modest sandstone work, voluntarily devoid of allegory, was located on the periphery of the town. The inscription on the monument was non-committal, ‘1870–1871. Belfort, in memory of its defenders who died during the siege’.

Even before this monument's inauguration (21 October 1873), consideration had been given to building another monument, which would be more central, more original, more ‘memorial’, which would embody the idea of courage to ‘perpetuate the memory of this resistance in a remarkable way’, according to the newspaper *Le Libéral de l'Est* (21 February 1872). Indeed, the legend had swiftly spread that Bismarck had left Belfort for France as a tribute to the suffering endured by the people of the town and the courage of the troops mobilised during the siege. The town council opened a competition. In vain. The mayor then approached Auguste Bartholdi. A sculptor born in Colmar (1834–1904) in the Haut-Rhin region, whose fame was rising, he had fought in the war alongside the famous Garibaldi.

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80 Jean Martelet, « Le patriotisme et l'idée républicaine : leurs incidences sur le monument du cimetière des mobiles et le projet du Lion monumental (1870–1874) », *Bulletin de la société belfortaine d'émulation*, n° 96, 2005, p. 97.

81 This is how Jules Clarette, in his *Histoire de la Révolution de 1870–1871*, describes 1873: ‘Never before had there been such crude and idiotic insults between the various parties vying for control over the country. Never before had hatred brought such corrosive foam to the lips, never before had ink left such stains on the reputations it splattered and the fingers that held the *escritoire* or the rostrum of insults’.

He had become the statue sculptor of Alsace in mourning and made a name for himself with the Voulminot Monument.<sup>82</sup> He had already made one attempt to shake statuary out of its commemorative drone through a project for an immense lighthouse on the new port of Suez to mark the inauguration of the Suez Canal in 1869. The project was rejected but was repurposed a few years later in New York, where it gave birth to the Statue of Liberty. The young artist was so enthralled by the project that he waived his right to any remuneration. From the outset, he came up with the idea of erecting the Lion he had in mind against the sheer drop of the Citadel. Bartholdi had learnt the lesson of Egypt during his journeys there in 1855 and 1869: he made full use of space, as the artists of Khufu and Ramses II had done at Giza and Luxor. As though a monumental work were worth less in itself than in the singularity of the site in which it is set and revealed. As though it were created only to merge with and become consubstantial to its environment.

Bartholdi wrote to the mayor, explaining that he wanted ‘this work to be very personal to the city and not one of those monuments that can be installed anywhere, with complex allegories and painstakingly researched allegories, that can be applied to almost anything. [...] Placed there, the monument will identify with the fortress's appearance, becoming a kind of palladium visible from every direction: the town, the surrounding area, and even from a passing traveller. This is a unique site, and we should make the most of it’.<sup>83</sup> The sculptor meant to create a patrimonial landscape. On 4 May 1872, the newspaper *Le Journal de Belfort et du Haut-Rhin* announced that ‘M. Bartholdi has offered to have a monumental Lion executed in high relief on the vertical wall of the château’.

### *A politically correct lion: Bravery over revenge*

Bartholdi intended to immortalise a lion. He chose allegory over personalisation. Indeed, who could be a consensual and available ‘hero’? Adolphe

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82 On Bartholdi, cf.: Robert Belot, *Bartholdi, l'homme qui inventa la Liberté*, Paris, Ellipse, 2019; *id.*, « Le Lion de Belfort comme lieu de mémoire : sémiologie politique d'un monument patriotique », Exhibition Catalogue: *Bartholdi, le Lion*, musée Bartholdi, Colmar, 2004, p. 107–131.

83 Letter to the Mayor of Belfort, 12 August 1872, Archives Municipales de Belfort (AMB), 1M 31.

Thiers? He was seen as responsible for the downfall of the Commune, although he had striven hard to hold on to Belfort, 'for the sake of honour'.<sup>84</sup> Gambetta? His overly politicised and 'Caesarian' image was inappropriate for the role. Denfert-Rochereau? Too much of a Socialist and a Freemason. As a candidate in the legislative elections of the Territoire de Belfort, he had been defeated by Émile Keller, an Alsatian patriot but fiercely papist. A Marshal? But all the Marshals had failed in their mission, including Mac-Mahon, who would soon become President of the Republic. None of them would fit the bill. Yet it should be noted that he was fond of this idea. In fact, the artist revisited an idea he had already presented in October 1863, entering a competition launched by the Paris City Council for the erection of a monument commemorating the defence of the City of Paris at the *Barrière de Clichy* during the siege of 1814.<sup>85</sup> Two terracotta sketches, a plaster model, and two photographs in the storerooms of the Musée de Colmar bear witness to the existence of this non-award-winning group, which features a lion in the round, its mouth open and its right paw raised, ready to strike. It was this furious feline that Bartholdi would initially reuse eight years later. The stamp on the 1873 subscription forms depicted the fawn in profile, one front paw raised. Other drafts were produced, reflecting the various stages the artist had to go through, from correction to correction, before delivering the final model we know today in the summer of 1875. From aggressive at first, the animal, depicted at times walking, lying down, or standing up, progressively acquired serenity. This was no coincidence.

The Lion was famous even before it was born. 'There is no one in Belfort who, over the last two years, has not been repeatedly questioned by foreigners about the progress of the construction of the monumental Lion'.<sup>86</sup> One of the issues of the very popular magazine *Magasin Pittoresque* featured an impressive reproduction: 'The Lion of Belfort, which we describe from an already colossal plaster model, will be one of the most gigantic works of sculpture of modern times. It will leave the Lion of Lucerne far behind.'<sup>87</sup> It will compare only to the famous sphinx of Giza, the most prodigious

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84 Nicolas Bourguinat, Gilles Vogt, *La guerre franco-allemande de 1870. Une histoire globale*, Paris, Flammarion, 2020, p. 252.

85 Régis Hueber, « Bartholdi belluaire » in *Catalogue de l'exposition de Colmar et de Belfort Bartholdi, Le Lion* (5 juin 2004–2 janvier 2005).

86 *Le Journal de Belfort*, 17 May 1876.

87 The Lion of Lucerne was designed by Berthel Thorvaldsen and sculpted by Lukas Ahorn in 1821. It commemorates the sacrifice of the Swiss Guards defending the Tuileries on 10 August 1792.

sculpted monument of ancient Egypt'.<sup>88</sup> At the *Palais de l'Industrie* on the Champs Élysées, it proudly stood as one of the highlights of the 1878 World Fair. The Paris City Council considered acquiring a reproduction in repoussé copper to decorate the new Buttes-Chaumont park. A committee appointed for this purpose approved the project and invited the Prefect to deal directly with the artist.<sup>89</sup> It would take almost four years to complete the monument. By early 1880, the scaffolding had been removed, and the Lion finally appeared on display for all to see and also exposed to the first criticism. It is a pity—one could hear—that the animal's countenance, with its mouth raised, is partly masked, that its overly extended right foreleg resembles a stiff tree trunk and that the rounded flank lessens its muscular power; it is also a shame that its mane looks like a 'hood' from which the head emerges, 'small and petty in proportion to such a vast body',<sup>90</sup> and that the material used was not white limestone but Vosges sandstone.

The Lion was inconsistent with 'Revenge' (against Germany), a sentiment long ascribed to the French due to its use by nationalists and Charles Maurras. Yet it could not withstand the scrutiny of historians who saw it more as a 'fantasy',<sup>91</sup> which concealed the acceptance of a *fait accompli* in truth. This lion is not looking east but south, from whence no danger can come. Bartholdi defended himself, saying, 'There is nothing violent about it, and I think that the gossips who would have us believe that it might offend the Germans will be disappointed'.<sup>92</sup> Although he 'wholeheartedly shared in the joy that must have been felt in Belfort at the news of the treaty'<sup>93</sup> (the Franco-German treaty of 15 March 1873 by which Thiers had definitively obtained, in exchange for the advance payment of the 5 billion war debt, the retention of Belfort in the French fold and the evacuation of the occupied regions), he had no intention of turning his 'quadruped', as he called it, into the standard-bearer of a Germanophobia that was alien to him. He was well aware of the complexity of the message that his work was meant to express:

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88 *Le Magasin Pittoresque*, October 1876.

89 Paris City Council meetings of 11 August and 7 December 1878. Archives de Paris, VID1 69 and VID1 78.

90 *Le Journal de Belfort*, 14 January 1880.

91 N. Bourguinat, G. Vogt, *La guerre franco-allemande de 1870*, *op.cit.*, p. 388.

92 Letter from Bartholdi to his mother, 3 September 1875. Bartholdi Museum Archives, Colmar.

93 Letter to an unnamed addressee, undoubtedly the local person responsible for the subscription, 31 March 1873, AMB, IM 31.

‘It (the sculpture) is meant to commemorate *neither a victory nor a defeat*; it is a glorious fight whose tradition must be passed on to perpetuate it [...]. The monument is a colossal representation of a harried lion, cornered and still terrible in all its fury’.<sup>94</sup>

There can be no doubt that Bartholdi understood the general trend of opinion, which did not identify with anti-German, bellicose nationalism. As a man of compromise, he was also aware that offending the new government replacing Thiers would be unthinkable. On 21 June 1873, he told his mother his fear that the Ministry of Moral Order would ask the Belfort town council to abandon the project: ‘I think that in the end, nothing will be done in Belfort. They fear it will be a demonstration favouring Mr Thiers, whom the government dislikes. You see, the moral order is quite healthy ...’ The artist’s choice of the animal thus revealed its full meaning, reflecting his political acumen.

#### *A divisive and arduous subscription*

The Town Council approved the project on 4 October 1873 but requested a subscription. This was the customary funding method for monumental heritage at the time. A double subscription was launched by a Belfort committee and a Paris committee. The Lion seemed to command a consensus in Paris between the right and the left-wing parties.<sup>95</sup> Auguste Scheurer-Kestner, the *Union Républicaine* senator; Désiré Barodet, the anti-clerical Gambettist deputy; the Duc de Broglie, head of Mac Mahon’s government; and the Comte de Chambord, grandson of Charles X and contender of the Legitimists, all donated to build a creation presented in the spirit of reconciliation. This reconciliation was meant as a sign of appeasement towards Germany. Thus, the Paris committee explained that they had decided to support the subscription because the monument was to evoke ‘indomitable resistance’ and a ‘glorious memory of duty accomplished’. And free of vindictive sentiments.

The head of the Belfort committee was of the same opinion. He felt that the Lion would create a link between France and Alsace: ‘Thus, it will con-

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94 Letter to the Mayor of Belfort, 12 August 1872, AMB, 1M 31.

95 Emmanuelle Riche, « Les Belfortains et le Lion (1871–1914) », mémoire de maîtrise, Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines de Haute-Alsace, Mulhouse, 1996.



secrete the invaluable attachment to their dual allegiance to the French and Alsatian homelands.' There was even a political truce in Belfort. Besides, was not the chairmanship of the local committee held (by the mayor's delegation) by the reactionary and clerical Auguste Juster, the man the republican movement detested? Yet, the truce was short-lived. The left-wing shift of the county council and the municipality refocused the political game and politicised the Lion. The left-wing newspaper, *Le Libéral de l'Est* shunned the subscription to avoid promoting the local committee. The Freemason lawyer Michel Thiault and Dr Louis Fréry, a future Member of Parliament, expressed their hostility to the 'clerics' on the committee. Consequently, the Belfort committee struggled to raise funds. This was hardly fitting for the town that had saved France's honour! Contrary to the legend, there was no marked enthusiasm. Quite the opposite, in fact, as a legal dispute would arise later over how to use the residuary subscription funds. At the civil court hearing in December 1881, Bartholdi and Juster's lawyer stated, 'As the first subscription attempts in our town were unsuccessful, it was Mr Juster who took over the case'. At the appeal hearing, another lawyer explained, 'The first subscriptions launched in Belfort were unsuccessful. It soon became apparent that the town had made many sacrifices. It was not Belfort's role to provide the funds for a work that was meant to glorify the town'.<sup>96</sup> The head of the Belfort committee appealed to a patriotic reflex, 'Let us learn to be a little more Alsatian every day'.

Freemasons, priests, pastors, Jews from all over France and, of course, a vast number of Alsations and people from Lorraine joined in a brilliantly executed operation. The national success of the operation served to encourage the people of Belfort and favoured political union. The venerable Michel Thiault, who was initially hostile to the project, endorsed it and encouraged the Grand Orient to participate in the subscription.<sup>97</sup> The Grand Orient would soon welcome Bartholdi to its Alsace-Lorraine lodge, where he would meet Gambetta again. Left-wing politics was finally coming to terms with the project. By 16 January 1875, more than 100,000 francs had been raised, twice the amount Bartholdi originally estimated was needed. The *Journal de Belfort* rejoiced, 'This will be an exceptional monument, as it is identified to the physical nature of the town. Placed above the town and visible from afar, it will be eminently national, as the subscription has

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96 Quoted by E. Riche, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

97 According to Jean Martelet, *art.cit.*, p. 109.

already shown. It is a sort of crown that France has awarded the patriotic Alsatian town,<sup>98</sup> which has so valiantly safeguarded the country's honour'.<sup>99</sup> However, Belfort would fail to live up to the symbolic mission assigned to it by a battered France. How the town treated the Lion showed it was hardly worthy of such a crown. Admittedly, the geopolitical context interfered. The worst was about to happen for the artist.

*The geopolitical context in Europe deprives the Lion of an inauguration*

Bartholdi and the people of Belfort were denied the joy of inaugurating this remarkable monument. For several weeks, the Reich authorities had been raging against what they perceived as a resurgence of warmongering in France, with a press campaign relaying this feeling. A toast by Léon Gambetta (President of the Lower House since February 1879) on 8 August 1880 in Cherbourg had reignited speculation about the President's alleged double game. In expressing the hope that France would 'Regain its place in the world', was he not covertly preaching a call to arms? In fact, he was only reasserting his mantra that 'major reparations can be produced by law' and 'immanent justice'.<sup>100</sup> The *Gazette d'Allemagne du Nord* threatened to punish Paris for these 'incitements to revenge': 'If republican France, led by Mr Gambetta, wishes to continue the traditions of monarchical France and follow in the footsteps of Louis XIV, Louis XV and the two Napoleons, we must resign ourselves to the fact that we cannot count on lasting peace with France. The peaceful majority of both countries must know who is disturbing their peace'.<sup>101</sup> The German newspaper's comments, which rekindled painful memories, were not taken lightly in Paris. Freycinet's cabinet endeavoured to dampen spirits. Escalating its military ambitions would not be in France's interest, as it was building a colonial empire for which it needed support, at best, and neutrality, at worst, from the other European powers. This inauguration issue serves as a reminder of France's fragile situation at the time. Republican France stood alone amidst hostile monarchic powers. During the conflict, Europe had been conspicuous for

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98 At the time, the city of Belfort was part of the Haut-Rhin department.

99 *Le Journal de Belfort et du Haut-Rhin*, 22 August 1874.

100 Quoted by Gérard Unger, *Gambetta*, Paris, Perrin, 2022, p. 286.

101 *La Gazette de l'Allemagne du Nord*, 23 August 1880.

its 'forbearance' and 'passivity' towards France.<sup>102</sup> As Gambetta wrote in a letter, 'Europe let her be crushed. Europe thought it could do without her (France)'.<sup>103</sup> As a matter of fact, the primary objective of Bismarckian diplomacy was 'the isolation of France'.<sup>104</sup> And Bismarck certainly knew how to exploit Franco-German antagonism. To win German opinion over to his side, 'He did not hesitate to pretend he believed in her (France's) bellicose character'.<sup>105</sup>

Bartholdi was well acquainted with Gambetta from the war; he shared the latter's opportunistic Republicanism, which was anything but bellicose. He would design a monument to Gambetta, erected in Ville-d'Avray in 1891. Both men were in favour of European peace and the balance of power. However, Gambetta's image was more potent than the reality of his politics. When he became President of the Council in November 1881, the British magazine *Punch* ran the following headline: 'Léon or (Napo-)Léon Gambetta? That is the question'.<sup>106</sup> Under pressure from the French government, the City of Belfort abandoned plans to turn the inauguration into a national event. Bartholdi resigned himself to the fact that an inauguration was 'impossible due to the political circumstances'.<sup>107</sup> He was dejected that he had not been able to convince people that his work 'in no way bore the character that malicious tongues lent it'. The artist had been sure that using the animal metaphor would protect his work from political appropriation. Even before the first scaffolding had been erected, he explained that this would be 'A funereal monument to great and painful memories. Its design will avoid anything that might stir up sensitivities. No one will be able to fault it'.<sup>108</sup> Auguste Bartholdi put his flag in his pocket. In late August

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102 N. Bourguinat, G. Vogt, *La guerre franco-allemande de 1870*, *op.cit.*, p. 284.

103 Letter written by Gambetta to Juliette Adam, 17 October 1876. Quoted by Jean-Philippe Dumas, *Gambetta. Le commis-voyageur de la République*, Paris, Belin, 2011, p. 89

104 Jean-Paul Bled, *Bismarck*, Paris, Perrin, 2011, p. 235. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, France's foreign policy aimed to loosen the stranglehold by building closer ties with Russia and England.

105 Jean-Philippe Dumas, *Gambetta*, *op.cit.*, p. 87.

106 Quoted by Jean Garrigues, « Gambetta en représentations : commis-voyageur ou homme providentiel? », in : *L'entre-deux électoral : Une autre histoire de la représentation politique en France (XIX<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015, p. 108.

107 Register of Town Council proceedings, 17 November 1882, AMB, IM 31.

108 Letter written by Auguste Bartholdi to his mother, 22 August 1875. Bartholdi Museum Archives, Colmar.

1880, he settled for a small evening ceremony, almost improvised, on the sly, without even informing the people of Belfort:

‘Mr Bartholdi, who had come to put the finishing touches to the Lion of Belfort, decided to surprise the townspeople by lighting up the monument with a Bengal fire on Saturday evening during the musical retreat to enhance the effect of this grandiose work of his sculptural talent. The result was a beautiful glimpse but one that passed too quickly for most onlookers to enjoy.’<sup>109</sup>

At this point, one might wonder whether there is any other monument in the world as famous and renowned as the Lion of Belfort that has only ever been inaugurated with a barrage of flares, barely enough to liven up a local patronage party. Three weeks later, in Paris, the Place Denfert-Rochereau was getting ready to welcome the replica of the Lion, which still stands to this day. Auguste, a Parisian, would have wanted a fine ‘patriotic celebration’ in the heart of Paris. Yet, at the last minute, the planned speeches were cancelled at the government’s request. The main concern at the time was to spare Chancellor Bismarck. Fearing compromising public outbursts, the government allowed only military music and a discreet fireworks display. It is clear that commemorating a defeat is challenging, especially when the victor is watching from the vantage point of his increasingly dominant position in Europe. It is also easy to understand why so few monuments are dedicated to the 1870 war on French territory.

In Berlin, however, the Victory Column (*Siegestsäule*) was erected with great fanfare on 2 September 1873. A bas-relief features a mosaic illustrating Prussia’s significant battles, including the 1870 war. In 1939, Hitler decided to showcase the column and transferred it from *Königsplatz* to *Grosser Stern*, where it still stands today. It faces two other monuments, one dedicated to Bismarck and the other to Von Moltke. In 1945, the French asked the Allies to have it demolished, but the Soviets, the Americans and the British rejected the request. The American delegate felt that ‘its destruction could have worldwide repercussions ...’<sup>110</sup>

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109 *Le Journal de Belfort*, 1 September 1880.

110 Quoted by Bernard Genton, *Les Alliés et la culture. Berlin, 1945–1949*, Paris, PUF, 1998, p. 115.

*After the offence of the inauguration, the insolence of the courts*

1880 ended in ambiguity and frustration. After eight years of effort, this conclusion left Belfort feeling that the job had been botched. In recognition of the artist's refusal to accept any form of remuneration, the town council expressed its sympathy for Auguste's selflessness and decided to present him, as a token of its appreciation, with 'A gold medal bearing the town's coat of arms (...) minted by the Paris mint (and) which will bear on one side an inscription recalling the event whose memory it is intended to perpetuate'.<sup>111</sup> But the disappointment he may have felt at the lack of official tribute was compounded by a bitterness that was all the greater because of the town council's casual attitude.

Let us go briefly back to 1878. On June 7, the Council voted in favour of erecting a monument in one of the town squares to commemorate the role of the two people to whom the town owed the privilege of remaining in France: Adolphe Thiers and Colonel Denfert-Rochereau, the reactionary and the Socialist.<sup>112</sup> Some people argued that this project, in which Dr Charles Fréry,<sup>113</sup> the Lion committee's regular adversary, played a major role, was designed to compete with the Lion!<sup>114</sup> A subscription was launched, adding to the 2000-franc credit already granted by the Council. Bartholdi entered the competition organised by the town and presented an (overly) ambitious project featuring an allegory of France consoling the City of Belfort flanked by the statues of Thiers and Denfert facing one another at either end. The mayor of Belfort discarded the project in favour of another candidate, Antonin Mercié, with a more modest submission: an Alsatian woman in traditional dress holding up a dying Mobile in one hand and pointing a gun at the enemy with her other hand. Yet, the subscription was not very successful. The war was past. Too much may have been asked of the people of Belfort (and others). Revenge had become a rhetorical and platonic posture. The mayor, Louis Parisot, then decided that this monument, known as '*L'Alsacienne*' (also known as the '*Quand*

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111 Town Council meeting, 28 October 1880, AMB.

112 It should be noted that initially, as evidenced by the town council meeting of 12 February 1878, the project only concerned Adolphe Thiers. Colonel Denfert-Rochereau was added later on.

113 Charles Fréry was a Member of Parliament for Territoire-de-Belfort from 1881 to 1885 and a Senator from 1887 to 1891.

114 André Larger, « Le Lion... et après? », *Bulletin de la Société belfortaine d'émulation*, n°95, 2004, p. 129.

*Même*’ statue or the ‘Thiers-Denfert Monument’), should be financed using the residuary funds from the contribution collected by the Lion committee, around 15,000 francs.<sup>115</sup> After all, Mercié’s project, like Bartholdi’s, was ‘intended to glorify the town’s defenders’, Belfort’s chief magistrate argued, and the Committee, which was nothing more than ‘an emanation of the town council’, was free to use the funds it had raised on its initiative. The council unanimously approved this proposition.<sup>116</sup>

This initiated a long and procedural dispute between the town of Belfort and the Parisian Lion Committee. The latter objected to the misappropriation of the residuary funds and demanded that the treasurer temporarily freeze the subscription money. Quite naturally, Bartholdi backed this request. He explained that work on the Lion had not yet been completed: the commemorative inscription had yet to be engraved, the wall behind the animal’s head, which was essential for the silhouette to stand out, had yet to be cut, the rockwork on the pedestal was not finished, and the work needed to clear the monument had yet to be done on the surrounding area (in particular a small garden area on the Lion’s terrace). The Lion could not be visited. It would not be open to visitors until much later! Unfortunately, his arguments were unheeded. A lawsuit was filed, in which Bartholdi, a Freemason, was supported by Auguste Juster, a cleric. The Belfort civil court ruled against him, and the Besançon Court of Appeal upheld the judgement on 26 May 1882.

The press went into a frenzy over the war of the two monuments intended to exalt national unity. This memorial vaudeville continued, however, as Parisot (who had been defeated in the municipal elections of February 1881) still considered himself the acting chairman of the Lion Committee, even though he was no longer mayor. A new lawsuit was filed against the new mayor, Jean Nicolas Simon. Parisot won the appeal, but the town went to the Court of Cassation. This final move was rendered pointless when Louis Parisot returned to office in the elections of 4 and 11 May 1884. Following a series of procedural twists and turns, he was forced to seek satisfaction from the French *Conseil d’État* by decree of the President of the Republic. This ended the residuary funds trial. On 31 August 1884, ‘*L’Alsacienne*’, Mercié’s monument paid for in part with funds earmarked for another monument, was inaugurated to the sound of cannon fire, whereas

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115 Research into the artistic ownership of the monument « Quand Même », Archives municipales de Belfort, 1M 32.

116 Town council meeting, 17 December 1880. AMB, 1M 32.

the Lion had been granted only official silence by the authorities four years earlier! Auguste Bartholdi felt deeply disgusted with the town's customs, where ingratitude and bad faith rivalled. The town councillors went so far as to withhold the minting of the medal that they had promised him! Torn apart by infighting, the town council seemed incapable of recognition and showed little concern for a project with which, however, the local population had immediately identified. Dejected, Bartholdi would write in 1889 that 'The former town council, having diverted the funds for the Lion from their intended use, funds that I had worked to collect, has acted towards me in such a way that I will never again do anything in Belfort unless I am called upon to do so by an official act or vote of the town council'.<sup>117</sup>

Another court case would keep Bartholdi busy. He issued a warning to the shopkeepers in Belfort who were using his Lion in various reproductions without ever having thought to ask his permission, although he owned the copyright to the work. He felt robbed of his work and meant to redress 'this abuse' through legal means. He then appointed an official custodian. Yet, the traders remained indifferent to his threats. One of them dared to reply that Bartholdi had no claim to the Lion because 'he did not create anything, as to create means making something which does not exist before; yet, Bartholdi found his subject in nature. The Lion did not wait for Mr Bartholdi to exist...' In 1901, legal action was taken and upheld on appeal.

### *Would the barely erected Lion fall to ruin?*

In May 1882, Bartholdi lost his trial. The Lion was yet to be completed and could only be seen from a distance. Therefore, in November 1882, he attempted to apply to the Prefecture Council for 3,000 francs in compensation. This Council declared itself incompetent on the matter. Hence, on 30 September 1883, the sculptor asked the town council to complete his work to make it accessible to the public. The council approved this request. However, the situation changed with the municipal elections of 1884. Moreover, the residuary subscription funds had been donated to the Thiers-Denfert committee. The press went up in arms. In 1884, one could read, 'Will this

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117 Letter to Mr Grosborne, 21 January 1889, AMB, 100 W 19.

poor Lion be left to fall into ruin'?<sup>118</sup> Four years later, the situation had not changed. The *Journal de Belfort et du Haut-Rhin* (11 February 1888) reported on the scandal:

'Visitors who stop in Belfort to admire "Quand Même", Mercié's work, and Bartholdi's Lion are left with a very poor impression of the pitiful appearance of the latter monument. Carved into the rock on which the citadel<sup>119</sup> is built, the noble animal collects all the water from gutters, kitchens and bedrooms on its sinewy spine. The corrosive properties of some of these liquids have left indelible marks on the animal's spine. The other parts of its body are covered in thick pinkish moss. (...) So far, the town council has done nothing to put a stop to this deterioration.'

In truth, the people of Belfort demonstrated a distanced or indifferent attitude towards the tragedy they had experienced. The will to forget accounted for their limited interest in the Lion and in the memory of the conflict in general. The town councillors were committed to the town's renaissance, which was reaping the benefits of the influx of Alsatians. The population of Belfort rose from 6,257 in 1867 to 39,731 in 1911. The town welcomed many 'optants' (Alsations who had chosen to retain French nationality). A secondary school was to be built for them. The Mulhouse bank branch was transferred to Belfort, as was the customs office. A new municipal theatre was built. A new district was to be created between the Savoureuse and the old town. *The Société Alsacienne de Construction Mécanique* (Alsatian Mechanical Construction Company) set up business there (later to become Alstom). As the mayor stated, 'All this new population, all these projects, all these institutions, if they come to fruition, will undoubtedly bring prosperity and well-being to Belfort'.

A new town council headed by Paul Laloz and the prospect of a music festival, which was expected to draw large crowds, brought about a welcome change. A cleaning-up and works plan was initiated in June 1888. The Lion was even granted a (not in the best of tastes) coat of varnish as the French President of the Republic, Sadi Carnot, was expected to visit Belfort. But it wasn't until the spring of 1890 that a solution to the monument's accessibility was found: the French Alpine Club succeeded in negotiating with the military authorities (who had jurisdiction over the citadel) to take charge of visits to the Lion, appoint a permanent caretaker and carry out work on the terrace. It was only 13 years after the fawn had been delivered that the

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118 *Le Libéral de l'Est*, 9 October 1884.

119 This was not true, but the legend spread nevertheless.



inscription was finally engraved on the pedestal. Incidentally, the artist was not even consulted! On May 1, 1890, the public was finally allowed to climb to the terrace and admire the quadruped for a fee of 1 franc. From then on, it was a growing success, reaching a peak of 15,628 visitors in 1902.

Bartholdi would return to favour through the memory of another war. Very early in 1889, plans began to pay tribute to General Lecourbe, who had organised another siege of Belfort in 1815, during which he had been killed. The wish to erect a monument had been expressed at the time but had never been acted upon. Émile Grosborne, one of the town councillors, suggested associating Thiers and Denfert—who until now had only been entitled to a rather discreet medallion on the monument in the Place d'Armes—with this tribute. He also asked Bartholdi if the latter might consider reworking the project he had submitted for the competition won by Mercié. A subscription was launched, but it proved unsuccessful.

In early 1898, a new idea emerged, this time for a monument to Lecourbe, Denfert, and Thiers. This was when Bartholdi resurfaced. Apparently determined to forget the past, he recommended building a monument that would unite the emblematic figures of the three sieges: Commandant Legrand (1813–1814), General Lecourbe (1815), and Colonel Denfert (1871). 'This is an apotheosis that few towns can celebrate!'<sup>120</sup> he wrote the mayor, to encourage him to agree to the project, which would glorify his constituents and their ancestors. In a letter to the mayor dated 28 March 1902, he reiterated his interest in this exceptional historical landmark, 'I believe that Belfort is the only town to have withstood three sieges in a single century without falling. It is a remarkable and exceptional subject that cannot be repeated elsewhere'. Despite his weakened health, Bartholdi saw this as an opportunity to achieve a final feat and perhaps compensate for his earlier humiliation. The mayor, Charles Schneider, was amenable to the idea of 'rectifying a regrettable omission concerning the man who saved Belfort'. The town council voted in favour of the project in October 1901. A 40,000-franc credit was voted by the municipality, and a subscription was immediately launched. Far from holding grudges, the artist wholly committed to this final project and, once again, refused any form of payment. He was interested in the project because it would be included in the new section of the town under construction, the Quartier Neuf, built on the site of part of Vauban's fortifications. True to his urbanist conception of the

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120 Letter written by Auguste Bartholdi to the mayor of Belfort, 9 October 1901. AMB, 1M 33.

sculptural approach, he saw this as an opportunity to make his mark on this new territory. This was to be the 'Trois Sièges' Monument on Place de la République, renovated in 2024.

Bartholdi was finally able to present his model at the Paris Fair in 1903. However, he died on 5 October 1904. He would not witness the erection of his last work. He would be spared the posthumous vicissitudes of his life's work and the new insult from the town council, which sparked a fresh dispute. As a result of the sculptor's demise, the municipality felt released from its commitment to him. On 15 October 1904, just ten days after Bartholdi's death, the town council cancelled the project as it had been designed and commissioned another sculptor. Jeanne, Auguste's until then self-effacing wife, fought with dignity and secured compensation after nine years of protracted negotiations, marked by threats of legal action and appeals to arbitration, in which she demonstrated a surprising tenacity. She challenged the mayor and threatened to take legal action: 'Could it be, because he [Bartholdi] has gone down into the grave, that his confidence should be deceived, that his work should escape him, and with it the glory he was entitled to hope for? Could it be that Belfort, I would like to say the City of Belfort, should abandon him as life has, cruelly, and that a foreigner to Alsace should take his place for a monument essentially to the glory of Alsace?'.<sup>121</sup> Presumably, at the instigation of Eugène Lux, the town's architect, the town council had sought to appoint one of Lux's friends, a certain Gustave Umbdenstock, who was also born in Colmar and had won the Prix de Rome.<sup>122</sup> Then, Antonin Mercié, Bartholdi's rival, was approached.<sup>123</sup>

After a long series of twists and turns, an agreement was reached in March 1910. On 15 August 1913, a year before her death, Jeanne-Émilie Bartholdi attended the inauguration of the 'Trois Sièges' Monument, partly financed out of her funds, reworked and completed by the two sculptors she had chosen. By that time, another war, this time a world war, was looming. Bartholdi's honour had been restored, Colonel Denfert-Rochereau finally received the tribute he deserved 42 years after his feat of arms, and the town was reconciled with its past. It was as if a page of history

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121 Letter written by Jeanne Bartholdi to the mayor of Belfort, 25 October 1905, AMB, IM 33.

122 cf. André Larger, *art.cit.*, p. 150.

123 Ultimately, Louis Noël, the artist Bartholdi had appointed to assist him, would complete the work with the help of Jules Dechin.

had been turned. Remarkably, the official speeches on this occasion did not mention Alsace-Lorraine and showed no belligerent, Germanophobic spirit, although France and Germany were on the brink of a new conflict. Antonin Ratier, Minister of Justice, made only a discreet reference to current events: 'The time is still far off when your lion, having accomplished its mission, will be able to close its eyes and let its head drop'.<sup>124</sup> Instead, these speeches emphasised Bartholdi's artistic genius and expressed the gratitude the city owed to his widow.

The Belfort paradox further illustrates the argument that the memory of wars is often conflictual. Heritage does not always soften the blow, and evoking the past does not spontaneously promote reconciliation and harmony.

### *The Lion reclaimed by nationalists*

It was undoubtedly a kind of betrayal for the pacifist and liberal Bartholdi to gradually witness the political exploitation of his lion (especially the Parisian lion) by the far-right.<sup>125</sup> To mark the 25th anniversary of the end of the siege, the town of Belfort did not consider it essential to focus the 5 and 6 April 1896 ceremonies on the Lion. The official speeches were lenient and far from marked by bellicose exaltation. This was not true at Place Denfert-Rochereau in Paris. There, the nationalist leader of the Ligue des Patriotes (founded in 1882), Paul Déroulède, delivered a heated speech that heralded the drift of French nationalism towards an authoritarian, anti-parliamentary and xenophobic attitude. The *Journal de Belfort et du Haut-Rhin* did not view this favourably, and the newspaper's reaction sheds light on the perception that the people of Belfort, and the French in general, had of the Lion and, through it, of the matter of Alsace-Lorraine.

'To be honest, we fail to see what Mr Déroulède's new feverish outburst can add to our prestige, how it will improve the tense situation on the Alsace-Lorraine border and, above all, how it will benefit the people annexed to the two provinces, who are forced to live there under the law of the conqueror. We believe that when it comes to patriotism, the most silent is still the most active and the best'.

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124 *Le Haut-Rhin républicain*, 17 August 1913.

125 Zeev Sternhell, *La droite révolutionnaire, 1885–1914. Les origines françaises du fascisme*, Paris, Fayard (nouvelle édition), 2000.

This was an allusion to Gambetta's famous words regarding Alsace-Lorraine: 'Always think about it, never talk about it'. Meanwhile, the poet François Coppée used the Lion to confuse—in his poem 'Au Lion de Belfort'—patriotism with the 'duty' of 'holy hatred'. Bartholdi was a stranger to the 'authoritarian patriotism' that paved the way for the putschist General Boulanger: he was instead attached to what might be called a form of 'liberal patriotism'. At the end of the century, the Lion on Place Denfert-Rochereau became the rallying spot for the new nationalist ceremonial, which was hardly consistent with what the monument represented. While in exile in Spain, having been banished in 1899 following his attempted coup d'État, Déroutède published, in 1901, an appeal in *Le Drapeau* to his supporters to go en masse (in fact, only a few would respond ...) to the statue of the Lion of Belfort 'as a sign of protest against the government'. By then, the Lion was no longer an abstract and consensual patriotic symbol; it had become a political weapon. The protesters, frequently forbidden from speaking up by the police, shouted: 'Down with the Ministry! Down with the Freemasons and the Jews!'. François Coppée, the first poet to laud the Lion, followed suit in the *Ligue de la Patrie française* (French Patriot's league).

Yet, in the new force field of turn-of-the-century nationalism, Alsace-Lorraine became an alibi. Déroutède himself conceded that '(...) before liberating Alsace-Lorraine, we should liberate France'.<sup>126</sup> Domestic policy procedures had taken precedence over foreign policy. The Lion, a perfect example of apoliticism, had become the butt of a political recuperation of which its creator would not have approved. Thus, in 1907, the newspaper *La Croix de Belfort*, which supported the nationalist cause, viewed the erection of a monument to Jacques Trarieux—the first president of the Human Rights League—a stone's throw from the Lion on Place Denfert-Rochereau, as a provocation. The newspaper explained the incompatibility of both monuments, 'one symbolising national defence and the other a reminder of the nefarious, so clearly anti-French, Dreyfus campaign'. While Bartholdi identified with the 'Patriots' Republic',<sup>127</sup> he certainly did not with the nationalist and anti-Dreyfus party. His creation had escaped him. Some had politicised and radicalised it, although, at least in Belfort, the local political

126 Paul Déroutède, *Qui vive? France! Quand même. Notes et discours, 1883–1890*, 1910, quoted by Jean-Jacques Becker, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *La France, la nation, la guerre : 1850–1920*, Paris, SEDES, 1995, p. 177.

127 In the words of Raoul Girardet, *Le nationalisme français. Anthologie. 1871–1914*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1983, p. 37.

class of all persuasions seemed determined to preserve it as a sanctuary above the fray.

The very concept of the Lion had been designed to avoid this kind of recuperation. Using this quadruped was a challenge which was not to be underestimated. Bartholdi had not meant it as an allegoric or symbolic lion; he studied the animals at the fawn farm in the Jardin des Plantes. He wanted an animal representation that was reasonably close to its natural state. Such a total absence of political representation is precisely a guarantee of sustainability because it means the monument is free from the univocity of its edifying signification, offering spectators and the public opinion a space of freedom they can invest in as they wish. Who would ever think of tearing down a monumental animal? Therefore, the Lion of Belfort is unique in that it is both hyper-historicized and anhistorical since it is a living being that refers to a non-human universe.

The animal was not designed and perceived as a promise of reconquest; if nothing else, it was a protective 'bulwark' in case the Germans meant to invade the country again. It expressed no desire for revenge or vengeance. It was as if the new order resulting from the Frankfurt Treaty could not be called into question. One notes that Alsatians were fond of flocking to Belfort on July 14th, in particular, to honour the Lion. Belfort had become the Alsatians' 'capital'. On 14 July 1895, the number of admissions to the Lion peaked at 1,220, a record figure. The press of the time was quick to stress this, pointing out that it was a naive expression of confidence in the military establishment. 'Hope' is what people came to glimpse; it was a fraternity they wanted to nurture. Georges Ducrocq's account is interesting in this respect. Founder of the magazine *Les Marches de l'Est*, he published a story in 1913 of a trip he took to (this is the title of the book) *Les Provinces inébranlables* (The Unshakeable Provinces):

'I know nothing more beautiful, vibrant than a 14 July celebration in Belfort, under a magnificent summer sun. The crowds that flock that day from all over Alsace, from the Sundgau and the Haut-Rhin, from Colmar and Mulhouse, are of exceptional interest to us French people. They dictate our duty. These winegrowers, these vigorous farmers, these ruddy-cheeked tall girls who are moved by the passing soldiers, who clap their hands and weep at the sight of the flag, have the right of it. They have retained the enthusiasm, the fiery love of the three colours that represent freedom for them. Without a second thought, they applaud

military glory and panache. [...] This is why Belfort remains their capital'.<sup>128</sup>

Some historical research has shown that the nationalists could not change what was obvious: the French had accepted the loss of the Alsace-Lorraine and were not ready to go to war to win them back. Military heroism could not become a re-founding myth because the war was unpopular. No one wanted to remember that collective lassitude and desertion had begun as early as December 1870.<sup>129</sup> Against all expectations, the 8 February 1871 elections had consecrated the pacifist monarchists over the Republicans, who supported the continuation of the war. Hence, it is hardly surprising that the Alsace-Lorraine issue and the theme of Revenge were virtually absent from the 1881 electoral campaign. In his famous speech given on 9 August 1880 in Cherbourg—which had highly offended the Germans—Gambetta defined the proper attitude to show as follows: 'Our hearts do not beat for bloody adventure, but for the remainder of France to stay whole, and so that we may count on the future to know whether there is immanent justice in what comes in a timely fashion'.<sup>130</sup> The spirit of revenge affected only a 'fraction of public opinion'.<sup>131</sup> Nostalgia, affliction and grief prevailed.<sup>132</sup> The scant interest shown in the Lion de Belfort by public authorities and the general public (Alsations excepted) says it all.

### *Modern artists mock the Lion and reject 'official' heritage.*

However, it had become a witness to a bygone time when monumentalism was regarded as the epitome of heritage institutionalisation. Bartholdi had to contend with the fundamental social trend to shake off the yoke of 'commemorative tyranny'. As the art historian June Hargrove rightly said, monuments 'in their immoderation are akin to the race of dinosaurs that

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128 Georges Ducocq, *Les Provinces inébranlables*, 1913, quoted by Raoul Girardet, *op. cit.*, p. 248–249.

129 Jean-Jacques Becker, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *La France, la nation, la guerre*, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

130 Gambetta quoted by Charles Seignobos, *L'évolution de la 3<sup>e</sup> République*, in *Histoire de la France contemporaine depuis la révolution jusqu'à la paix de 1919, sous la direction d'Ernest Lavisse*, Hachette, 1921, p. 78.

131 François Roth, *La guerre de 1870*, Paris, Poche-Pluriel, 1990, p. 709.

132 Laurence Turetti, *Quand la France pleurait l'Alsace-Lorraine*, Strasbourg, Nuée bleue, 2008.

gigantism doomed to extinction'. The future was in that 'dreadful statue', according to an old-school teacher, Rodin's *The Thinker*, a model of which was placed in front of the Pantheon in 1904 as an experiment. This was the year Bartholdi died. This was the year Constantin Brancusi came to Paris, three years before a certain Picasso painted *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. Art was on the brink of a revolution. There was 'a widespread need for innovation in the plastic arts'<sup>133</sup> in various forms (Fauvism, Expressionism, Cubism, etc.), and the avant-garde was paving the way.

One sculptor from the Bartholdi generation who fared better was Auguste Rodin. Picasso, to name but one, was in contact with Rodin. The Spanish artist was keen to see Rodin's first personal retrospective, which was held in Paris, Place de l'Alma, on the sidelines of the 1900 World Fair.<sup>134</sup> Art was on the brink of a revolution. Bartholdi was unable to withstand this trend. He was the victim of his reputation and honours. He was already an outdated symbol of a style that no longer had a place in the artistic and heritage field. Writer and art critic Joris-Karl Huysmans dealt him the final blow only a year after the sculptor's demise. In 1905, he published *Trois Primitifs* after visiting, for the second time, the Unterlinden Museum in Colmar, where he admired Grünewald's masterpiece, the Issenheim Altarpiece. A closer look at the fountain in the small cloister had shown him 'a rather sadly perched red statue of Martin Schongauer.' Unexpectedly, because this sculpture is a remarkable achievement by Auguste, given that the figure seems alive, his comment is cruel and unfair: '... this is official art, an emetic for the eyes, Bartholdi's work'. Bartholdi would long remain trapped in the nefarious category of official arts and 'patriotic jibes.'<sup>135</sup>

Bartholdi was a victim of the fundamental social trend of shaking off the yoke of 'commemorative tyranny'. As the art historian June Hargrove rightly said, monuments such as the one glorifying Victor Hugo, designed by Auguste's friend Louis-Ernest Barrias and inaugurated Place Victor Hugo in Paris in 1902, 'in their immoderation are akin to the race of dinosaurs that gigantism doomed to extinction.'<sup>136</sup> Auguste Bartholdi had to bear the brunt of the stigma of academicism that affected monumental art. In

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133 Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, *Les Avant-gardes artistiques, 1848–1918. Une histoire transnationale*, Gallimard-Folio, 2017, p. 330.

134 Claude Jurdin and Hélène Pinet (dir.), *Rodin en 1900. L'exposition de l'Alma*, Paris, RMN, 2001.

135 Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Trois Primitifs*, Paris, A. Messein, 1905, p. 52.

136 June Hargrove, « Les statues de Paris », in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, sous la direction de Pierre Nora, t.2, Quarto-Gallimard, 1997, p. 1880.

1859, at a time when public statuary had started invading public space, Baudelaire stated that he loved 'brutal and positive' sculpture, which, such as 'a stone ghost, seized one' and carried you away to 'the most fundamental archives of universal life.'<sup>137</sup> Yet, this was no longer true on the eve of the 20th century.

As early as 1905, the press began to lament the fact that the streets of Paris had become annexes to our necropolises.<sup>138</sup> The first serious study of the receding tide of monumental art is entitled *Statuomanie parisienne. Étude sur l'abus des statues*<sup>139</sup> (Parisian statuary. A study on the excessive use of statues). Denouncing this excess would become a trendy theme in the pre-war period following the First World War. In his book *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926), Louis Aragon warned that 'Humanity would perish from statuary frenzy'. In 1933, the Surrealists issued a questionnaire to indicate which Parisian monuments should be transformed or taken down. The replica of the Lion of Belfort, Place Denfert-Rochereau, was in the line as a patriotic symbol after the slaughter of 1914–1918. André Breton wanted it to 'go chomp at the bit'. Paul Éluard suggested 'perching' on the Lion's back 'an underwater diver holding a pot with a hen in his right hand'. Tristan Tzara favoured 'spearing it with a huge rod and roasting it in flames of bronze'. In 1922, Robert Desnos was referring to Bartholdi when he said that 'pawns get their lion's share in art'. Yet, Max Ernst would be the one to take the anti-leonine satire the furthest in his surrealist novel-collage *Une semaine de bonté ou les sept éléments capitaux*.<sup>140</sup> In it, he developed some of his favourite themes: anti-clericalism, rejection of the family, sexuality, criticism of the bourgeoisie and rejection of patriotism and authority. The last part of this strange book features quotes by Jean Hans Arp, André Breton, Paul Éluard and Marcel Schwob. In 1896, the latter, who was the dedicatee of Alfred Jarry's play *Ubu Roi*, put forth a new definition of art that was the antithesis of what the Colmar sculptor embodied: 'Art is the

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137 Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, Paris, Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1976, p. 670 & p. 488.

138 Simon Baker, *Surrealism, History and Revolution*, Peter Lang, 2007, p. 153.

139 This study is signed by Gustave Pessard. It is Volume #36 of the Bibliothèque du Vieux Paris. Parisian gardens, avenues, crossroads, pavements and facades were overrun by over 900 statues or busts of figures, not to mention the 72 monuments still in the planning stage in 1912.

140 Simon Baker, *op.cit.*, p. 60–61, p. 186–187.



opposite of general ideas, it describes only the individual, it desires only the unique. It doesn't classify; it declassifies.'

In Bartholdi, irreverence and modernity had found a scapegoat.

### *Conclusion: The Monumental abuse*

Auguste Bartholdi embodies a generation of statue sculptors who manufactured heritage for the sake of heritage. He described his approach in an unpublished letter from 1878, in which he told a friend that the City of Paris had just agreed to acquire a replica of the Lion:<sup>141</sup>

'The city council's decision is not merely the acquisition of an interesting work of art; it is a tribute to Alsatian patriotism and indirectly a tribute to the patriotism of the people of Paris during the siege. *It is a remembrance of the past, placed for all the population to see, with a view to the future* ...'<sup>142</sup>

The Lion of Belfort provides a better understanding of the nature and limits of public statuary in the 19th century. Displayed in public areas, monumental sculpture inevitably has a political dimension. It implies a dependence and an obligation between the artists and the authorities, from the State to municipalities. This is the paradox of technically conservative art, exploited by every regime, an 'intrinsically depoliticized and extrinsically politicized'<sup>143</sup> art. Generally speaking, one should not forget that from the second half of the 19th century onwards, the field of heritage operated according to the law of the field of power.

A master of monumental art, Auguste Bartholdi was very much in step with this century of urban renewal, which offered sculptors many opportunities. Public monument sculptors were no ordinary sculptors. They depended on public commissions, which they sometimes solicited. Despite the dynamism around monumental art, it was a tiny market, and he had to contend with his 'competitors' (a term he often used), convince local

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141 At the time, as he mentioned in this letter, the replica of the Lion (in fact, the original model presented at the Fair) was to be placed in the Buttes-Chaumont.

142 Letter written by Bartholdi to 'Mon cher ami' (My dear friend) (unidentified), Paris, 8 December 1878. Archive de Paris.

143 Albert Boime, *Hollow icons: the politics of sculpture in Nineteenth-Century France, Kent, Ohio, and London*, The Kent State University Press, 1987. *Id.*, *The unveiling of the national icons: a plea for patriotic iconoclasm in a nationalist era*, 1998.

authorities to accept his plans, fight to find funds (often by public subscription) and assert his aesthetic point of view. This called for compromise. It implied setbacks. It meant exercising patience and diplomacy and being unable to express oneself freely. It meant having a network of relations. The Statue of Liberty, Bartholdi's only self-commissioned work, entailed a 15-year struggle against indifference and countless obstacles, which left him feeling defeated and bitter, not to mention the unresolved issue of the reproduction rights stolen from him. In Clermont-Ferrand, the *Vercingétorix*, a much less famous example, was the result of an arduous 35-year journey buffeted by military and political events. The history of public statuary is often the history of its associated lawsuits. This was the case in Belfort, and it lasted several years. In Marseille, Bartholdi was involved in legal proceedings over a fountain monument that lasted from 1859 until his death. Behind the polished image of the sculptor filled with glory, there is another reality that the historian has a vocation to illuminate. Bartholdi is sculpture as a martial art!

However, historical heritage in excess has been the death of historical heritage. Auguste Bartholdi's memory undoubtedly suffered from this general 'loss of dignity' that affected the artists who contributed to transforming public sculpture 'from the status of artwork to that of street furniture',<sup>144</sup> as Maurice Agulhon put it. Bartholdi would appear to be one of the victims of the monumentalisation of Republican France and the untimely celebration of great men or great principles. His memory resurfaced a century later, prompted by the renewed interest in heritage that marked the late 20th century, brilliantly analysed by Pierre Nora. The city that had caused it so much grief would finally inaugurate the Lion of Belfort in 2010.

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144 Maurice Agulhon, « Les transformations du regard sur la statuaire publique », in *La Statuaire publique au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Éditions du Patrimoine, 2004, p. 18.



## 2 An ‘absurd prodigy’ turned hyper-monument: the Eiffel Tower

Why was the monumental heritage embodied by Auguste Bartholdi shunned in the early 20th century when the Eiffel Tower, erected at the same time as the Statue of Liberty and the Lion of Belfort, was gradually becoming a figure of lasting inspiration to avant-garde artists, from Robert Delaunay to Jean-Michel Basquiat?<sup>145</sup> Why did these two contemporary artists and friends (Gustave Eiffel helped build the Statue of Liberty) achieve such radically different posterity, one sinking into oblivion and the other inspiring biographies, films, comic strips, and documentaries? How did the Eiffel Tower come to embody France's heritage and identity, designed as it was to be free of any reference to a historical event and conceived to defy the people's idea of heritage at the time? Does this imply that the Eiffel Tower is an ‘involuntary monument’? That it is heritage despite itself? An ‘absurd prodigy’, a ‘vain miracle’ as described by the poet François Coppée<sup>146</sup> in his time? This is an enigma that bears investigation in light of the centenary of the death of its creator, Gustave Eiffel (1832–1923), which was celebrated in 2023.

It could even be described as a mystery, given that the Eiffel Tower, the world's most famous and popular monument, was not intended to last and was contractually fated to disappear. Its sudden appearance in the Paris landscape at the 1889 World Fair was a shock because of the disruptive novelty of this monumental concept, which sparked a smear campaign in the intellectual and artistic world. Could iron, a product of the Industrial Revolution and a symbol of modernity and industrial progress, be considered a material worthy of monumental art and the source of a new aesthetic? It had already been used experimentally for the Statue of Liberty in New York (inaugurated in 1886): Eiffel designed the metallic framework that supports the hammered copper cover from which Liberty emerges. However, in this instance, the idea was to expose the structure for

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145 The exhibition *Basquiat x Warhol à quatre mains*, held at the Fondation Louis Vuitton in 2023, featured their painting *Eiffel Tower*, composed in 1985, from a private collection.

146 François Coppée, « Sur la Tour Eiffel », 22 juillet 1888. Poem published in: François Coppée, *Les Paroles Sincères*, Paris, Lemerre Alphonse éditeur, 1891, p. 93–101.

all to see. Therein was the novelty and the scandal, compounded by the fact that this monument conveyed no apparent message. It was heritage without a past, an ideal to exalt, and with no justifiable use. A hollow icon,<sup>147</sup> a 'useless force' (François Coppée).<sup>148</sup> As far as the average public opinion was concerned, the intolerable had been reached in terms of taste. This is why it was denied monument status for such a long time.

We aim to analyse this hostile perception and, in particular, the difficulty that France has experienced in accepting the idea of an 'industrial culture,' i.e., an attempt to reconcile the realms of technology and art in a capital city that had trouble conceiving of the presence of metal architecture as anything other than an affront on noble stone. This challenge was not merely the reflection of an academic stance. A more fundamental issue was at stake, which involved a Catholic mindset that rejected the Eiffel Tower as an affirmation of scientific and technical progress and republican values.

### *Primitive inspiration: The technical revolution of the Statue of Liberty*

Auguste Bartholdi was a sculptor and architect, and Gustave Eiffel was an engineer who graduated from the École Centrale des Arts et Manufactures in 1855, the same year that the first major World Fair was held in Paris, after London.<sup>149</sup> They were from two very different worlds, but they were brought together by the cultural revolution that was the Industrial Revolution and their shared quest for a new approach to building monuments.

After spending a few years in southwest France, where he supervised work on the major Bordeaux railway bridge, Eiffel set up his own business in 1864 as a 'builder,' that is, a contractor specialising in metallic structures. His exceptional career as a builder was marked by achievements such as the Porto viaduct over the River Douro in 1876, followed by the Garabit

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147 Here, I transpose the notion that the American historian Albert Boime used (wrongly, in my opinion) to describe another work: Albert Boime's « La statue de la Liberté : une icône vide », *Le Débat*, n° 44, mars-mai 1987, p. 143.

148 François Coppée, « Sur la Tour Eiffel », 22 juillet 1888.

149 Gustave Eiffel participated in the 1867 and 1878 World Fairs as an 'independent locksmith contractor'. In 1867, he was commissioned to build the metal section of the Gallery of Fine Arts and Archaeology in Paris. In 1878, he contributed to designing the main building. The 1889 World Fair would mark his coronation before the downfall. It is worth mentioning that Bartholdi visited the London World Fair in 1851 with his mother and brother. The bust of Liberty was presented at the Paris World Fair in 1878.

viaduct in 1884, the Pest railway station in Hungary, and the Nice observatory dome. With his reputation on the rise, he was appointed by Auguste Bartholdi to design the metal structure of the Statue of Liberty, a world premiere.<sup>150</sup> The building of the Statue of Liberty was a massive endeavour involving every industrial trade. This experience inspired Eiffel to invent the tower that bears his name. His career as a builder came to a brutal halt following the Panama Canal affair. In 1893, the Compagnie, chaired by de Lesseps, was caught in a vast financial scandal linked, among other things, to the corruption of some members of parliament responsible for covering the Compagnie's near bankruptcy. Eiffel would go on to lead an active life of experimental scientific research into meteorology, radiotelegraphy and aerodynamics.

The technical challenge of the Statue of Liberty was to design a structure (which was to be the tallest of its time) capable of withstanding its load and the horizontal forces exerted by the wind. Eiffel was an expert in solving such problems. A specific challenge in this instance was the object's irregular shape. Bartholdi was particularly interested in the engineer's ability to design the pylons supporting massive viaducts capable of withstanding the wind. Eiffel entrusted the project to Maurice Koechlin, an Alsatian. Together, the two men invented a new technique: the copper casing was to be hung over an iron framework, which would serve to hold it up. This tall pylon is fixed on the statue's masonry pedestal in four places. The copper casing is connected to this pylon using flat-iron reinforcements on the casing's inner face. The breakthrough was to ensure that the casing would be supported and not load-bearing. This is the principle on which the architecture of skyscrapers would be based, and America would exploit it admirably. Elevation was favoured over gravitation.

The first monument created 'as a kit', the Statue of Liberty is a major technological masterpiece. Through Eiffel, industry found its way into the world of statuary art. The Statue of Liberty is also an example of industrial art. Not surprisingly, the first published study of the Statue was signed Charles Talansier, an engineer from the Arts et Manufacture, who wrote an article for *Le Génie civil*, a magazine of French and foreign industries. An offprint would be published in 1883.<sup>151</sup> The magazine *Le*

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150 Robert Belot, « La statue de la Liberté. Une révolution technique et esthétique », *Cahiers de RECITS*, n°3, 2004, p. 77–89

151 Charles Talansier, *La Statue de la Liberté éclairant le monde*, Paris, Publications du journal *Le Génie civil*, 1883.

*Mouvement scientifique* showed interest,<sup>152</sup> as well as *Scientific American*. In fact, the original meaning of Lady Liberty was as much political freedom as economic free trade. As Édouard de Laboulaye, chairman of the French-American Committee, put it, it was 'a pacific celebration of industry and universal science'.<sup>153</sup> At the inauguration, Ferdinand de Lesseps mentioned a tribute to America and its 'faith in progress'.<sup>154</sup> This achievement encouraged Eiffel to venture into the art world with the Tower that bears his name, which purported to shamelessly show the iron framework hidden by Lady Liberty's dress. This was his monumental revolution, symbolic of the emergence of a new culture: industrial culture. Conservative artists who criticised the Tower clearly saw the link between Liberty and Eiffel's project. We know that Koechlin presented his friend Bartholdi with a preliminary design for the Eiffel Tower. Koechlin's—the Tower's true designer— first sketch showed a superimposition of several monuments (in particular Notre-Dame de Paris and the Arc de Triomphe), which included the Statue of Liberty.<sup>155</sup>

Bartholdi and Eiffel expressed the 'decadent' modernity symbolised by the new and 'mercantile' United States. The poet François Coppée illustrated this point of view in his poem entitled '*Sur la Tour*':

Œuvre monstrueuse et manquée,  
Laid colosse couleur de nuit,  
Tour de fer, rêve de Yankee,  
Ton obsession me poursuit.<sup>156</sup>

Yet, compared with the Statue of Liberty, Eiffel added a specific dimension that would cause a scandal: not only was his work useless, but it did not convey any accessible meaning. This is why François Coppée stigmatised and ridiculed 'this nonsensical pyramid'. The Eiffel Tower revealed a paradigmatic shift in monumental design, in which 'the form is the

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152 Charles Julien, *Le Mouvement scientifique*, 1<sup>ère</sup> année, n° 9, 29 december 1883.

153 « Le discours de M. Laboulaye », *L'Événement*, 1 mai 1876. Fonds du Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers.

154 Speech by Ferdinand de Lesseps, *Courrier des États-Unis*, 6 November 1886.

155 Caroline Mathieu, « La Tour de 300 mètres. Histoire d'un mythe », *Gustave Eiffel. Le magicien du fer*, Paris, Skira/Flammarion, 2009, p. 125–127.

156 François Coppée, « Sur la Tour Eiffel », 22 July 1888. ('Monstrous and flawed work/ Ugly night-coloured colossus/ Iron Tower, a Yankee's dream/ Your obsession haunts me.')

message'.<sup>157</sup> People were not ready to embrace this shift. The meaning was either hidden or implicit: Gustave Eiffel also meant it as a 'summary of contemporary science',<sup>158</sup> as evidenced by the 72 scientist names inscribed on the border of the tower's first floor.

### *Engineer art*

Gustave Eiffel also intended to create a work of art. He projected to dare show what Bartholdi had hidden in the Statue, namely the iron framework. However, were the mentalities of the time ready to accept that an engineer should dare venture into the territory of art and claim, as Eiffel put it, 'the art of the modern engineer', in other words: 'The art of the century of industry and science we live in, and whose path was paved by the great scientific movement of the late 18th century and by the Revolution of 1789'? The resistance to change in the urban landscape through the emergence of radically new forms has been a constant feature throughout history. Consider the creation of the Centre Beaubourg (1977), the Buren columns in the Palais Royal in Paris (1986) or the Louvres Pyramid (1988). To those complainants who denied his work as unartistic, Eiffel answered that they did not have a monopoly over beauty and that an engineer also had a say in the matter:

'And what if, once built, my tower were a thing of beauty instead of an eyesore? Would artists not regret having been so quick to unthinkingly campaign against the preservation of a monument that was yet to be erected? I will tell you what I think and what I hope. I think that my tower will be beautiful. Why should one think that, because we are engineers, beauty is of no concern to us when we build (...)? Well, I believe that the curves of the four ridges of the monument, as defined through my calculation, will give off an impression of great strength and beauty because they will convey the boldness of my design'.<sup>159</sup>

Gustave was influenced by his friend Bartholdi and the latter's fondness for the 'colossal', in line with the dominant Egyptomania of the time and

157 Françoise Gaillard, « Le monument involontaire, le cas de la Tour Eiffel », in *L'Abus monumental* (sous la présidence de Régis Debray), Paris, Fayard, 1999, p. 119.

158 « La réponse de l'ingénieur à la lettre de protestation des artistes », *Le Temps*, February 1887.

159 G. Eiffel, « Réponse », *Le Temps*, 14 February 1887.



which progressively became a defining criterion of monumentality in the late 19th century:

'Besides, the colossal has its own appeal and charm, to which ordinary theories are scarcely applicable. Would anyone argue that the pyramids have powerfully captured the human imagination through their artistic value? (...) And where is the source of this admiration if not in the immensity of the endeavour and the grandeur of the result? My tower will be the highest building ever erected by humans. Will it not be grand in its own fashion? And why should something admirable in Egypt become hideous and ridiculous in Paris?'

What Eiffel meant was that it was now possible to design the 'colossal' through technical innovation born of the Industrial Revolution. The Eiffel Tower was part of a movement toward the technicisation of art, which included the photographic revolution (1839), the discovery of the phonograph (1877) and the invention of cinema (1895). Photography would spark debate because it illustrated the intrusion of technology into the artist's work; it was an artefact interposed between the artist's hand and the artwork. Together with photography, recorded music and film, this marked the transition from the visual arts to the visual industries. This shift would meet with resistance from the contenders of 'pure' art. On 15 December 1862, for example, the magazine *Moniteur de la photographie* published a 'protest by leading artists against any assimilation of photography to art'. The Eiffel Tower met with a similar fate.

Photography also established a different relationship to the work of art, with the emergence of 'repeatability' and 'reproducibility' (Walter Benjamin). In multiplying the unique work of art, photography contributed to the development of the (political and aesthetic) democratisation that marked the last decades of the 19th century. 'Soon, we shall see the beautiful prints only found in the homes of wealthy connoisseurs adorning even the humblest homes of labourers and peasants.' (*La Revue Française*, 1839). The artistic event, marked by its uniqueness and an exclusive following among bourgeois circles, became a mass phenomenon. This was also the significance of such *palladiums* as the Lion of Belfort, the Statue of Liberty and the Eiffel Tower. These three achievements were also 'repeatable' insofar as they promoted a new form of communication: their reproducibility was achieved by manufacturing miniature objects that ensured their worldwide distribution. It was the advent of the 'gadget', or of by-products, to use a contemporary term, as well as a financing source. Some were shocked by

this form of communication. The newspaper *Le Temps* ironically commented on the enthusiasm of ‘manufacturers who set about building miniature Eiffel Towers in gold, silver, steel, ivory, etc. to send all over the world as watches, seals, or charms’.<sup>160</sup>

The famous sociologist Roland Barthes was well aware of the original dimension of the Eiffel Tower, a unique object that is constantly reproduced, both grandiose and commonplace:

‘Perspective, object, symbol, the Tower is everything Man invests in it, and this is infinite. A spectacle both seen and seeing, a useless and irreplaceable building, a familiar world and a heroic symbol, a witness to a century and an ever-new monument, an inimitable object that is endlessly reproduced, it is the pure sign, open to all times, all images and all meanings, the unbridled metaphor; through the Tower, human-kind exercises this significant function of the imagination, which is its freedom since no history, however dark, has ever been able to take it away’.<sup>161</sup>

The Eiffel Tower was the brutal witness of the new universe in the making and focused on vapour, electricity, and mobility. From 1880 onwards, the consolidation of the Republic went hand in hand with the development of a work *ethos*: the worker became a heroic figure who embodied social justice and progress. The 1889 World Fair was a hymn to this ambitious and working Republic. The President of the Republic at the time was Sadi Carnot (1887–1894), a graduate of the *École Polytechnique* and a leading figure in French engineering. It was a time of celebration as national energy merged with modernity and progress.

Industrial culture transformed culture. New industrial landscapes became a source of inspiration for some painters, such as François Bonhommé (1809–1881). The Impressionists, who incorporated features of the industrial landscape (railway bridges, locomotives, stations, smoke, urban landscapes, etc.), were viewed as outsiders<sup>162</sup> and needed Émile Zola to

160 *Le Temps*, 26 February 1889.

161 Roland Barthes, *La Tour Eiffel*, Paris, Delpire, 1964. Republished in: Roland Barthes, *Œuvres complètes*, tome I : 1942–1965, édition établie et présentée par Éric Marty, Paris, Seuil, 1993, p. 1400.

162 Pierre Daix, *Pour une histoire culturelle de l’art moderne. Le XX<sup>e</sup>*, Éditions O. Jacob, 2000, p. 15.

encourage them: 'Our artists must discover the poetry of stations, as their fathers discovered that of forests and rivers'.<sup>163</sup>

### New 'artificial landscapes'

The advent of the railway and industry created 'artificial landscapes'<sup>164</sup> and reshaped urban forms in every major city affected by the Industrial Revolution: Paris, London, New York, etc. The Eiffel Tower should also be considered as part of a new way of ideating the city, in keeping with the work of Paris prefect Haussmann (from 1853 to 1870). The town centre is structured around thoroughfares which, with their straight lines, resemble a continuum of the rails. The newly built iron and glass railway stations in the city's heart are integral to the urban fabric (such as the covered market). A symbol of modernism, they brought the railway revolution to capital cities. In the writer Théophile Gautier's words, they resembled 'palaces of modern industry that display the religion of the century, the railway. These cathedrals of new humanity are the meeting places of nations, the centre to which everything converges, the core of gigantic stars with iron rays that stretch to the end of the Earth.' In Émile Zola's *The Masterpiece*, the painter Claude Lantier hailed these new look-outs of modernity as symbolising 'the greatness of our conquests.'

The Modernists were fascinated by the creation of the Saint-Lazare railway station (1868), the Pont de l'Europe and the new European district completed in 1867. The first act of Offenbach's *La Vie Parisienne* (1867) is set in the Saint-Lazare railway station. The station features in *Remembrance of things past*, where Proust evokes 'those marvellous places called railway stations, where one sets off for a distant destination'. In 1872, Édouard Manet moved near the Pont de l'Europe. Claude Monet followed suit in 1877. Fascinated by train engines and the reflection of vapour and light on the iron framework, Monet painted *Le Pont de l'Europe, gare Saint-Lazare* (1877), as did Gustave Caillebotte and many others.

Construction and architecture were also undergoing a cultural revolution at the time.<sup>165</sup> Metal architecture was the major innovation of the 19th century. Concealed for a long time, iron (an industrialised, prefabricated,

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163 Émile Zola, *Les peintres impressionnistes de 1877*.

164 Marc Desportes, *Paysages en mouvement*, Paris, Gallimard, 2005, p. 99 et suiv.

165 Bertrand Lemoine, *L'architecture du fer. France : XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Seyssel, éditions du Champ Vallon, 1986.

transportable material) gradually became a legitimate building material, exposed in many buildings, notably market halls, railway stations and department stores. The art of assembly was developing, as evidenced by the Statue of Liberty and the Eiffel Tower. New cultural buildings were being erected, such as the *Bibliothèque Nationale* (National Library), rue de Richelieu. Henri Labrousse (1801–1875) was the first architect to incorporate an all-metal framework into a public building. The *Bibliothèque Nationale* boasts a delicately decorated iron and cast-iron framework concealed beneath compact masonry. The library's cast-iron columns are connected through a network of iron arches, with domes that let in light. Its two reading rooms can accommodate a large number of people. It was inaugurated in 1869, 20 years before the Eiffel Tower. After significant renovations, it was reopened to the public in 2023 and became the *Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art* (National Institute of Art History). Other examples include the Grand Palais, with its metal framework, its great nave, which is unique in Europe, and its immense glass roof, not to mention the levels built using reinforced concrete elements, one of the first applications in architecture.

Gustave Eiffel was attuned to this new atmosphere. The Eiffel Tower was a brutal signal of the new world that the convergence of art and technics was in the process of inventing.

### *A temporary installation to highlight the 1889 World Fair*

May 1884: The French government announced that a World Fair would be held in the capital in 1889 to mark the centenary of the French Revolution (1789). The organising country had a duty to unveil an exceptional building for this celebration of progress, in line with the following equation:

REPUBLIC = PROGRESS = SCIENCE = INDUSTRY

At a time when skyward construction was the order of the day, the decision was made to build a one-hundred-foot (300-metre) tower. The Eiffel Tower remained the tallest building in the world for 41 years.<sup>166</sup>

After the terrible defeat of 1870, the goal was to enhance France's prestige and showcase its technological excellence. We should remember that in 1889, Otto von Bismarck, who had brought France to its knees, was still

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166 The Tower was dethroned by the Chrysler Building in New York in 1930.

the Imperial Chancellor of the German Reich. Bismarck had banked on France's isolation as the only republican regime in a Europe of monarchies to permanently weaken the country. The designers of the 1889 World Fair meant to show that, on the contrary, the Republic was a regime with a promising future because it had understood that progress hinged on embracing scientific and technical culture, a culture based on rationalism. Eiffel never sought to put forth his tower's political message. It was apparently of secondary importance to him. All that counted was to achieve a feat: erecting a metal tower that would be the tallest in the world. Yet, a draft pencil and ink sketch of the tower produced by the engineers of the 'Maison Eiffel' in 1884, entitled 'Gallia', reads: 'Project for a monument commemorating 1789'.<sup>167</sup>

Two men, two corporations, and two projects were in competition. Jules Bourdais, the famous architect who had built the Palais du Trocadéro (torn down in 1937), presented a project for a gigantic stone lighthouse to light Paris. He was supported by the President of the Council, Charles Freycinet. Gustave Eiffel, an engineer, presented a project for an audacious iron tower. He was not the only one to claim authorship over the tower: its rightful designer was the Franco-Swiss engineer Maurice Koechlin (1856–1946), a friend of Bartholdi's who worked in his firm. However, Koechlin did not enjoy the same networks as Eiffel, who was supported by Édouard Lockroy, the new Minister for Trade and Industry, a radical Socialist and a Freemason. The obsession with lighthouses was a myth of the time. Eiffel would file a patent for improvements in the construction of iron towers, especially lighthouse towers. Eiffel's argument was decisive: he committed to covering the building costs in exchange for a ten-year concession. In late May 1886, he won the competition (which was said to be 'biased'). From the outset, the press emphasised that it was technically impossible because of the soggy terrain. Charles Garnier, the architect of the Paris Opera, launched an attack against his project.

The challenge was won on March 31st, 1889. The Eiffel Tower was inaugurated according to schedule. It attracted 2 million visitors in six months. In the run-up to the 1900 World Fair, a competition was launched to determine whether to destroy, conserve, or transform the Eiffel Tower. The Tower was on borrowed time. Projects, some of them outrageous, were submitted to the higher commission for the Fair. For instance, Henri Mind-

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167 Caroline Mathieu, « La Tour de 300 mètres. Histoire d'un mythe », *art. cit.*, p. 126.

erof's project for a '19th century column', which consisted in wrapping the Tower in masonry to render it invisible.<sup>168</sup> All sought to distort it, to remove the essence of its profound originality: its geometric poetry. Finally, it was granted an additional period of ten years. It was to be destroyed in 1910. Between 1901 and 1914, the Tower only attracted between 150,000 and 250,000 visitors annually. It did not enjoy 'monument' status at the time. At the very best, it was an experiment. So, what saved it? The new technique of signal transmission, wireless telegraphy, which had begun to emerge in the 1890s. Scientists such as Hertz, Marconi, Tesla, Branly, Popov, Tissot, etc., were working to develop it. The first radio link was established in 1898. On 5 November 1898, Eugène Ducretet succeeded in establishing a Morse code radio link from the Eiffel Tower to the Pantheon (4 km). A year later, in 1899, the first link with London was established. The military authorities began to take a serious interest in this technology. They commissioned Captain Gustave Ferrié, a 31-year-old polytechnician, to conduct experiments. Gustave Eiffel then offered to put the tower at his disposal and finance the installation of an antenna support at its top. Ferrié moved into a barrack at the foot of the south pillar to continue his experiments, aided by a small team of specialists. 1908: Ferrié established a communication link with the Bizerte naval base in Tunisia. The Tower's strategic interest was confirmed. Eiffel obtained an extension of the concession for the Tower for 70 years starting 1 January 1910.

So, the army initially saved the Tower, not artists or intellectuals. Its importance in terms of heritage and tourism would come much later.

*Bourgeois culture saw the Tower as a symbol of the 'barbaric' power of industry*

The Third Republic did not become genuinely Republican until the early 1880s. The centenary of the French Revolution was an opportunity to assert its values. France had just lost the war against the Prussians and had not yet recovered Alsace and Lorraine. The government wished for a politically potent symbol of technical progress and the power of French industry vis-à-vis Germany. Although Eiffel acknowledged this political dimension, he did so rather discreetly. Eiffel, a Freemason like Bartholdi (they belonged

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168 World Fair of 1900. The 19th-century column, a project to transform the Eiffel Tower, by Henri Minderof. Watercolour, National Archives (Paris) F/12/4446/D/Minderof.

to the same Grand Orient lodge), believed in republican values and the religion of technology as a source of human progress. His achievement was indeed political and would be perceived as so. As a patriot, Eiffel believed that the power of industry would wash France clean of its defeat. But he also intended to make art. And that is why people would not forgive him!

A few days after the ground was broken (work started on 1 February 1887), a petition entitled '*Protestation des artistes*'<sup>169</sup> (Artists' protest) was published. It was signed by Charles Gounod, Leconte de Lisle, François Coppée, Guy de Maupassant, Victorien Sardou, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Alexandre Dumas, Eugène Guillaume, Sully Prudhomme and many other long-forgotten names. All of them were celebrities of their time and had, for most, an academic background. Two Prix de Rome, and one member of the Académie Française (Sully Prudhomme). Not all of them were hostile to the regime. For instance, the sculptor Eugène Guillaume produced portraits of Jules Grévy and Jules Ferry, two great figures of the Third Republic. Sully Prudhomme<sup>170</sup> would support Captain Dreyfus. However, most signatories were not known for their Republicanism or audacity. The organist Gounod was a papist, and Huysmans, the writer of refinement, went from dandyism to strictly observant Catholicism. Maupassant had nothing but contempt for politicians, democracy and the homeland. Garnier designed the opera that bears his name, commissioned under Napoléon the Third. Leconte de Lisle was known for his anti-Communard positions, shared by François Coppée, herald of the Parnasse movement, which would embrace anti-Dreyfus hypernationalism.

These artists spoke up as 'lovers of the still pristine beauty of Paris'. They protested 'with all (their) might, with all (their) indignation in the name of the underestimated taste of the French, in the name of French art and history under threat'. The only construction material they tolerated was stone: 'The soul of France, creator of masterpieces, shines through the august blooming of stone'. Eiffel's 'stupefying' dream would insult 'the Paris of sublime gothic art, the Paris of Jean Goujon, Germain Pilon, Puget, Rude, Barye, etc.' In fact, they expressed resistance to modernity, change,

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169 « À Monsieur Alphand », *Le Temps*, 14 February 1887. Jean-Charles Alphand was the Director General of Public Works for the City of Paris, including the World Fair.

170 « La Tour Eiffel, discours de M. Sully Prudhomme » in *Revue scientifique*, 20 April 1889.

the 'babelisation' of the world, 'decadence'<sup>171</sup> and dreamt of times immobile. Let us read François Coppée's poem '*Sur la Tour*' (On the Tower):

Ô Moyen Âge!  
Ô Renaissance!  
Ô bons artisans du passé!  
Jours de géniale innocence,  
D'art pur et désintéressé;  
Où, brûlant d'une foi naïve,  
Pendant vingt ans, avec amour,  
L'imagier sculptait une ogive  
Éclairée à peine en plein jour; (...)  
O vieux siècles d'art, quelle honte!  
À cent peuples civilisés  
Nous montrerons ce jet de fonte  
Et des badauds hypnotisés'.<sup>172</sup>

Many people found the building fashion and the speed of construction unbearable. No monument could be a Meccano of 18,000 parts assembled by 2.5 million rivets and completed in 26 months. Iron is a material that speeds up the building process. Above and beyond what it is, the Eiffel Tower embodied this new iron era.

Many were offended by the rough aspect of iron. Gustave Planet, director of the magazine *La Construction moderne*, had nothing against the fact that Eiffel put 'every resource he had in the service of Art'. However, he believed that the artistic dimension of the Tower was only conceivable if the metal framework was concealed: 'This metal scaffolding, this iron carcass can only be a skeleton that must be clothed in flesh, and afterwards dressed'.<sup>173</sup> One might as well say that he understood nothing about the Eiffel project and could not understand it. Among the projects in competition, preference

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171 'Building of decadence', in François Coppée's words.

172 François Coppée, « Sur la Tour Eiffel », 22 July 1888. 'O, Middle Ages! / O, Renaissance! / O, ye good craftsmen of the past! / Days of marvellous innocence / Of pure and selfless art; / When, burning with naive faith, / Twenty years long, lovingly, / The sculptor would carve an ogive / Barely lit in daytime / O, old centuries of art, shame! / To a hundred civilised peoples / We shall show this spray of cast iron / And hypnotised onlookers.'

173 Gustave Planet, « L'Exposition de 1889 et la Tour de 300 mètres », *La Construction moderne*, 20 May 1886.



was given to the one by architect Jules Bourdais, which combined masonry with metal.

Institutional cultural players saw the Tower as a 'desecration' of art, and this for five reasons. By proposing to use a 'vulgar' material, the author broke with the aesthetic, sculptural and urban tradition that had marked the 'genius of so many centuries': 'Notre-Dame, the Sainte-Chapelle, the Saint-Jacques Tower, the Louvre, the dome of the Invalides, the Arc de Triomphe'. Eiffel was not seen as a 'genuine' artist who cherished 'all things beautiful, great and just' but as a 'builder of machines' who could only produce 'mercantile ideations'. The protesters saw this tower as a symbol of the 'barbaric' power of industry. They denounced 'the vandalism of industrial companies': it would be 'a black and gigantic factory chimney', an 'odious column of bolted sheet metal' that would be like an 'ink stain' on the city. As bearers of the idea of beauty, the dominant cultural players declared that the Tower was ugly: 'it is truly and disconcertingly ugly'. Huysmans felt it resembled a 'horrible aviary'.<sup>174</sup> Maupassant saw it as a 'giant ungainly skeleton'. Not only was it an insult to 'beauty,' but it was also devoid of significance, purpose, and reference. It was perceived as a 'monument, without use, without a name' because it 'is neither a building, nor a tower, nor a pyramid, nor a column, nor a spire'. The reactionary newspaper *L'Univers* (4 April 1889), wrote that it resembled nothing more than 'an enormous stock sitting on four disproportionately open legs and topped by a tiny bell tower. The stock lacks both proportion and purpose. It is said to be a tour de force of metalwork; it is certainly not a masterpiece of art.' People of bourgeois culture were incapable of perceiving the modernity of this work, which is an end in itself and whose message is subsumed by its form.

In short, the Eiffel Tower was 'the dishonour of Paris': 'Because the Eiffel Tower even the commercial Americans wouldn't want, will without a doubt dishonour Paris. Everyone knows it, says it, is deeply afflicted by it, and we are but the weak echo of the universal and legitimately alarmed opinion'. Guy de Maupassant would convey his horror of the Tower in his novels. *The Wandering Life* (1890) begins as follows: 'I left Paris and France too, on account of the Eiffel Tower.' Other writers such as Paul Verlaine and Léon Bloy also expressed similar distaste. Another generation of conformist artists, notably André Maurois, Paul Landowski, Maurice Genevoix and

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174 Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Certains* (ITAL), Paris, Plon, 1908, p.163-177.

Julien Green, would echo this contemptuous point of view. The Eiffel Tower was not beautiful, and it was too republican.

*The dispute between the Ancients and the Moderns*

The dispute over the Eiffel Tower posed the question of modernity. To deflect criticism, Gustave Eiffel emphasised the progressive dimension of his project. He evoked the ‘undeniable services it would render to science’ (meteorology, astronomy, physiology, military research). In a lecture delivered to the *Association Française pour l’Avancement des Sciences* (French Association for the Advancement of Science) on 10 March 1888,<sup>175</sup> Eiffel justified the use of iron as a new material. He praised the innovations in metallurgy that made it ‘extremely easy’ to work iron. Regarding the ‘constant battle’ between iron and stone (or wood), he stressed the superiority of iron and its virtues for large-scale constructions: resistance, lightness, fire resilience, and transportability. ‘To mention but one example, that of the Tower for the Fair, I astonished more than one person who was worried about the load on the ground of the foundations by saying that it would be no heavier than that of a house in Paris’.

The *Société d’Encouragement pour l’Industrie Nationale* (Society in support of national industry) supported him.<sup>176</sup> They were initially fascinated by the project’s technological aspects, particularly a stability issue that had never been solved before. This Society meant to overcome the prejudices of those who criticised the Tower for ‘not being sufficiently artistic’. It argued against comparing it with other buildings and advocated concentrating on its specific originality instead. La *Société française pour l’avancement des sciences* was also on board and provided powerful support for Eiffel.

While it was at odds with how ‘monuments were made’ and upset the critics of modernity, Gustave Eiffel’s Tower was in tune with the industrialist ideology of the time, which was at one with the republican idea. The election of Sadi Carnot, an engineer by trade, as President of the Republic

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175 Gustave Eiffel, « Les constructions métalliques », conference delivered at the Association française pour l’avancement des sciences, on 10 March 1888. On this occasion, he explained the combined use of 800-tonne hydraulic presses and a sandbox to lift the pillars and minutely secure them in place.

176 « Exposition universelle. Note sur la Tour Eiffel ». Signé W. *Bulletin de la Société d’encouragement à l’industrie nationale*, décembre 1888, p. 680.

in 1887 was viewed as the emblem of this modernist Republic, heir to the two revolutions. A journalist of the time observed, 'The French Republic had already had a politician, a soldier, and a lawyer as presidents. Elevating Mr Sadi Carnot to the presidency has consecrated the definitive triumph of a new figure, the offspring of the Revolution and modern science: the Engineer, the true king of the late century'.<sup>177</sup>

Yet this faith in scientific and technical progress was not unanimously shared. Conservatives, artists and non-artists alike, whose intentions were not devoid of ideological ulterior motives, were putting up a united front. What united them was the feeling that the modern world posed a political threat. Anti-modernists mixed politics with aesthetics. This is hardly surprising, given that the 1889 Universal Exhibition's very purpose was political: to commemorate the French Revolution and bolster the republican sentiment. It should be noted that the Third Republic, which emerged almost inadvertently from the defeat of 1870, did not become genuinely republican until later. The republican elites supported Gustave Eiffel. One example: the '*diners de la Marmite*', monthly repasts gathering the cream of republican intellectuals. *La Marmite* was a club created in 1873 in the wake of the *Ligue de l'Enseignement* (Education League). It only accepted hard-lined Republicans.<sup>178</sup> Such as Paul Bert, of course, the founder of *La Marmite*, the Jesuits' eternal foe. I found a collection of menus in Bartholdi's archives. The March 1887 menu brought Auguste Bartholdi, Lockroy and Eiffel together. A dinner in his honour was held on 17 January 1890: the invitation illustration shows him carrying the Tower on his shoulders. Gustave Eiffel would chair *La Marmite* from 1890 to 1892. Bartholdi, Lockroy and Eiffel had one thing in common: all three were Freemasons. Eiffel's membership in the Masonic movement was a critical factor in the hostility he aroused against him.

Conservative Catholics were the most vocal critics of Eiffel's project. The popular right-wing catholic and antisemitic newspaper *La Croix* viewed the Tower as a 'second Babel'. Industry was perceived as a challenge to an immemorial order, and modernity was represented as an act of violence committed against heritage, equated with a rigid and traditionalist conception of society. Modernity was also feared as a vector of democratic culture. This was also the underlying issue in the debates concerning the Tower. *La*

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177 Hugues Le Roux, *Le Temps*, 7 December 1887.

178 Janelle Dietrick, *Alice & Eiffel: A New History of Early Cinema and the Love Story Kept Secret for a Century*, BookBaby, 2016.

*Croix* wrote: 'Witnessing the introduction of the European parliamentary system, Joseph de Maistre, shortly before his death, predicted that it would lead to so much division that, by the end of the century, no two men would be able to agree'.<sup>179</sup> In their *Protest* against the Eiffel Tower, the artists intended to react against a 'grovelling' press that 'exalts the genius of Mr Eiffel' (Huysmans), a press they considered one of the fundamental components of democratic culture. The crowds that rushed to the World Fair were a harbinger of the rising power of the people that threatened the traditional elites. The Eiffel Tower would, therefore, be the triumph of ordinary taste, the takeover of symbolic power by the people in support of democracy.

Guy de Maupassant expressed this in no uncertain terms: 'This proves definitely that the triumph of democracy is complete'. In *The Wandering Life*, he openly stated this elitist rejection by depicting the 'nightmare' that was for him the 'horrible spectacle that a crowd enjoying itself may be to a disgusted man'. The 'very instinct' of art, according to him, would have been denied to the 'élite of the nation' in favour of 'the aristocracy of science, or rather, of scientific industry'. This is why anti-industrialism held such a central role in the argument against the Eiffel Tower. Progress in science and technology was central to republican values, as evidenced by the *Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers*, founded in 1792 by the Abbé Grégoire to educate the people and introduce them to the Enlightenment. This is why anti-Republicans rejected the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution outright. They regarded it as an anti-Christian ambition, a desire to overturn an immutable order dating back to the Middle Ages.

### *The Eiffel Tower as a spiritual threat to the Nation*

Through its condemnation of the Tower, the catholic press revealed its anti-modernism. One should not forget that the Tower had been intended to serve as a beacon to light part of the capital. It was also the symbol of electricity, which had presented the Church with a host of theological issues.<sup>180</sup> The corpus of criticism revolves around five themes:

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179 *La Croix*, 10 April 1889.

180 See Michel Lagrée, *La bénédiction de Prométhée Religion et technologie*, Paris, Fayard, 1999. On the Tower's electricity vocation, see: *Le Génie civil*, 13 December 1884; 7 February 1885 and 19 June 1886.

- Industry is against (healthy) rural order, against nature, unfalsifiable
- Industry is 'protestant' and cosmopolitan
- Industry is materialistic, secularist
- Industry brings comfort, a source of vice, and keeps mortification at bay
- Industry turns man into a Promethean demiurge (the Creator's rival).

The Abbé Combalot summed this all up in his article '*Un bûcher pour les industriels*' (A Pyre for Industrialists) (*Le Siècle*, 24 November 1854): 'Our century is the century of matter and demands everything from matter. It is the century of machines. Purely physical knowledge, chemistry, algebra, mathematics, industrialism and machines are dulling and automating intelligence'.<sup>181</sup> With a 'pre-Orwellian' inspiration, Maurice Maignen looked to anticipate the future in his article '*L'An mil-neuf-cent. Légende de l'avenir*' (The year one thousand nine hundred. Legend of the future). He condemned 'science and industry', calling them 'new powers of destruction': 'Dreadful instruments were invented, and steam and electricity lent them power. Holy Father, there are no more armies; all that is left are executioners and engineers'.<sup>182</sup>

As a monument 'to the glory of the rationalisation of our relationship to the world,' the Tower's materialistic semiotics offended anti-modernist spiritualists. In this sense, the Tower emerged as 'a monument to the disenchantment of the world'<sup>183</sup> and stood as a parable of a godless century that had lost its sense of traditional values, leading to France's decadence. In the words of Joris-Karl Huysmans, it was the emblem of an era 'ruled by the passion of profit', 'the steeple of the new church in which the divine service of high banking is celebrated'. It was a 'Yankee's dream' (François Coppée), a 'beacon of disaster and despair' (Léon Bloy).

Hence, the reference to Babel is a recurring metaphor in every anti-Tower argument. The newspaper *La Croix*, forgetting that it spearheaded the anti-Eiffel polemic, lamented that a 'breath from hell' was in danger of destroying France: '... there is, so to speak, no longer a homeland, but a conglomeration of people who clash, insult each other, tear each other apart, perhaps waiting for their throats to be slit in the struggle'. Amid these 'ruins', there was only one resort/rescue: 'Blessed Marguerite-Marie'

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181 Quoted by M. Lagrée, *op.cit.*, p. 38.

182 *Ibid.*

183 Françoise Gaillard, « Le monument involontaire, le cas de la Tour Eiffel », in *L'Abus monumental*, *op.cit.*, p. 171 et p. 120.

of the Sacré-Cœur, like a 'second Joan of Arc' who harbours 'the secret of the reconstruction of our national edifice'.<sup>184</sup> Indeed, construction work on the Sacré-Cœur basilica on the Butte Montmartre had begun in the 1880s. It was the victory of moral order. I discovered that Auguste Bartholdi had lamented this project dedicated to the atonement of the French, as he would have liked to build a gigantic monument instead dedicated to his hero, the Republican Gambetta. The reactionary Catholic magazine *L'Univers* wrote: 'It was the revenge of Babel, the triumph of modern society'. It went so far as to deny Eiffel's capacity for architectural innovation: 'The Christian ideal has created an architecture that no ability of modern engineers will surpass. The Middle Ages have not been defeated.' (4 April 1889).

Because it expressed Man's Promethean intent to equal God, the Eiffel Tower was of a 'demonic nature' (Huysmans) and impious. If proof were needed, it was inaugurated on a Sunday, with no benediction:

'To the very end, the Lord's Day was profaned to be ready in time. It was also imperative to show that the undertaking was wholly secular and that the tower would bear no signs of clericalism. The ceremony was a civil one: no benediction, not even the slightest prayer, nor a tribute to God. The Republic does not acknowledge the Creator, and the engineer perhaps feels that he is equal to He who made the mountains'.<sup>185</sup>

The Tower was more than a mere technical object. It was 'a challenge to Christian civilisation: either the Tower will fall, or something higher will one day be erected to bear the cross'.

*The Tower became the muse of modern painters and poets 'weary of the old world'*

As the Tower began to emerge, the artists who supported it were less vocal than those who opposed it. Painters, in particular, saw it as an encouragement to prowess and a promise of modernity. The Eiffel Tower is unique in that it is the only monument that has been 'rescued' and honoured by painters from the outset.

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184 *La Croix*, 10 April 1889.

185 Arthur Loth, *L'Univers*, 4 April 1889.

From the moment it was built, the Tower inspired painters and illustrators.<sup>186</sup> A painting by Paul Louis Delance, *La Tour Eiffel vue de la Seine* (The Eiffel Tower seen from the Seine) (1889), shows the tower under construction with remarkable realism. The engraver and photographer Henri Rivière was probably the first to produce a lithograph of *La Tour en construction vue du Trocadéro* (The Tower under construction, seen from the Trocadero), set against a snowy and confidential landscape. In 1889, he produced a very original photograph of the Tower, showing the iron monster's innards. One should also mention his book, published in 1902, *Les Trente-six Vues de la Tour Eiffel*. In a very Japanese atmosphere, he shows views of the Tower from different places in Paris. Another example is Albert Robida's more tongue-in-cheek drawings and lithographs, including *Les amoureuses de la Tour Eiffel* (The Eiffel Tower Enthusiasts) (1890). A magnificent, very classical oil on canvas was brought to life by Luis Jiménez Aranda's paintbrushes in 1889, *Une dame à l'Exposition universelle de Paris* (Lady at the Paris World Fair). In this painting, the Tower is only featured as a backdrop. Although the Impressionists were sensitive to new forms emerging from the Industrial Revolution, they ignored the Tower. Georges Seurat would be the first to exploit the opportunity presented by the Tower as a source of inspiration. He composed a Tower of multicoloured dots powdered in light. His work would become a reference in the pointillist movement. Seurat's interest in optics shielded him from the objections of classical artists. Other innovative painters would follow suit. The Tower was represented as it was (such as in Paul Signac's *Seine-Grenelle* in 1890) or in the background (as in the Douanier Rousseau's *Moi-même, portrait-paysage* in 1890). In 1899, Louis Welden Hawkins, a British painter who became a naturalised French citizen, produced a highly original 'The Eiffel Tower, seen from the Trocadero'. Marc Chagall would later take an interest in the Tower, first with the painting *Paris à travers mes fenêtres* (Paris through my windows) (1910) and then with *Les mariés de la Tour Eiffel* (The Bridal Pair with the Eiffel Tower). Others include Raoul Duffy (Paris 1926), Maurice Utrillo (*L'Avenue de Versailles et la Tour Eiffel*, 1921), and Marcel Gromaire (*Nu à la Tour Eiffel*). Paul Gauguin was ecstatic about its 'Gothic iron lace'.

1907 is a crucial year for understanding the Tower's long-lasting place in the Paris landscape. A new type of paint, Ferrubron, and a new yel-

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186 Sylvie Girardet, Claire Merleau-Ponty, Anne Tardy, « La muse de fer », *Monuments Historiques*, n°132, avril-mai 1984, p. 28.

low-brown shade were chosen and approved by Gustave Eiffel. 'This new use of paint can be interpreted as the transition from industrial colour (red-brown) to the colour of Haussmannism, characterised by its ashlar facades (ochre and yellow-brown)'.<sup>187</sup> The new aesthetic effects produced by this colour appealed to a young non-conformist painter and architect, Le Corbusier. When he saw the Eiffel Tower for the first time, it was love at first sight. On March 11, 1909, he wrote to his parents:

'Apart from that, I have been in love for 15 days now, and from something of the female sex still, and very, very tall to boot. Oh, so as not to cause you deep anguish, I will tell you right away that it is the Eiffel Tower which lights such a blazing fire in my heart! Paris is the enchantment of grey, of the most beautiful shaded and rich grey; the Eiffel Tower is a work of delicacy and bold elevation; and of mist; Paris turns it into a poem and a work of art: a superb shape and such a harmonious texture when presented diagonally! From dark grey at the tip to light grey at its base, when the sky is floating with grey eiderdown. Sharp red in the fire puddles of the setting sun amongst the thick and opaque blue islands of the clouds. It's Japanese! And, as I had the rare privilege of holding in my hands, eight days ago, around sixty original prints by Hokusai, please excuse this very orientalist predilection, which would have all my buddies and the rest jeering ...quite unjustly besides'.<sup>188</sup>

Many years later, the Tower would have its own painter, Robert Delaunay (1885–1941). He painted the Tower 30 times in two series (1909–1911 and 1922–1928). Delaunay glorified this new symbol of the union between industry and art. He recognised the Tower's aesthetic potential for cubist expression. He was fond of disarticulating the linearity of the iron lines, simultaneously combining planes and angles, and breaking the perspective frame by showing several depths of field. The Eiffel Tower allowed him to express his concept of 'pure' and 'absolute' painting, which is free of subject matter to give voice to 'the only reality: light.' In October 1911, Robert Delaunay sent photographs of his recent work, including the Eiffel Tower, to Wassily Kandinsky (a Russian painter who became a German and then a French citizen). As a pioneer of abstract art, Kandinsky was enthralled.

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187 Pierre-Antoine Gatier, « La tour Eiffel, une histoire de couleur », <https://www.academiedesbeauxarts.fr/la-tour-eiffel-une-histoire-de-couleur>.

188 Letter written by Charles-Édouard Jeanneret to his parents, 11 March 1909. Fonds Jornod. Excerpts. Le Corbusier, *Correspondance. Lettres à la famille, 1900–1925*, t. I, Paris, Infolio/Gallimard, 2011, p. 106.



Non-conformists had found their muse, a muse of steel. They would dictate their conceptions and thus legitimise the Eiffel Tower. It was no coincidence that he was commissioned to design the Electricity Pavilion at another World Fair in 1937. Like many artists of his time, Robert Delaunay was fascinated by the early days of aviation. This is reflected in his *Tour Eiffel et jardin du Champs-de-Mars* from 1922. An aerial photograph taken by André Schelcher and Albert Omer-Décugis inspired this painting. These two balloonists had launched into aerial photography at the beginning of the 20th century. On 5 June 1909, their *Tour Eiffel vue en ballon* (Eiffel Tower, Seen from a Balloon) was published as a double-page spread in the magazine *L'Illustration* (the first aerial photograph to be published in this mainstream magazine)<sup>189</sup> This photo shows a unique view of the Tower that inspired painters. Aerial photography is a 'shift of the gaze'.<sup>190</sup>

It would find favour with poets such as Guillaume Apollinaire. The poet enjoyed the imprint of industry on the city: 'iron constructions, machines, automobiles, bicycles, aeroplanes' were, for him, 'masterpieces of modern style (which) are made of cast iron, steel and sheet metal'.<sup>191</sup> He saw the source of a new lyricism in these 'Paris evenings drunk on gin/With electricity ablaze' ('Song of the Unloved'). He understood that the Tower would please anyone who was 'At last (...) tired of these antiquities' and had 'had enough of living in ancient Rome and Greece'. The famous verses of *Zone* are well known: 'At last you are tired of these antiquities/ O Shepherdess Eiffel Tower, this morning the flock of bridges bleat'. In 1919, the year he published *Anthologie nègre*, another writer of modernity and everyday life, Blaise Cendrars,<sup>192</sup> published a collection of poems that included a poem about the Eiffel Tower. This poem, *Tour*, was written in 1913 and dedicated to Robert Delaunay. It consecrated the Eiffel Tower as a 'giant firework display at the World Fair' and also as a universal monument. The poem ends as follows:

'Gong tam-tam zanzibar bête de la jungle rayon-X express bistouri symphonie

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189 André Schelcher et Albert Omer-Décugis, *Paris vu en ballon et ses environs*, préface de Georges Cain, Paris, Hachette, 1909.

190 Thierry Gervais, « Un basculement du regard », *Études photographiques* [En ligne], 9 | Mai 2001, mis en ligne le 10 septembre 2008, accessed 25 April 2024. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesphotographiques/916>.

191 Guillaume Apollinaire, *L'Intransigeant*, 6 June 1912.

192 Blaise Cendrars, *Dix-Neuf poèmes élastiques*, avec un portrait de l'auteur par Amedeo Modigliani, Paris, Au Sans Pareil, 1919.

Tu es tout  
Tour  
Dieu antique  
Bête moderne  
Spectre solaire  
Sujet de mon poème  
Tour  
Tour du monde  
Tour en mouvement<sup>193</sup>

The Tower would inspire filmmakers, such as René Clair's *Paris qui dort* (Paris asleep) (1924). Photographers were also quick to seize upon this symbol of modernity. This was the case, among many others, of Ilse Bing, who produced a silver print full of mystery in 1931 entitled *Paris, Champ de Mars depuis la Tour Eiffel* (Paris, Champ de Mars from the Eiffel Tower).<sup>194</sup>

'Should the Eiffel Tower be knocked down?' A look back at a survey from 1929

In June 1929, literary critic Gaston Picard launched a provocative survey to mark the 40th anniversary of the Eiffel Tower: '*Faut-il renverser la tour Eiffel*'<sup>195</sup> (Should the Eiffel Tower be knocked down?).

The answers were often funny, such as Clément Vautel's proposal to flip the Tower over and stand it on its tip: 'And what a symbol of our world this would be, where everything is upside down ...' Fernand Vanderem wanted to award the Tower the Croix de Guerre for services rendered during the Great War. Georges-Armant Masson praised its developing role in 'radiophony'. Conversely, the sculptor Paul Landowski mentioned, 'The Eiffel Tower is not beautiful'. The very reactionary Guy de la Fourchadière considered that it did not correspond to the idea one had 'of a monument

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193 'Gong tam tam zanzibar jungle beast x-ray lancet symphony/ You are everything/ Tower/ Ancient God/ Modern Beats/ Solar Phantom/ Subject of my poem/ Tower/ Towering over the world/ Moving Tower'

194 This photograph is in the collections at the Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris).

195 Gaston Picard, « Faut-il renverser la Tour Eiffel? », *La Revue Mondiale*, 1 June 1929 and 15 June 1929. The following quotes are taken from both editions. On Picard, see: Anna Krykun, « La passion de l'enquête littéraire, ou l'étrange cas de M. Gaston Picard », *Fabula / Les colloques*, L'âge des enquêtes, Enquête sur les enquêtes (dir. Alexandre Gefen, Guillaume Métayer), URL : <http://www.fabula.org/colloques/document8033.php>, accessed on 28 April 2024.

today' because of its practical nature, a point of view which would have changed since the war. In his opinion, a monument should be related to death:

'A monument is a thing that is allowed not to be beautiful (and which sometimes abuses this prerogative) but must have a symbolic and, as far as possible, a funereal meaning. (...) The *Panthéon* is a mausoleum. The *Arc de Triomphe* is a tombstone. The *Invalides* is a necropolis for superior heroes. The *Dôme de l'Institut* is home to a graveyard where the shadows of the illustrious unburied dead wander ...'.<sup>196</sup>

On the contrary, Léo Poldès, a leftist and radio personality, described the Tower as the 'Pantheon of anthumous glories', i.e., living glories. He saw it as 'an indispensable monument', 'a 20th-century cathedral'. While la Fourchardière felt that the monument was condemned to be part of the past, it was quite the opposite for the journalist Armory (Chares Dauriac); the Tower was the promise that Paris was a city 'with a great future'. In fact, Georges Normandy argued that it was because the Tower was 'ahead of its time' that so many writers, painters, sculptors and architects were 'immediately nauseated' by it.

Jean Ajalbert of the Académie Goncourt also thought that 'without it, Paris is an old thing': 'What a sudden rejuvenation it brings, in a sky with new wings!' The young poet Blaise Cendrars, who was also interviewed as part of the survey, felt that it was time to rethink the concept of monuments: 'The great monumental constructions of the near future will be aeroplane stations in the middle of the ocean'. His friend Robert Delaunay, whom the investigator described as 'the Tower's resident portraitist', agreed: 'The Tower shows the near future', 'the best collective life', and something 'extremely vital' because new art, in his view, must turn away from 'reminiscence' and the 'corpse of the past'. Yet he was lucid and brave when he argued that the Tower's opponents reflected the 'mediocrity' that prevailed in 'artistic circles' where one could find 'the most retrograde, the most prejudiced people against everything that changes and transforms life'. Those who can transform and innovate were a 'minority', 'but like the visionary Eiffel, they are right regardless of the odds'. For Delaunay, 'the Tower has become one of the wonders of the world'. He 'loved' it and, through his paintings, demonstrated 'multiple forms of my (his) love'. Gustave Eiffel was one of the 'authentic inventors' who 'faced in their time the passive

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196 He evoked the Académie Française.

idiocy of those who are afraid'. The painter Delaunay believed in the 'Global Spirit of industry' as the vector of the 'dynamism of our modern life'. He saw the Eiffel Tower as the precursor of the 'Modern'age', as there had been the Middle Ages. He felt that Paris must be granted a 'new life,' and power must be given to those who 'love the light, the sky, the sun and speed.'

Delaunay mentioned the 'side of the idiots' that spawned the anti-Eiffel Tower 'followers'. The painter Von Dongen, on an ironic note, spoke of 'stupidity': 'Tomorrow will be free shaving day. I can easily envisage a monument dedicated to human stupidity, which would have the advantage over the Eiffel Tower in that it would never go out of fashion. To shave down the Eiffel Tower, call a barber'.

For Georges Delamare, director of radio broadcasts at the Eiffel Tower, the Tower was 'the only original building that the Republic has managed to create. Because the regime is rather weak in architecture ...'. Waldemar-George, an art critic with *La Revue Mondiale*, praised the Tower as the 'epitome of our age' and 'the clearest and most uncluttered example of contemporary art':

'The Tower defies the traditional laws of statistics, equilibrium and gravity. It marks a new attitude of humankind towards the world. Its perforated volume, its aerial, clerestory carcass, rises into the infinite. In my eyes, it embodies the concept of abstract architecture, without object or purpose, of mental architecture, the pure poetry of forms staggered through space'.

Most contributors agreed that the Tower was 'now part of the Parisian landscape'. In a sense, it progressively became a familiar feature, 'Is the Tower beautiful or ugly?' André Foy wonders. 'My God! It has been in the same spot for so long that one no longer knows. (...) It's an old acquaintance ... and then, Paris without it ...'. The former combatant writer Maurice Genevoix wrote something similar: 'Now that it is past its flowering, that it is part of the landscape, even of the Parisian family, let us allow it to radio broadcast and erect its vertical advertisement in the night. Whether it is ugly or not, we will no longer know: it is there.'

Some past opponents made amends, such as the writer Yvonne Sarcey. In 1889, she thought that 'nothing in the world' seemed uglier to her than the Tower: 'So let's keep this once cursed forty-odd year old, so beautiful on certain evenings with her fiery illuminations, she has earned her rightful place.'

Le Corbusier, an apostle of the 'machinist civilisation' and a member of the younger generation of artists who wanted to overturn the old order, wrote an inspired preface to Charles Cordat's book *La Tour Eiffel*, based on a collection of drawings and photos of the monument. It was an opportunity for him to mention an anecdote: 'I heard his voice on the telephone around 1923. I asked him for an illustration of the Garabit Bridge for an article in *L'Esprit Nouveau* entitled *Pérennité*'. Le Corbusier neatly summarised the reasons for the overall hostility shown by academicism:

'Its height, line, appearance? Pathetically, solemnly and pompously proclaimed a holy horror in the Artists' Protest, who called for the worksite to be closed! Artists and engineers? A hiatus, incompatible! Little did we know that the time would come when artists, engineers and architects would (will) be unified in the caste of builders.'<sup>197</sup>

Le Corbusier was right to claim that Eiffel had been 'saddened not to have been recognised as a donor of beauty' because 'his desire was elegance'. Indeed, Gustave Eiffel, replying to his critics in *Le Temps* (14 February 1887), defended the artistic dimension of his project: 'The Tower will have a beauty of its own'. Roland Barthes recognised that the Tower was 'a sign of boldness and modernity that has become over time a work of art, a work of laced iron, a sign of lightness and, through its verticality, of the impossibility for Man to reach the sky'. A year later, in 1929, Le Corbusier ideated the *Plan Voisin*, which aimed to destroy the centre of Paris to erect gigantic towers. This plan would be fiercely criticised. He then drew a sketch showing the *Arc de Triomphe*, Notre-Dame and the Pantheon (small-sized) facing a giant Eiffel Tower, with the following caption: 'The future of Paris today faces the same ghosts as in 1887'.<sup>198</sup>

## Conclusion

A study of the reactions to the Eiffel Tower reveals the conformism that prevailed in French artistic circles and the difficulty the fledgling Third Republic had in winning a foothold in people's minds. The Tower embodies a new conception of Beauty, blurring the boundaries between art and

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197 Le Corbusier, préface Charles Cordat, *La Tour Eiffel*, éd. de Minuit, 1955. See also: Le Corbusier, « Vers le Paris de l'époque machiniste », supplément au *Bulletin du Redressement français*, 15 février 1928.

198 Gustave Eiffel. *Le magicien du fer*, Paris, Skira/Flammarion, 2009, p. 235.

non-art, between artistic and technical objects. Minds were not ready to accept such a revolution. The Tower also testifies to the persistent resistance in the late 19th century to the establishment of the industrial world, which was perceived as an attack on a natural, imaginary order willed by God.

Artists played an essential role in the process of de-ideologising the Eiffel Tower. They deactivated it politically. At the same time, they brought it into another dimension, transforming it from a technical feat into a poetic promise. It was they who were responsible for the first step in making the Tower a heritage site. By representing the Tower, they contributed to its cultural and patrimonial emergence. Gustave Eiffel saved it by showing its military and scientific utility. But it was the artists who made it a part of our heritage, and unbeknownst to its creator, the new landscape that the Tower created in Paris made it famous the world over. However, its first mission, commemorating 1789, has disappeared.

This 'absurd prodigy' has become a worldwide hyper-monument, in other words, a monument that defies time, attracts and inspires as if it were a work of art that is still relevant today. It survives, and it is alive. So much so that its creator and the circumstances in which it was created may remain unknown in the sole interest of its ability to appeal to future generations. The Eiffel Tower is the most striking illustration of this modernity, which means that a work of art can escape its creators and belong to its future, i.e., to those who will see and interpret it. Another monument falls into this category: the Statue of Liberty.

The ultimate irony, however, is that the Eiffel Tower wasn't included in the supplementary list of historic monuments until André Malraux became General de Gaulle's Minister of Culture. This happened in 1964, the year Roland Barthes wrote his enlightened text on the Eiffel Tower. It was finally granted institutional heritage status, albeit timidly, as it was not listed as a '*Monument Historique*', the highest form of protection. And unbelievably, 60 years later, it still hasn't. Anne Hidalgo, the mayor of Paris, refused to submit the application in 2024.<sup>199</sup> The Iron Lady has a consolation prize; it has been listed on UNESCO's World Heritage List since 1991. But the Eiffel Tower can live without a certification!

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199 In response to the controversy surrounding this refusal, Anne Hidalgo explained that the Paris City Council would be allocating €360 million to the 20th renovation of the Eiffel Tower, starting in 2020.



### 3 France's unwanted gift to America: the Statue of Liberty

A new Statue of Liberty museum opened in 2019. It provided a new narrative of the iconic monument, which we took part in.<sup>200</sup> This rewriting of the narrative moved away from the silences and clichés found in the older museum presentation and came closer to historic reality. It is worth paying attention to a theme that re-emerged in a critical way: the reticent, not to say humiliating welcome the Americans gave to a work that was meant to embody the friendship between the two peoples, but which was actually used for political and geopolitical aims. Exploring this theme was a chance to examine the ontology of heritage which is combined in a chemically pure way in the monumental Liberty project.<sup>201</sup>

Even though the artist has been largely eclipsed by the lasting worldwide fame of his colossal work, we should not forget that *Liberty Enlightening the World* was first and foremost the project of one man, Auguste Bartholdi (1834–1904), who was seeking to show off his artistry (he spoke of achieving his ‘great artistic dream’) and to promote his humanist conception of the world.<sup>202</sup> But to grasp the originality and complexity of the Statue of Liberty, we need to bring out the triple ambition upon which it was based:

- a celebration of Franco-American friendship at a time when France had been defeated by Prussia (1871)
- a reminder of the important historical role that France has played in helping the Americans break free of the British crown and achieve independence

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200 Robert Belot, *The Statue of Liberty. The Monumental Dream*, New York, Rizzoli, 2019.

201 The main sources used in elaborating this text come from the archives of the Colmar Museum (Bartholdi's letters to his mother), from the CNAM – Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers in Paris (mainly concerning the French and American press) and from the New York Public Library (Bartholdi's letters to Richard Butler; various documents about the American Committee of the Statue of Liberty and Bartholdi's notebook during his first stay in the US). We found a pioneering work helpful: Paul-Ernest Koenig, « Bartholdi et l'Amérique », *La Vie en Alsace*, Strasbourg, August 1934, n° 8.

202 Robert Belot, *Bartholdi, L'Homme qui inventa la Liberté*, Paris, Ellipse, 2019.



- an encouragement for republican and democratic values at a time when monarchies still prevailed.<sup>203</sup>

The ultimate issue is geopolitical, as Édouard de Laboulaye, the philosophical founder of the project, pointed out: 'More than ever, since fortune has betrayed us, we must strive to claim and to defend what we did not deserve to lose'.<sup>204</sup> In concrete terms, the aim for France was to regain its position in international relations, now that Germany had become the dominant power in Europe. It was also important to see that France's rivals (Great Britain, Russia, Germany) had already grasped the importance of a special relationship with America. In these conditions, would it be true to say that the Statue of Liberty is an 'empty icon'?<sup>205</sup>

The case perfectly reflects the process whereby a patrimonial initiative taking place in the present (in a specific context) and summoning up the past (a historic event), acts as a commitment to the future (affirming the friendship between two peoples and the development of democratic systems of government). Far from idealising the past, it is a promise turned towards the future. Far from being gratuitous, it aims to lay a foundation and be useful. The Statue was designed as a democratic monument in itself, needing the approval of the people (of two peoples) in its funding and communication. It thus embodies the first experience where a subscription, as such, was seen as matching the political stakes of a project and the meaning of the work's message. It corresponds to the rise of a mass culture where public opinion had become an independent force and the press a vital factor.

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203 A caricature by Alfred Le Petit highlights the philosophical/political meaning of Liberty. We can see the authoritarian face of Liberty contemplating a tiny globe with a crown facing a throne. Liberty's thumb is wiping away the crown. The Republic had to overthrow regimes which were, at the time, mainly non-republican: Touchatout, *Le Trocadéroscope. Revue Tintamarresque de l'Exposition Universelle*, Paris, 1878.

204 Letter from Laboulaye, written to the newspaper 'editors' on 30 June 1876. It comes with two notes of explanation. CNAM archives. Laboulaye explains that Great Britain, 'after one hundred years of rivalry and resentment, has the sole aim of beginning a new era of more cordial relations with America'; Russian diplomacy already has 'excellent relations with the great Republic'; Germany 'is competing with us for the old affections of Washington's countrymen and is striving to impose the prestige of its politics and the influence of its race'.

205 Albert Boime, « La statue de la Liberté: une icône vide », *Le Débat*, 1987, n° 44, p. 143.

But the appeal to the people(s) had very little resemblance to the hopes its promoters had placed in it. It was a great disappointment that almost wrecked the project and showed, along with the drawbacks of the subscription system, the lack of psychological harmony between the French and American peoples and the difficulty of 'selling' a monument with an abstract meaning to the peoples. The unvarnished history of the funding of this private, monumental and bi-national work, funded by public subscription, shows how a project filled with the idealism of its creators became 'an unwanted gift' that almost wrecked the idea the two people had of themselves and almost led to a diplomatic crisis.

To date, with few exceptions, narratives<sup>206</sup> have preferred to pass over in silence or to minimise this reality. One can see why: it is hard for myths to withstand the prosaic and critical eye of the anthropological historian. But the eventful genesis of the monumental statue can help us to see beyond the social imagination that it engendered and to examine the complexity of Franco-American relations based on a kind of 'reluctant fascination'.<sup>207</sup>

### *The French liberals' myth of Franco-American friendship*

Auguste Bartholdi recalled the initial idea of sending a French monument to the United States in 1885, in a publication produced by the *North American Review* to help finance the Pedestal: *The Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World*. According to Bartholdi, the encounter with Laboulaye took place in 1865, in Glatigny, near Versailles, during a dinner.<sup>208</sup> The jurist liked to invite a circle of friends to his family home in Glatigny. The guests included the historian Henri Martin and Charles de Rémusat (who married La Fayette's granddaughter), a member of the French committee of the Franco-American Union. We have no written proof of this (apart from Bartholdi's own account), even though everyone who has written on the

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206 Albert Boimelbert, *The Unveiling of the National Icons: A Plea for Patriotic Iconoclasm in a Nationalist Era*, U.K., Cambridge University Press, 1998; Robert Belot, « La liberté sans fard. Comment fut inventée l'icône républicaine la plus connue au monde », in *La Muse Républicaine. Artistes et pouvoir, 1870–1900*, Gand-Courtaai (Belgium), Snoeck, 2010, p. 96 – 117.

207 Jacques Portes, *Une Fascination Réticente. Les États-Unis dans l'opinion française, 1870–1914*, Nancy, Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1990.

208 In fact, their first meeting was in 1862, when Bartholdi gave Laboulaye a copy of *Curiosités d'Alsace*, a journal recently founded by his brother, Charles.

subject mentions the anecdote.<sup>209</sup> Auguste, who was not known for his success as a student and always remained at heart a provincial in Paris, was very impressed by the 'eminent political men of letters'. Laboulaye strongly appealed to the young Auguste, since the latter sculpted his bust in terracotta and exhibited the work at the 1866 Salon.

In the course of the evening, according to Auguste's own account, the conversation turned to international relations. Laboulaye put forward an idea he had long cherished, and which he developed in the letter he sent to Adolphe Schaeffer in 1867 for his book *De la Bonté Morale, ou Esquisse d'une apologie du christianisme*.<sup>210</sup> The professor at the Collège de France wanted to convince readers to take inspiration from the principle of friendship that Aristotle recommended as a way of improving relations between people and states. Laboulaye applied Aristotle's idea by explaining that the ideal of friendship 'is maternal love, the affection that asks for nothing in return, and which only aims at the loved one's happiness'. This is the definition of a liberty for liberty's sake, which is not based on any political ideology or a collective project that the State might implement. It was an individualistic form of liberty matching the liberal ideal and the prevailing view of the American system of government.

Someone might retort that a feeling of gratitude cannot exist between nations, due to questions of interests, power and geopolitics. Some of the guests thought that because of its Empire, France could no longer count on evoking a close and emotional past shared with the United States. A break had occurred in politics, strategy and friendship. Laboulaye pointed out that such a special link, proved in blood, did not exist between France and Italy. He was convinced, however, that the United States had more sympathy for France than for any other European country, since its sympathy was based on powerful memories of a 'community of thought and combat' but also on shared aspirations. Of their own free will, French people had fought and died for US independence. This was not only assistance given to an ally, but a 'fraternity of feelings', a 'community of efforts and emotions'. Such an urge from the heart could only have positive results and serve the future relations between the nations. In a clear allusion to the current situation in Europe (an Empire hostile to America), Laboulaye tried to explain that the actions of governments needed to be distinguished from popular

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209 See in particular, Jacques Betz, *Bartholdi*, Paris, Minuit, 1954, p. 67.

210 Letter from Édouard de Laboulaye (2 December 1867), in Adolphe Schaeffer, *De la Bonté Morale, ou Esquisse d'une apologie du christianisme*, 1868.

feeling, where the memory of mutual friendship was still alive. He went on to declare, prophetically: 'If ever a monument were erected in America to commemorate its independence, it seems to me quite natural that it should be built through a shared effort from the two nations'.<sup>211</sup> Auguste pointed out that he was quoting from memory, but the conversation was not published until that day in 1885.

From the beginning, the Monument's aim was to commemorate a historic event – US Independence – even though it also clearly aimed at reviving a shared ideal and looked towards a new common future. Laboulaye expressed himself on the subject in 1876 in the preface he wrote for Léon Chotteau's book, *La Guerre d'Indépendance (1775–1783)*. *Les Français en Amérique*: 'To revive memories, to recall a glorious past and to give the union between the two peoples an eloquent symbol, we had the idea of erecting a colossal statue at the entrance to New York Bay that would convey to remote posterity the memory of the eternal friendship between France and America'.<sup>212</sup> So the aim was also to evoke the friendship between peoples and to revive links that had been temporarily weakened. The target was definitely 1876, the centenary of US Independence (but the aim was not achieved, since the inauguration finally took place 10 years later, in 1886). Is the 'we' used by Laboulaye an example of the 'majestic plural' or was he including the sculptor? In the speech he gave at the Paris Opera on 25 April 1876, during a musical evening organised by the Franco-American Union, the constitutional expert rendered to Auguste the things which were Auguste's: 'To celebrate these dates, a symbol was called for, and we were looking for this symbol when a talented artist, an artist who is dear to us, one of the sons Alsace who has remained French, Mr Bartholdi, had the idea of the monument you can see depicted at the back of the room [Applause]'.<sup>213</sup>

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211 Allen Thorndike Rice, *The Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World*, described by the Sculptor Frédéric Bartholdi, published for the benefit of the Pedestal Fund, by the *North American Review*, New York, 1885, p. 14. In fact, Rice translated Bartholdi's text.

212 Édouard de Laboulaye, preface to Léon Chotteau, *La Guerre d'Indépendance (1775–1783)*. *Les Français en Amérique*, Paris, Charpentier et Cie, 1876. Our emphasis.

213 « Le discours de M. Laboulaye », *L'Événement*, 1 May 1876. CNAM archives.

*Idealisation of the 'great Republic' under the Second Empire*

The aim was to promote a certain idea of liberty, and since 1865, Laboulaye had seen this liberty with the features of a woman. As he said in a speech given in Versailles in December 1865, mentioned above, he saw her as the 'mother of a family', a protector, and not a fanatic 'in a Phrygian cap with a pike in her hand, dead bodies under her feet, disturbing the peace and filling the streets with blood'. The jurist repeated this theme, with very few variations, in his speech at the Opera.<sup>214</sup> For Laboulaye, the mother is the opposite of the vengeful woman portrayed by Delacroix in his famous '28 July 1830, Liberty Leading the People to the Barricades'. Two years earlier, in 1863, in *Paris en Amérique*, Laboulaye developed the metaphor of light and shade to show France plunged in darkness but glimpsing the light of resurrection from the other side of the Atlantic. The metaphor already combines the idea of a flame, liberty and a smile that the Statue was to symbolise and personify so well:

'Perhaps one day, in the light of my lantern, you will see all the ugliness of the idols you worship today; and perhaps, beyond the diminishing shadow, you will glimpse, in all the charm of *her immortal smile*, liberty, the sister of justice and mercy, the mother of equality, abundance and peace. On that day, dear reader, do not let *the flame be quenched* which I am handing on to you; *enlighten the youth* who are already hurrying and pushing us, asking us the way to the future'.<sup>215</sup>

The idea of associating the symbols of the flame and the woman with America was clearly an obsessive one for the jurist. From the beginning, the Statue of Liberty was more than a statue. It was the symbol of French-American friendship or the commemoration of Independence. It embodied the political thinking of the liberals during the Second Empire.

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214 'The statue was well chosen – Liberty, but American Liberty. It is not liberty with a Phrygian cap on its head and a pike in its hand, trampling over dead bodies. Our own is holding a torch – not a torch to burn things down, but the flame that enlightens others, the Tablets of the Law'. « Le discours de M. Laboulaye », *L'Événement*, 1 May 1876. Bartholdi archive, CNAM.

215 René Lefebvre (pseudonym of Laboulaye), *Paris en Amérique*, Paris, Charpentier, 1868. The quotation is taken from the address 'To the reader' which begins the book, and which is ironically referenced: 'New-Liberty (Virginia), 4 July 1862'. In fact, Laboulaye had never set foot in the United States. The idea of 'liberty' was already central to his outlook.

A tragic event that took place a few days before the dinner in Glatigny explains this declaration of principle against political violence. The discussion could hardly fail to focus on the news of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, the man who had abolished slavery in the United States, on 14 April 1865. Laboulaye spoke of his vision of America at length. Everyone was celebrating the North's victory. Laboulaye recalled that during a debate in 1862 he had encouraged the French to 'line up behind Lincoln and the North, and to hold aloft with a firm hand the old French flag with the word Liberty written on it'. He summed up his position: 'Today, we have seen a great people rise up to abolish the infamous institution of slavery and, all over Europe, all hearts have been beating for Lincoln, the wood cutter who became the president of the United States and gave freedom to four million people'. Bartholdi, who was from a family of Freemasons and humanists, could only support Laboulaye's point of view and deplore the assassination. He took part in the collection to create a gold medal dedicated to Mary Todd Lincoln, the wife of the US president. In a recently discovered photo, we can see an event held in Bartholdi's honour on the property of Henry Spaulding in Maisons-Laffitte on 14 July 1888. Spaulding was a Francophile businessman, the treasurer of the Franco-American Committee, and a friend of Laboulaye and of the sculptor. In the photo, I have formally identified one of Lincoln's sons, Robert Todd Lincoln.<sup>216</sup>

The tragic assassination triggered strong emotions in the Grand Orient of France. J.-T. Hayère, honorary Superior Great Custodian of the Oriental Masonic Order of Misraim, pronounced the American's funeral oration. In his view, what Lincoln represented was a conception of the free man: 'Slavery! And to think that in the 19th century this social calamity still sullies part of the globe!' Thanks to Lincoln, America had attracted men of progress and become a reference in masonic culture. Thus, the Venerable leader of the Reunited Hearts Lodge in Paris, in 1869, declared: 'If you are asked which head of government has sacrificed his life to free the United States from shameful slavery, you will proudly quote, to all nations, our Ill. F. : President Abraham Lincoln, whose generous blood fructified liberty on the American soil.' This event played no small part in Auguste Bartholdi joining the Grand Orient of France.

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216 Robert Belot, *Bartholdi. Portrait intime du sculpteur*, Bernardswiller, I.D. L'Édition, 2016, p. 5.

A tendency to idealise the American Republic seized opponents of Napoleon III's regime.<sup>217</sup> Every Monday, five hundred young men came to the Collège de France to hear him praise the US institutions. Why is American 'fashionable', and why do we 'admire the American people?' he asked. First of all, because this people 'has vigorously overcome an unprecedented civil war and defeated sedition without taking refuge in a dictatorship, which is always fatal to liberty'; next, and above all, in his view, 'because America is an example of an all-powerful democracy owing its prosperity and greatness only to itself': 'Here is a model for old Europe, a constant focus for all eyes; the problem we have been facing for 80 years, with so much agitation and misery, has been resolved in the United States'. And to what do the Americans owe their success? To their capacity for moving away from the old European culture: 'As emigrants from the old Europe, they left behind royalty, the aristocracy, the Church, centralisation and standing armies: privilege has never set foot in their country'. For the historian, with his optimistic tone, America is 'the reign of perfect equality and perfect liberty' which has developed due to a shared effort in favour of education.<sup>218</sup>

In his public speeches, Édouard de Laboulaye liked to highlight two of America's main virtues.<sup>219</sup> Education, first of all: 'Instead of taking round-about routes to boost the production of capital, the Americans get straight to the point and seek to perfect man himself. They address his intelligence, and they have taken the first place among civilised peoples'. Laboulaye especially appreciated and welcomed the fact that the citizens of Massachusetts had decided to build a statue to Horace Mann, the senator born in 1796 who was Secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Education and a great innovator in education. Next, the abolition of slavery: 'Today, we have seen a great people rise up to abolish the infamous institution of slavery and, all over Europe, all hearts have been beating for Lincoln, the

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217 The aim was not only to oppose domestic policy but also foreign policy. Napoleon III wanted to boost France's presence in America. From 1862, he developed the idea of setting up a conservative and Catholic monarchy in Mexico, in line with French interests. The Republic under President Benito Juárez was overturned in favour of the Habsburg Prince Maximilian, who was imposed as emperor of Mexico in 1864. But the move failed to take into account resistance from Mexican republicans, who succeeded in overthrowing the new regime in 1867.

218 Émile Jonveaux, *L'Amérique actuelle* (introduction by Édouard Laboulaye), Paris, Charpentier, 1869, p. 10.

219 Upper Free Primary School, Versailles. Prize-giving ceremony. Speech by Edouard Laboulaye. Versailles, Imprimerie Aubert. 1866 and 1867.

wood cutter who became president of the United States and gave freedom to four million people'. The election of the Republican Grant, in 1868, was welcomed by French liberals, who saw in him anti-slavery personified, while his Democrat rival, Horatio Seymour, had denounced the slavery Emancipation Proclamation as 'unwise, unjust and unconstitutional'.<sup>220</sup> A political regime that permits these things can only be a model. For Laboulaye, as he wrote in 1871, 'the Republic best suited to France is the one resembling the governments of the United States and of Switzerland'.<sup>221</sup> Laboulaye introduced Bartholdi to an ideal America, forgetting the annihilation of the Indians, racial prejudice, the scale of German emigration<sup>222</sup> (we should recall that Bartholdi fought against the Prussians in 1870) and US neutrality during the war.<sup>223</sup>

We can see why Laboulaye became the first president of the Franco-American Committee, in charge of collecting funds to finance the gigantic project. Laboulaye was very well known on the other side of the Atlantic. His *Paris en Amérique* was a best-seller that was translated across the Atlantic. In 1866, he translated and provided notes for the *Memoirs of Benjamin Franklin; Written by Himself*. Laboulaye was a member of the New-York and Massachusetts Historical Societies, and his prestige and network within the US elite would be of great use to the sculptor.

### The American dream to forget France's defeat by Prussia

During the Franco-Prussian War, Bartholdi served as a soldier-citizen as Garibaldi's aide-de-camp. His native Alsace, where his mother still lived, was under the German yoke. He lived in Paris, a witness to the violence of the Commune. He was filled with a feeling of bitterness. On 4 March

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220 See Léon Chotteau, *Les Véritables Républicains. Biographies de Ulysses S. Grant, président, et Schuyler Colfax, vice-président de la République des Etats-Unis*, Paris, Degorce-Cadot, 1869.

221 Édouard de Laboulaye, *La République Constitutionnelle*, Paris, Charpentier, 1871, p.9.

222 At the beginning of the 20th century, the German-language press accounted for 80 % of foreign-language newspapers in the US, and German was the second most widely spoken language in the country. See: Denis Lacorne, *La crise de l'identité américaine*, Paris, Gallimard ('Tel'), 1997–2003, p. 160.

223 We sometimes forget the US declaration of neutrality during the Franco-Prussian war, signed by President Grant on 22 August 1870, and his letter of congratulations sent to Emperor Wilhelm II soon after his victory over France.



1871, he wrote: 'The decrepitude of our country has brought us to our current situation'. The Republic has risen from the disaster, but as it were accidentally. The reactionaries were in control of a Republic without republicans. And he sometimes feared that this National Assembly ('A horrible Assembly', in Gambetta's words), due to its conservatism, might trigger 'revolutionary reactions'. Auguste was not a revolutionary, but he hated the moral order that had been established in France. He criticised the project to build a basilica in Montmartre for the expiation of the French people. He would have preferred a huge monument dedicated to his hero, Léon Gambetta. True republicans wondered how France could reconquer the place it had once had among nations. With a heavy heart Bartholdi decided to go to America in 1871. He intended to take up a challenge, which was actually to implement Laboulaye's idea.

It was natural that Auguste should confide his decision to Laboulaye to 'get some fresh air elsewhere' in a letter on 8 May 1871:

'I thought it was the right time to make the journey, which I had the honour of discussing with you, and I made arrangements to leave this month for the United States. So I have come to ask, my dear sir, for the powerful support you were kind enough to promise me; I have come to ask you for a few letters that could give me credit among the Associations, in the press or the government. I hope to make contacts with art lovers, to find great works to do, but I hope most of all to carry out my project for a monument in honour of Independence. I have read and am again re-reading your works on this subject, and I hope to do justice to your friendship, which will support me. *I will seek to glorify the Republic and Liberty over there, until I find it again in our homeland, if possible...*<sup>224</sup>

This letter proves that Bartholdi already had the idea of a commemorative monument before sailing across the Atlantic. But beyond the project's heritage aspect, there was a political goal: the Republic.

On 29 May 1871, the young sculptor was in Versailles. He met up with the French Americanist, who gave him the precious addresses of Americans who might help him. Auguste wrote to his mother: 'I have seen Mr Laboulaye, who encouraged me in person as much as he did in his letter. I cannot yet say what I will do, I will have to make contact with various

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224 Bartholdi's letter to Laboulaye, Colmar, 8 May 1871. Bartholdi Museum archives. Cited by J. Betz, *op.cit.*, p. 98.

people...’ In *The Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World*, Bartholdi also explains that Laboulaye encouraged him in his project and gave him a roadmap:

‘Go to see the country. You will study it and you will come back and give us your impressions. Suggest to our friends to create a monument with us, a shared project, in memory of the old Franco-American friendship. We will organise a subscription in France. If you come up with a good idea, a plan that might arouse the enthusiasm of the public, we are convinced that success will be guaranteed on both continents, and we will undertake a job that will have a great ethical impact.’

The site where the project could be achieved was spotted by Bartholdi from the bridge of the French Line ship, the *Pereire*, on his arrival in New York at 4 o'clock in the morning on 21 June 1871. He told his mother that it was like an illumination: Bedloe's Island, just facing New York. An intuition of genius. So the Statue of Liberty was not a commission. It was the megalomaniac project of an artist alone, originally inspired by an intellectual, in a very specific political context. It would take 15 years for the work to be completed, after countless struggles (both technical and political) waged by Bartholdi and costing him a lot of money. As he told a journalist, once his work was complete: ‘My Statue of Liberty was purely a work of love which cost me ten years of work and 20,000 francs’.<sup>225</sup>

After his arrival in the United States, one of the first people Bartholdi met, on 23 June 1871, was Miss Mary Louise Booth, a translator, author and publisher, who played a major role in the New York intellectual abolitionist milieu. In fact she translated Édouard Laboulaye's ironic work, *Paris en Amérique*. Booth gave Bartholdi the names of several people who might support his project. On 5 July, Bartholdi visited Charles Sumner, who would be of great help to him later. Sumner was a Republican senator from the state of Massachusetts who had been recommended by Laboulaye. The latter praised him as one of the leaders of abolitionism at the first session of the French Committee for the emancipation of slaves, which was held in 1865.<sup>226</sup> Auguste saw him later in Paris, and introduced him to the great

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225 Interview with Bartholdi by a New York journalist, quoted by André Gschaedler, *Vérité sur la Statue de la Liberté et son créateur*, Jérôme Do Bentzinger Editeur, Colmar, 1992, p. 26. Our emphasis.

226 Barry Moreno, *The Statue of Liberty Encyclopedia*, Simon & Schuster, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Singapore, 2000, p. 95.

French politician, Léon Gambetta.<sup>227</sup> Bartholdi was also a guest of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, a poet translated by Baudelaire, a professor at Harvard, a figure in the abolitionist combat and a friend of Laboulaye. He received support from Colonel John Wein Forney, an exceptional resourceful aid to his project. Forney was an anti-slavery Democrat with extensive knowledge of the Senate, where he had served as a secretary from 1861 to 1868 thanks to the support of Abraham Lincoln. He founded the influential *Philadelphia Press* and was a backer of the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. He was immediately won over to the cause and was present in 1875, in Paris, at the launch of the subscription for the Statue. He was also a pillar of the US Committee.

We can see that Bartholdi found himself among the friends of Laboulaye, intellectuals engaged in the fight against slavery and against the Confederates. But the sculptor soon noticed that they were not representative of American society as a whole.

### *Was America banking on a German Europe?*

Laboulaye and Bartholdi sincerely believed that unconditional, lasting and free links of affection united France and America. But they also knew that after the French defeat in 1871 and the birth of a powerful Germany, France needed to find geopolitical allies. Their contemporaries did not necessarily share the idealisation of republican America and did not always understand their strategy.

Like Léon Gambetta, the republican left, which gained momentum from 1875, 'rejected any kinship, other than a formal one, with the regime of Washington or Lincoln'.<sup>228</sup> The right-wing press was generally little in favour of France and America drawing closer together, given the US positions during the Franco-Prussian War. This attitude was deplored in the French press in the United States, as seen in the *Courrier des États-Unis* (the main French-language paper in New York and a mouthpiece for the Franco-American population). It criticised *Le Figaro* which, 'like all the monarchist newspapers, has no great sympathy for the American republic and never misses a chance to make some poisonous remark about it'. But

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227 We should note that Gambetta was an Americanophile under the Empire, like Laboulaye, but later became very critical towards the American model, like the rest of the French left.

228 Jacques Portes, *op.cit.*, p. 155.

*Le Courrier des États-Unis* recognised that the recent past in Franco-American relations did not justify the Committee's optimism. 'It is true that during the (Franco-Prussian) war, American sympathies were very generally in favour of Germany, which most newspapers described as "the champion of freedom and civilisation"'. But the journalist would like to believe that a 'major reaction' had taken place since then, especially due to the fact that France has introduced republican institutions.

It should be remembered that after the fall of the Empire, France disappeared from the American's strategic horizons to be replaced by Germany, the only European power than counted for the US. In *L'Année Terrible*, Victor Hugo expressed despair in seeing President Grant praise the new emperor of Germany on 7 February 1871. Those who, like Bartholdi, had set sail for America from June 1871, were few and seen as 'bad' Frenchmen. In a letter to his mother written on board ship on 17 June 1871, Auguste wrote: 'There are not very many passengers, although it is the holiday season. This is probably due to France's troubled state'. The past seemed to have been overtaken by *realpolitik*. For the majority of French and American people, La Fayette is no longer anything but a figure of style for nostalgic men of letters and diplomats lacking in inspiration. Republican America was admirable, but during the Empire! The reactionaries in power do not like America.

The attitude of the US government during the war of 1870 was hard for some newspapers to accept. This was the case of *La Gazette*, which declared its 'patriotic antipathy' in April 1876, the day after the lyrical festivities at the Opera:

'We are asked for French money to build a colossal monument in New York Bay as a symbol of the indestructible alliance between France and the United States. It remains to be seen if this alliance has ever been real, effective or profitable to the serious interests of our dear homeland.'

The newspaper gave the example of the Franco-Prussian War and stated that France could not claim to have obtained anything more than dearly paid services:

'And shall we recall the distressing memories of 1870 and 1871? Shall we show the United States, remaining indifferent and as if ashamed of their old friendship, while the power of the modern Teutons invaded our France, betrayed by its leaders? Shall we describe, even briefly, the infamous agreements made between American citizens and the sinister

reprobates in the United States who wore the honourable insignia of French civil servants? Shall we recall the wooden rifles, the guns without touch holes, the spoiled biscuits, the half-rotten clothes that our dear allies, including sometimes from the very highest official circles, sent us for astronomical sums? No, we won't. Because all of this is still present in the minds of each of us. The wound is not yet healed. We have seen, on this occasion, face to face, the emptiness of the pompous declarations and the dazzling promises.'

The journalist criticised Laboulaye for not understanding the America of today, for only seeing it from his 'peaceful study in Glatigny'. He particularly criticised him for failing to see that American public opinion no longer loved France. Why? It has undergone a 'radical' change in the past 30 years following the 'German invasion', which changed it into a 'docile serf under German influence'. If he was to be believed, 'our disasters hardly roused any pity', while 'each Prussian victory triggered a cry of joy'.

The journalist criticised the fact that the 'so-called liberals' were determined to base 'our young Republic' on the American example, which 'banks its entire future on domestic and material prosperity'. America, with its 'infamies' cannot correspond to 'our ideal of the true, sincere and honest Republic'. Laboulaye and Bartholdi's project thus seemed like a form of 'anti-patriotism'.

### *The difficulties of implementing history's first bi-national 'fund-raising' campaign*

Right from the start, it was agreed that the statue was not a gift from the French government but from the French people. This was clearly shown in the first subscription appeal made on 28 September 1875: 'This monument would be jointly undertaken by the two peoples linked in a fraternal work, as they once were during the founding of American Independence. We will make the statue a homage to our friends in America; they will join us in paying for the cost of creating and erecting a monument for the statue's pedestal'.

The organisers wanted to obtain popular blessing: 'Let the number of signatories bear witness to the sentiments of France. The lists were to be collected in volumes and given to our friends in America'. So an association was put in charge of the 'fund-raising' campaign, as we would say today.

This was the Franco-American Union set up in 1875 with headquarters at 175 Rue Saint-Honoré in Paris. The first subscription forms show the memorial aspect of the project: 'Subscription to the construction of a monument in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of US Independence'. On 28 September 1875, the subscription appeal was launched and widely covered in the press.<sup>229</sup> The appeal aimed to be both a hymn of love to America (the 'great Republic'), a celebration of the past and of the 'old and strong friendship that has long united the two peoples' and an act of faith in 'French genius'. The political aspect was brought out discreetly. In the letter he sent to the president of the Cercle Français de L'Harmonie in New York informing him about the appeal and asking him to set up a committee in America, Laboulaye had no hesitation in saying that 'all the liberal press is warmly supporting us here'.

The first lists of subscribers were issued by the Committee and published by Parisian and regional newspapers. *L'Echo de la Creuse* expressed its joy on 4 December 1875 that 'public opinion in France has sensed everything that is great and useful in the work of the Franco-American Union, and all politicians truly worthy of the name are of the same mind on this subject'. On 10 December, and taken up by other newspapers, *Le Temps* cited a few 'interesting' subscriptions: the French President gave 500 francs, the ministers 1,000 francs, the city of Le Havre 1000, Rouen 500, Amiens 300, Meaux 200, the Marquis de Rochambeau 1000 francs, Casimir-Perrier 200 francs, Cernuschi 300 and the Valenciennes Chamber of Commerce 500 francs. The biggest sum was donated by the Paris City Council: 10,000 francs. Some papers, such as *Le Bien Public* (6 November 1875), welcomed the effort made by small contributors, which gave a 'truly national character' to the project, 'the work of all the French people': 'Great and small, rich and poor, all want to make a contribution, even a modest one'. In 1875, it was believed that the subscription would reach its goal in one year's time. But it was actually reached in 1880... A total of 100,000 subscribers was announced. The figure is unverifiable but probably exaggerated. In fact, by the end of 1875, thanks to a large donation from the Grand Orient of France, the subscription had collected 400,000 francs.<sup>230</sup>

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229 We have used the press documents for the Statue of Liberty in the archives of the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers in Paris. They were donated by Auguste Bartholdi's widow.

230 Jacques Betz, *Bartholdi*, *op.cit.*, p. 128.

The members of the Committee proved to be particularly inventive in keeping the press on the alert and mobilising the country's elites. They understood that attention would decrease (as would the funds raised), if events were not organised to make the news.

On Saturday 6 November 1875, the Committee organised a grand 'banquet' at the Grand Hôtel du Louvre where, for the first time, the Statue was unveiled. This first major promotional event was presided by Laboulaye.<sup>231</sup> The Statue was projected onto a large, luminous screen in the centre of a wall at the back of the room. The projection was the work of Pierre Petit, the most famous photographer of the time, and was based on the canvas made for the Lion in 1873. There was also a model of the statue in the room. The speeches show the political aspect of a project that is still often presented as simply a historic commemoration. The political dimension of the project was affirmed during the great banquet organised by the Committee on Saturday 6 November 1875. A speaker explained that the idea of celebrating the centenary of the independence of the United States 'is a patriotic and even a political idea, as has been rightly said, but not the idea of a party'. The French MP, Henri Martin, who made the opening speech, had no hesitation in paying homage to the US model, 'a great political society' built 'on the principles of law and liberty'. He highlighted the fact that the memory of the help France had once given to America could reconcile two Frances: the 'new France' of 1789 and the 'old France' which could 'also claim its share'. This was of course a chance to point out that the grandson of La Fayette – 'a man who had the well-deserved honour of beginning the great era of 1789' – was a guest at the banquet.<sup>232</sup>

The elite of the period (especially in politics) answered the appeal: ministers (Léon Say, the finance minister, Henri Wallon, the education and religions minister), many MPs, mayors (from Nancy and Strasbourg, for example), city councillors from Paris, generals, members of the American 'colony' in Paris, diplomats, artists (Jean Léon Gérôme), architects (Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, who was directly involved in the Statue of Liberty project, but who died suddenly in 1879), writers (Alexandre Dumas fils), musicians

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231 For a presentation of the banquet and the launch of the campaign, see: Catherine Hodeir, « La campagne française », *La Statue de la Liberté. L'exposition du centenaire*, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Sélection du Reader's Digest, 1986, p. 132–161.

232 Brochure published by the Union Franco-Américaine, *Discours de MM. Henri Martin, E. B. Washburne, Édouard Laboulaye et W. Forney, prononcés au banquet du 6 novembre 1875*, Paris. CNAM archives.

(Jacques Offenbach), bankers and, of course, French, British and American journalists, in all 200 people.

Events were organised to make an impact and to show that the project, although arising from the private sphere, would be decisive for France. A musical event was launched by Charles Garnier at the Paris Opera House, which had just been inaugurated, on 25 April 1876. But the press pointed out that 'the takings were not great', due to the fact that 'there was little response from the public to the Franco-American Union Committee's appeal'. Events for the general public were devised. On 19 December 1875, a 'Franco-American party' was organised by the Committee as part of the International Exhibition of Maritime and River Industries at the Palais de L'Industrie on the Champs-Élysées. For five francs, the public could attend a concert given by the Republican Guard band, hear poetry read by the Freemason poet Laurent Tailhade and watch a demonstration of maritime fireworks and signals. Parisians could see 'a vast image representing the gigantic statue' in the main hall of the palace. Bartholdi asked the landscape painter and decorator Jean-Baptiste Lavastre to portray the Statue from a perspective view on a 10-metre-high canvas. The aim was to unveil the Lady, put her on display and give people an idea of her gigantic scale to attract subscribers. Other initiatives had the same aim and aroused the interest of the press: a visit to certain parts of the Statue or a visit to the workshop from 1878.

Bartholdi exhibited the Statue's head (5.26 metres high) at the Universal Exhibition in Paris, inaugurated on 1 May 1878. Visitors could step inside the head and walk up a 43-metre-high staircase as far as the diadem. *Le Monde Illustré* published a drawing on its front page showing what could be seen inside the head. It immediately became an object of popular curiosity and was one of the main attractions at the Exhibition. Publicity and the search for funding were still closely linked, so that at the Committee's stand near the pedestal bearing the head, visitors could buy a fragment of copper stamped with the date of the Exhibition, a scale model of the head or an embroidered blue satin badge showing the whole Statue. In different issues, *Le Journal Illustré* gave a large place to pictures of Liberty's virile head. It was the beginning of the trend for spin-off products. At the same time, in the Tuileries Gardens, Parisians could see a diorama or illusionist panorama produced by painters on an 11-metre-long semi-circular canvas. It was entitled: 'View of New York Bay and of the monument commemorating the friendship between France and the United States'. Spectators felt as if they were on the rear bridge of an ocean liner leaving New York



Bay. On the bridge, models dressed as Yankees, chatted and smoked. The spectator could see the Statue close up. The illusion created by the diorama was perfect, the journalists said. Of course, admission cost 1 franc but on Sundays and public holidays it was only 50 cents. The colour posters for the event in Paris were designed by Jules Chéret, the period's great lithographer and father of advertising posters. The event was a success with 7000 visitors in two months. The work became well-known. It was caricatured in the satirical paper *Charivari*, for example, and its creator began to attract attention. One of the first portraits of Auguste was published the same year, 1878, in the popular newspaper *Le Monde Illustré*.

### *Indifference and ingratitude across the Atlantic*

In the summer of 1880, the Franco-American Union announced that France had at last collected the funds needed to complete the Statue. It was thought that the inauguration could take place in 1883. But it remained to be seen whether the Americans had managed to raise the funds from their own subscription. Because these funds were to pay for the vast pedestal that would be the base for the statue.

Right from the start, Bartholdi understood that winning over American public opinion would be difficult. This can be seen in the diary he wrote during his first stay in the US (1871), and which I found in the New York Public Library. He knew that he would have to convince people, and that enthusiasm was lacking. The meaning of his project eluded the Americans he met. The first setback was that the statue could not be inaugurated in 1876. In 1876, during the Universal Exhibition in Philadelphia, only the arms and the head were displayed. The sculptor had the idea of creating a vast canvas to project the future statue on the façade of the *New York Club Building* in Madison Square. 30,000 people came to see it. And yet, as he wrote to Laboulaye, Bartholdi had the impression that 'things have not progressed much so far'. He also expressed his pessimism to his mother: 'I will strive to do everything that can be tried, and if later my efforts turn out to be fruitless, I will at least know that I did all I could'.<sup>233</sup> The effect of curiosity had little impact on the subscription: 'I would like to give an

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233 Letter from Bartholdi to his mother, New York, 28 June 1876. New York Public Library archives.

impetus to the subscription. All the elements have been well prepared, and there is only the spark I need, that I am waiting for'.<sup>234</sup>

From 1880, US newspapers raised the issue of their compatriots' lack of enthusiasm.<sup>235</sup> In New York, the *Evening Telegram*, for example, wanted to see a little more warmth from Americans: 'It may be that by 1883 something resembling enthusiasm will arise; but that remains to be seen'. In 1881, the same newspaper (owned, like the *Herald*, by the Francophile James Gordon Bennett Jr.) expressed concern about the slow progress of the American subscription. It noted that the torch held up by the muscular arm of the future Statue, exhibited in Madison Square, seemed 'to cast light on American impecuniousness', and expressed regret that for a long time Auguste Bartholdi's name went unmentioned publicly in New York: 'The Americans are, to a sublime degree, ungrateful towards France and indifferent to the pedestal'.<sup>236</sup> The Francophile *Courrier des États-Unis* moved into action. The event that triggered the reaction was an exhibition at the National Drawing Academy organised to help finance the pedestal in 1883: the Art Loan Exhibition, launched by the editor of *Art Amateur*, Montague L. Marks. It was a collection of paintings and works of art which resembled a jumble sale. A profit of 12,000 dollars was expected. The organisers hoped it would be 'the beginning of a new ferment, taking different forms and leading to more subscriptions. The slow progress has begun to make intelligent people seriously lose patience. They were initially counting on greater willingness from their fellow countrymen'.<sup>237</sup>

At the same time, the *New York Times* published a supposedly humorous article criticising the very principle of the Statue's funding: France wants to make a gift to America, but it is apparently up to America to pay for part of it. France, which was putting its generosity on 'display', seemed quite 'miserly'! This viewpoint was widely shared by the Americans:

'The French informed us that we would not have the statue if we failed to provide the pedestal. Such miserliness is quite revolting. For several years now, they have been intending to take money out of our pockets, and the press has yet to criticise as severely as it deserves this audacious attempt to make us pay with our own money to embellish our port.'

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234 Letter from Bartholdi to his mother, Philadelphia, 24 September 1876. New York Public Library archives.

235 See the press review in the *Courrier des États-Unis*, 19 July 1880.

236 *Telegram*, cited and translated by *Le Courrier des États-Unis*, 17 March 1881.

237 *Le Courrier des États-Unis*, 29 December 1883.

The caricaturists got involved in the shooting match. *Life*, for example, on its front page on 17 January 1884, had a drawing entitled: 'The Statue of Liberty as it will look when the pedestal is finished'. We see a hideous old woman with her skin scarred by deep wrinkles, a baleful look on her face, a sagging body and a skinny and feeble right arm having trouble holding up a puny flame.<sup>238</sup> On 30 August 1884, *Franck Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* published a drawing entitled: 'The Statue of Liberty, 1000 years later, it is still waiting'. Here we see a poor woman with a worn diadem, her head bent and seated feebly on a hillock, at the foot of which is the first stone of the pedestal which is completely cracked. And there were many other cartoons in the same sarcastic and delighted vein!

Suspicion was combined with the indifference and sarcasm. In 1884, the Suez project was mentioned: Bartholdi had always hidden the fact that he had redirected Laboulaye's intentions by designing a statue in the form of a beacon for the inauguration of the Suez Canal in 1869, and this project clearly heralded Miss Liberty. I have shown that the project was reused and that the sculptor had lied. The American press began to make fun of the recycling process believed to be at the origin of the *Statue of Liberty*. 'Liberty Enlightening the World' was said to have been bought 'at a discount' by the Franco-American Union, after having been rejected by the Suez Canal, which it was made for originally.<sup>239</sup>

The *Times* on 5 August 1884 even cast doubt on the Statue's artistic novelty: 'There remains... a vague doubt about the Statue's aesthetics, and some people wonder whether it would not finally damage their reputation if they publicly supported the subscription campaign; and this doubt is made to discourage capitalists looking for safe investments in the field of Art, no matter how open they may be'. Artists, in particular, remained very passive or prudent. On 26 April 1885, *The World* published interviews with artists, none of whom wished to comment on the Statue until they had seen it! In fact, the Statue does not stand out in terms of purely artistic originality. The formal elements included in it had already been used, and its neo-classical style was far from innovative. The revolution, which went relatively unnoticed at the time, lay in the technology used for the metal structure and for the mounting process, invented by Gustave Eiffel and his teams.<sup>240</sup> But what few people saw was that the Statue was less important

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238 *Life*, New York, January 17, 1884. Volume III, number 55. CNAM archives.

239 *Le Courrier des États-Unis*, 15 July 1884.

240 André Chastel, « Nouveaux regards sur le siècle passé », *Le Débat*, n° 44, 1987, p. 74.

than the site it would reinvent and the urban scenery it helped to create. Bartholdi invented a landscape.

A diplomatic crisis was on the verge of breaking out. As the US ambassador to France, Théodore Roustan, a professional diplomat, said without protocol to his minister, ‘the gift is indeed unwanted’.<sup>241</sup>

### *An unwanted gift*

The American community in Paris was well aware of the seriousness of the situation. It organised events, but they had no impact on the other side of the Atlantic. The ocean seemed like a deep gap.

Henry F. Gillig, a wealthy American, gave a banquet at the Continental on 21 May 1884 to celebrate the event and to honour Bartholdi. The artist was usually quite prudent, but now spoke out to describe the difficulties he was facing:

‘These difficulties were sometimes important, I admit; for a long time, ill-intentioned minds and critics believed that our project was, as they say in the United States, “an elephant”, a burden that you cannot be rid of; but now we have left this period far behind us, and our task is almost completed.’

On 28 June 1884, the US ambassador, Levi P. Morton, organised a big dinner. The official transfer took place on 4 July 1884, US Independence Day. The ceremony was held at the Gaget-Gauthier workshop in Paris, at 25 Rue de Chazelles, where the statue was made. Two hundred guests were invited, both French and American. The Statue was presented, ‘in the name of the French people’, by Ferdinand de Lesseps (the successor of Laboulaye, who had died, as the head of the Committee). He praised the Statue as the ‘Eighth Wonder of the World!’ In response, on 5 August 1884, the first stone of the Statue pedestal was laid during a ceremony in New York.<sup>242</sup> In fact, it was due to take place on 4 July, US Independence Day, and at the very moment when France officially gave the Statue to America... Yet another

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241 Dispatch from Théodore Roustan, Archives of the French minister of foreign affairs (Paris), CPEU 159, 18 December 1882.

242 The pedestal was designed by Richard Morris Hunt, an architect with an excellent reputation across the Atlantic. He had studied architecture in France and knew Bartholdi’s friend, Jean Léon Gérôme.

sign of incomprehension! What is more, the climatic conditions were not favourable. The weather was awful. Only five hundred people attended.<sup>243</sup> They were asked to pay 50 cents. It was a fiasco.

The *Daily Express* noted that the French press began to be amused by the Americans' 'indifference'. *Charivari* can be quoted, expressing sorrow and advising the 'brave Yankees' to reject the gift, considering that the pier in Le Havre better deserved the colossal statue. To which the *Commercial Advertiser* (July 1884) replied that the French had hardly done any better and were in no position to give lectures: it had taken them five years to collect the sum needed for the Statue! The French newspapers in France were not indifferent. For *Le Quotidien*, for example, the heart of the matter was American psychology: 'Our Americans are too down-to-earth to go as wild as the French at the sight of the Statue of Liberty. Their god is the dollar'.

The American press and the French press delighted in the incredible nature of the situation. They outdid each other in polemics without imagining they were sending out negative signals to a public that was already doubtful. As a result, the myth of Franco-American friendship was affected. But it was an American, a press baron, who reacted more than anyone, turning the issue both into a question of principle and a superb marketing operation. This was Joseph Pulitzer, a Democrat lawyer with Hungarian and Jewish roots, who bought the New York paper *The World* in 1883. He wanted to make it the 'newspaper of the people' and seized the chance to wage war against the US owning class, who were responsible for the situation in his view.

On 14 March 1883, he attacked the apathy of billionaires and warned: 'Who will save us from national dishonour?' He also criticised the 'anti-patriotic small-mindedness, miserliness and selfishness of our citizens who have kept a lock on their pockets and have left it (the statue) without a pedestal until, by begging, the money needed was collected in miserable little contributions'. To encourage 'little people' to make a donation, he decided to publish letters from donors as a homage to them. He launched a subscription for one dollar each, so that anyone could contribute to the work which he saw as in the national interest. But results were slow in coming. The fundraising campaign had stalled.

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243 *Courrier de San Francisco*, 7 August 1884.

What did the sculptor think? He confided in Richard Butler, the General Secretary of the Committee of the Franco-American Union. On 3 August 1883, Auguste wrote to him to complain that some 'very stupid' French newspapers were rashly reporting 'gossip' from the United States: 'I see you are going to a lot of trouble, and I hope that you will succeed; in all these questions that are raised to represent *public opinion*, someone is needed to fan the fire. (...) Here, we have sometimes had difficulties with newspapers that repeat chatter from America; but we have many friends in the press and we correct the mistakes'. He is afraid 'that the newspapers only repeat that things are not going well in America and that our means have been reduced'.<sup>244</sup>

Auguste believed he was alone in resisting adversity on the French side, and complained about it. On 4 March 1884, he says he has 'very wounded feelings at the moment', although he has 'already done a great deal for (his) grown-up daughter, Liberty'. He experienced alternating phases of anxiety and optimism. On 17 March 1884, he said he was 'not worried' about the result of the subscription: 'the money will definitely be found'. He launched some ideas: for example, to grant someone the right to charge 25 cents to people who wanted to visit the Statue for the first 20 years! It remained for him to appeal to the patriotism of the Americans: 'Let's hope that the American patriotic spirit will awaken and the funds will arrive...'<sup>245</sup>

*America threatened with 'eternal shame' and the French press disgusted*

The Statue was ready. It had been dismantled and was waiting in the crates. But on the other side of the Atlantic, the funds had still not been collected. A serious affront seemed to be looming. Especially when the press announced on 24 March 1885 that the House of Representatives in Washington had refused to vote for the credit of 100,000 dollars requested by the 'Sons of Revolution' to complete the pedestal. Since the Franco-American work was private, and the French state had made no contribution, the Congress considered that it could not vote to apply state funds to a private work.

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244 Letter from Bartholdi to Butler, Colmar, 14 October 1883. New York Public Library, manuscripts cabinet, Archives of the American Committee of the Statue of Liberty.

245 Letter from Bartholdi to Butler, 1 February 1884.

The French press was outraged. 'Why, I ask you, did we need to go and spend our talent, money and courtesy on people who are so ungrateful? Have we run out of room in our own country for statues, so we have to export them for free to peoples who, due to their education and lifestyle, are the least capable of appreciating the value of our attention and the beauties of a work of art, whatever it may be?'<sup>246</sup> The gravity of the situation was such that the American Committee expressed alarm in public about the slow flow of money. In early April 1885, the Committee made a new appeal to the public, where pessimism and anxiety were no longer hidden, since the question was now no more nor less than avoiding 'eternal shame'. The appeal contrasted the generosity of New Yorkers with the selfishness of other States, which were unaware that the project had become of national interest:

'Our efforts have not been successful. We have made a number of appeals to the people of the United States, but they have remained unanswered. Of the total subscription of 182,000 dollars, over 90 % came from the inhabitants of the New York area. We are forced once more to appeal to them to achieve this noble and magnificent undertaking that they have so gloriously begun. They will not fail us on a day when honour and patriotism are at stake.'<sup>247</sup>

The Committee asked Allen Thorndike Rice to write a short opusculé in praise of the merits of the Statue and to collect a few funds. The work became a special issue of the *North American Review*, published in New York in 1885: *The Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World, described by the Sculptor Frédéric Bartholdi, published for the benefit of the Pedestal Fund*. But a work of this kind could not reverse the trend. Despite the risks involved, Bartholdi decided that the Statue should set sail on Thursday 22 May 1885.

This time, the American press accused the engineer, Stone, in charge of building the pedestal, of mismanaging the budget. 'All this is due to a disappointed entrepreneur who was not given all the contracts he had hoped for', wrote the *Times* bitterly on 19 August 1885. *The World* finally provided the decisive impetus. Just as Joseph Pulitzer had done a great deal for the Democrat Grover Cleveland to be elected president, he was convinced that a new dynamic would make an impact on public opinion.

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246 *Le Siècle*, 4 April 1885.

247 *The Journal des Débats*, 5 April 1885.

He wrote in his paper: 'Cleveland was elected and the pedestal will be built!' On 16 March 1885, he published a feisty editorial where once again he played the card of the People:

'Money must be raised to finish the pedestal for Bartholdi's Statue. It would be a permanent shame for the city of New York and for the American Republic if France should send us this wonderful gift without our having prepared a site to erect it... The Statue is now finished and ready to be shipped to our shores on a vessel that has been specially chartered by the French government. Congress, by its refusal to vote for the credits needed to complete the preparations to welcome and erect it fittingly, has passed the responsibility to the American people... The two-hundred and fifty thousand dollars that the Statue cost were donated by the French people as a whole, by workers, merchants, shop assistants, craftsmen, by everyone, irrespective of their social condition. Let us respond in the same way. Let us not wait for millionaires to give the money. (...) We will publish the names of all donors, even if their donation is tiny. So, let the people's voice be heard.'

If Americans 'at the top' had failed, the Americans 'down below' must take up the challenge. Pulitzer suggested that each reader of *The World* should give 25 cents and encourage their friends to do the same, guaranteeing that in a week the amount needed would be raised. Each donor would have his or her name published in the newspaper. Moving letters were published from ordinary people ready to make a contribution to the work and to the ideal, letters that were possibly written by... himself. Such as a certain Jimmy Palmer, who wrote: 'Since I quit smoking, I have gained 25 pounds, so I am sending you a penny for each pound I put on'. This technique of harassment, highlighting the gains obtained rather than complaining about the gap to be filled, produced positive results. On 11 August 1885, Pulitzer's newspaper featured the banner headline: 'One Hundred Thousand Dollars! Triumphant Completion of the World's Fund for the Liberty Pedestal.'

On 20 September 1885, Pulitzer had a letter sent to senator William Evarts, the president of the American Committee, with a cheque for 41,091 dollars (205,500 francs). Before this contribution, three other payments were made: two for 25,000 dollars and one for 10,000 dollars, with a total of 101,091 dollars, to which should be added sums from other donations. In all, thanks to Pulitzer, over 120,000 dollars were raised in record time. The journalist had come up with a new way of addressing his readers, while perhaps saving the Statue of Liberty and the honour of the United States.



The American Committee raised a total of 300,000 dollars, with one-third from Pulitzer's campaign. The members of Congress' reticence went as far as creating difficulties for President Grover Cleveland, who requested a loan to cover the costs of the inauguration (550,000 francs). He pointed out that the American Committee had been forced to pay costs linked to maintaining and taking care of the Statue, although these costs were meant to be paid by the State. He asked for these sums to be refunded to the Committee. An agreement was finally reached, but the total amount was cut!

To check on the progress of the pedestal, Bartholdi and his wife arrived in New York on 4 November 1885. His arrival attracted the attention of the press. He gave a number of interviews. When asked to react to the slow progress in building the pedestal, he remained unshakeably stoic. To the question whether it was true that the French had shown signs of impatience, Auguste replied: 'On the contrary, we have felt a great deal of satisfaction in seeing how quickly the money has been raised recently. The sum needed was large, and no one could expect that it would be collected in one day. I think America has done very well'.

### *The contemporary view of the meaning of the Statue of Liberty*

Bartholdi returned to the United States one year later to attend the inauguration, which finally took place on Thursday 28 October 1886 in the presence of the US president, the Democrat Stephen Grover Cleveland in his first term of office (1885 to 1889). A day of liberation and glory for Auguste Bartholdi. A day of celebration for his Statue of Liberty. His efforts had been crowned with success. An incredible crowd (said to be one million people) came to celebrate the event. But what was said in the speeches given on the day? An analysis of the monument must always include the narratives greeting its birth. Then we can compare the speeches of the time with what the Statue's creator intended and with later perceptions, so we can detect discordances and concordances. A monument's identity is partly a narrative and is always changing.

The speeches made for the inauguration mainly evoke the principle and declared meaning of the project, recalling the help provided by the French to US independence and reaffirming Franco-American friendship. It was a way to leave behind the support given by Grant's America to Germany during the Franco-Prussian War. But from inauguration onwards,

this aspect give way to others: free trade and industry for some, individual and political liberty for others, but always a non-libertarian and non-revolutionary liberty, well protected by laws and respect for the consensus. This is what Auguste sought to show in the Constitution held by Liberty and the diadem on her head, rather than the Phrygian cap, seen as too violent. The broken chain at the foot of the Statue is very unobtrusive. The Statue of Liberty features the torch giving light and overcoming darkness: knowledge, learning and education finally win out over ignorance, religion (like the opium of the people) and superstition.

What did the French government see in this gigantic work? The plenipotentiary minister, Albert Lefavre, specially delegated by the French government, spoke in the name of France, now embodied in a self-confident Republic. In his view, the Statue is a homage to a country that has displayed 'to such a dazzling effect, all the virile virtues of Liberty' and a recognition of 'the beneficial mission that your nation is accomplishing in modern society'. He evokes the fact that this liberty is a virtue shared by both countries, a doctrine, but also 'a family tie'. He went on to recall France's foresight in supporting the rise of America and 'understanding, from the first day, the grandiose perspectives that such generous ardour opened up for humanity'. He also gave his own view of liberty and his vision of the Statue of Liberty. In contrast to Ferdinand de Lesseps, who in his speech highlighted freedom of trade, Lefavre underlined the fact that liberty is 'the triumph of reason and justice over material domination' and that it cannot be conceived without equality, tolerance, the rejection of racism and social progress. 'True' liberty must have a content, if it is to leave the realm of pipe dreams:

'The republics of Antiquity were based on violence and slavery, and even in the modern world, for a long time liberty was reserved only to the privileged castes. Our own Liberty is completely different, since it is based on the equality of rights and duties, it gives the same protection to all, and it extends its maternal care to all members of a civic family, *without distinction of class, rank, opinion or colour*. So, this symbol we are inaugurating today is not a chimerical allegory, but testifies to the fraternal union between the world's two great Republics, it is being celebrated by one million free men, holding out their hands across the Atlantic Ocean.'

For the representative of the French government, the statue is not so much a witness to the past as the promise of a brighter future for all mankind. He

thus highlights its universality and usefulness. The opposite of liberty, in his view, is war, violence and rivalry between nations:

'Liberty means, in the very near future, an end to bloody rivalries, the union of different peoples in a single family, through law, science, art and sympathy for the weak! Yes, these are the truths proclaimed by our Statue of Liberty! The beneficial light that its torch shines over the whole world! And among the thousands of Europeans that each day brings to these hospitable shores, not one will pass in front of this glorious icon without immediately understanding its moral grandeur, without greeting it with respect and recognition.'

Lefavre underlined the pacifist and fraternal message of the future Statue, which he saw as an emblem 'of a new age where the nations will be led, not by the empire of force, but by the supremacy of wisdom and justice, making their irrevocable verdicts on all civil and international issues'. He goes as far as to present Liberty as a 'French immigrant'.<sup>248</sup> This meaning given to the monument was not what Bartholdi had in mind. But American Freemasons began to highlight this interpretation during the ceremony to lay the first stone of the pedestal, on 5 August 1884, an event organised by the Grand Masonic Lodge of New York.<sup>249</sup> In his speech, the Grand Master, William A. Brodie, underlined one of the meanings given to the Statue and of which its creator was not necessarily aware: this was Liberty as a symbol of welcoming men fleeing from poverty or persecution:

'A few years ago, when Auguste Bartholdi was sailing across New York Bay, he was struck by the greatness of the perspectives and of the city stretching out before him; but greater still was a thought that came

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248 *Courrier de San Francisco*, 13 August 1884.

249 A study of the archives of the Grand Lodge of New York shows that direct financial aid allocated by the Lodge for the pedestal was quite small (1000 dollars), but it encouraged other lodges to raise funds and recommended its members to make individual donations. The New York 'brothers' were well aware of Bartholdi's membership of the *Alsace-Lorraine* Lodge of the Grand Orient de France (on several occasions the sculptor went to talk to his 'brothers' about the progress of his American project). We should point out that Auguste Bartholdi was initiated as a Freemason when he was designing the Statue of Liberty. An encrypted, secret note has been found that he wrote to his American 'brothers' during his stay in the US in autumn 1885. The title is: 'Notes on the mysteries of the Statue of Liberty to be revealed during a speech to the American brothers of our secret society. *Novus Ordo Seclorum*'.

to him, of placing at our continent's gateway something that would be a symbol of welcome for everyone who loved and sought liberty. (...) Liberty enlightening the world... Yes, the whole world, since our continent opens its arms to men from all nations and gives them, along with the material goods provided by nature, the blessings of liberty.<sup>250</sup>

This aspect of the Statue had appeared in 1883 in a famous poem by Emma Lazarus, 'The New Colossus', where Liberty appears as the 'Mother of Exiles'.<sup>251</sup> This is the interpretation that has held sway until today.

*Conclusion: Popularity won at the cost of forgetting the work's original meaning*

Édouard de Laboulaye and Auguste Bartholdi wanted to show the whole world, through this exceptional monument, that France had adopted the values of the liberal Republic, as well as its capacity for resilience after the Franco-Prussian War, the fall of the Empire and the Paris Commune, which was actually a civil war. Republican ideas, born in France, had developed better across the Atlantic than in Europe. In a draft of the first appeal to French subscribers, a sentence was deleted that explicitly mentioned the 'liberty' that the future work was meant to symbolise: 'It (this work) will express their shared faith in liberty, in the development of ideas that once arose on the old continent, and which have powerfully developed on the other side of the Ocean'. The change in position seems deliberate, to judge by another expression, which was also deleted: 'the celebration of free peoples' was changed to 'the celebration of modern peoples'.<sup>252</sup>

This search for recognition from America showed a geopolitical transformation in the balance of power between Europe and the New World. The aim was to regain esteem by recalling the past and reforging the links of friendship between the two nations, which recent history had separated. In a few years, the American Civil War, Napoleon III's intervention in Mexico and the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 had increased mutual misunderstanding. The hundredth anniversary of US Independence was a boon, the chance to heal old wounds. But it was not a foregone conclusion, and

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250 « Lettres d'Amérique », *Le Temps*, 23 August 1884.

251 Her poem was later inscribed on a plaque in the corridor leading to the staircase below the Statue.

252 The first draft of the appeal is in the Bartholdi archives at the CNAM in Paris.

US public opinion was not immediately swept up in a spirit of unanimous recognition. Baron Edmond de Mandat-Grancey, in his book *En Visite chez l'oncle Sam* (where he showed a highly negative face of America, denouncing, for example, the policy of 'exterminating' the Indians), could not help expressing irony about the Statue of Liberty project and the Americans' lack of enthusiasm for it: 'We passed by the small island where the huge Liberty Enlightening the World is planned to be built in the middle of a fort that will be the statue's pedestal. We are giving it as a gift to the Americans – an idea that always seemed to me quite surprising, since they do not seem to want it'.<sup>253</sup>

The gift's usefulness was questioned, and suspicion cast on such gratuitous generosity. For a long time, the gift was not wanted, and the French, or at least their elites, had no qualms about saying that the children of Washington and Lincoln had only reached the earliest stages of civilisation. A people of sheep herders, on the whole, fanatically worshipping 'the dollar god'. On either side of the Atlantic, mistrust and arrogance continued undiminished despite heroic references to Rochambeau and Lafayette.

In contrast to the legend that the Liberty project's designers wanted people to believe, the historian must agree that from 1870 to 1914, Franco-American relations were generally very frosty. The French were a notorious exception in Europe in holding the too youthful country in contempt. They had no feelings of admiration for the US or any wish to emigrate there. The sentiment was widely shared by the public. It should be recalled that in 1872, the French government was forced to ban Victorien Sardou's popular comedy, *Uncle Sam*, which was considered as insulting to America and its way of life! The play's heroine proclaims to the Americans at the end of the first act: 'Let this madness cease of setting yourselves as an example to us'. As for the Americans, they showed complete indifference to old Europe. For America, France was no longer a reference, if it had ever been one, except in the imagination of a Francophile elite. We can see why the German party in the US was treated well at each presidential election, which helped to slow down Operation Liberty. At the same time, there were many cases of corruption in the US Republic, and it failed to bring about progress in a society that discriminated against minorities. The Americans extended their

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253 Edmond de Mandat-Grancey, *En visite chez l'oncle Sam: New York et Chicago*, Paris, Plon, Nourrit et Cie, 1885, p. 23.

imperialism over their continent on the basis of the Monroe doctrine.<sup>254</sup> They worried about the opening of the Panama Canal (work began in 1881) as a way of reducing their influence. They had no hesitation in saying to de Lesseps that they saw the project as a threat. They would be helped by the catastrophic financial situation of the Universal Inter-Oceanic Panama Canal Company (declared bankrupt in 1889), which helped bring about the fall of Ferdinand de Lesseps, the project's promoter, although de Lesseps himself had proclaimed closer Franco-American ties during the inauguration of the Statue of Liberty. The 'real' United States seemed far removed from the ideal of its founders and the idea Laboulaye had of it.

One man, very early on, asked the terrible question. This was the journalist Frédéric Gaillardet, who, in 1883, published *Aristocratie en Amérique*. The former editor of the *Courrier des États-Unis* wondered: 'Do the Americans like the French?' His answer was negative. In his view, the Americans had only ever had 'purely formal sympathy' towards them. Their only criterion is their geopolitical interests: 'The Americans only sympathise with us in cases where our interests are not in conflict with them, with the Chinese, with the Mexicans or with any other people, in fact, which they use as tools and as markets.'<sup>255</sup> And he confirmed America's determination to break free of Europe and to acquire a new status as an emerging world power: this 'obscure satellite of British power aspires to nothing less than attracting all of humanity into its orbit'.

The Statue of Liberty project showed the limits of the capacity to give heritage status to 'the friendship that the blood shed by our fathers once sealed between the two nations'.<sup>256</sup> It undermined the belief that creating a monument based on an 'enduring memory' could influence the strongest trends in geopolitics or could foster the unity of cultures. It is for this reason that the history of the Statue of Liberty interests us. It exemplifies the delicate relations between France and the United States, always marked by mutual curiosity, confusingly blending fascination – a 'reluctant fascination' – and muted hostility. It does not appear that things have greatly changed in the 21st century, with regular ruptures and reconciliations according to

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254 Aïssatou Sy-Wonyu, « Le prélude à l'impérialisme (1865–1897) », *Les États-Unis et le monde au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle* (ed. Aïssatou Sy-Wonyu), Paris, Armand Colin, 2004, p. 245–279.

255 Frédéric Gaillardet, *Aristocratie et Amérique*, Paris, E. Dentu, 1883, p. 123, p. 146.

256 Brochure published by the Franco-American Union in 1875 and entitled: *Discours* ('Speeches'). It features speeches made on 6 November 1875 at the Union's founding banquet.

circumstances, like a spiral in which the inward and outward movements end up more or less balancing each other out. Finally, the complex history of the Statue may help to cast light on the present.

*Liberty Enlightening the World* was meant to glorify the love between the two nations. Finally, it seems like a sad illustration of the definition of love given by the great psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan: 'To give what one does not have to someone who does not want it'.<sup>257</sup> Giving heritage status to the friendship between two nations assumes that the question of gift exchange has been resolved. In a survey on the Statue of Liberty carried out by the Parisian correspondent of the *New York Evening Mail* in October 1877, an American artist named Story evoked this psycho-political issue: 'You tell me that both nations should share the costs. This would be valid if it had been clear from the beginning. (...) But I think that sometimes they (the French) exaggerate our share of the debt. Haven't we already paid a large part of the debt in the sense of bearing witness to the memory of La Fayette and Rochambeau?'

The leaders of the Statue of Liberty project wanted to make a gift to America. Any gift calls for a 'counter gift', explained the sociologist Marcel Mauss,<sup>258</sup> since the thing that we give has such a force that the beneficiary must give something back. If only to escape from his status as a debtor. For Mauss, a gift is 'a service mutually obliging giver and beneficiary, and which actually unites them in a sort of social contract'. Has the Statue of Liberty managed to escape from this conception? In the end, the 'liberty' that the Americans showed by resisting the logic of the 'counter gift' may come from the fact that they did not feel truly concerned by the gift. Or the positive version is that they exercised their liberty... the liberty of not giving anything back.

Let us not forget that the work's popularity was slow in coming. We should note that in 1890, the number of visitors was only 88,000, and half that number in 1902. Visitor numbers only rose above 500,000 in 1945 and reached one million in 1964. The centenary, which gave rise to large-scale restoration work and spectacular festivities, brought the figure up to 3 million. Today, there are over 5 million visitors a year. The paradox is that the process of appropriation was achieved at the cost of forgetting the meaning

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257 Philippe Roger, *L'Ennemi Américain. Généalogie de l'anti-américanisme français*, Paris, Seuil, 2002, p. 145.

258 Marcel Mauss, *Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques*, PUF, coll. 'Quadrige Grands textes', 2007 (1<sup>st</sup> edition: 1925).

that its creators (Bartholdi and Laboulaye) wanted to give to the donation. The original meaning of the 'unwanted' gift was changed to become a purely national, self-centred and naturalised icon. Is the Statue of Liberty the expression of the 'non-existent French-American relations', 'a fallow symbol', whose 'colossal success' is 'filled with ambiguity'?<sup>259</sup> The paradoxical force of the statue is that it has a sufficiently nondescript meaning and historic and ideological references to provide endless appropriations but also unexpected new directions and purposes. It is a kind of 'semiological Golem',<sup>260</sup> a polysemous mirror which each of us can fill with fantasies or fears, and which adapts itself perfectly to all periods and all events. It owes its worldwide and permanent success to its remarkable ductility. An extraordinary act of generosity that gave it its initial semantic neutrality and its status as an 'empty icon', to borrow the expression of the American art historian Albert Boime, permitting all kinds of reinterpretations and uses (in art, advertising, politics).<sup>261</sup>

It is still true that the Frenchman had reinvented New York. He had created a landscape. As one of the members of the French delegation said at the inauguration: 'To tell the truth, Liberty Island was created for Bartholdi's Statue and not the Statue for the island'. Here lies the revolution. Auguste's aim was not to be colossal for the sake of it. His aim was to break with a classical system of statuary art where, as François Loyer said, 'a monument is fundamentally an *object*: isolated, heterogeneous, autonomous and centred on itself'.<sup>262</sup> The revolution comes from the fact that it stands at the heart of an urban scene, giving it a new line of horizon, a new focal point. The other virtue of the monument is to forge a link between the ocean and the city. The sculpture becomes something other than a sculpture: it is designed as the 'accentuation of a space vaster than itself' and pits itself 'against the immensity of nature'. Here, the statue is not only an object or a symbol – it is a landscape, a cultural landscape. The Frenchman had thus invented what would later be called *land art*.

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259 Philippe Roger, *op.cit.*, p. 148, p. 147, p. 144.

260 Philippe Roger, « L'édifice du sens », in *La Statue de la Liberté, l'exposition du centenaire*, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

261 See on this subject: Robert Belot, *La Liberté. Histoire d'un hyper-monument*, Saint-Étienne, Presses universitaires de Saint-Étienne, 2018 (chapter: « Une puissance iconique qui défie le temps »).

262 François Loyer, *Paris XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle : l'immeuble et la rue*, Paris, Hazan, 1994, p. 292.



This was the spirit inspiring the new museum, inaugurated on 14 May 2019.<sup>263</sup> Until that date, the Statue of Liberty museum had been on the ground floor of the statue pedestal. A dark and cramped setting with a staging focused on the statue as a symbol of America and on objects. Today, the museum is outside. The architect, Nicholas Garrison, immediately had the idea of designing the museum as an extension of the park. The goal is to unite the landscape and the building to create fluidity and harmony. Hence the idea of a green roof, the rain garden and the wide picture window giving a glimpse of the outside of the original torch and a new view over New York. The interior staging was entrusted to the designer Edwin Schlossberg and is in harmony with this aim. Again we encounter the question of meaning. The *Inspiration Gallery* brings us back to ourselves and to the present time. 'What does Liberty mean to you?' Liberty as a value and as an aim that is more relevant than ever. Visitors can follow the museum narrative via a continually changing gigantic mosaic. The visit concludes with *Liberty's Torch*. A moving experience for the spectator, face to face with the monument's original torch, piously preserved. So this is a new approach and a new reading of the monument, showing that heritage is a reality in the making.

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263 Survey made in New York in November 2018 and January 2019. Accounts collected by the author in New York from Nicholas Garrison, Edwin Schlossberg, Stephen Brigandi, president of *The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation*, Diane von Fürstenberg, patron for the fundraising campaign.

#### 4 'War memorials, is that what the dead would have wanted?'

The first-time traveller to France is always struck by the presence of memorials commemorating the 1914–1918 war in every town and every village. At least 36,000 of these memorials mark public spaces, offering an impression of national unity around the slaughter of 1,350,000 French people. A heritage of suffering or heroism redefined the topography of France's communes with the triptych of church, town hall, memorial, and established a new social ritual of the 11 November ceremony, the date of the 1918 armistice.<sup>264</sup> The commonly held vision of the commemorative process for the two world wars that France was subject to rests on a thesis that dominates historiography: after the Great War, French society experienced a fusional epiphany around memory, then after the Second World War, the country grappled with a plural and conflictual form of memory owing to the need to confront the civil war caused by the Vichy regime. Given the different natures of the two conflicts, there is, of course, a paradigmatic differentiation between the two politico-memorial regimes. This process of memorialisation for the First World War is reputed to have laid the foundations for a 'civil religion'<sup>265</sup> that would reconcile the French people and consolidate Republican sentiment around the 'cult of laicity'. However, the idea of a dominant, unanimous, and consensus passage into memory requires some nuance.

This premise of unanimous consensus continues to dominate and makes it difficult to integrate different or dissenting memories into commemorations, such as soldiers shot as an example ('fusillés'), mutineers, deserters, and anti-militarists.<sup>266</sup> It is unimaginable that mayors of communes today could refuse to participate in the ceremonies commemorating the 1918

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264 Maurice Agulhon, *Les métamorphoses de Marianne. L'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1914 à nos jours*, Paris, Flammarion, 2001, p. 35.

265 Antoine Prost, *Republican Identities in War and Peace: Representations of France in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, trans. by Jay Winter and Helen McPhail, Bloomsbury 2014, pp. 36–37. The first essay in this volume 'War Memorials of the Great War: Monuments to the Fallen' in which this phrase appear was first published in Pierre Nora's *Lieux de mémoire*.

266 André Loez, 14–18. *Les refus de la guerre: une histoire des mutins*, Folio-Histoire, 2010.

Armistice; it is even more difficult to imagine that there were cases of mayors refusing to do so in the aftermath of the Great War. And yet, this phenomenon did exist. The commemorative and celebratory enthusiasm witnessed, for example, in Nantes should not be considered the norm.<sup>267</sup> From this perspective, the situation in the Loire department offers an interesting example to study. Saint-Étienne presents a particular set of circumstances: the area's traditional industries made the city the largest arms supplier during the conflict, whilst its political tradition was steeped in revolutionary trade unionist ideology, orienting it towards a pacifist and anti-capitalist left. Taking account of these conditions, how does one 'honour' (since commemoration is largely contingent on the process of transforming soldiers into heroes) something that caused the death of so many young Frenchmen?

Such circumstances can only produce a sort of uneasy conscience, which may explain the fact that mobilising industry in Saint-Étienne and the Loire department as part of the war effort has barely left any trace on heritage and memory. It is as if the process of heritage creation has not happened, as if memory has been subject to repression. This ontological ambiguity is at the centre of the difficulties inherent to the process of creating heritage, whether immaterial or material, and allows for an understanding of why memory in many cases was non-consensual and shaped by political oppositions. The case of the Loire department contextualises the hypothesis that memory was a force for resilience and reconciliation. The difficulty of creating a memory of the Great War and, in times of peace, prolonging the myth of the sacred union it created should be read within the context of the post-war 'social explosion' and the little-known conflicts that peppered both commemorative ceremonies and the erecting of memorials.

Reality lies somewhere between the historians who advance the argument that 'heroic grandeur'<sup>268</sup> was at the heart of the commemorative process set up

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267 In Nantes, 12 roads were renamed; several monuments were planned in the most prominent locations; a 'gate of glory' and a 'park for the heroes' were conceived; there was a desire to create 'peace houses'; a museum in the Château des ducs de Bretagne was even suggested. It was as if a new 'utopia' had emerged from the horror, resulting in the search for 'a society regenerated by the war, made more fraternal, and worried it would forget the soldiers' sacrifices.' Bruno Cabanes, *La victoire endeuillée. La sortie de guerre des soldats français (1918–1920)*, Paris, Seuil, 2004, p. 438–439.

268 Ch. Theodosiou, *Le deuil inachevé. La commémoration de l'armistice du 11 novembre 1918 en France dans l'entre-deux-guerres*, éditions de la Sorbonne, 2018, p. 21. See al-

after the war, and that of other historians who prefer to speak of a ‘mourning-filled victory’.<sup>269</sup> In the Loire department’s large towns (it is necessary to distinguish towns from the countryside), it is possible to speak of a ‘divided victory’. Commemoration did not produce the effect of resilience that is normally ascribed to it: rather, it revealed and revived the social and ideological fractures at work prior to the war and signified a redefinition of the trade unionist and political field. The political context of the time should not be forgotten, with the split on the left following the Tours Congress (1920) that put the socialists and the communists in opposition for a long time. This division had evident repercussions at a local level.

Histography has tended not to deal with this image of misalignment in relation to the myth of unity.<sup>270</sup> However, commemorations of the Great War mirrored the fragmentation in French political life, and sometimes fell victim to becoming political instruments. Debates around the construction, financing, and symbolic meaning of war memorials intersected with more general anthropological questions of the relationship between war and death, and the meaning that should be ascribed to this European drama.

### *Revolutionary Trade Unionist Culture and Pacifist Propaganda*

At the very beginning of the war, which many believed would be ‘over by Christmas’, the population seemed largely favourable towards general mobilisation: ‘The declaration of war was not met with resolute resistance from the working class’.<sup>271</sup> German aggression was condemned and the increase in production boosted the workforce and buying power. Yet this did not last long. The economic situation worsened very quickly due to the crisis of provisions, rationing, and price increases, as well as the ruthless salary policy of employers with a ‘feudal’ reputation. It is estimated that

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so A. Becker, « Du 14 juillet 1919 au 11 novembre 1920 mort, où est ta victoire? », *Vingtième Siècle, revue d'histoire*, n°49, January–March 1996. pp. 31- 44.

269 B. Cabanes, *La victoire endeuillée*, *op.cit.*

270 In her seminal book, Monique Luirard shows this irenic tendency to believe in consensus by affording it a place that cannot be reduced to the process of politization which took hold very soon after the commemoration of the victory, and by eschewing the question of the ambiguity around the memory of industrial mobilisation in the war effort.

271 Jean Charles, « Le syndicalisme français, la paix et la guerre, de 1909 à 1921 », in François Boulet (ed.), *Les sociétés, la guerre et la paix de 1911 à 1946 : Europe, Russie puis URSS, Japon, Etats-Unis*, 2003, p. 31.

the cost of living in Saint-Étienne tripled between 1914 and 1918<sup>272</sup>. The pacifist push and resistance towards the infernal rhythm imposed by the war effort took root well before the end of the conflict, and even before the start of the Russian Revolution, which inspired a resurgence in pacifist and anti-militarist sentiment.

On 4 January 1915, the Prefect of the Loire department notified the Sub-Prefects and police superintendents of the distribution of a 4-page tract intitled 'Appel aux socialistes, syndicalistes, révolutionnaires et anarchistes' (Call to Socialists, Trade Unionist, Revolutionaries and Anarchists)<sup>273</sup> written by Sébastien Faure, a Saint-Étienne-born anarchist propagandist and Freemason with an international reputation. Faure founded the newspaper *Le Libertaire* with Louise Michel in 1895 and he was an ardent supporter in the Dreyfus Affair. The Prefect singled out Faure's analysis of the causes of the war, and notably of 'German aggression' and his 'call' that 'promised benefits from a rapidly concluded peace'. The Prefect judged that no truce could be offered so soon to those 'Barbarians' whose only goal was 'to crush France and civilisation'. In the text, Faure laments the coming of war to Europe, which broke his dreams of 'universal fraternity'. After five months of 'a rough, relentless, atrocious war', he asked his 'comrades' who believed in the legitimacy of war against Germany and in a patriotic war to look at the situation with 'sangfroid' and to return to their positions. The war had not been wanted by 'the working class of any country' but was the result of 'the murderous will of certain governments' and has been imposed on the proletariat. Faure admitted that 'we had neither the strength, nor, perhaps, the courage to avoid this crime' and that the French government had no choice but to react with military force in the first instance. But now, the time had come for compromise, to negotiate to stop the worst outcome. He agreed to not 'dishonour France' in pushing the country to ask for a separate peace treaty without its allies' knowledge. The manifesto suggests the neutral European powers could play the role of intercessors to convince both France and Germany to stop this 'wretched war' and to prepare a peace treaty with the view of a 'reconciled and pacific Europe'. Faure recommends following the German socialist leader Karl Liebknecht who, by refusing to vote for military spending, advocated for 'a quick peace without

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272 Jean Lorcin, « La société stéphanoise face à la guerre et à la paix (1911–1946) », in François Boulet (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 69.

273 Sébastien Faure, « Appel aux socialistes, syndicalistes, révolutionnaires et anarchistes ». Printed sheet, no date (1915). Archives départementales de la Loire (ADL), 1 M 473.

humiliating anyone, a peace without conquest'. The 'revolutionaries' who were fighting for peace were the 'only conscious, powerful and coordinated individuals'.

This manifesto circulated in the Loire department, but without hope of reaching the masses. Yet, its ideas were transmitted through the 'Resolution' adopted at a meeting of departmental and national labour councils and trade unions (Conférence des Bourses du travail, Unions départementales et Fédérations nationales corporatives et d'industries), which took place in Paris on 15 August 1915. With the same pacifist tone as Faure's manifesto, the meeting declared 'This war is not our war!' The Resolution invalidated two key themes found in discourses justifying France's participation in the conflict: the liberation of 'peoples oppressed prior to the war' and resistance towards 'Germany's imperialist war against Europe'. For the signatories, the war was but the result of the 'shock of national imperialism that has intoxicated every State, large and small, and taken root in the oversized, essentially egotistical, ambitions of every ruling class'. All governments, including Russia, are thus responsible and guilty for not having wanted to find a common ground. According to the Resolution's authors, only one combat is legitimate: 'class struggle', which must lead to 'the proletariat's victory' over 'the economic exploitation of modern employers'. 'The sacred union' must therefore be considered a trap that risks 'silencing the most wholesome and most conscious part of the proletariat'. This discourse would be taken up again by politicians on the left who came to power in the 1919 local elections.

The signatory organisations of the Resolution included the departmental trade union association for the Loire (amongst 12 other departmental associations) and the labour councils for Rive-de-Gier and Firminy (but not for Saint-Étienne) alongside 7 other councils (Aix, Marseille, Nîmes, Romans, Algiers). This offers an interesting indication of the 'revolutionary' culture that dominated this highly industrialised region and allows for a better understanding of the difficulties of commemorating the victory. Metalwork factories in the Giers valley (Saint-Chamond, Lorette, Rive-de-Giers) made cannons, artillery material, and parts for the Navy.

The authorities were worried about this movement 'agitating for peace'. On the 20 December 1915, the police chief superintendent for security informed the Prefect in writing of the measures he had taken 'with a

view to halting pacifist propaganda.<sup>274</sup> He organised a discreet surveillance service 'in the factories', which allowed them to identify, for example, 'some workers' at the Forges et Ateliers de la Chaléassière in Saint-Étienne who were working on national defence projects. This reporting included the distribution of a brochure about the Zimmerwald conference (5–8 September 1915), which the secretary of the Metalwork Federation in the Loire and a member of the Socialist Party attended. The police also obtained a list of subscribers in favour of peace who frequented workers boarding houses. The labour council seemed to be the nerve centre of the movement. It hosted a large meeting in March 1918 organised by the Ligue des Familles nombreuses to protest high living costs (and those starving people and stockpiling food).<sup>275</sup> During the meeting, the delegate from a renters' union (Syndicat des locataires) declared that moving towards 'immediate peace' was necessary. The governments who presided over the fate of the country during the war were treated as 'incapable'. Shouts in favour of 'Wilson's peace plan' were heard.

The Acieries et Forges de Firminy seems to have been particularly active and was closely watched. General Pouradier, commander of the 13<sup>th</sup> military region at Clermont-Ferrand, was alerted about some pacifist acts in 1916. A tract entitled *Unissons-nous contre la guerre* (Let's Unite Against the War) and the manuscript announcing it were sent to the Prefect. The tract was a cry of despair against 'Europe [which] has become a gigantic abattoir of men' to the profit of the 'ruling classes' and the 'capitalists'. The authors sought to tug at the readership's heart strings:

'Women, with your sensitive and gentle hearts, you who are made to procreate and love, do you not see the horror of the battlefields? Do you not hear the cries of pain from your sons, your husbands, your brothers, who implore you as they struggle in horrible suffering. [...] Workers, fathers, mothers, widows, wives, fiancées, you all suffer from the war. We ask you to demand immediate peace and to tell everyone around you that peace will only be obtained through our collective will and our combined energies...'

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274 Note from the police chief superintendent for security to the Prefect of the Loire Department, 20 December 1915. ADL, 1 M 473.

275 500 people, mostly women and children, took part. Report dated 4 March 1918 by special superintendent at Saint-Étienne station. ADL, 1 M 473.

Firminy became the hub driving forward this revolutionary trade unionism and experienced significant strikes that fostered a rejection of the war. The Zimmerwaldist group voiced their opinion throughout the whole conflict, but this was quickly surpassed by the progressively growing anti-militarist movement in which women would play an important role.<sup>276</sup> The context of social tension linked to price rises and rationing led to strikes. The increased pace of production in heavy industries provoked pre-insurrectional instances of hostility: ‘Very quickly, the strikes, which were originally restricted to salary demands, were directed towards the war due to the influence of women’.<sup>277</sup> In early 1917, the very centre of arms production was even affected. A brochure with a preface written by Anatole Sixte-Quenin, a socialist member of parliament, circulated in the state-owned Manufacture Nationale d’Armes. It seemingly sought to rehabilitate the German Socialist Party by mentioning the press campaign orchestrated by ‘Prussian militarist’ circles to show how Russia was excessively arming itself to destroy the Austrian Empire before turning its sights on Germany. The Zimmerwaldists took an active role in the discussions of plans to create a cooperative restaurant at the Manufacture and, according to a police report, ‘they spoke up against the interference by the military establishment’s management’.<sup>278</sup>

The Russian Revolution added a more ideological dimension to the anti-war position. On 30 March 1918, the gendarmes spotted ‘defeatist posters’ on the wall of Rue de la République in Chambon-Feugerolles, opposite the main entrance to the town’s factory. This text by the ‘Groupe des amis de la Paix’ (Friends of Peace Group) defended the Russian Revolution on political grounds as being far from ‘banditry’ and ‘anarchy’: ‘It is only the transformation from the capitalist regime to a collective regime wholly applied with justice and equality’<sup>279</sup>. The Revolution provided an ideological foundation to the partisans for peace who justified the retreat of Russia from fighting against the common enemy.

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276 Whilst it is difficult to measure this phenomenon, police reported increasingly mention the places that were influenced by ‘pacifist propaganda’.

277 Jean Lorcin, *art. cit.*, p. 70.

278 Report dated 5 mars 1917 by special superintendent at Saint-Étienne station. ADL, 1 M 473.

279 *Ibid.*



'War memorials: is that what the dead would have wanted?'

The discourse of pacifist movements likens war memorials to lying, underlining the contradiction between the spirit of post-war treaties, which promised to end all wars and the coming of an era of peace, and the policies of revenge and armament, which seemed to motivate French politics. The young pacifists union (Union départementale des Jeunes pacifistes de France), whose headquarters were at 24 Rue Rouget-de-Lisle in Saint-Étienne, launched a membership campaign based on this idea:

'We're being lied to! Between 1914 and 1918, 13 million men died in the war to end war. On 28 June 1919, the governments at Versailles promised the people disarmament and peace. What have they done? WAR MEMORIALS. Is that what the dead would have wanted? No! Young people, young women, so that they didn't die in vain, fight for PEACE! Let's unite across borders, across old grudges, across parties to create the biggest party for the future of humanity, the party for the FUTURE! Join the Union des Jeunes Pacifistes, a movement independent of all political parties and under the patronage of the FOP des anciens combattants et victimes de guerre [association for veterans and victims of war].<sup>280</sup>

Memorials represent a ploy, a false homage to those who died and a violation of their memory. The commemorative injunction, which established consensus around the respect owed to the dead, also posed a danger as people could not view the international policy undertaken by the government objectively, and this policy that would not lead towards appeasement. The pacifists criticised the nationalistic usage that could emerge from the necessary national union towards the fallen that commemoration was meant to symbolise. Even if it was not explicitly stated in the tract, the call for a worldwide fraternity aims to surpass Franco-German antagonism. For the pacifists, the memorial lies.

Since the vast majority of memorials erected in the aftermath of the war do not have a warmongering tone, this view is not entirely accurate. Overtly pacifist or anti-war memorials are indeed rare, with only around

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280 ADL, 1 M 542. The tract is not dated but seems to have been written in 1920. On pacifism linked to the Great War, see Norman Ingram, *The Politics of Dissent: Pacifism in France, 1919–1939*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991.

one hundred found in France.<sup>281</sup> Nonetheless, the pacifists' reaction is of interest as it opens up avenues to explore the philosophical and political issues underlying the creation of the Great War's heritage. Do memorials 'honour those who died for France' (to cite the terms of the 25 October 1919 law) or are they a glorification of war and the military as the pacifists believe? The inscription on the pedestal of the memorial in Saint-Ouen (Paris region) serves as a warning: 'War is a crime that does not excuse the victory.'<sup>282</sup> Should we pay homage to victims or to heroes, or to heroes who are also victims of an absurd war? Can reference be made to religion? These questions are by no means theoretical: they are found in the minutes of municipal council meetings when communes attempted to define the characteristics of their memorial. The war memorial in Villeurbanne (Rhône department, close to Lyon), located in the town's cemetery, is a case in point. In January 1922, the commission put forward the idea of a simple memorial, 'representing the suffering and on which, alongside the names of the fallen soldiers, only epitaphs against the war would be inscribed'. The inauguration should be a sombre affair and exclude 'any military elements' and 'any religious presence'. The minutes from the council meeting of 14 February 1922 state that the mayor, a communist, was keen to stress that it was not about 'perpetuating the memory of the war, but of our poor fallen soldiers'. The memorial's pacifist inspiration is found in the understated inscription chosen for its pedestal ('From Villeurbanne to its fallen, 1914–1918') and the refusal to mention 'Died for France'. This discreetness is testament to the fact that the memorial, finally inaugurated on 11 November 1925, was the result of numerous discussions and a compromise<sup>283</sup>.

The theme of 'lying' spread in certain spheres during the war. An anonymous printed tract entitled *Au peuple français* (To the French People)<sup>284</sup> begins: 'Armed with lies and defamation, our governments are forcing the

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281 Danièle and Pierre Roy, *Autour de monuments aux morts pacifistes en France (Histoire et présentation d'édifices de la mémoire pacifiste et laïque et évocation de leur actualité: rassemblements de commémoration et d'action contre la guerre)*, published by the Fédération Nationale Laïque des Associations des Amis des Monuments Pacifistes, Républicains et Anticléricaux, 2006.

282 Cited in M. Agulhon, *Les métamorphoses de Marianne*, *op.cit.*, p. 40.

283 Xavier Hyvert, « Le monument aux morts (1914–1918) de Villeurbanne au cimetière ancien de Cusset, monument pacifiste ». [http://lerizeplus.villeurbanne.fr/arkotheque/client/am\\_lerize/encyclopedie/fiche.php?ref=716](http://lerizeplus.villeurbanne.fr/arkotheque/client/am_lerize/encyclopedie/fiche.php?ref=716)

284 « Au peuple français », printed tract, no date (1917?), ADL, 1 M 473.

country to pursue the terrible butchery 'til the end. But 'til the end of what? Do they seek to make us continue this monstrous battle until the very last drop of blood of the very last French soldier has been spilt?' The tract's rhetoric of 'immediate peace' is not part of an ideological logic. In a catastrophist tone, it speaks of the 'suicide of France' and the 'destruction of the French race'. The Germans are not demonised. It assures us that they are not 'an enslaved people' as they could have made their government 'renounce all programmes of conquest and accept a peace that would respect the liberty, independence, and territorial integrity of all peoples'. The tract blames France. The country, 'which calls itself the most democratic in the world', should be 'ashamed' for not engaging in the pursuit of a 'generous formulation of peace without annexation, nor indemnities'. The tract denounces the 'madness' of France's official position: 'No peace without victory'. For 'pure' pacifists, the very notion of 'victory' must be questioned. To them, the memorialisation of France's victory does not represent a work of peace-making, but rather a false reconciliation and a misleading commemoration. For these reasons, one veterans' association with communist allegiances, the Association Républicaine des Anciens Combattants (ARAC), were opposed to erecting memorials. The great writer Henri Barbusse shared this view, mocking the 'unsightly memorials' that 'disfigure town squares and the corners of villages'<sup>285</sup>.

The pacifist movement, bolstered by a left-leaning political culture that was revived with the bright new dawn in the East, allows for an understanding of the reluctance, even the initial opposition, towards commemoration. However, other factors blur and make more complex this process of memory creation.

*The "Poilus" died for 'interests and a cause that was not their own'*

One consideration that needed carefully managing was the syndrome of the opposition between 'the back' and the soldiers at the front and the image of a population who, according to some, worked in the arms industry, without seeing front-line action, to boost the famous 'benefits of war'. The heavy industries (extract of coal, crucible steel, coke) in the Saint-Étienne region experienced a significant increase in production and all the other industries

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285 Cited in Nicolas Offenstadt, *Les fusillés de la Grande Guerre et la mémoire collective (1914–1999)*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 1999, p. 86.

contributed to this growth, including textiles. Foreigners, colonial subjects, and women were employed, which caused xenophobic tension that has only lately and discreetly been historicised. Metal workers and miners were brought back from the front as ‘special operatives’ to make up ‘the other front’. For this reason, Saint-Étienne has ‘often been labelled a city of shirkers (“embusqués”) by soldiers on leave’.<sup>286</sup> For patriots, the workers in the arms industry were shirkers.

This view was referenced in a Saint-Étienne’s municipal council meeting on 27 December 1918. The deputy mayor René Peuvergne spoke in front of the council to calculate the number of victims from Saint-Étienne at the front, arriving at an estimate of 4800–5000 victims. The conclusion of his short speech reflected at length on ‘current opinion’ that tended to diminish Saint-Étienne’s patriotism and engagement in the war:

‘Compare these numbers with those that were provided for the country as a whole and you will notice that, contrary to current opinion and despite the large number of our fellow citizens engaged elsewhere, there were many men from Saint-Étienne that generously sacrificed their lives for the country. It must be known in the city, in the neighbouring communes, and in the whole department that we paid a heavy price for the war and that a great number of the city’s children died for this country.’<sup>287</sup>

Peuvergne puts his finger on the specific circumstances in Saint-Étienne that might play a role in the city’s refusal to commemorate the war: due to their special assignment, workers were ‘relatively spared’ in comparison to agricultural workers. Moreover, officers from the engineering school *École des Mines de Saint-Étienne* paid ‘a potentially even heavier price’ than the workers.<sup>288</sup> The figure of 6000 dead was reached in 1919. By the time of the municipal council meeting on 13 August 1919, the idea of a memorial dedicated to these fallen soldiers was in advanced talks. Yet the city was in no rush and sought to confer the search for funding and artistic proposals to an association.

These difficulties can be perceived, for example, during a meeting on 3 April 1920. The mayor Louis Soulié (democratic left, Georges Clemenceau’s

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286 Aurélie Brayet, *Revivre: victimes de guerre de la Grande guerre à Saint-Étienne 1914–1935*, Presses de l’Université de Saint-Étienne, 2006, p. 212.

287 1 D 112, Registry of municipal council meeting minutes, Archives municipales de Saint-Étienne (AMSE)

288 Jean Lorcin, *art. cit.*, p. 73.

party) proposed that the municipal council reflect on what would be a suitable way to pay homage to the soldiers from Saint-Étienne who were killed during the war. The deputy mayor Ferdinand Faure, whose remit notably included the labour council and workers retirement, expressed the left's reluctance to make a decision. Faure, a future member of parliament for the Loire department who was a café owner then printer, was a socialist from a family of passementerie workers: he was first on the list of the leftist bloc that triumphed in the 1919 local elections. In his short speech, Faure accepted that it was necessary to 'honour' those 'we consider as victims', but it must not stop there. As he explained, it was also necessary to denounce the troublemakers and the war profiteers:

'We have the duty both to protest and to ruin once more those responsible for the horrendous carnage. [...] We believe that, whilst it may appear to the fallen soldiers that they died a glorious death, it is profoundly sad to think that many unfortunate souls, whose whitening bones are scattered from the sea to the Vosges mountains, felt a moment of supreme sacrifice when they were actually dying *for interests and a cause that was not their own*, when they were actually giving their lives solely in the interests of capitalism. It is in these conditions that we join forces, us other socialists, to pay homage, in the way we want, to the memory of those who died in the great turmoil, and we express our sincere condolences to their families.'<sup>289</sup>

During some municipal council meetings, there was hesitation over whether to question industry's role in the conflict. This line of argument on 'war profiteers' permeated discourse on the left during the entire inter-war period, and it found its way into the depoliticised positions taken by veterans. In 1924, Joseph Beynet, future president of the veterans' association Union des Poilus de la Loire, recalled the shock when poilus (infantrymen) returned from the front only to discover that 'people had suddenly become rich from their misery'. In 1927, the section of veterans from Saint-Bonnet le Courreau denounced the shirkers who had been honoured and decorated as well as 'the profiteer and the marketeer [who] seemed to miss wartime when their cliental was never better and their profits never higher'. The newspaper *Le Mutilé de Roanne*, in 1930, went after the 'canon sellers' for whom peace came too soon, whilst in Chambon-Feugerolles, in 1932, the

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289 Registry of Saint-Étienne municipal council meeting minutes, AMSE, 1 D 114.

spokesperson for veterans attacked the 'big financial brains' who saw the war as 'just a huge profit-making operation'. In another speech in November 1938 in Saint-Étienne, the 'immorality' of the war and the 'feeding time for profiteers, the shameful getting rich of munitions dealers' were condemned<sup>290</sup>.

It is perhaps necessary to see a dialectic relationship between the accusation brought against the 'profiteers' and the workers' worries about exonerating themselves from the suspicions of shirking that hung over them. The same dialectic might also be applied to the pacifists who, to escape inflammatory accusations of defeatism and anti-patriotism, overplayed the argument of the uselessness and immorality of the Great War. Politicians on the left certainly experienced this phenomenon on a psychological level. Their discourses implicitly reflect a logic of image rehabilitation. The social uprisings (1919–1920) and the violent confrontations that the population of Saint-Étienne (amongst other cities) experienced were perhaps a way of 'reaffirming a working-class culture that had been compromised by the war',<sup>291</sup> of restoring the conflicted image of workers in arms factories that the soldiers from the front could spread.<sup>292</sup>

### *A source of 'shame': The endless deliberations over the Saint-Étienne War Memorial*

The shadow of shirkers and profiteers and the fear that commemoration would 'glorify the war' can account for the difficulties in constructing a memory of the Great War and establishing a consensus founded on opposition to the *Chambre Bleu horizon*.<sup>293</sup> The endless deliberations over the war memorial in the capital of the Loire department attest to this.

The first trimester of 1920, it must be noted, was marked by large-scale strikes in Saint-Étienne, from railway workers to miners. Pierre Chovet, a trade unionist for railway workers and local councillor for Saint-Étienne (he was on the list led by Ferdinand Faure in November 1919), was a

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290 Citations taken from M. Luirard, *op.cit.*, p. 76.

291 Antoine Prost, Jay Winter, *Penser la Grande Guerre. Un essai d'historiographie*, Seuil Point-Histoire, 2004, p. 201.

292 On this question, see Jean-Louis Robert, *Les Ouvriers, la Patrie et la Révolution. Paris 1914–1919*, Besançon, Les Annales littéraires de l'université de Besançon, 1995.

293 The 1919 legislative elections gave a majority to right in parliament, the *Bloc National* coalition, which is where the expression '*Chambre Bleu horizon*' comes from.

member of the general strike committee. In a speech delivered to 7000 people, he proclaimed: 'I salute the proletarian class. We need to make the profiteers pay. Long live the social revolution.' The 'assassin' generals who led the war were also in his sights. Chovet represented an anti-militarist hard line that would see him, in 1924, 'calling for the working class to desert en masse if a new conflict broke out'<sup>294</sup>. This background is important for understanding the reluctance of the municipal council to commemorate the war.

At the municipal council meeting of 12 May 1920, elected officials denounced the students from the *École des Mines* who had replaced striking railway workers. Some right-leaning members of the *Union nationale des combattants* supported the efforts of students. A communist deputy mayor condemned the *Ecole* as the 'home of Action française' (a far-right monarchist movement) and attacked the engineer as 'the most formidable adversary of the proletarian movement', which resulted in the delay of a vote on a subsidiary for the new *Ecole* building. These circumstances bear witness to a radicalisation of political life, which favoured the birth of the communist party to the detriment of traditional revolutionary trade unionism. Society in Saint-Étienne was more divided than ever, and a new line of division emerged: those that opposed both the workers and the soldiers, the back and the front. For this reason, the city opposed any official participation in the 11 November ceremonies. On 10 September 1920, the municipal council ruled: 'We have taken the resolute decision not to participate in the celebrations being organised for 11 November because it does not represent a Republican celebration for us, rather it appears to be a nationalist and militarist event.'

This movement would become widespread with the dynamics that emerged from the Tours Congress (December 1920). Ferdinand Faure represented the radical anti-commemorative position. During the municipal council meeting on 24 February 1921, he refused to vote for the subsidy to erect a war memorial, but he supported the proposal that sought to affix a plaque in memory of the 'fusillés' from the Great War. The Prefect put an end to the project but, in the same year, the city renamed a road in Saint-Étienne 'Rue des Fusillés de Vingré' (which would later become 'Rue des Réhabilités de Vingré' and then 'Rue des Martyrs de Vingré').<sup>295</sup>

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294 <http://maitron-en-ligne.univ-paris1.fr/spip.php?article2302>, entry 'CHOVET Pierre' by Jean Lorcin, version uploaded 30 June 2008, last modification 29 June 2012.

This difficulty of constructing a memory of the war explains the endless deliberations over the memorial in Saint-Étienne, which the newspapers spoke of as a source of 'shame'. As it deliberated, the municipal council decided to affix a commemorative plaque on the Hôtel de Ville.<sup>296</sup> Significantly, this plaque makes no direct reference to the Great War, rather it reproduces François Rude's *La Marseillaise*, a republican icon paying homage to the volunteer soldiers of 1792. The event of the 'First World War' gives way to a reminder of the Revolutionary myth and a re-affirmation of Republican culture, as if there was a potential paradox that only sought to view patriotism through a belligerent lens. This symbolic distancing from the Great War expresses the municipal council's difficulty of positioning itself on the very delicate terrain of memorialising the role of Saint-Étienne during the war.

It was not until 23 October 1933 that, after years of controversy, the Saint-Étienne war memorial at Place Fourneyron was finally inaugurated. This delay was not only because of its cost as was frequently mentioned at the time. The Saint-Étienne council meeting on 22 February 1930, which relaunched the project, was keen to reaffirm 'the reservations expressed in 1921, that is to say that the memorial, in general, should express the idea of peace and exclude any glorification of the war'.<sup>297</sup> It was about paying 'homage to the children of our city who died during the turmoil'. A long-lasting dividing line formed between partisans for the cult of 'heroes' and those attacking the 'butchery' that attached itself to the 'victims', between those who valorised the country and those who advocated for 'universal' accord, between those who were in favour of the war memorial and those who above all were looking at it from the perspective of the labour council.

The change that came about in 1930 is certainly linked to Antoine Durafour's rise as the leader of the council. As a member of parliament and minister, he brought about the vote for the '5 sous for the poilus' law. The population of Saint-Étienne liked the man who was also behind the laws establishing an eight-hour working day in the mines and social security. As *Le Poilu* from 11 November 1930 recounts: 'For the first time, the mayor of

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295 The 'Vingré martyrs' were six soldiers (three of whom were from the Loire department) shot 'as an example' in the Aisne department in December 1914. They were rehabilitated in 1921 by the court of cassation. A consensus quickly emerged within the municipal council. See: Nicolas Offenstadt, *op.cit.*, p. 86, p. 91.

296 Registry of municipal council meeting minutes, AMSE, 1 D 113.

297 Minutes of the Saint-Étienne municipal council meeting from 23 October 1930 (which mentions previous meetings). ADL 1 M 614.



Saint-Étienne enthusiastically waved the flag and was brilliantly passionate'. The previous year, on 1 August 1929, the international day against war declared by Communist International had not been a big success. The page of hostility towards commemorating the Great War gradually turned.

### *Constructing War Heritage Outside Public Spaces*

Before 1930, war heritage was constructed outside public spaces. The memorialisation of the industrial war effort, which was politically highly sensitive, discreetly materialised in private spaces across the city of Saint-Étienne as the following four examples show.

The first project was the erection of a commemorative monument, which is currently housed at the Musée de la Mine in Saint-Étienne. The monument was inaugurated on 11 July 1920 at the former Couriot mine. One of the rare company memorials, *La Victoire* sculpted by Paul Graf presents a group of three bronze statues — a winged Victory, a soldier and a miner — with mining tools depicted on the rear. The monument carries the following inscription: 'From the Société des Mines de la Loire to its fallen employees, victims of war and duty.' This monument, a unique work of statuary in France, seeks to reunite the poilus of 1914 and the miner, the worker and the warrior in one homage. Its anthesis is found in Levallois where the war memorial, one of the rare explicitly pacifist examples, stages a worker breaking a sword, which would provoke a hostile campaign from the UNC.<sup>298</sup> For the mining company, it was a case of honouring 'the many employees that we lost, fallen on the battlefield of honour' and who 'without any distinction of social rank, paid with their life for devoting themselves to defending the fatherland'<sup>299</sup>. Contrary to the dominant discourse of shirkers and profiteers, the employer sought to show that industry too had fulfilled its 'duty' far from the front, and that victory was as much due to them as the frontline fighters. The back and the 'employees' also have a right to their part of the honour:

'We have the right to pay homage to all our employees without distinction, because we owe it to their intelligence and their tireless activity

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298 Frédéric Rousseau (ed.), *Guerres, paix et sociétés, 1911–1946*, Neuilly, Atlande, 2004, p. 553.

299 Société anonyme des Mines de la Loire: report by the board of directors to the annual general meeting (1911–1920). ADL, 1 ETP 1058.

for having developed our production at a moment where the intensified needs of national defence imposed an extra effort on all of us.<sup>300</sup>

The second project appeared in a Catholic setting, with the inauguration of a memorial to the students of the Saint-Louis boarding school on 22 May 1921. There were no representatives from the municipal council at the inauguration, which can be easily understood, but the colonel in command of the Saint-Étienne branch was present. The president of the association for former pupils reeled off the religious metaphors. What the poilus lived for five years was a 'Passion'. Their sacrifice was sacred. The poilus were the 'sacred phalanx of God', the 'resurrection' awaits them. Homage was paid to the army, that 'great family', and its leaders. The writer Charles Péguy was the titular figure of the ceremony.<sup>301</sup> It was the cross and the sword, all that Saint-Étienne's municipal council viewed with dread.

The Saint-Étienne lycée was behind the third project and erected a monument to the memory 'of its teachers and former pupils'. During the inauguration on 19 November 1922, the mayor himself delivered the speech in the guise of a former pupil. It was as if he had been liberated from the pressures exerted by the left and could let his own emotions speak. Whilst he deplored the 'losses' that no 'glory' could ever repay, he acknowledged the 'heroes' who represented 'the immortal France' that the monument symbolised. Vouillé, Poitiers, Bouvines, Patay, Valmy, Marne: 'these are the immortal steps of France's defence,' proclaimed the mayor. However, he took care to add an important nuance: 'the French people have acquired their military glory, superior to that of all the other peoples, *not in conquest but in defending* victoriously its land for fifteen centuries'. He even dared to cite the reactionary Joseph de Maistre and his definition of the fatherland.<sup>302</sup>

The fourth project was located in another educational institute: the École des Mines de Saint-Étienne. From 1921, a collection of biographies featuring students who were killed or received recognition during the war was published.<sup>303</sup> It was a homage to the role that science and industry played

300 Report by the board of directors on the 1920 financial year (1921), Société anonyme des Mines de la Loire; report by the board of directors to the annual general meeting (1921–1929). ADL, 1 ETP 1059.

301 Speech reproduced by M. Luirard, *op.cit.*, p. 101–102.

302 *Ibid.*, p. 107–108.

303 L'École Nationale des Mines de Saint-Étienne à la guerre 1914–1918, (1921). Fonds de l'Amicale des anciens élèves de l'École des Mines de Saint-Étienne., AMS, 18 S 266.

to put France on the side of the victors, but, with a preface written by General de Castelnau, Chief of the Defence Staff during the war, it was also a sign of support for the army. A member of parliament for the right and president of the Ligue des Patriotes before establishing the Fédération nationale catholique, Castelnau was a figure on the anti-communist, nationalist right, representing the complete opposite of the dominant political culture in Saint-Étienne. Castelnau acknowledged the engineers from the École des Mines who contributed to 'that abundant wartime rise of the metalwork and mining industries applying themselves to the war effort'. In the speech the dean delivered during the ceremony awarding the Croix de Guerre to the Ecole on 20 June 1926, he endeavoured to render homage to the Maréchal Émile Fayolle (originally from Puy and former student, like Maréchal Foch, of the Collège Saint-Michel in Saint-Étienne) who presided over the ceremony. He anointed him a 'great soldier crowned with the purest glory'. In the same hero-worshipping tone, a war veteran imagined that the fallen soldiers were looking down at the Maréchal: 'They are looking down at you, Maréchal, and their eyes, still filled with the horrors of the battle, but also its tragic beauty, are saying: thank you<sup>304</sup>'. His speech ended with a hymn to France and her glory:

'France, oh beloved fatherland, on the ever-gloomy route to peace, can you find leaders to guide you worthy of those that wrote the most glorious pages of your glorious history?'

The president of the École's board of directors foregrounded the role of the soldiers of industry who also could risk the worst fate outside of the battlefield in the defence of France:

'A plaque already full of so many names reminds the young generations of the dangers of the profession, but also the glorious service rendered by many of our former students, fallen victim to duty, some at the bottom of mine galleries, others during dangerous explorations in far-off lands, others in the factories where they pursued perilous research whose results were not insignificant for the defence of the fatherland.'<sup>305</sup>

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304 Speech by M. Doliguez, veteran. ADL, 1 M 675.

305 Circular n°195, la Société amicale des anciens élèves. Fonds de l'Amicale des anciens élèves de l'École des Mines de Saint-Étienne. 'Remise de la croix de guerre' (20 June 1926). AMSE, 18 S 266.

This ceremony worried the Prefect. The police reassured him: 'I have the honour of letting you know that there is no question in the progressive and extremist milieus of organising a counterdemonstration'.<sup>306</sup> The simple fact of having carried out this inquiry certainly indicates the tense climate that reigned in the capital of the Loire department. The Prefect did not want to speak out. The speeches must have really irritated the mayor who was present.

*Conflicts between monument committees and municipal councils*

Whilst memorials sprung up in almost all the small rural communes of the department without posing any political issues, it was not at all the case in larger communes whose industrial activities had been impacted by the war effort. Some communes refused to finance war memorials, leading to the creation of committees that took charge of the project and organised the ceremonies. The case of Firminy shows how this could be a source of conflict.

At its highest, the Forges de Firminy employed 9983 workers during the war.<sup>307</sup> The town's municipal council refused to be represented at the inauguration of the commemorative memorial and provided no subsidy. In the lead up to the inauguration, which was scheduled for 11 November 1928, the Prefect of the Loire wondered if he should accept the invitation that the war memorial committee had sent him. Was the municipal council going to be associated with it? he wondered. And will the member of parliament be invited? When quizzed, the police superintendent seemed to know that the memorial committee 'had not yet sent invitations to the municipal council, nor any politician in the region'.<sup>308</sup> The municipal council had only been informed of the date of the inauguration. The committee for planning the memorial to the Great War in Firminy had been set up precisely because of the council's reluctance, so it was therefore a purely private endeavour. The superintendent concluded: 'In any case, it is already almost certain that Firminy's municipal council will refuse any invitation sent to it'.

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306 Note from special superintendent Nonon to the Prefect of the Loire department, 16 June 1926. ADL, 1 M 675.

307 Factories of war: list of businesses working for national defence (1916). ADL, 2 R 126.

308 Note from the superintendent of the Firminy Police to the Prefect of the Loire department, 22 October 1928. ADL 1 M 614.

The committee was presided over by M. Vergeat, a disabled veteran. He was a sales representative on behalf of the coal mining companies in Roche-la-Molière and Firminy. The committee members, if the superintendent is to be believed, were 'patriots' who profess 'republican ideas, a centre left persuasion, with some individuals slightly more to the left without adhering to socialism'. With only one representative from the working class, a metal-worker, the social composition of the committee is telling. In addition to Vergeat, it included a trader, a war widow, three office workers, a masonry business owner, a sales representative, and a privately wealthy woman. The working class was not reflected in this committee; and the municipal council did not support the project.

When the associations charged with planning memorials did not initially have support from the commune, they sometimes sought funding to organise the inauguration. This was the case, for example, in the commune of Roche-la-Molière. The municipal council put to a vote the decision of attributing the sum of 3000 Francs to the event: 8 votes 'for', 4 'against', 1 abstention. Opposition was discreet, but real. In small communes, the situation was very different. In general, all the municipal councillors participated in the planning committees and supported funding contributions. Political questions did not interfere with consensus, rather it was the opportunity for a collective celebration.

In rare cases, there was no inauguration for the monument. The commune of Saint-Martin d'Estreaux in the conurbation of Roanne has the only explicitly pacifist monument in the Loire department. The village's mayor Pierre Monot, a farmer and departmental councillor with radical socialist tendencies, wanted to pay homage to the 64 fallen soldiers from his commune. Yet, he combined that homage with a critical reflection on the war and those who could not stop it. The account of the conflict that appears on the bas relief specifically mentions the 'scandalous fortunes built on human misery' and more discretely men who were shot as an example ('From innocent to the execution post'), before declaring 'Damned be the war and its authors!' The mayor never hid his wish for those shot as an example to be rehabilitated. Erected in 1922, the memorial would only be inaugurated in 1947. It has been vandalised several times.

*Religious Symbols: A Source of Conflict*

Religion, like politics, was also a dividing factor. One source of dissensus was the question of the presence of religious representatives at the ceremonies. In Grand’Croix in 1921, the municipal council clashed with the war memorial planning committee as it intended to apply an old decree banning the clergy from wearing sacerdotal dress in any procession that they took part in. The village’s commemorative programme was also drawn up without the municipal council’s consent. The mayor feared that the procession would provoke a counterdemonstration by the Barbusse group. Henri Barbusse, an anti-clerical pacifist and veteran, wrote *Le Feu* (1917), the first book demystifying the Great War. ‘Barbusse groups’ circulated pro-Bolshevik ideas. The police superintendent concluded: ‘Though it is certainly divided into two camps, the population is calm. Opinion is split, but the majority of inhabitants approve the mayor’s decision’.

Demonstrations from the far left were feared, as were ‘reactionary events’ to use the term found in a note by the police superintendent of Rive-de-Gier. As the clergy was excluded from the commemorative public space, they organised events on their own land, in private spaces. In Rive-de-Gier, a war memorial was inaugurated on 29 August 1920 at the Notre-Dame church. However, the procession was formed on and had to take a public road, which the police superintendent reflected on:

‘On this occasion, a slightly reactionary event was organised and in which sports clubs from Saint-Chamond, Izieux and Rive-de-Gier took part. In a procession, this group crossed the main roads of the town. No provocations, nor incidents of any nature were reported during their passage. It should be mentioned that the bishop of Saint-Étienne delivered a measured, correct and especially patriotic sermon. On the other hand, Sir Germain de Montauzan gave a long speech to the Mollard circle (free schools) during which he showed himself to be somewhat aggressive towards the government. The impression left by the speaker was of an eloquent, ironic and even aggressive orator. Around 1500 people listened to and applauded his speech<sup>309</sup>’

The religious issue could also emerge in other situations, for example, when there was a request to transfer a war memorial from the municipal

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309 Note from the superintendent of the Rive-de-Gier police to the Prefect of the Loire department, 30 August 1920. ADL, 1 M 614.

cemetery to a public space. The town of Veauche presents an interesting case that shows the difficult relationship between these committees and municipal councils, particularly when the council did not align with the association's motivations.

In 1919, the Veauche war memorial was planned for the small Place des Tilleuls, which bordered the main road. Private land had been given over to the commune. The initial project included religious symbols and it was rejected by the Prefect of the Loire department. Arguing that this memorial had been financed with public funds and a contribution from the commune, the Prefect explained that this public memorial, on public land, could not exhibit any religious symbols. A new project without Christian emblems was submitted to the Prefect and was accepted. However, in protest, the committee's treasurer refused to transfer the funds to the municipal purse. The committee opposed transferring the 10,000 francs that they had collected on the grounds that 'the incorporation of the religious symbol, the cross, had been the main reason for these donations'. By way of conciliation, the mayor proposed placing the memorial in the cemetery. Despite opposition from some councillors, a new ruling from the municipal council intervened in the matter in February 1920: the monument would be erected not in the initial location, in a public space, but in the municipal cemetery with the original religious symbols. All interested parties seemed satisfied.

However, ten years later, on 13 April 1930, without consulting the committee members or the donors, the municipal council reversed their decision: they wanted to return the memorial to the original site, a public space, and to remove its religious symbols in line with article 28 of the law of 9 December 1905. A request to stop the movement of the monument was submitted on 25 March 1931. The members of the committee felt betrayed, and an intense legal debate ensued. Article 28 states: 'It is prohibited, in the future, to erect or to affix any religious signs or symbols on public buildings or in any public place, except on buildings used as places of worship, burial grounds, in cemeteries, and on funerary monuments, including museums and exhibition halls. As a defence, the municipal council explained that 'war memorials are not on funerary monuments'. In response, the Conseil d'État's decree of 4 June 1924 ('arrêt Lebon') was brandished. The decree stipulates that the definition of a 'funerary monument' applies to all monuments designed to remember the dead, wherever they are erected, even if they do not cover a grave'. For the mayor, it was all in the small details: 'it is a commemorative memorial and not a funerary monument'.

He explained that it was ‘a question of higher principles. Men were not called to the front for belonging to one religion or one philosophical sect, and some Frenchmen did not belong to any. In fact, ‘men holding very different views did their duty and to be equitable, if any symbol other than those representing France needed to figure on the monument, there would be place to inscribe them all without distinction’<sup>310</sup>. Moreover, the mayor referenced the fact that the commune had given 2000 francs for the memorial, and a further 1500 francs for its enclosure, which made up the largest contribution towards the 12,000 francs cost. The Prefect followed this line of thinking and ruled against the complainants: the memorial would be placed on town land since, having paid the businesses through the municipal purse, the commune was its owner and could manage it as it wished.<sup>311</sup> It was agreed the religious symbols would be removed. In the place of the cross, three names were engraved: Marne (which marked the halting of the invasion); Verdun (which symbolised ‘resistance and courage’); Somme (where ‘the movement to evacuate the region’ emerged).

Sometimes there was a war of memorials, which crystalised the tensions between working class memory and memory of the war. This was the case in La Ricamarie, a mining village whose emblematic figure was the trade unionist miner and mutual benefit company militant Michel Rondet. La Ricamarie’s Poilus organisation decided to take on the planning of a memorial in 1920. To collect funds, they organised a fête with a raffle. The Prefecture advised that the association would need the municipal council’s authorisation if they wanted to put the takings towards the committee’s activities. To force the hand of the municipal council, the association asked the Prefect directly to be the committee’s honorary president, which he ‘gladly’ accepted. The municipal council therefore could not oppose the tombola. However, a war of monuments was already underway in the village, which meant that secular associations were absent from the war memorial’s inauguration on 3 September 1922. Their issue related to the statue monument dedicated to Michel Rondet, which was discreetly inaugurated by the trade unionists in 1913. Ten years later, in a highly significant symbolic act, the statue was moved on 3 March 1923 to a prominent location in front of the town hall. Working class memory supplanted memory of the war.

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310 Veauche municipal council meeting minutes, 1 March 1931. ADL, 1 M 614.

311 Note to the Prefect of the Loire department, 9 April 1931. ADL, 1 M 614.



'Politicians don't understand the word "Fatherland"'

Organising the inauguration of memorials often led to controversy. When communes themselves planned the inauguration ceremonies, it was necessary to work with veterans to avoid the risk of conflict, which was what happened in Roanne.<sup>312</sup> The war memorial's inauguration was scheduled for 1 November 1925. All would have gone off smoothly had the mayor Albert Sérol not decided to deprive veterans of the opportunity to speak. For the press, who widely reported this controversy, it was a political issue. *Le Journal de Roanne* from 11 October 1925 wrote:

'Clearly there is fear that they (the veterans) would not be internationalist or pacifist enough. There is fear that they would stress too loudly the detestable responsibility of Germany. In particular, there is fear that they would mention the victory, *the victory that is loathed and misunderstood* by the amnesty party, the shirkers and second line fighters. Are the soldiers going to take this snub without protesting?'

*L'Union républicaine de Roanne* also criticised the mayor's decision as an inexcusable 'lack of tack'. Behind this reluctance of allowing the veterans to speak, there was apparently a desire to exonerate Germany to the detriment of Raymond Poincaré: 'We know that the mayor's party supported the odious idea that Poincaré was responsible for the war'. Sérol was also a member of parliament and supported the left coalition as a member of SFIO.

The procession started well. After long negotiations, the mayor allowed the president of an association for bereaved parents whose sons had died for France to speak, but not representatives of veterans, who saw this move as a trick. The names of the 1297 fallen soldiers were read out. The mayor's speech was structured around the idea that it was necessary to 'preserve the memory of the fallen for future generations so that there would be no more wars' and to move towards 'a general reconciliation of all peoples'. Hate must be banished. This speech, influenced by the ideas of Aristide Briand, aimed to distance itself from nationalism and anti-German sentiment. Numerous veterans on the right did not see themselves reflected in the speech. The expression 'loathed victory' comes from this misalignment, which once again raises the ever-present question of shirkers in Saint-Étienne and the

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312 The key references for the Roanne affair come from the file: ADL, 1 M 615.

positions that elected officials on the left sometimes took with regard to conscious objectors.

The Sub-Prefect’s speech was the least well accepted. He explained that the victory was actually made possible because the soldiers had been educated in the Republic’s schools, that is secular schools where ‘moral virtues are glorified’. According to the 2 November edition of *Le Nouveau Journal*, the sub-Prefect was ‘pathetic’. The little that he said of his own invention was ‘misplaced’: ‘The soldiers educated in secular schools did do their duty, but others did theirs as well’. The mayor was ‘sectarian’. The article ends simply with: ‘Poor fallen soldiers’. The religious divide, which ran through French society and resulted in strong political oppositions, is found here. The Sub-Prefect should be reported to the Prefect of the Loire department. Significantly, the article was written by ‘an injured veteran who had undergone trepanning’ and was president of the Poilus’ association in Roanne. He accused the Sub-Prefect of acting ‘politically’ in the name of the ‘reactionaries’ and to the profit of the parliamentary group Union républicaine. He assured readers that he did not enjoy ‘any respect’.<sup>313</sup>

On 3 November, *Le Nouveau Journal* was even more damning, running the headline: ‘Politicians don’t understand the word “Fatherland”’. The Sub-Prefect was ‘odious’: he had insulted the fallen. The criticism of the mayor’s speech was cutting:

‘When he finished, the only thing we learnt was, according to him, the poilus were not killed to save France, but for international justice... International justice? The poilus were... They marched because the Boche invaded their land, burnt their houses... But the mayor couldn’t say any of that because his party maintains that Germany wasn’t responsible for the war.’

Whilst this account of the mayor’s speech is highly selective and inaccurate,<sup>314</sup> it does reveal how violent the disagreements were.

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313 Note from the Sub-Prefect of Roanne to the Prefect of the Loire department, 7 November 1915.

314 The Sub-Prefect said: ‘Teachers will teach them [the children] how France was unjustly attacked and how she defended herself. [...] It was because it wasn’t just France that was at stake in the war, but defending ideals of liberty, civilisation, and social justice of which she is the flagbearer. Those whose memory this memorial preserves were sacrificed in the hope that the war would spare other generations. I think not of diminishing Germany’s responsibility and reducing the crime that her leaders committed by unchaining it from the plague that cost the lives of millions

The great interpretative debate over the causes of the war and what Europe should subsequently become bubbles to the surface in these speeches. The mayor was ahead of his time in terms of opinion. He was reproached, like in the *Journal de Roanne*, for not having named France, nor the victory (which was real), for having given an 'official and cold' speech 'like the style of the memorial itself'.<sup>315</sup> Yet, underlying it was the strength of political, religious, and ideological divisions, and, precisely at that time, those for and against the leftist coalition. On 11 November 1925, the Roanne branch of the poilus association had its revenge. They organised a highly successful event that contradicted the Sub-Prefect's account. It started with a mass at the aptly named Notre-Dame des Victoires church in the presence of 1500 people. The procession (in which the Action Française flag was present) then visited the memorial for the soldiers of the 1870 war, before reaching the cemetery. A speech was delivered honouring 'the courage of our soldiers during the war'. The next day, the *Journal de Roanne* praised 'a magnificent patriotic display': 'the veterans have their revenge for the insult of 1 November'. All the city's patriotic societies and a delegation of officers from the garrison responded to the invitation. Yet, there were also notable absences, namely the association of the war wounded. The speeches spoke of the 'glorious fallen soldiers' and their sacrifice, but the president of the Poilus association had to concede that the sacred union was dead: it was a 'return to the pre-war internal fighting'.

Even if this lament for the end of national 'concord' did not make its way into political discourse, it was increasingly affirmed in the discourse of those who represented the veterans. For example, in a 1922 speech, the president of the veterans' association in Chambon-Feugerolles spoke of his broken 'dream' in remarking that the 'community of danger and sacrifices', forged through 'so much suffering', had not survived the victory, that the 'great purifying current' which should have 'regenerated' France had come up against a barrier of 'divisions' and 'debates'.<sup>316</sup> One of the reoccurring ideas in

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of men. History will judge this crime with a merciless severity. But I have not come to sew or stoke hate between people either.' To cite the words of President Paul Painlevé during the inauguration of the Lorette war memorial, it was a question of the 'safety of Europe'. Cited in *Le Réveil républicain*, 8 November 1925.

315 The mayor positioned himself very abstractly: 'Be courageous. We need to raise up our fragile humanity, regenerate the old world. With all our strength, we wish that the passionate youth of tomorrow develop and thrive in safety, that humanity calmly opens the road to happiness.'

316 Speech delivered 11 September 1922. Cited in M. Luirard, *op.cit.*, p. 83.

the discourse of war veterans was the ‘sickening politics that divides us’,<sup>317</sup> which, nevertheless, was evoked in an ‘apolitical sense of coming together’.<sup>318</sup>

### Conclusion

In a speech in front of the war memorial, the mayor of Roanne imagined at the inauguration would allow for an unparalleled point of communion between citizens to be reached: ‘here today, nothing divides us. It is neither the time, nor the place for controversies...’ Either he was mistaken or taking refuge in denial. The commemoration of the fallen soldiers seems not to have had enough resilience or cohesive strength. This inauguration, in fact, revived divisions and increased the lack of consensus in opinion: ‘A work of misunderstood deaths, humiliated Poilus, a disappointed and unhappy population, that is the result of this sorry morning.’<sup>319</sup> Heritage’s virtues of social cohesion disappear into political cultures.

Pacifism, which postulates the ‘immorality’ of war, cannot pay tribute to the soldiers’ heroism or the participation of the arms industry. Victory has such a high price that it cannot be celebrated. The process of ‘glorification’ is a pitfall on the road to peace, which can just as easily lead to nationalism. A certain amount of forgetting, as Ernest Renan said, is thus necessary so that peoples will reconcile amongst themselves and work towards a united Europe. This discourse was rarely heard from war veterans who felt that their ‘victory’ was denied, their sufferance reduced to silence, and their sacrifices hijacked to the benefit of interests that were not their own. Moreover, as Antoine Prost has shown, war veterans on the left and right (including the UNC) were attached to the unity of memory and the idea of peace. Elected officials (especially communists), who feared that commemoration would engender national hate and took offense at the explosion of monuments, only wanted to see memorials that ‘glory not the victorious Fatherland, the grandeur of France or the triumph of the poilu, but the sacrifice of the dead’, testifying, above all, to a culture of republican civicism.<sup>320</sup>

317 Cited in Antoine Prost, *Les Anciens Combattants, 1914–1940*, Gallimard/Julliard, coll. Archives, 1977, p. 101–109.

318 Serge Berstein, Michel Winock (eds), *La République recommencée, de 1914 à nos jours*, Seuil, 2004, p. 69.

319 *Journal de Roanne*, 8 November 1925. ADL, 1 M 615.

This misalignment between what the war veterans felt and how some municipalities represented them resulted in an over-politicisation of the question of memory, which was used as an instrument to serve other causes. Part of the disappointment of the surviving poilus, who dreamed of an apolitical source of union and fraternity, comes from this misalignment. Sometimes, the Loire department's war veterans had to fight to preserve 'their' celebration of 11 November. They sometimes needed to explain (including in the early 1930s) that 'remembering is not stoking the fire of revenge. Rather, it is understanding the true price of sacrifice and paying homage in our reverence and our eternal gratitude to those that signed up for it, to those that died so that their Fatherland could live'.<sup>321</sup>

The question of the war's 'benefits', which fostered the refusal to commemorate the conflict, was rightly asked as part of an exhibition curated by the Musée d'art et d'industrie (October 2015 to March 2016) in Saint-Étienne that retraced the war effort. The very title of the exhibition ('Benefits of war, war of benefits?') resonated a century later as a response to the controversies of that time. The exhibition courageously addressed the theme of the profiteers at the back and the benefits of war. It aptly revealed the unease that Saint-Étienne society experienced (and still perceives today) regarding its industries' participation in the Great War. The inhabitants of Saint-Étienne must accommodate a conflicting memory that seeks a point of conciliation between an anti-militaristic political culture and the image of an industrial supplier of arms. This fundamental ambiguity is at the centre of the difficulties inherent to creating heritage around the Great War in the city. These difficulties were fanned by the violence of political expression and social combat that prevented Saint-Étienne society from uniting around the memory of the Great War. It would not be until the early 1930s that politicians would understand the profound meaning of a commemorative ritual, which promotes a 'funerary cult'<sup>322</sup> and adherence to the Republic. The paradox is that veterans, from one war to the next, and from left to right, continually showed their support for the pacifism found in the politics of reconciliation promoted by Aristide Briand, a long-standing member of parliament for the Loire department.

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320 Antoine Prost, *Republican Identities in War and Peace*, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

321 According to a speech delivered by Jean Taurines, member of parliament for Bloc National de la Loire and veteran who underwent amputation after the war, in Firminy in November 1928. Cited in M. Luirard, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

322 Antoine Prost, *Republican Identities in War and Peace*, *op.cit.*, p. 98.

## 5 Hiroshima. How to Create Heritage from the ‘Promethean shame’?<sup>323</sup>

The decision to create heritage for and memorialise an event inevitably reflects the regime of historicity and narrativity of the time in which that choice is made. Whether explicitly expressed or concealed, conscious or not, such decisions provide an account of the event, which is invested with a political function. Resembling a founding fiction,<sup>324</sup> these narratives, at once *historical remembrance* and *axiological reference point*, are all the more valuable for the heritage of wars and conflicts. Requests to inscribe ‘lieux de mémoire’ relating to the Second World War on UNESCO’s World Heritage list have provoked much controversy.<sup>325</sup> Due to the universality and renown conferred by this status, such requests propose constructing a ‘heritage of the worst of humanity’ that has virtues of truthfulness and prevention.<sup>326</sup> The Auschwitz Birkenau camp was the first in a series of Second World War sites to receive World Heritage status in 1979. In 1996, it was the turn of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome). The decision to designate the Genbaku Dome as ‘the witness transmitting the tragedy of Hiroshima to future generations’ was met with opposition. Whilst Japan and the United States are strategic allies, the latter criticised ‘the lack of historical perspective’ in Japan’s request, which would not allow for an

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323 This study is the result of the ethno-museographic research that I conducted in Japan, South Korea, and China from 2012 to 2017. I have presented conference papers on this topic on three occasions: The City University of Hiroshima, Hiroshima Peace Institute (12 February 2014); the Université du Québec in Montreal (4 June 2016) at the Association of Critical Heritage Studies’ biennale conference; Stephen F. Austin University in Texas (19 April 2018). The exploration of the file submitted to list the Genbaku Dome as a UNESCO’s World Heritage Site was carried out by my Masters students (HCP and DYCLAM+).

324 In the sense of ‘fiction instituante’ employed by Lucien Sfez in *Technique et idéologie. Un enjeu de pouvoir*, Seuil, 2002, p. 17.

325 Chloé Maurel, « Enjeux et tensions à propos du patrimoine mondial de l’UNESCO », *Revue d’histoire diplomatique*, 2016/2, p. 177–192.

326 Robert Belot, « La patrimonialisation du pire a-t-elle des vertus vériditives et préventives? Le Dôme d’Hiroshima comme lieu de *dé-mémoire* », *Ethnologies*, Laval university (Québec), vol. 37, n°2, 2017, p. 3–28.

adequate ‘understanding’ of the ‘tragedy of Hiroshima’.<sup>327</sup> Barak Obama would later reformulate this line when he visited Hiroshima for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial’s inscription. He let it be known that history was not the real concern behind creating a heritage site at Hiroshima.

This chapter explores how international recognition that the atomic bomb dropped by the Americans constituted the ‘worst of humanity’ introduces a new hierarchy of horror, which has the effect of lessening Japan’s war crimes and deflecting blame. It questions whether the process of creating heritage at Hiroshima had the effect of de-historicising the event it seeks to memorialise, thereby constructing a heritage without memory that runs contrary to history. I thus suggest that the Hiroshima Peace Memorial be seen as a ‘lieu de dé-mémoire’, a site that undoes memory, through a strategy of avoidance that overstates and does not mention. A double narrative effect is produced: an overstated discourse plays on emotions and enchantment (the bomb, the victims, nuclear danger) and a silent discourse is invisible and concealed (hypernationalism, Japanese hegemonism in the Asian Pacific, Pearl Harbour). The strategy of creating heritage for Hiroshima was thus based on a ‘politics of silence’, on an ‘inherent silence’,<sup>328</sup> produced by an ‘anti-discourse’ (as one would speak of anti-material) that commemorates to forget, highlights to conceal, and speaks to silence. This discourse prohibits any historical criticism: the event ‘Hiroshima’ is transformed into a metaphysical, post-historical object, whereby the discourse of the ‘worst to come’ allows for a forgetting of the ‘worst of the past’. Structured around a dystopia that sets in motion a catastrophising eschatology (the fear of destroying the planet), its effect (if not, its motive) is to silence the past. Philosopher Günther Anders advances this argument by seeing above all in Hiroshima an effect of ‘Promethean shame’,<sup>329</sup> which heralds humanity’s entrance into the era of technology as an end in itself.

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327 Statements by China and the United States of America during the Inscription of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome) <https://whc.unesco.org/archive/repc096x.htm#annex5>

328 Catherine Gravet, Héliane Kohler, eds, « Le non-dit », *Cahiers internationaux du symbolisme*, 2013.

329 In Greek Mythology, Prometheus is a titan, god of forethought. His ambition is to steal the sacred fire of Olympus and give it to men so that they have the capacity to transform matter. Prometheus thus teaches men the art of metalwork.

Heritage was long believed to serve history or rather collective memory. Philosopher Paul Ricœur's necessary intervention cautioned against the risk of substituting history and 'of the inversion of the historical into the commemorative',<sup>330</sup> which can contribute to a questioning of the verifiability of memory. Studying the case of Hiroshima shows how the phenomenon of creating heritage has the potential to lead to an obliteration of history, even a manipulation of memory.

### *Western Indifference*

In the aftermath of 6 August 1945, a profound indifference towards the victims of the first atomic bomb can be observed in the West. The Allies, who had just ended the barbarity of the Nazis, were still at war with the second persecutor, Japan, which had put the Asian Pacific to fire and the sword. This period was dominated by a fascination with the techno-scientific act that had produced a never-seen-before level of power. This ambient 'technophany' amongst the 'victors' contributed to a relativising of the horror endured by the 'defeated'. The hour was not for the compassion that today dominates how the heritage of atomic bombing Japan is represented, but for submission of the 'defeated'.

The great French atomic physicist Frédéric Joliot-Curie, a major force on the left, reacted positively, focussing on the techno-scientific progress that the bomb would enable, without considering its effects on the Japanese people. On 12 August 1945, the Nobel prize winner wrote in *L'Humanité*:

'If one must admire the United States' gigantic effort of research and production, it does not make it any less true that the first principles of its realisation were discovered in France and provided support of prime importance to this new conquest of man over nature.'

The atomic bomb was a technological feat that showed human's capacity to dominate nature (and other humans as well), which, at the time, was considered a decisive factor in the 'progress' of humanity.<sup>331</sup> In the United

330 Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2001, p. 91.

331 On the reception of Hiroshima in France and the perception of techno-scientific progress in the aftermath of the Second World War, see Robert Belot, *L'Atome et la France. Aux origines de la technoscience française*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 2015.



States, it was celebrated as a military, political, and technological victory.<sup>332</sup> In a survey carried out in September 1945, 69 % of Americans surveyed saw this discovery positively and 17 % saw it negatively. 27 % of Americans thought that the atomic energy could change the world, whilst 53 % did not think it would. Surprisingly, only 47 % of Americans believed that in ten years' time atomic energy would be used for practical purposes. As for the bomb itself, 85 % of Americans approved and 10 % disapproved. British opinion was established along similar lines: 72 % of people were in favour of the bomb.

At the same time, questions of commemoration were being debated in Japan over the specificity of the event, and whether the ruins should be removed or the site be preserved as a symbol of horror. On 5 September 1945, a local newspaper *Chugoku Shimbun* opposed the idea of making Hiroshima a place of memory: 'We all, who love our native land, are immensely angry at those who have no shame in putting forward the very irresponsible idea that the city of Hiroshima becomes a war memorial and be forever preserved in its ruined state.'<sup>333</sup> The deputy mayor of the neighbouring city Kure held the opposite opinion, declaring in 1946: 'I hope that you will preserve the ruins left by the flames as a commemoration in homage to eternal peace'. The idea was not to create a 'war memorial', but a memorial 'to peace'. Perhaps not the most obvious approach for a country that had long maintained a culture of war, this pacifist posture would surface very early after the end of hostilities. Pacifism allowed Japan to escape the 'shameful' image of military defeat through transforming a purely historical event (the bombing) into an eternal moral quest ('eternal peace') before the cold war had even begun. This pretext of atemporal pacifism also eschewed the impossibility of 'glorifying' or 'victimising' the survivors of the bomb, the 'Hibakusha' who were ostracised and made taboo by their fellow citizens.<sup>334</sup> Recounting his journey to Japan in 1946 for

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332 On the United States' entry into the atomic era, see Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light. American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1985. According to Boyer, just after dropping the bomb, 80 % of Americans said they supported Truman's decision.

333 Barthélémy Courmont, *Le Japon de Hiroshima. L'abîme et la résilience*, Vendémiaire, 2015, p. 139.

334 Robert Jungk, *Children of the Ashes: The Story of a Rebirth*, trans. by Constance Fitzgibbon, Paladin, 1985 p. 8. *Barefoot Gen* (1973–1974) by manga writer Keiji Nakazawa bears witness to this discrimination. See Pierre Pigot, *Apocalypse manga*, PUF, 2013, p. 44ff.

*Les Lettres Françaises*, Boris Agapov was surprised by the silence of people in Hiroshima regarding the question of the bomb's consequences:

'I asked the inhabitants about the delayed after-effects of the explosion, these after-effects we've heard so much about. No one breathed a word to me about this time bomb of evils, all the mysterious phenomenon etc. People only complained of the damaged caused to their property. Some claimed to have been blinded for several days by the extremely violent light of the explosion. At the present time, in both Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the grass is growing green, vegetables are growing well in gardens, children are having fun, the trams are running.'<sup>335</sup>

Only in 1957 did the National Diet of Japan vote for a law that guaranteed medical care for the Hibakusha.

André Duboscq's testimony can be cited as symptomatic of this widespread lack of feeling in the early aftermath of the bomb. Journalist at *Le Temps* and later *Le Monde* with significant expertise on Asia, Duboscq was professor at the Institut des hautes études chinoises and the Institut des hautes études internationales. In 1947, he published a book called *Les Japonais*, which he presented as a study on 'one of the actors of an unprecedented drama that played out in the world and is barely over'.<sup>336</sup> There is not even the smallest allusion to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Local councillors were early adopters of the pacifist strategy. Elected as mayor of Hiroshima in April 1947, Shinzo Hamai soon organised an event on the theme of pacifism. The first 'Festival of Peace' took place on 6 August 1947. His first speech erased the war and memory in favour of prayer and fear for the future. The speech presents three themes that would long structure the commemorative narrative in Japan: 'the horrifying army' who threatened humanity; the risk of a 'global war'; and the fear of 'humanity's extinction'. The fantasy of a total wipe out took shape; its approach is to de-historicise and decentre Japan. Hiroshima is no longer a Japanese city, but a global by-word for morality, the 'mecca of world peace'.<sup>337</sup>

335 Boris Agapov, « Visage profond sur Japon », *Les Lettres Françaises*, 16 August 1946.

336 André Duboscq, *Les Japonais*, SELFI Éditions, 1947, p. 8.

337 Yoshiteru Kosakai, *Hiroshima Peace Reader*, Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation, 1980, p. 22.

The Japanese would only acknowledge the bomb's medical consequences relatively late.<sup>338</sup> In 1954, Tokusaburo Dan, an eminent Japanese journalist and editor-in-chief of *Heiwa*, dared speak of the 'ashes of death [that] sowed terror in Japan'. On 1 October 1954, a scientific congress that addressed the subject took place. A short piece in *Le Monde* (28 October 1954) mentions the death of a 9-year-old girl, the thirteenth child victim of the delayed effects of radiation from the bomb. Cinema began to draw upon both the pacifist and proto-ecological aspects of the theme of nuclear warfare through *Gojira* (Godzilla, 1954) directed by Tomoyuki Tanaka. The film series depicts the story of a prehistoric monster who is awoken by atomic radiation. The public became familiar with the idea of total destruction, a theme that could not be treated in Japanese culture prior to 1945.<sup>339</sup>

In the West, the year 1954 marks a watershed moment that sees the fear of nuclear rapture beginning to attack the positive and progressive image of the civil nuclear industry.<sup>340</sup> Following the Korean War and nuclear testing at Bikini Atoll, the debate centred on the defence of Europe within the framework of the EDC (European Defence Community). The catastrophic spectre was increasingly present, a fear that emerged from the pacifist campaign orchestrated remotely by Cominform. It had an impact on enthusiasts of technological progress following the example of Jules Moch, a former student of the *École Polytechnique* and socialist, who published *La Folie des hommes* (1954). From 1951 onwards, Moch was France's permanent delegate at the UN Disarmament Commission and would henceforth speak of 'universal anguish'.<sup>341</sup> His key causes were the 'madness' of thermonuclear war and fighting for 'safe disarmament'. It was thus not by chance that the Peace Memorial Park opened on 1 April 1954.

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338 The embargo on medical information put in place by the Americans, occupying forces in Japan was there for a reason.

339 Pierre Pigot, *Apocalypse manga, op.cit.*, p. 77.

340 This did not stop Japan from having been one of the first civil nuclear powers.

341 Jules Moch, *La folie des hommes* (Preface by Albert Einstein), Robert Laffont, 1954, p. 168.

*Geopolitics and Metaphysics of Fear and Shame*

During the Second World War, Japan was the common enemy of the USSR and the United States. Hours after Hiroshima,<sup>342</sup> the Soviet army attacked Japan, 'formally' giving the coup de grâce. Years later, Japanese pacifism elicited the interest of the Soviet Union, which had since become a nuclear-weapon state.

When it carried out its first atomic experiment (29 August 1949), the Soviet Union was conscious of covering up and playing down this major event, which represented its mastering and possession of atomic weapons. At the same time, it launched a remarkably efficient campaign of pacifist intoxication that sought to blame the United States and mobilise opinions against European countries tempted by nuclear military power. It aimed to demonise the United States to weaken its bond with Europe and to prevent Europe from becoming a superpower once again. Using the memory of Hiroshima as a political instrument was part of this strategy. For this reason, the World Peace Council (created on the initiative of Cominform<sup>343</sup>) promoted Japan's attempts to work towards peace. For example, a song festival was created in 1952 whose slogan was 'Song is a great human force, a force for peace'. The *Bulletin of the World Peace Council* praised the event's fourth edition, which took place on 27 November 1955 in Tokyo, and mentioned two songs in particular: 'No More Atomic Bombs' and 'Fuji', 'a song expressing the Japanese people's love for Mont Fuji, currently threatened by launch ramps for atomic rockets'. This example shows that pacifism drew inspiration from the Soviet world, but it also underlines how the Japanese people were resisting American power in their way.<sup>344</sup> Japan's participation in the anti-nuclear campaign was in an indirect and clever way of criticising the United States, singing in unison with the USSR, and re-establishing itself on the world stage.

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342 Stalin would have been informed that United States would resort to the A-bomb and would have not disapproved.

343 The World Peace Council's first president was Frédéric Joliot-Curie, which would lead to his dismissal at the Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission. On 18 March 1950, the WPC launched the famous 'Stockholm Appeal', which specifically demanded 'outlawing of atomic weapons'. Japanese intellectuals welcomed the Appeal.

344 *Bulletin du Conseil mondial de la paix*, 1 January 1956, p.13. Fonds Pierre Biquard, École supérieure de physique et de chimie industrielles de la ville de Paris, carton 5.

According to John Richard Hersey, journalist at *The New Yorker* and Pulitzer Prize winner in 1945, the people of Hiroshima hated the United States. After the dropping of the bomb, he went to Hiroshima to interview survivors. His key witnesses were Jesuits (there was a mission in Hiroshima and a noviciate in Nagatsuka, five kilometres away) who participated in setting up humanitarian mutual aid and taking in the injured. He recounted the event through the eyes of the six survivors in his report for *The New Yorker* published at the beginning of 1946, which would become a book. It is perhaps the first investigation that intimately and precisely describes without pathos the bomb's terrible consequences on people succumbing to 'the strange, capricious disease which came later to be known as radiation sickness'.<sup>345</sup> Hersey is the first to recount, with empathy, the dignity of the dying people and to reveal the incredible phenomena produced by the bomb, like the permanent shadow thrown on the roof of the Chamber of Commerce Building, 220 meters from the centre of the explosion.

He explained that the occupying American forces 'systematically censored all mention of the bomb in Japanese scientific publications'.<sup>346</sup> Whilst the mushroom cloud had immediately acquired myth status, there was a lack of images of the victims due to the American blackout. The first archival footage was shown at the end of the 1960s, and it was only in 1995 that films made by the occupying American forces in Japan could be broadcast.<sup>347</sup> In response, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum from the very beginning aimed to 'illustrate' the event through a significant amount of photographs to confer on the event a radical centrality.<sup>348</sup> Whilst some inhabitants were stuck in fatalism and the cult of the emperor, Hersey did not hesitate to acknowledge that 'many citizens of Hiroshima, however, continued to feel a hatred for Americans which nothing could possibly erase'.<sup>349</sup> His book was a success in the United States, with a first print run

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345 John Hersey, *Hiroshima*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1946 p. 90.

346 *Ibid.*, p. 108

347 Barthélémy Courmont, *op.cit.*, p. 192. See also Selden, Kyoko, and Mark Selden, eds. *The Atomic Bomb Voices from Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, New York, M. E. Sharpe, 1989.

348 Frédéric Rousseau (ed.), *Les Présents des passés douloureux. Musées d'histoire et configurations mémorielles*, Michel Haudiard Éditeur, 2012, p. 128. See also Annette Becker and Octave Debary, *Montrer les violences extrêmes. Théoriser, créer, historici-ser, muséographe*, Craphis Éditions, 2012.

349 John Hersey, *Hiroshima*, *op.cit.*, p. 117

of 3 million copies, and provoked a sort of 'commotion'.<sup>350</sup> Hersey would become an anti-nuclear activist.

It was not because the American occupier censored the truth of this event that the Japanese demanded the truth. The pacifist strategy and the emphasis placed on one bomb is presented as a denial of historicity. Lisa Yoneyama states: 'Hiroshima memories have been predicated on the grave obfuscation of the prewar Japanese Empire, its colonial practices, and their consequences'.<sup>351</sup> This dialectic leads to favouring a commemoration based on prayers and mourning to the detriment of the 'truth': in 1954, the aim was to construct 'the Peace Memorial Park, a place of prayer for the peace of all mankind'.<sup>352</sup> The metaphysical dimension frees the memorial from the demands of history and serves the objective of exonerating Japan by shifting guilt onto the victor. In the shadow of the geopolitical recovery from the drama of Hiroshima, a metaphysical approach developed.

Against the backdrop of a widespread demand for defensible development, an accusatory discourse on the consequences of technical progress and Western science today dominates. This discourse establishes Hiroshima as the totemic figure of a repulsive representation of the atom bomb by giving the event a sort of metaphysical status. For example, when the tsunami hit Fukushima in March 2011 and damaged the city's nuclear power stations, the Japanese writer and Nobel Prize winner for literature Kenzaburo Oé came out to present Japan as the ontological victim of nuclear power, both military and civil. He also drew a questionable parallel between Fukushima and Hiroshima.<sup>353</sup>

This argument of a self-cannibalising technologization, a rationalism that sucks the blood of reason, was developed very early on by Günther Anders, a former student of Martin Heidegger.<sup>354</sup> The event of 'Hiroshima' is at the

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350 See Michael J. Hogan, *Hiroshima in History and Memory*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 149–152; Michael J. Yavenditti, 'John Hersey and the American Conscience: The Reception of "Hiroshima"', *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 43, N°1 (Feb., 1974), p. 24–49.

351 Lisa Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces. Time, space and the dialectics of Memory*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999, p. 3.

352 Yoshitaka Kawamoto, 'The Spirit of Hiroshima', *Museum International*, 'Museums of War and Peace', No. 177, Vol 45, 1993, N°1, pp. 14 -16 (p. 14).

353 Philippe Pelletier, 'Hiroshima-Fukushima, même combat', in *La Fascination du Japon. Idées reçues sur l'archipel japonais*, Philippe Pelletier (ed), Paris, Le Cavalier Bleu, 2018, p. 267–274.

354 Günther Anders (pseudonym of Günther Stern, 1902–1992) was Jewish of German origin and the first husband of Hannah Arendt.

heart of his reflection that would (discreetly) take shape in the middle of the 1950s. He was perhaps the first to transpose upon Hiroshima the ‘crime against humanity’ committed by the Nazis (which, being Jewish, he was particularly aware of). For him, the ‘Apocalypse’ is the infernal logic where man has put himself in the position of wanting that the ‘world becomes machine’. Nuclear power attests to the power of technology that takes power over humans: ‘We are capable of making a hydrogen bomb but we cannot imagine the consequences of what we have ourselves made’. The power of humans replaced the power of God and the power of nature. From this position, what he terms the ‘Promethean gap’ emerges: ‘the asynchronicity that grows each day between man and the world he creates.’<sup>355</sup> Technology was the promise of progress; it can become ‘the power of annihilation’ as Anders wrote in his major work *The Outdatedness of Human Beings* (1956). Philosophers seized the myth of the total destruction of humanity and secularised it: ‘It is the first time that the anxiety of the apocalypse has reached the non-religious.’<sup>356</sup> Yet, this point of view is moralising and guilt-inducing: Anders speaks of ‘Promethean shame’.<sup>357</sup> Starting from other preconceptions, the French philosopher Jacques Ellul comes to the similar conclusion that humans created a world of reification in which they bow down to ‘the superiority of the thing’, thus becoming ‘the object of the object’.<sup>358</sup>

This myth, which was taken up again at the beginning of the twenty-first century despite the cold war having ended, leads some, in entirely good conscience, to free themselves from the distinctions that the historian’s approach imposes. Jean-Pierre Dupuy, for example, considers Auschwitz, the tsunami of 26 December 2004, and Hiroshima within the same work.<sup>359</sup> Hiroshima has even been assimilated into the category of crimes specifically invented for the inalienable and irreducible Nazi horror: ‘crime against humanity’.<sup>360</sup> The inverted outcome of this line of thinking: by dropping

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355 Günther Anders, *L’Obsolescence de l’homme. Sur l’âme à l’époque de la deuxième révolution industrielle* (1956), Paris, éditions Ivrea, 2002, p. 31.

356 *Ibid.*, p. 308.

357 Günther Anders, *Hiroshima est partout*, éd. du Seuil, 2008.

358 Jacques Ellul, *La Technique ou l’enjeu du siècle*, Paris, Economica, 1990 (1<sup>st</sup> edition: 1954).

359 Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *Petite métaphysique des tsunamis*, éd. du Seuil, 2005.

360 Pierre Piérart, Wies Jaspers, *D’Hiroshima et Sarajevo. La bombe, la guerre froide et l’armée européenne*, Bruxelles, EPO, 1995, p. 7.

the first atomic bomb, the Americans join the same camp as those they fought against and the Japanese are transformed into victims.

In 1958, Anders visited Japan and attended the World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs and Disarmament in Tokyo (August 1958). The conference sought to ban the victors from possessing nuclear arms, a weapon that Japan, which had been defeated, could not have. Disarmament was designed to put countries on an equal geopolitical footing. Anders wanted to go to Hiroshima in person to immerse himself in the reality that inspired his philosophical engagement. His journal *The Man on the Bridge: Diary from Hiroshima and Nagasaki* offers a compassionate and empathetic perspective. He sought to help Japan reintegrate itself into a collective international project, or rather, into an international solidarity project based on a worldwide fear of the 'Apocalypse': 'We are in the same boat'.<sup>361</sup> In his journal, he presents his project: 'The goal of my trip is to accompany the Japanese at least on one part of the journey to show them that they are not alone, that we are considering the threats that weigh on them as they weigh on us, that we recognise their goal as our own'.<sup>362</sup> He spoke of a 'Babel of cordiality'. Anders presents a process that reverses established roles and images: the former persecutor gives lessons to the world and to potential future persecutors. As if fault forces a change of camp, Japan becomes affected with a loss of moral awareness. Japan the belligerent became a Japan of Buddhist temples: Anders was pleased that a young Buddhist Atsushi Ishimoto organised a procession from Hiroshima to the World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs and Disarmament in Tokyo.

This metaphysical pacifism has the power of relativising values and of negating time (of historicity): it forgets the meta-values that pushed the Americans to strike Japan with nuclear weapons, the warmongering and racist ideology that Japan had promoted since 1910, and the country's ideological break with the world. It was founded on two strategies: demonisation of the future/undoing of the past and a lack of differentiation/historical confusion ('babelisation' of events). This confusionism, serving comparatist demands, is current practice in Japan. For example, the Maruki Gallery created in 1967 in Saitama prefecture exhibits paintings of Hiroshima created by Iri and Toshi Maruki alongside collections on Auschwitz and Nanjing,

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361 Günther Anders, *L'Homme sur le pont. Journal d'Hiroshima et de Nagasaki*, 1958, p.92.

362 *Ibid.*, p. 99.



and even mentions the victims of mercury poisoning from industrial waste discharged into the sea in the nearby city of Minamata. The UNESCO authorities did not see cause to issue a reminder that this approach was anti-historic. In contrast, in its journal *Museum International*, Terrence Duffy comments: ‘The atomic bomb is thus juxtaposed with images from the Holocaust and from other examples of war and environmental destruction. This reflects the growing concern with finding a comparative dimension for the horrors of nuclear destruction.’<sup>363</sup>

### *Creating Heritage as Redemption*

As the USSR launched its peace offensive, the Japanese government decided to follow the Hiroshima authorities and consecrate its pacifist strategy. On 6 August 1949, a law conferred the status of ‘peace memorial city’ on Hiroshima. Its 1<sup>st</sup> article stipulates that the law has the aim ‘to provide for the construction of the city of Hiroshima as a peace memorial city to symbolize the human ideal of sincere pursuit of genuine and lasting peace’.<sup>364</sup> This ambition for heritage is not conceptualised as a desire to establish a ‘lieu de mémoire’ or a ‘lieu d’histoire’. Its three defining characteristics are:

- erasure of the war, forgetting history (‘peace’)
- decontextualisation of national specificity in favour of an international perspective (‘human ideal’)
- negation of time (‘lasting’)

This strategy proposes forgetting the past to preserve the future. Instead of a ‘Peace Memorial’, the neologism ‘Peace Futorial’ would more readily apply in this case.

Five symbolic places were conceptualised for this ‘peace memorial city’: the cenotaph (list of bomb victims’ names); a peace flame (which will burn until nuclear weapons no longer exist); the Genbaku Dome; the memorial museum (which opened to the public on 24 August 1955); and the Peace Park which, over the years, has become home to around 50 other small memorials paying homage to different categories of victims (students, wo-

363 Terrence Duffy, ‘The peace museums of Japan’, *Museum International*, n°196, vol. 49, Issue 4, December 1997, pp. 49–54 (p. 51).

364 ‘The Hiroshima Peace Memorial City Construction Law and Commentary’ <https://www.city.hiroshima.lg.jp/uploaded/attachment/23440.pdf>

men, post office workers) and benefactors (Marcel Junot, Norman Cousins, Barbara Reynolds). The attitude towards the Koreans who were killed in Hiroshima is symptomatic of the refusal to seek historical 'truth' and the denial of the suffering of non-Japanese people. A reminder that Koreans worked as forced labourers in the factories of Hiroshima's military-industrial facility would be unwelcome here. 40,000 Koreans were in the city on 6 August 1946. On 10 April 1970, a memorial to Korean victims of the bomb was inaugurated. The inscription on the mausoleum reads: 'Prince Lee-Woo and 20 000 others.'<sup>365</sup>

The museum attests to the same phenomenon of selective amnesia.<sup>366</sup> During a visit in 2014, I looked in vain for a photograph of the Japanese attack on the American Naval Air Force Base Pearl Harbour (8 December 1941), which precipitated the United States' entry into the war. Japan's policy of domination in the Asian Pacific is sidestepped, save for some references to 'incidents'. The war is not present here. Koreans only appear in statistical accounts where forced labourers are only mentioned implicitly and nothing is said about the 'comfort women'. The reasons behind the United States' decision to use the atomic bomb are the subject of a purely political and reductive reading: the Americans had to justify the funding spent on making the bomb and gain strategic advantage over the USSR. Historic silences oppose the profusion of images, personal belongings, and representations (notably burnt bodies) presented in a compassionate staging that offers more emotion than explanation.

Easing the Japanese conscience is spectacularly presented in the final area of the tour. Visitors cross a long room made up of small cubicles with desks where they can sign a peace declaration and a petition for banning military nuclear arsenals. They can read (or hear) letters by the mayors of Hiroshima who have sent letters of protest on the occasion of every nuclear test since 1968. This incredible collision of past, present, and future is designed to produce a cathartic effect for Japanese citizens. Young Japanese visitors in school uniform are required to sign the declaration. The worst of humanity, it is others; the risk, it is the future. It is perhaps the only museum in the world with such practices, even if the 'great illusion' of the utility of heritage and memory is common across all the projects submitted

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365 Yoshiteru Kosakai, *Hiroshima Peace Reader*, Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation, 1980, p. 75–76.

366 The museum's architect Tange Kenzo (1913–2005) had already worked on a design for a memorial to soldiers killed in combat that would have been located at the base of Mount Fuji. He re-used an idea of war into an idea of peace.

to UNESCO. The approach represents putting oneself on the side of the Good and the Universal by positively transforming the worst.

The 1993 special issue of UNESCO's journal *Museum International* on 'Museums of War and Peace' includes an article on the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum written by its then-director Yoshitaka Kawamoto, the only bomb survivor of his class of 48 students. Kawamoto mentions the museum's two names: 'Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum' and 'atomic bomb museum'. Emphasis is placed on the horror and the contemporary apolitical risk. The museum is concerned with appearing preventative, prophylactical, and pedagogical: 'Through the exhibits, the people of Hiroshima strive to relay the horrors of the atomic bombing and appeal for everlasting world peace. We would especially like to appeal to children<sup>367</sup> who bear the responsibility of leadership for the next generation.'<sup>368</sup> History and memory are absent from this presentation of the museum in favour of a futurist vision that is, at once, abstract (decontextualised historically), dystopian ('the threat of nuclear warfare'<sup>369</sup>) and beneficial (acting for universal peace). The whole museographic apparatus rests on the myth of utility, of visitors 'gain[ing] a greater understanding of the horror'<sup>370</sup> to avoid history repeating itself: 'As the first city to have suffered an atomic bomb in the history of mankind, Hiroshima has the responsibility to insist on the total elimination of all nuclear weapons to prevent our tragedy from being repeated. Hiroshima has consistently made an effort to promote world peace'.<sup>371</sup>

Duffy, who introduces this special issue, does not intervene to question this official Japanese discourse. On the contrary, he supports the fact that 'Peace museums are now emerging as a global trend in museum development',<sup>372</sup> UNESCO's mission is, of course, to encourage a 'culture of peace'.<sup>373</sup> Despite the fact that the Cold War had ended and, with it, the

367 Half the visitors in 1993 were children.

368 Yoshitaka Kawamoto, 'The Spirit of Hiroshima', *op.cit.*, p. 14

369 *Ibid.* The French version of this article makes an explicit comparison with the holocaust here by employing the expression 'la menace d'un holocauste atomique' [the threat of atomic holocaust].

370 *Ibid.* p. 15.

371 *Ibid.* p.16.

372 Terence Duffy, 'The Peace Museum Concept', *Museum International*, 'Museums of War and Peace', No. 177, Vol 45, 1993, N°1, pp. 4–6 (p. 4).

373 Revision of the 1974 Recommendation concerning education for international understanding, co-operation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms, UNESCO, 1974.

prospect of nuclear war became a purely hypothetical viewpoint, Duffy also puts forward the argument of pedagogical utility: ‘The portrayal of conflict for purposes of peace education.’<sup>374</sup> The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, built on the premise of not discriminating between just wars and unjust wars, offers anything but a historical analysis of ‘conflict’. This special issue does not ask two very fundamental questions: first, why did the Americans resort to dropping the bomb? Second, what will guarantee peace: the absence of the bomb or the absence of democracy? It is understandable why there is no mention of the importance of democracy, the right to self-determination, and human rights. This perspective suggests that showing the horror and calling for peace allows for historical critical perspectives to be dispensed with, even prohibits them. Kawamoto’s piece in the same volume begins with the statement: ‘The very name “Hiroshima” has come to symbolize the ultimate horror of the war. The Hiroshima Peace Memorial stands as both a reminder of the past and an eloquent plea for the future.’<sup>375</sup> The catastrophic future that nuclear arsenals were supposed to cause has not happened and the calls for pacifism had nothing to do with it. Paradoxically, the principle of nuclear deterrent has maintained the balance in the second half of the twentieth century: the ‘balance of terror’, an oxymoronic concept that was difficult to understand.

Pacifism instituted as a system and as a value in itself became a way for Japan not to think about the war. Given these conditions, the reasons behind the country’s request to have the dome listed as a World Heritage Site requires further investigation. Initially, the Japanese authorities’ desire to reconstruct and erase made most indicative traces of the bomb disappear. During his visit to Hiroshima, Anders was surprised: ‘The traces of annihilation were erased; by consequence, the memory of the annihilated was annihilated as well’.<sup>376</sup> He spoke of the need to fight against the ‘annihilators’. Anders looked at ‘the rusted structure of the dome’, the only vestige of the bomb preserved. This dome, which is all that remains of the Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall, was built in 1914. The Czech architect Jan Letzel designed a three-storey brick building with a five-storey central part crowned by a steel-framework dome. This highly resistant building was situated 150 meters north-west of the epicentre. As the skeleton-like frame was the only part preserved, it came to be habitually

374 Terence Duffy, ‘The Peace Museum Concept’, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

375 Yoshitaka Kawamoto, ‘The Spirit of Hiroshima’, *op.cit.*, p. 14.

376 Günther Anders, *Hiroshima est partout*, *op.cit.*, p. 181.

known as the 'Genbaku Dome', meaning 'the dome of the atomic bomb'. The museum tour signposts in English to the 'A-Bomb Dome'.

It was only in 1966 that the city of Hiroshima voted to conserve and restore the dome. There is the tendency to forget that this decision was taken against the Japanese government who did not want to contribute funding towards it. Controversies arose because many wanted it demolished for different reasons. During his visit, Anders did not consider it necessary to commit to conserving this single material witness to the catastrophe. His point of view was unusual at the time. He mentions the risk that creating heritage from this vestige presents: it would be liable to taking one part as the whole. For Anders, 'the absence of markers of what took place here cannot be embodied by this ruined building alone'. Hiroshima had become a symbol that exceeded its historic reality and it must not rule out the event that it was witness to: 'So that those who, even today, still do not know about it, finally understand that the name Hiroshima does not designate a city, but the state of the world; and that they understand that they live in Hiroshima as well.' This resembles the sentiment that runs through Marguerite Duras's film *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959): 'You saw nothing in Hiroshima.'

In the 1980s, new impetus was provided that would change the Japanese government's position on the Dome. In 1987, a new renovation programme was launched with a fundraising initiative that would finish on 31 March 1990. All the conditions had been met. Japan could submit its request to UNESCO to list Hiroshima as a World Heritage Site. The Japanese government presented this official justification (28 September 1995):

'Firstly, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, Genbaku Dome, stands as a permanent witness to the terrible disaster that occurred when the atomic bomb was used as a weapon for the first time in the history of mankind. Secondly, the Dome itself is the only building in existence that can convey directly a physical image of the tragic situation immediately after the bombing. Thirdly, the Dome has become a universal monument for all mankind, symbolizing the *hope for perpetual peace* and the ultimate elimination of all nuclear weapons on earth.' (My italics)

Beyond the attention placed on the ‘physical image’ of the catastrophe, there are two (seemingly contradictory<sup>377</sup>) stem cells at the core of the memory of Hiroshima:

- exceptionality (a unique techno-scientific and military event in history)
- universality (a valuable counter-example for the future of ‘all mankind’).

The event is essentialised and heritage is created from the future by eschewing any historical perspective. The file used for classification requests that can be consulted at UNESCO headquarters primarily contains technical elements, thus confirming the absence of any desire to inscribe this heritage creation operation in an approach of ‘historical truth’, of repentance or resilience. Similarly, there is not a sliver of reflection on the questions of democracy, right to self-determination, and human rights, in Japan or in the world, in the past or in the present. The focus is solely on the bomb alone, which allows for a sidestepping of the true issues of *why* the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and the nature of the regime that, during the first half of the twentieth century, from Korea to China, conducted a politics of violence and hegemony on peoples across Asia.<sup>378</sup> UNESCO experts did not seem aware of the assassination attempt on the mayor of Nagasaki (January 1990), following his declaration that ‘the Emperor bore some responsibility for the war’.<sup>379</sup> Nor did they notice that in 1994, only a year before the submission of the request, 161 members of parliament supported a petition (signed by 4.5 million Japanese people) disapproving of the tendency of their leaders to present ‘masochistic’ excuses during the annual anniversary marking the end of the war. Creating heritage of the Genbaku Dome is unique in that inherent to this process from the beginning was its opposite goal, namely the un-making of heritage. The honouring of this object immediately shifts its status as a ‘witness’ of the past (the war) to become, by means of its name, a ‘world’ symbol: ‘Hiroshima Peace Memorial’.

The ICOMOS’s report picks up on Japan’s arguments without distancing its position, thereby supporting the silences inherent to the heritage

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377 An exception presumably cannot be held up as a model of what must not be done and serve the future, particularly when the catastrophe predicted for 50 years has not taken place.

378 Robert Belot, Woo Bong Ha, Jung Sook Bae (eds), *Corée-France: regards croisés sur deux sociétés face à l’occupation étrangère*, Pôle éditorial de l’UTBM, Belfort, 2013.

379 George Hicks, *Japan’s War Memories: Amnesia or concealment?*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 1997, p. 72.

approach and the memorial vision of Japan: focussing on the event as it is, projection on the future, illusion on the preventive and pedagogical virtues. By listing this building, UNESCO sees it as a witness transmitting the tragedy of Hiroshima to future generations. It gives in to the myth of the utility of memory, which is not part of the historical approach of the historian. UNESCO's current webpage dedicated to the Genbaku Dome reflects this position:

'The Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome) was the only structure left standing in the area where the first atomic bomb exploded on 6 August 1945. Through the efforts of many people, including those of the city of Hiroshima, it has been preserved in the same state as immediately after the bombing. Not only is it a stark and powerful symbol of the most destructive force ever created by humankind; it also expresses the hope for world peace and the ultimate elimination of all nuclear weapons.'

What is interesting to note is that UNESCO, whose criteria are quite strict and recommendations imperative, remains silent on the memory that all heritage sites have the vocation to preserve. Whilst it claims to preserve 'cultural heritage', its recommendations remain purely technical, such as 'Protection and management requirements'. UNESCO is not concerned with the *truth* but the *beauty* of the site, with its website recounting: 'A city beautification plan was developed by Hiroshima City that calls for this area to remain an attractive space appropriate to a symbol of the International Peace Culture City.' What matters for UNESCO is that the city sought to protect the surrounding environment and planned a consultation process 'for building height and alignment, as well as wall colors, materials and advertisement boards'. UNESCO must have been pleased with the outcome as the Peace Memorial Park was additionally awarded the designation 'Place for Scenic Beauty' in 2007.<sup>380</sup> Visiting Hiroshima can thus elicit that strange sensation of finding yourself at Lourdes, in a place of pilgrimage or a 'theme park'.<sup>381</sup>

380 See 'Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome)' UNESCO World Heritage Centre <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/775/>. The information boards around the Park also refer to it as: 'Peace Memorial Park. National Place of Scenic Beauty'.

381 Jean-Louis Margolin, *L'Armée de l'Empereur, Violences et crimes du Japon en guerre, 1937-1945*, Armand Colin, 2007, p. 406. See also Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1994, p. 94.

The two countries most directly affected by Japan's fascist and supremacist politics prior to 1945 reacted negatively to UNESCO's listing of the site. The Chinese government stressed Japan's historic responsibilities: 'During the Second World War, it was the other Asian countries and peoples who suffered the greatest loss in life and property'. They denounced, but without giving precise examples, how, in 1995, 'there are still few people trying to deny this fact of history' and feared that 'it may be utilized for harmful purpose by these few people'. China judged that 'This will, of course, not be conducive to the safeguarding of world peace and security'. The future would seem to confirm these fears. Whilst China was content to express 'its reservations' on the acceptance of this proposed inscription, the government of the United States appeared more hostile. Its statement reminded that the United States and Japan are 'close friends and allies' who cooperate 'on security, diplomatic, international and economic affairs around the world'. Yet the country was not able to lend its support to the project on the basis of what it saw as a violation of history: 'The United States is concerned about the lack of historical perspective in the nomination of Genbaku Dome.' Obama would express the same sentiment during his visit to the site in 2016. The negation of contextualisation means that 'the tragedy of Hiroshima' cannot adequately be understood and serve the cause that this classification claims to defend: 'The events antecedent to the United States' use of atomic weapons to end World War II are key to understanding the tragedy of Hiroshima. Any examination of the period leading up to 1945 should be placed in the appropriate historical context.'<sup>382</sup>

According to Olwen Beazley, for whom this classification is a 'paradox of peace',<sup>383</sup> the American government would have feared the reaction of veterans as well as others who perceived UNESCO's distinction as an insult. It is interesting to compare the reaction of the French communist left to the American response. The newspaper journal *L'Humanité* (6 December 1996) showed itself to be the loyal heir of the pacifist, anti-American positions of the 1950s: it impartially participated in the strategy of making fascist Japan innocent by accusing the United States of practicing a politics of amnesia: 'In its opposition to the recognition of this monument as part of

382 Statements by China and the United States of America during the Inscription of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome) <https://whc.unesco.org/archive/repco96x.htm#annex5>

383 Olwen Beazley, 'A paradox of peace: the Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome) as World Heritage', in John Schofield, Wayne Cocroft (eds), *A Fearsome Heritage: Diverse Legacies of the cold war*, p. 33.



world heritage — and thus collective memory — the American authorities confirmed the country's determination to attempt to consign a major crime of the twentieth century to the scrap heap. But the international community has not succumbed to orders from Washington and Hiroshima will be a World Heritage Site for humanity'.

This acquiescence to the revisionist instrumentation of heritage and of UNESCO in view of 'whitewashing' history and repositioning Japan geopolitically is visible in Duffy's piece on 'the peace museums of Japan'. Duffy praises how the Hiroshima Memorial Museum allows visitors to record their own 'peace messages' in the lobby area. The historic silences in the museum's scenography are presented as virtues of moderation: 'It neither provocatively confronts the politics of Japan's past nor indeed challenges the visitor with rhetoric against nuclear weapons. Rather, by careful programming, it seeks to model the dignified desire of this city for global peace.'<sup>384</sup> The end of the article increases its pacifist and self-righteous tone, with Duffy suggesting 'One suspects that it will not be long before there is a peace museum in every major Japanese city. This a wonderful expression of commitment to such museums in the public arena.'<sup>385</sup>

Duffy seems to ignore the fact that ill-considered usages of the word 'peace' in Japan can border on intellectual dishonesty. For example, at the 'Peace Museum for Kamikaze Pilots' created in 1975 in Chiran, situated at the southern tip of Kyushu Island, visitors read that the kamikaze pilots 'wished for the restoration of peace and prosperity'. In Japan, the only true memorial to *peace* (in the sense generally understood) was conceptualised in 2001 as part of a report by an ad hoc commission set up by the government. It proposed dedicating a memorial to 'praying for peace' and remembering all those killed, not only the Japanese: 'all the foreign soldiers and civilians who lost their lives in the wars initiated by Japan'. The Japanese government did not follow through with this project which resembled more 'a publicity stunt designed to counteract the negative impact of [then prime minister Junichiro Koizumi's] visits to Yasukuni'.<sup>386</sup>

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384 Terence Duffy, 'The peace museums of Japan', *op.cit.*, p. 49.

385 *Ibid.*, p. 54

386 Michael Lucken, *The Japanese and the War: From Expectation to Memory*, Columbia University Press, 2017, p. 205–6

## Revisionism and Memory Wars

It is quite common to think that commemorating a heritage of the worst of humanity has values of appeasement, reconciliation and resilience. For Japan, the opposite has happened. Since the UNESCO classification, rather than peace, a return to honouring war heroes can be observed, which has created a war of memories with the countries who were victims of its former politics. This shift would seem to confirm the ineffectiveness of the preventative effects that the classification proclaims and the dangers of the pacifist campaign orchestrated since the aftermath of the war. More than ever, the victim remains history, which has been sacrificed on the altar of nationalist posturing.<sup>387</sup>

Since 1983, fundraising campaigns for financing Japanese peace museum projects have triggered strong reactions from right-wing opposition. With no inhibitions, proponents of this opposition organised a movement that sought to promote the idea of creating museums dedicated to the glory of the Japanese people who died during the war. Close to the Yasukuni shrine founded in 1869 to pay homage to the Japanese people who gave their lives in the name of the emperor,<sup>388</sup> there has been a war museum<sup>389</sup> since 1882 (renovated in 1961 and 2002), which reflects this position: glorification of the soldiers, justification of the wars conducted by Japan, diminishing of massacres inflicted on other peoples.<sup>390</sup> Similarly, the memorial museum in Chiran pays homage to the 'noble sacrifice' of the kamikazes. The museum, which was expanded and reinaugurated in 2000, attracts around 1 million visitors each year. In 1984, Tanaka Masaaki, former secretary to General Matsui (commander of the expeditionary force sent to China in 1937),

387 It should be noted that the history of historians progresses little by little entirely independent of 'heritage time'. In 1993, the Center for Research and Documentation on Japan's War Responsibility (JWRC) was created. Moreover, almost 200 lawyers were working on repatriation demands for victims of the Japanese empire in 1998. See: Jean-Louis Margolin, *L'Armée de l'Empereur*, *op.cit.*, p. 400.

388 The Yasukuni, a religious memorial, has become a symbol for revisionists. Amongst the soldiers honoured, there are 14 members of the armed forces who were tried at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East for war crimes. It should be remembered that, in addition to Yasukuni, there are 52 regional shrines that crisscross the memorial territory of Japan.

389 This museum is dedicated the souls of the soldiers killed in combat for the Emperor of Japan.

390 This revisionism appears very explicitly in the exhibit labels 'The China Incident' and 'The Korean Problem'.

became the messenger of radical revisionism by starting a series of books that denied the existence of the Nanjing massacre.<sup>391</sup> European scholars remained quiet on this phenomenon, even when they were, at the very same time, initiating the reverse approach in which ‘memory came to the fore in the public space’<sup>392</sup> with Pierre Nora’s *Les Lieux de mémoire* (1984), Claude Lanzman’s *Shoah* (1985), Paul Ricœur’s *Temps et Récit* (1985; *Time and Narrative*), and Pierre Vidal-Naquet’s *Les Assassins de la mémoire* (1987; *Assassins of Memory and Other Essays*). It would be unbelievable to imagine the creation of a museum in Germany dedicated to the glory of fallen soldiers from the Wehrmacht and Einsatzgruppen. A comparative study of Germany and Japan would reveal the strange clemency from which Japan has benefitted regarding its war crimes and crimes against humanity. In 1996, the same year of the UNESCO classification, the revisionist current was emerging, and the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform was created on the initiative of scholars, including Kanji Nishio.

Since 2000, this return to the war and its ‘heroes’ has been particularly evident. The most tangible and emblematic representation of this movement is the Yamato Museum (Kure Maritime Museum), which opened in 2005. After visiting Hiroshima, I was totally surprised to arrive in Kure. Kure is an industrial and military port, situated only a few kilometres from Hiroshima, which built warships. The museum shows its true colours: there is a warship on the forecourt, which is impossible to miss. Visitors are then greeted with an enormous propeller and an impressive canon. The *Mustsu* battleship is displayed in a vast entrance hall. Inside, the *Yamato* battleship takes centre stage with cross-section models. Education is in the service of heroism. The technological excellence of the Kure port and its responsiveness is celebrated. From the commander to ordinary soldiers, the men who served on the *Yamato* are praised: they are afforded portraits (individually or in groups) and short biographies. This warship’s unique history seems to justify it being given pride of place at the museum: it left the port of Kure on a ‘kamikaze journey’ and was sunk en route to Okinawa where a bloody battle with the Americans took place, the deadliest for them on the Pacific War. The letters that these sea kamikazes wrote before their departure are exhibited. There are also objects (bottles, telephones, lamps)

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391 Jean-Louis Margolin, *L’Armée de l’Empereur*, *op.cit.*, p. 399. It did not prevent school texts books at the end of the 1980s from mentioning the Nanjing Massacre and starting to make reference to ‘comfort women’.

392 François Hartog, *Croire en l’histoire*, Flammarion, 2013, p. 123.

that were found in the ship during underwater excavations. The soldiers are therefore considered as heroes whose memory should be perpetuated and magnified. The kamikaze ‘midget’ submarines like the *Kairyu*, are also honoured with a display. Contrary to what *Museum International* had hoped, it is not peace museums that multiplied in Japan after the world heritage classification of the Genbaku Dome. This museum sparked debate within the Kure municipal council in 2002 with the communist group denouncing the fact that it was not a maritime museum but a ‘museum of war’.<sup>393</sup>

In the same year of 2005, just before the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bomb, the minister of education supported a revision of school textbooks that sought to reduce the colonialist crimes committed by Japan. This revision would elicit numerous protestations from China, South Korea, and Taiwan.<sup>394</sup> Almost a decade later, in 2014, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe proposed a reinterpretation of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, which renounces war as a means of resolving international disputes, that would allow for Japan to send military forces abroad to engage in collective self-defence alongside its allies. This proposal sparked a diplomatic-memorial conflict with China and South Korea.

These initiatives appear provocative towards UNESCO’s aims. Similarly, in February 2014, leaders in the Japanese city of Minamikyushu submitted a request to list the letters of kamikaze pilots as documentary heritage on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register. A line had been crossed, which was judged intolerable. For the Chinese diplomat Hua Chunying, it was ‘an effort to beautify Japan’s history of militaristic aggression, and challenge the victory of the World Anti-Fascist War and the post-war international order’. She reminded that Japan had committed ‘numerous’ crimes against humanity during the Second World War. Recognising the memory of kamikazes as heritage would amount to legitimising Japan as the perpetrator of war and putting the victors and those defeated on equal footing: ‘This effort runs completely counter to UNESCO’s objective of upholding world peace, and will inevitably meet strong condemnation and resolute opposition from the international community’. Whilst awaiting a response from UNESCO, the Japanese documents in question are held at the museum in Chiran.

393 Yushi Utaka, ‘The Hiroshima Peace Memorial. Transforming Legacy, Memories and Landscape’, in *Places of Pain and Shame. Dealing with ‘Difficult Heritage’*, Edited by William Logan and Keir Reeves, Routledge, London, New York, 2009, p. 46,

394 B. Courmont, *Le Japon de Hiroshima*, *op.cit.*, p. 210–211.

According to its website, the museum hopes to obtain inscription ‘to forever hand down the letters to generations to come as a treasure of human life’. Revisionist culture in Japan has attained a limit that would be unacceptable in Europe. UNESCO would discredit itself if it were to respond positively and, on the other hand, it would also show that creating heritage from the worst of humanity is impossible.

In response to China, Japan complained about the inscription of the Nanjing Massacre (300,000 killed) on the Memory of the World Register in 2015 by raising questions over its historic authenticity and attacking UNESCO by questioning its integrity:

‘It is extremely regrettable that a global organisation that should be neutral and fair entered the documents in the Memory of the World register, despite the repeated pleas made by the Japanese government. The request was made on the basis of unilateral declarations by China and Japan considers these documents to be incomplete and present problems of authenticity.’<sup>395</sup>

When Nanjing’s inscription was announced, the Director-General of UNESCO Irina Bokova issued a banal statement explaining the organisation’s role ‘to preserve documentary heritage and memory for the benefit of present and future generations in the spirit of international cooperation and mutual understanding’.<sup>396</sup> This goal is completely to the contrary of what actually happened. Heritage therefore does not soften geopolitical conduct — sometimes it is even an issue of it or hostage to it — nor does it protect against revisionism, even historical negationism.

### *Conclusion*

By recognising what I term a ‘heritage of the worst of humanity’ with Auschwitz, UNESCO did not know that it would be setting off an inevitable chain of events. The reactions to the classification of the Genbaku Dome have shown that touching upon the history of wars and memorial identities will always provoke reactions that do not align with peace and ‘mutual understanding’. History, it seems, was too complicated to be the basis

395 *Le Monde*, 10 October 2015.

396 ‘International Advisory Committee inscribes 47 new nominations on UNESCO Memory of the World Register’ <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/international-advisory-committee-inscribes-47-new-nominations-unesco-memory-world-register>

of creating heritage at Hiroshima. A successful heritage making process demands minimal consensus on the historical reading of the conflict in question and profound agreement on the values that this reading leads us to promote for the future. This happened with Auschwitz. This did not happen with Hiroshima.

The case of Hiroshima presents a ‘non-lieu de mémoire’, which freed itself from the demand of seeking historical ‘truth’. It could be described as a ‘lieu de de-mémoire’, a site that undoes memory.<sup>397</sup> Heritage has been created to the detriment of history, even to ensure Japan’s unpleasant history of violence and hegemony is forgotten, thereby negating the very values of democracy. Moreover, it could also be said that this case presents heritage without memory and without history. The atomic bomb not only destroyed a city, but it erased the war and Japan’s responsibility in it.<sup>398</sup> The classification of the Genbaku Dome legitimised and made viable the shift in Japan’s status from aggressor to victim. For the two central persecutors of the Second World War (Japan and Nazi Germany), two opposing heritage phenomena have been produced: Japanese amnesia and German hyperthymesia. The question remains: does peace and reconciliation without truth allow us to draw ‘lessons’ from History, to cite the usual rhetoric of political discourse?

The universal and almost metaphysical dimension acquired by this catastrophe (or, according to some, ‘crime’) appears to have had the effect of neutralising and absolving the horror which the bomb put an end to, namely the racist and destructive power of ‘fascist’ Japan. The history of Hiroshima has been surpassed by the symbol of the ‘promethean shame’ that it came to embody. This symbol applies essentially to the West and more generally to the Anthropocene. For this reason, during the ‘historic’ meeting between Shinzo Abé and Obama at Pearl Harbour on 27 December 2016, the Japanese prime minister refused to present his apologies, avoided mentioning the ideological dimension of the conflict (by the traditional incantation to the ‘horrors of war’ that would never be repeated) and was happy to celebrate the memory of ‘all men and women’ (presumably including the kamikaze pilots) ‘whose lives were taken by a war that com-

397 Anne-Marie Paveau, 23 August 2013, « Démémoire discursive et amémoire (in)volontaire », *La pensée du discours* [research logbook], <http://penseedudiscours.hypotheses.org/?p=12318>.

398 ‘As if the past had been pulverised and dissolved by the atomic explosion’. F. Rousseau, *Les Présents des passés douloureux*, *op.cit.*, p. 151.

menced in this very place'. The Prime Minister did not apologise, but he urged 'We must never repeat the horrors of war again'.<sup>399</sup>

To conclude, Japan's heritage strategy could be characterised by three main concerns:

- over-valorisation of a 'pacifist' and 'compassionate' heritage (the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park and Museum) whose aim is to victimise Japan all the while rehabilitating it from its defeat (by technology);
- invention of a heritage with 'geopolitical' aims since the Hiroshima Memorial Museum is perhaps the only one in the world that invites visitors to make a geopolitical demand: banning atomic weapons (the text inscribing the Genbaku Dome as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1996 makes an explicit allusion to it);
- the (more or less) discreet and progressive creation of a 'heroic' heritage for purely national purposes (Yushukan Museum, Yamato Museum), which has not learnt, nor forgotten anything from the war.

Japan must contend with a contradictory heritage that emerges from a tendency to relativise its responsibility in the history of the Second World War. The initial utility (memory, reconciliation) proclaimed by Hiroshima's inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site has been subverted in favour of reaffirming a politics of national identity.

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399 'The Power of Reconciliation: Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe' [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/97\\_abe/statement/201612/1220678\\_11021.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/statement/201612/1220678_11021.html)

## 6 Controversy over UNESCO World Heritage List: Le Corbusier

17 July 2016: the Architectural Work of Le Corbusier (1887–1965) has been inscribed on the World Heritage List (UNESCO) as ‘an Outstanding Contribution to the Modern Movement’<sup>400</sup>, one year after the 50th anniversary of his death, and four years after UNESCO's initial rejection in 2009. What was supposed to be a consecration has provoked a movement of opposition to this patrimonialisation. It unleashed a stigmatising campaign against the Franco-Swiss architect.<sup>401</sup> A smear campaign ran from 2005 to 2020. Instead of building consensus and ‘resilience’, heritage has produced the opposite: controversy, polemics and accusations.

This leading figure in the modern architecture movement was the subject of a grassroots memory war campaign, of the type that is widely-reported in the media and is freed from the constraints that govern the slow work of historians. The proposed serial inscription of Le Corbusier’s works was met with accusations of the architect being a ‘fascist’, a Vichy ‘collaborator’, and even a ‘Nazi sympathiser’<sup>402</sup>. Le Corbusier is attacked for his supposed role under the Vichy regime (1940–1944) following the defeat of France. This case presents a blurring of the boundaries that separate opinion from knowledge, denigration from criticism, judgement from analysis. It's an

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400 Chosen from the work of Le Corbusier, the 17 sites comprising this transnational serial property are spread over seven countries and are presented as ‘a testimonial to the invention of a new architectural language that made a break with the past’. The Complexe du Capitole in Chandigarh (India), the National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo (Japan), the House of Dr Curutchet in La Plata (Argentina) and the Unité d'habitation in Marseille (France) ‘reflect the solutions that the Modern Movement sought to apply during the 20th century to the challenges of inventing new architectural techniques to respond to the needs of society’.

401 Ronan Audebert, « Le Corbusier en procès : état des lieux d'une polémique », Mémoire de master, École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Nantes, septembre 2017. <https://dumas.ccsd.cnrs.fr/dumas-01655579>

402 What is also at issue is the misuse of the word ‘fascism’ and the epithet ‘fascist’. I also reacted to this anti-Le Corbusier campaign because I wrote my doctoral thesis on the subject: Robert Belot, *Lucien Rebatet. Le fascisme comme contre-culture*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2015. See also: Serge Bernstein et Michel Winock (dir.), *Fascisme français*, Paris, Tempus, 2020.



illustration of the rise of a kind of pessimistic moralism<sup>403</sup>. Morality is now established as a criterion of truthfulness, emotion supersedes rationality and contrition has become a supreme value. The commemoration of the worst seems to have relegated scholarly history to the rank of a subservient discipline. Gradually, a highly mediatized *populism of memory* has supplanted the patient and thorough work of historians. UNESCO, supported by historians, resisted this denunciation campaign, which is in line with the worldwide trend of deposing 'heroes' but may ultimately be to the detriment of history.

On the pretext of the need to destroy the myth that UNESCO was accused of propagating, the promoters of the anti-Corbu campaign wanted to impose a new memory grid that does not respect historical ethics. How to analyse without minimising? How to demystify without indulging in biases and easy imprecation? How can the history of historians inform and frame the processes of heritagisation? These are the three fundamental questions addressed in this issue.

### *The 'venom' of 'memorial correctness*

Every generation experiences such a *depatrimonialisation* phenomenon. Interestingly, Le Corbusier's magazine *L'Esprit Nouveau* launched a survey in the 1920s entitled 'Faut-il brûler le Louvre?'<sup>404</sup> (Should the Louvre be burned down?). Today, it is Le Corbusier they want to burn. He was well aware of this typically French self-deprecatory attitude, this tendency to debunk innovators. He told students at architecture schools in 1942: 'Lately, France, this laboratory of ideas, has been taking pleasure in crushing, despising, ignoring, rejecting and discouraging its inventors.'<sup>405</sup>

This indictment of history and of memorial myths has now reached France and specifically how the French experienced WWII, Vichy and the Nazi occupation. Since the late 1970s, it has been a constant source

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403 See Perrine Simon-Nahum, *Les déraisons modernes*, Paris, L'Observatoire, 2021, p. 12–13.

404 Yann Rocher, « Faut-il brûler le Louvre? Pensées de la destruction dans une enquête de *L'Esprit nouveau* », in Esteban Buch, Denys Riout, Philippe Roussin (dir.), *Réévaluer l'art moderne et les avant-gardes*, Paris, Éditions de l'EHESS, 2010, p. 137–151.

405 Le Corbusier, « Entretien avec les étudiants des écoles d'Architecture », Paris, 17 octobre 1942, in *La Charte d'Athènes. Avec un discours liminaire de Jean Giraudoux*. Groupe CIAM-France, Paris, Plon, 1943 (éditions de Minuit, 1957), p. 137.

of controversy and dissensus. Rarely has a period aroused such interest in historical research, and so soon after the events. Major advances have made it possible to better understand these 'dark years'. Every European country has been concerned with this historicizing effort. The work is still in progress. It has evolved, naturally, with the changes in mentalities, the issues at stake and the availability of archival resources. However, in parallel to this work—which must face the difficult question of the complexity of societies and of behaviors in extreme situations, where the slightest gesture may have dramatic consequences—a form of social memory is developing, between affect and emotion, which gives rise to political and moral misappropriations. This memory is often at odds with, and even opposed to, history as it is seen by historians. It develops in a context where the effects of opinion and media coverage prevail, and where the vulgate may take liberties with knowledge and its protocols. This phenomenon, increased by the viral power of the so-called social networks, is supported by a general postmodern movement marked by its obsession for the moral revision of the past. In a context which points the finger at legitimate bodies and actors of knowledge, retrospective judgement tends to serve as the 'truth'. Recalling the 'dark years' and focusing on dissonant heritage (such as colonialism) has become a playground for those who would 'raise the dead to put them on trial' and who claim to reveal what historians supposedly refused or were unable to show and who, in the name of a 'denunciatory virtue', undo reputations, qualify or disqualify. The latest book by Pierre Laborie, a historian of French opinion during the Vichy regime, is devoted to analysing the 'venom' of 'memorial correctness'<sup>406</sup> and its 'unquestionable power': how do the construction processes of the relationship to the past invoke 'uses that are sometimes as akin to impostures as the impostures they claim to unmask?'<sup>407</sup> This widespread symptom is manifest in how the memory and the work of one of the world's most famous architects, Le Corbusier, has been treated in recent years.

In his eulogy to his 'old master' and 'old friend' on September 3rd, 1965, André Malraux recalled the tradition of hatred that hounded Le Corbusier during his lifetime: 'No one has ever been so long, so patiently insulted. Glory finds its supreme brilliance in outrage, and this glory is addressed more to a lifetime's work, than to a person who did not much care for

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406 Pierre Laborie, *Le Chagrin et le venin. La France sous l'Occupation, mémoire et idées reçues*, Paris, Bayard, 2011, p. 11.

407 *Ibid.*, p. 279.

it.' This did not prevent Charles de Gaulle's Minister of Culture from entrusting this unusual man with the project of creating a museum of contemporary art which was to be part of the new district of La Défense. Malraux thought that death would finally allow for propitiation and that the architect's memorial posterity would be kinder. He was wrong. The fiftieth anniversary of Le Corbusier's<sup>408</sup> death was a pretext to slander the memory of the world's most famous urban architect. His penchant for provocation and controversy, which made him famous from the outset, turned on him and made us forget that his ultimate ambition was to restore 'the human fundamentals of the architectural issue'<sup>409</sup> and that, above all, he was an 'idealist'. However, Malraux was mistaken in thinking him beyond the scope of criticism. Nowadays, this hatred is as much directed at the man as it is at his work. Gleefully, his detractors search for the 'embarrassing document'<sup>410</sup>, the sentence or the 'encounters that would have been better avoided'<sup>411</sup> that will reveal this man's 'true' personality and certify (what we already knew) that he was neither hero nor saint, but that he was (what we didn't know) a 'fascist'; a closet fascist because 'he himself never affirmed it, nor proclaimed it, whether publicly or privately'.<sup>412</sup>

### *Reconsidering Le Corbusier's past*

The dossier for Le Corbusier's architectural and urban works was initiated by the French Ministry of Culture in 2003, drawn up by seven countries and submitted in January 2008. The World Heritage Committee meeting in Seville in 2009 demanded a 'postponement'. It seems that this decision was independent of the controversy, which began a year later.

For Art historian Gilles Ragot, the problem was an opposition between two visions of heritage: 'a monumental vision that is essentially artistic, based on iconic works of art, and a vision in which heritage is considered more for its value as a testimony to the major changes in society, and more

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408 His real name was Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris. He was born on 6 October 1887 in La Chaux-de-Fonds, in French-speaking Switzerland, and died on 27 August 1965 in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin.

409 André Chastel, *Architecture et Patrimoine. Choix de chroniques du journal Le Monde*, Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1994, p. 169 (article nécrologique).

410 François Chaslin, *Un Corbusier*, Paris, Seuil, 2015, p. 176.

411 *Ibid.*, p. 271.

412 *Ibid.*, p. 119.

particularly in this case, the responses that architecture can provide<sup>413</sup>. A heritage of modernity? Inconceivable to the average public. When it came to listing the reconstruction of the city of Le Havre (a victim of the 1944 bombardments), the popular magazine *Paris-Match* (11–17 August 2005) ran the headline: 'Has UNESCO fallen on its face?'<sup>414</sup> Don't forget that Auguste Perret, the architect in charge of this reconstruction, was considered a master by Le Corbusier. The Le Corbusier project was the first time that UNESCO had been asked to recognise a 'serial property' with an international dimension. Perhaps the idea was too innovative. The other criticism was that the heritage project concerned the work of a single man. And it was precisely this man that his detractors wanted to destroy.

The second version of the nomination was presented at the 35th World Heritage Committee meeting in Paris in June 2012. ICOMOS (the International Council on Monuments and Sites) recommended that the nomination 'should not be inscribed', on the (spurious, in my view) pretext that 'outstanding universal value' had not been demonstrated. It is impossible not to see this as an indirect effect of the launch of the anti-Corbu campaign. Did Le Corbusier's work deserve UNESCO recognition? Art historian Gilles Ragot says yes. He highlights the fact that 'Le Corbusier is the first architect in the general history of architecture to have built in so many countries: eleven in all on four continents'. Moreover, the architect was the inspiration behind the Modern Movement, which aimed in particular to achieve a balance between individual and collective housing. UNESCO's second rejection delights the architect's detractors. In 2015, referring to the 'Maison radieuse' in Rezé (a housing unit created by Le Corbusier), François Chaslin wrote, ironically: 'And here it was being proclaimed everywhere that it should be loved, that it was a monument, a masterpiece, a heritage of humanity, that UNESCO was perhaps going to include on its lists, as the regular flow of visitors reminded us.' The inscription was finally obtained on 17 July 2016: 17 Corbusian buildings or sites are inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List, as part of the series

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413 Gilles Ragot, « L'inscription de l'Œuvre architecturale de le Corbusier au patrimoine mondial », *Conservation-restauration de l'architecture du mouvement moderne*, Presses universitaires de Perpignan, 2012, <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pupvd.6957>.

414 Maria Gravari-Barbas, Cécile Renard, « Une patrimonialisation sans appropriation? Le cas de l'architecture de la reconstruction au Havre », *Norois* [En ligne], 217 | 2010/4.

‘The architectural work of le Corbusier, an exceptional contribution to the Modern Movement’<sup>415</sup>.

The suspicion came from Switzerland in 2005, two years after France launched the heritage process with a view to World Heritage listing.

In a text published in the magazine of architecture *Tracés*<sup>416</sup>, the Geneva-based writer and architect Daniel de Roulet wonders why Le Corbusier moved his office as well as his home to Vichy in the early 1940s. ‘I was astonished to learn that my favorite architect had been a collaborator of the Nazis in France,’ he writes. According to the writer, Le Corbusier served Marshal Pétain directly and many letters testify to Le Corbu’s admiration for the French regime under the thumb of the Third Reich. In essence, these claims were based on three letters from the architect’s private correspondence which were disclosed in 2002<sup>417</sup>. In fact, it was a purely subjective, undocumented journalistic article. Only four pages. The paradox is that it all started from there. All the ingredients to launch a controversy were there: Le Corbusier as an anti-Semite, a follower of the Vichy regime and collaborator. What legitimacy did the author of these serious claims have, and what are the sources to support them? This was a writer who had no expertise in history, an amateur researcher. His account brings together all the methodological biases that teachers warn history students against: ‘Such claims, which are very serious and based on the use of fragments of correspondence taken out of their biographical and historical context, were taken seriously by some people and they call for a clarification regarding the positions of one of the greatest figures not only of architecture, but also of modern culture’.<sup>418</sup> More importantly though, the initial premise is linked to a moral point of view which purports to denounce, accuse and not to debate. The writer, although a refined dilettante, is a conscientious objector. It should be noted that the bank knew Daniel de Roulet very well because it had awarded him a grant of the UBS Foundation for Culture in 2001 to honor ‘his career’s work’. In 2010, the UBS bank put a stop to an advertisement campaign centered on the famous architect from the

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415 François Chaslin, *Un Corbusier, op.cit.*, p. 599.

416 Daniel de Roulet, « Sur les traces du Corbusier, un voyage à Vichy », *Tracés*, n° 20, octobre 2005, p. 32–35.

417 *Le Corbusier, Choix de lettres* (Selection, introduction and notes by Jean Jenger), Basel, Birkhäuser, 2002.

418 Jean-Louis Cohen, « Le Corbusier, les Juifs et les fascismes. Une mise au point », Octobre 2012. Stadt Zürich. [https://pavillon-le-corbusier.ch/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/ktr\\_2012-le-corbusier-zurich-report-jlc.pdf](https://pavillon-le-corbusier.ch/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/ktr_2012-le-corbusier-zurich-report-jlc.pdf)

La Chaux-de-Fonds, whom the Swiss press had accused of anti-Semitism. After the bank's collapse following the banking and financial crisis of 2008 and its rescue by the Swiss national bank, UBS saw this as an opportunity to reinstate its image<sup>419</sup>.

This attack was relayed by a former professor of architectural history from Lausanne, an admirer of the vernacular theories dear to Ivan Illitch, whose anti-modernist (even reactionary) origins differ diametrically from what Le Corbusier represents<sup>420</sup>. In 2019, he was convinced that reconsidering Le Corbusier's past would lead to the removal of the architect's work from the World Heritage List<sup>421</sup> and as a result, now the UNESCO is in the sights.

France took it from there. An editorial opportunity (2005: the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Le Corbusier's death) would fire up the ardors of those who would 'raise the dead to put them on trial'. This marked a radical change compared to the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the architect's death which was very consensual in terms of admiration. A series of highly publicized accusations aimed to make one of the founders of the Modern Movement appear as a follower of fascism, whose very work was based on a totalitarian vision. Le Corbusier would have been contaminated by the sad passions of his time, specifically anti-Semitism. He would have made a pact with the Vichy Regime, putting his genius at the service of a wrongful cause, and would have only escaped thanks to the failure of the purge at the Liberation, based on the hypothesis that the trust placed in Le Corbu by the great

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419 <https://www.rts.ch/info/2527611-lubs-retire-le-corbusier-de-ses-publicites.html>

420 Pierre Frey, *Learning from Vernacular : pour une nouvelle architecture vernaculaire*, Arles, Actes Sud, 2010. See: Valéry Didelon, « Pierre Frey. Learning from Vernacular : pour une nouvelle architecture vernaculaire », *Critique d'art* [En ligne], 37 | Printemps 2011. Pierre Frey told the press that 'Le Corbusier was a radical theorist', a 'violent anti-Semite', who would have 'built for Hitler without a second thought'.

421 In spring 2019, when the Le Corbusier Pavilion reopens in Zurich, the controversy will flare up again. See : « Le Corbusier, fasciste ou pas? Les points de vue opposés de Pierre Frey, professeur honoraire à l'EPFL et Patrick Moser, fondateur et conservateur du musée de la corbuséenne Ville Le Lac », *24 heures*, Lausanne, 10 mai 2019. Moser said: 'A historietomy (sic) is therefore essential. The inter-war period is far too complex to be left in the hands of amateurs. On the contrary, it takes all the science and analytical finesse of seasoned historians to manage to sketch a somewhat resembling portrait of the reality of that era. It is an offence to take statements out of context in order to cause harm. If Le Corbusier were alive today, he would sue for libel – and win.'

Resistance fighter Eugène Claudius-Petit<sup>422</sup> was only a ‘mysterious’ ‘rehabilitation’<sup>423</sup>. And so, he would have deceived everybody regarding his deepest intentions. His contemporaries would have been duped. Such is the basic common plot, albeit some differences, of a few books published in France that aimed at finally revealing the truth about the hidden vices of a life’s work and thought. Suddenly, a veil of dishonor shrouded Le Corbusier’s reputation.

The man was attacked, his work disqualified. This foretold the end of a myth. One of the authors explains: ‘Three books were indeed published that year, fortuitously and independently. Three books of a very different nature and which display different attitudes, different points of views also, which can be quite distant. Then, admittedly, a viral campaign was launched, and it was mainly the doing of the press and digital networks’.<sup>424</sup> Other authors have tried to ride this wave to take advantage of a good digital presence. This sent the social networks into a frenzy, and the press as well, on a global scale, given the architect’s notoriety. Because I am in charge of a Master’s degree on cultural heritage with classes held at the housing unit in Firminy-Vert (Loire, France), the guides who organize visits to this district —designed by Le Corbusier in this former mining town— ask me what they can answer tourists who ask them if Le Corbusier was indeed a “fascist.” The same questions come up among the students. As part of an EU project, our faculty organizes joint seminars on this subject with the School of Architecture and Urbanism in São Paulo<sup>425</sup>. Students conduct

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422 Eugène Claudius-Petit was an admirer of the Franco-Swiss architect before the war, when he was a drawing teacher; even then, he was already fascinated by his plan for a ‘Cartesian, harmonious, lyrical city’. After war, he was an influential supporter of Le Corbusier when he succeeded Raoul Dautry as Minister of Reconstruction and Urban Planning. It was him he chose to design ‘Firminy-Vert’, in the town where he was mayor. This was the only urban complex Le Corbusier was commissioned to create in France (and which he did not finish). Benoît Pouvreau, *Un politique en architecture. Eugène Claudius-Petit (1907–1989)*, Paris, Le Moniteur, 2004.

423 Marc Perelman, *Le Corbusier. Une froide vision du monde*, Paris, Michalon, 2015, p. 65–66.

424 François Chaslin, « Le Corbusier : les objets non identifiés », 9 mars 2020. Electronic memo.

425 This programme ‘COOPERA’ (2025–2017), financed by the Région Rhône-Alpes and supported by the Erasmus mundus DYCLAM master (Dynamics of Cultural Landscape and Heritage Management) and the European strategic partnership Pro-Peace, has been rolled out thanks to the support of the Jean Monnet University in Saint-Étienne (France) and the University of Sao Paolo (Brazil). See Robert Belot, « *Firminy-Vert* ao risco da História: Uma época, uma política, um novo espírito

field investigations on the history of Firminy-Vert and on sociability in a housing unit (there is a project underway with the University of Laval in Quebec). The idea for this socio-historical survey did not come about by chance; it came from there. But it is also rooted in my experience living in a Le Corbusier housing unit for two years, and thus realizing the abyssal gap between my experience and the bleak discourse the anti-Le Corbusier have always held on this type of housing.

The fact that a series of the architect's achievements were added to UNESCO's World Heritage list (2016) did not suffice to counter this smear campaign which was launched without taking any scientific precautions. The word of the few was taken at face value. Nowadays, at the slightest event, 'whistleblowers' appear. Some so-called intellectuals have called for an end to all public support for the work of Le Corbusier. When a statue of the architect was erected in Poissy, in the Yvelines, on January 24, 2019 with the support of the French Ministry of Culture, one of the promoters of the anti-Corbu campaign declared that: 'His ideas on urbanism, his social project are truly fascist. He wants to raze the older districts, centralize power in the towers and push the workers to the outskirts'. In a tribune published in the press, the filmmaker Jean-Louis Comolli accused the French Ministry of Culture of 'being an accessory to the rehabilitation of a man who rejoiced in the French defeat of June 1940 before he was recruited by the collaborationist regime of Marshal Pétain' thus revealing all the pitfalls of historical ignorance and of a case on which historians have been working for a very long time now. Blogs and social networks have relayed, by caricaturing them, these stigmatising and incorrect statements in order to censure the erection of the statue, considering that 'the fascist's friend deserves neither statue nor museum'.<sup>426</sup> In the course of ten years, it seems

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urbanístico », Anais do Seminário *Live Modern Heritage I*, São Paulo, Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo da Universidade de São Paulo, 2017, p. 21–40; *Id.*, « Le Corbusier, um fascista? Elementos de refutação dos principais erros de uma polêmica », *Live Modern Heritage II*, São Paulo, Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo da Universidade de São Paulo, 2021, p. 52–92.

426 It would be useful to analyse the reactions to this blog. For example, one person said: 'I never liked Le Corbusier's architecture. That is to say, I'm pleased to learn that his thinking and behaviour were also poor and hateful towards Jews and other groups, to the point, in particular, of rejoicing in his country's defeat in 1940.' That's what those who don't know Le Corbusier and that period remember. And those who didn't like his work have finally found the real, unconscious reason for their detestation. Once again, the polemical mode is demonstrating its capacity to



as if the memory of the architect had gone from adulation to detestation, from glory to shame.

*Le Corbusier, 'the dishonest Architect'*

What we are witnessing here is a brutal revision which caused a 'shock of shame'. The global myth was attacked from an ideological angle, with the following polemic and moral accusation: Le Corbusier would have embodied, in his work practice, in the company he kept and throughout his life's work, a liberticidal and anti-humanist ideology. An anarchist blog, drawing inspiration from one of these inculpatory books where one can read that 'as early as 1913, Le Corbusier was already vomiting his hatred (of the Jews)<sup>427</sup>, ran the following headline on June 21, 2019: 'Le Corbusier antisémite, pétainiste, pro-hitlérien et architecte' (Le Corbusier: anti-Semite, Petainist, pro-Hitler and architect). We are witnessing a display of one-upmanship with insulting terms that have less to do with rational discourse than with something out of the pamphleteering rhetorical tradition. Slander is highly and effectively contagious. It crosses borders but it also crosses the limits of simple intellectual honesty. This is how Malcom Millais, in a book *Le Corbusier, the dishonest Architect*, published in 2017, turns him into a 'Nazi collaborator'.<sup>428</sup> The attacks are *ad hominem*. They target the man himself. Held responsible for and guilty of the 'misdeeds' of modernity, an accomplice of the worst that happened in the twentieth century, Le Corbusier has become a 'sinister individual'.<sup>429</sup> The theorist of a new concept of urbanism is reduced to the dismal figure of a 'hygienist crow'.<sup>430</sup> Under the pretext of warning against the 'blindness' of Le Corbusier's "admirers"

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generate what I would call 'de-knowledge' (dé-connaissance), all this, of course, in the name of 'historical truth'.

427 Marc Perelman, *Le Corbusier. Une froide vision du monde*, op.cit., p. 39.

428 Le Corbusier 'was a Nazi collaborator', according to Malcom Millais, *Le Corbusier, the dishonest Architect*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017, p. 103.

429 Anselme Jappe, *Béton. Arme de construction massive du capitalisme*, L'échappée, 2020, p. 47.

430 F. Chaslin, *Un Corbusier*, op.cit., p. 140. The style of this book (a 'stroll' that aims to 'simply break some enchantments') is deliberately disrespectful, colloquial and vulgar, with possessive adjective full of disdain: 'our exalted Corbu', 'our architect from La Chaux-de-Fonds', 'our cronies', 'our great crony', their 'faces', etc. It's a book that's not just a 'stroll', it's a 'stroll' that aims to 'simply break some enchantments'.

(the 'believers'<sup>431</sup>) and blaming the 'professors' who supposedly did nothing but 'preach the master's good word' to their students without restraint, a black legend is in the making which depicts the architect as a 'fascist militant'<sup>432</sup>. He is blamed for the 'modern districts built between the late 1950s and the early 1970s' which are seen as 'the monuments left by French fascism' insofar as they would be the achievement of 'one of Le Corbusier's wishes: the mass expulsion of the most vulnerable individuals and their confinement outside of the city centers'.<sup>433</sup> The 'unprecedented brutality' he is accused of also shows in the manner of the accusation. Most of all, though, he is turned into a fascist, a follower of the Vichy regime, and a traitor to the country that welcomed him. The first outbreak of war in François Chaslin's book starts as follows: 'Already in August 1940, Charles Édouard had written to his mother and his brother to rejoice in "the defeat of arms" which appeared to him as a "miraculous French victory"'. Taken out of its context, this statement sounds like a fatal blow. The sentence is pronounced without any preliminary inquiry that the reader should be entitled to know of, all the more so as the author announced his intention of drawing up a portrait and not starting a trial. In this, he strays from the field of knowledge to adopt a hostile point a view. We are invited to follow 'the dark flight of the corbusant corvus' (sic) and chase after his 'demons'. The violence and bitterness of the tone considerably diminish an originally valuable project which aimed at better understanding Le Corbusier's protean facet, 'changeable, elusive'<sup>434</sup>.

The radical re-visitation of an emblematic character, of which editorial strategies are particularly fond thanks to the effect of commemorations, is a well-known phenomenon. It occurs regularly, usually three decades after the death of the person concerned. The generation who lived (with) World War II and the oppressive regimes that prepared it, could not escape the question of personal involvement (or absence thereof) because it was also an ideological conflict which led to civil wars within each country. Every individual was affected by the challenges of this tragic event which upset European societies. Every man was confronted with the questionings and

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431 *Ibid.*, p. 341.

432 Xavier de Jarcy, *Le Corbusier, un fascisme français*, Albin Michel, 2015, p. 270. The process of 'revising' and 're-ideologising' Le Corbusier's work has been a slow one. See: Daniel Le Couedic, « Les fondements idéologiques du planisme de Le Corbusier », *Urbanisme*, février 1988, n°223, p. 56–63.

433 X. de Jarcy, *op.cit.*, p. 267

434 F. Chaslin, *op.cit.*, p. 42–43.

the injunctions of his conscience because it was the idea of Man and a conception of freedom which were at stake. Every man had to take on the difficult burden of his own responsibility, because 'rarely had History been embodied in people less conditioned by economic or social facts, less predetermined'<sup>435</sup>. Every man had to account for, in one way or another, his attitude during the 'dark years' of Europe. And one could say that the people who research these questions nowadays are hard put not to wonder about what their behavior might have been in such circumstances; which is surely a humbling thought<sup>436</sup>.

Artists, intellectuals and writers alike have been, at one point, caught up by history when the memory of those tragic times started becoming 'a duty' to the point of morphing into a 'haunting' which turned historians into 'prosecutors of the past'<sup>437</sup>. Hannah Arendt, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Blanchot, Cioran, Mircea Eliade, Ionesco, Lucien Febvre and so many others. Even Marcel Pagnol, although he was a member of the purification committee for his trade in 1945, was summoned before the court of memory because of the brief excerpt from Pétain's first speech following the French defeat, and which appeared in *La Fille du Puisatier* (released in 1940), excerpt which would mark the 'beginning of cinematographic Vichyism' and testify to a 'fascist temptation'.<sup>438</sup> Of course, myths are grounded in history and they must be subjected to the arduous test of science to become secularized and put into perspective. Every myth has its limits. The scientific approach requires intellectual freedom and must not bow down to totems or taboos. I have shown this by trying to historicize the 'Resistance myth'. But freedom comes with duties and must answer to a moral code, or else it will be demoted to the rank of opinion and drift into prejudice. One can (and must) question dominant paradigms and *epistemes*, but not without method, and certainly not in the name of replacement doctrines. This requires ethical and intellectual prerequisites which have nothing to do with moralism and retrospective imprecations. Descartes laid down the foundations of rational-critical thought: 'the methodic doubt'. This is the

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435 Jean Lacouture, *Le témoignage est un combat. Une biographie de Germaine Tillon*, Paris, éd. du Seuil, 2000, p. 84.

436 Pierre Bayard, *Aurais-je été résistant ou bourreau?*, Paris, éditions de Minuit, 2013.

437 Henry Rousso, *La Hantise du passé*, Paris, Textuel, 1998.

438 Joseph Daniel, « Tentations fascistes », *Le Monde diplomatique*, octobre 1980. He produced a documentary commissioned by the Vichy propaganda services in 1941. See Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit, *Les Documenteurs des années noires : les documentaires de propagande, France 1940-1944*, Paris, Nouveau Monde, 2004.

ethics of knowledge which seems to elude the very people who seek to reveal the hidden truths about Le Corbusier and condemn the conformism of the representants of academic culture in order to rewrite history.

*Disregard for the academic ethos*

It seems rather unusual that one of the representatives of the anti-Corbusier movement should take the liberty to write to a recognized American historian, Robert Paxton, a great specialist of the Vichy regime<sup>439</sup>, to ‘warn’ him against his possible presence at the colloquium on the architect in 2016:

‘Although the campaign against Le Corbusier ‘the fascist’ has taken on an absurd and disproportionate dimension, I would like to warn you against certain circles whose faint-heartedness regarding this case is exactly the same as that which you encountered and fought against in the early 1970s. Naturally, we are quite delighted with the news of this presidency, but your notoriety should not be used to endorse the actions of those who systematically skirt around the gray areas or tread lightly where the floor creaks’.<sup>440</sup>

One of the unfortunate effects of this threat or pression is the fact that Robert Paxton withdrew his participation in the conference. His insight would have been a very useful addition to the debate. According to François Chaslin, a former member of the Le Corbusier Foundation, any researcher who dares, in the name of science, question the statements of the neo-detractors suffer from ‘faint-heartedness’. They fall under the category of ‘experts in self-censorship who will be invited to debate the subject blithely among themselves’. He himself, in the first lines of his book made a point of clarifying that it was not ‘the fruit of academic research’, in order to free himself from ‘conformist grandeur’. The detractors of 2015 seem to share a prophetic-paranoid syndrome: they would be the only ones to reveal facts that others would refuse to hear, and for that they would be opposed by a certain Establishment suffering from faint-heartedness and blindness, and above all anxious to protect the Corbu ‘brand’ and exclude any dissidents.

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439 Whom I know well because he was a member of my PhD defense jury.

440 François Chaslin, Lettre à Robert Paxton, 2 mai 2015, *La République des livres*. Blog de Pierre Assouline. <https://larepubliquedeslivres.com/lettre-ouverte-robert-paxton/>

However, historical reality clearly indicates that there has always been a debate about the architect and that he has been the subject of ‘thorough’ research that did not avoid the matter of his relationship to fascism, but, rather, which was concerned with respecting the *ethos* of historical research. I will just take two examples. Robert Fishman’s book (*Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century*, 1979) where one can read that ‘Le Corbusier’s hostility towards democracy was closer to Platon’s than Pétain’s’, or Mark Antliff’s latest book *Avant-Garde fascism, The Mobilization of Myth, Art, and Culture in France, 1909–1939*, published by Duke University Press in 2007, which goes back on the impact of the Sorelian theory of cultural revolution in the emergence of the artistic avant-gardes. There are few, if any, new elements in the writings of today’s detractors<sup>441</sup>.

Biographical writing is an exercise which requires certain qualities and is not without risks<sup>442</sup>, especially when writing about a figure of global stature. How to analyse without banalising? How to demystify without indulging in biases and easy imprecation? By respecting the professional ethics that befits the scientific approach or merely by showing intellectual honesty. Exercising easy moral judgment and incriminatory analysis are the surest way to fail in this endeavor. Neo-detractors often tend to think they are the only ones to glimpse the light of truth about the architect’s thought, which might explain why they have been criticised. However, they themselves adhere to a tradition of denigration which has never ceased to hound Le Corbusier throughout his life, it being noted, as I propose to show, that the grammar of denigration evolves with time and context. Le Corbusier’s *post mortem* consecration tends to make us forget that, all his life, he was prey to hostility, unfounded accusations, and invectives.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Le Corbusier was the representative of ‘Judeo-Bolshevism’, the ‘destroyer’ and the black sheep of the exponents of academism. During the Vichy regime, he was the expatriate globalist who

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441 Just two examples. Jean Plumyène et Raymond Lasierra, *Les fascismes français, 1923–1963*, Seuil, 1963 : ‘Fascism dreamt of a city of the sun, a radiant city, which Campanella had dreamt of before him, and to which Le Corbusier, who was a member of the Faisceau in 1926, strove to give architectural expression’. See also: Robert Fishman, *L’utopie urbaine au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle : Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier*, Paris, Mardaga, 1979, p. 183. The American historian acknowledges that the architect was ‘neither a fascist nor a collaborator’.

442 Robert Belot, « La biographie, entre mémoire et histoire, affect et concept », in *La biographie en histoire. Jeux et enjeux d’écriture*, Antoine Coppolani, Frédéric Rousseau dir.), Paris, Michel Houdiard éditeur, 2007, p. 56–67.

did not understand a thing about the land of France. At the WWII Liberation, he became the ‘fada’ (crackpot). In the 1960s, he was the enemy of the proto-environmental libertarian movement. In the 1970s, he was branded a ‘crypto-Stalinist’. And now he’s become a ‘fascist’. Michel Foucault lamented such “cruelty” which he deemed ‘perfectly useless’: ‘Le Corbusier, I’m certain, was full of good intentions and what he did was in fact intended to produce liberating effects’.<sup>443</sup> Such benevolence is no longer appropriate. Le Corbusier has crossed over to the other side of the ideological spectrum. The actual consensus (judging from the very positive reception that this thesis has received from the media) aims at destroying the myth, but in doing so, it is taken from a very specific, and even delusory, angle. What is new is the opportunistic editorial conjunction around an anniversary, the media frenzy and their docility in relaying, without any perspective, theses that are no usual exercises in thought<sup>444</sup>.

Demystification is a laudable operation, but it is also a difficult and perilous one. It must conform to the ethics of intellectual debates. Now, the accusatory front (since this is not an isolated case but a ‘trend’ and it should be analysed as such) develops a pseudo-argumentative logic which takes surprising liberties with the most elementary rules of the academic *nomos*. The lack of mastery of certain concepts (in other disciplines than architecture) produces cognitive biases which lead in turn to assertions that have nothing to do with the scientific realm or, quite simply, with knowledge. More, the detractors seem to show a desire to free themselves of the scientific *ethos*, which results in an attitude that consists in disqualifying historians, their methods and their results<sup>445</sup>. Hence a marked disregard

443 « Questions à Michel Foucault sur la géographie », *Hérodote*, n°1, janvier-mars 1976, pp. 71–85. See also: Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, Paris, Gallimard, 1994, p. 270–285.

444 These ‘theses’ have also been emulated. It is now taken for granted that ‘Le Corbusier’s involvement with French fascists lasted twenty years and led him to work for the Vichy regime’, which would explain his ‘totalitarian’ theories: Olivier Barancy, *Misère de l’espace moderne : la production de Le Corbusier et ses conséquences*, Marseille, éd. Argone, 2017. Xavier de Jarcy et Marc Perelman have come together to coordinate the book which sets out their accusations: *Le Corbusier, zones d’ombre*, éditions Non-Standard, 2018.

445 The historian Remi Baudouin is criticised for ‘his ability to moderate or even excuse the fascist and pro-Vichy political positions of his herald’; his ‘historiographical objectivity’ is said to be no more than the admission of an ‘ideological *a priori*’. In short, anyone who tries to examine the ‘fascist Corbusier’ thesis becomes *ipso facto* a ‘patent thurifer’ and an ideological suspect. See M. Perelman, *op.cit.*, p. 59, note 33,

for ‘professors’. The times seem to mark the triumph, in every domain, of a type of *anti-intellectual populism* and of a form of distrust towards the institutions and protocols of knowledge. Insinuation, suspicion, extrapolation and finally, judgement, are favored over the production of proof. Prosecution and inquisitorial modes are preferred to methodical doubt and nuance, because they encourage media coverage. As a result, the foretold ‘demystification’ operation is caught in a vicious circle and becomes a negative mystification which produces a black legend in the name of the supposed battle against the legend. The anti-Le Corbusier operation is interesting to analyse because it refers to a more fundamental concern regarding our entry into the era of ‘post-truth’<sup>446</sup>, ‘alternative facts’, and ‘fake knowledge’<sup>447</sup>.

The particularity of this phenomenon is that it affects academic circles. And it is not only a question of handling concepts, methodological biases or of straying from scholarly *ethos*. More often than not, the style is aggressive, accusatory and sometimes vengefully rhetoric. Such is the rhetorical style found in Marc Perelman’s book, for example, who can be credited for pioneering the accusation of ‘totalitarianism’ prior to the 2015<sup>448</sup> wave, for which he would have been ‘professionally banned’ and ostracised<sup>449</sup>. Le Corbusier becomes the ‘Father of the horde of Architects’; ‘appointed or self-proclaimed specialists’ are under attack; one scholar’s article is dispraised as ‘damning’ and the author as the victim of his ‘fascination’ for his ‘herald’; another is shown as ‘permanently enamored of Le Corbu’, suffering from a ‘fervent hysteria towards his idol’; the denunciation of the epistemological failings of the ‘adulators, worshippers and other sycophants’ (of which some might say that they only mirror their own failings) takes a turn for the worse when the author accuses his colleagues of ‘delving and wallowing in the mire of hollow, petrified, concepts’ and of ‘wandering around the cemetery of dead categories’; Le Corbusier himself is psycho-

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et p. 67. See also R. Baudouï, « L’attitude de Le Corbusier pendant la guerre », in *Le Corbusier une anthologie*, Paris, CCI Beaubourg, 1987, p. 455–459.

446 Ralph Keyes, *The post-truth era: dishonesty and deception in contemporary life*, New York, St Martin’s Press, 2004.

447 Henning Hopf, Alain Krief, Goverdhan Mehta and Stephen A. Matlin, “Fake science and the knowledge crisis: ignorance can be fatal”, *Royal Society Open Science*, Volume 6, Issue 5. Published: 01 May 2019 <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.190161>.

448 Marc Perelman, *Urbs ex machina. Le Corbusier (le courant froid de l’architecture)*, Paris-Lagrassse, Les éditions de la Passion/Verdier, 1986.

449 Marc Perelman, *Le Corbusier. Une froide vision du monde, op.cit.*, p. 61.

analysed in his relationship with women and placed in the 'category' of individuals suffering from a 'neurotic emotionally-troubled shield'; scholars who explain that 'the work must be seen in the context of its time' are nothing more but the 'valets' of the master, prey to an illusion that keeps them from understanding that Le Corbusier was trying to give birth to a 'monstrous urban behemoth'. Fortunately, he admits to a certain faith in 'rigorous historians who will be able to put things into perspective' (which might be my ambition), even though he 'mistrusts some historians who are often indulgent with history and with those who were its more or less servile protagonists'. A 'rigorous' historian must, precisely, understand that 'truth' is dialectical and inaccessible, that it evades binarism, judgment and imprecation. In that sense, he is modest because he adopts the words coined by Lucien Febvre who, when presenting the collection 'Esprit de la Résistance' in 1954 to the Presses Universitaires de France, recommended remaining aware of the "terrible complexity of everything that concerned man, his dreams, ideas, passions"<sup>450</sup>. He also explained that 'history is a perpetual reworking of the past by successive generations'.

*Le Corbusier 'a notorious fascist and collaborator'?*

What is most surprising is that this attempt at reinterpretation is not based on any new fundamental source which would justify this reconsideration endeavor and shift in paradigm. With one exception, however: Le Corbusier's private correspondence, published in 2013 (letters to his family from 1926 to 1946) thanks to the Foundation Le Corbusier—which was accused of guarding the Corbusean temple, although it made this part of the architect's private life public— letters that reveal some of his judgments and which will, ironically, fuel the smear campaign in question<sup>451</sup>.

In the preface to the edition, the part devoted to the ideological or political questions is limited, precisely because it is proportional to the place and

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450 Lucien Febvre, « Avant-propos », H. Michel, B. Mirkine-Guetzévitch, *Les Idées politiques et sociales de la Résistance*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1954, p. VIII.

451 Le Corbusier, *Correspondance. Lettres à la famille, 1926–1946*, t. II, Paris, Infolio/Gallimard, 2013. An edition compiled, annotated and presented by historian Rémi Baudouï and Arnaud Dercelles. I would like to thank Arnaud Dercelles, archivist at the Le Corbusier Foundation, for the invaluable support he gave me in my investigation.



role that these matters held in the architect's life and correspondence. It is reported that Le Corbusier was culturally sympathetic to the authoritarian right, although such an orientation is inconsistent with the deep contempt he felt for bourgeois conservatism, his loathing of 'plutocracy' and his freedom of spirit. His 'hatred for the Hitlerian regime' is also put forth, and the editors explain that his Vichy period, beyond the 'sycophantic and presumptuous remarks' could be, more than anything, attributed to his professional opportunism. This preface makes no mention of the few anti-Semitic remarks that can be found in the letters. In fact, in this 1,000-page volume, there are only 7 occurrences of the term 'Jew'. Nevertheless, it is precisely some of these letters that will fuel the anti-Corbusean verve of the authors whose books will resound worldwide on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Based on this disproportionality bias, a counter-narrative is produced which, against all odds, turns Le Corbusier into a follower (open or secret) of anti-Semitic Hitlerism, which led him to becoming a supporter of the Vichy regime. The main quotes from his letters are, 'Money, the Jews (who were partly responsible), Freemasonry, everything will be subjected to fair law. These shameful fortresses will be demolished'; 'Hitler can crown his life with a great accomplishment: the planning of Europe'; 'The Jews are going through a very bad time. I am sometimes contrite about it. But it does seem as if their blind thirst for money had corrupted the country'.<sup>452</sup> According to François Chaslin, these excerpts show that Le Corbusier was 'steeped' in anti-Semitism, and that this was not only a 'brief' reaction<sup>453</sup>. Once again, this manifests the tendency to essentialize the architect's (explicit and implicit) thought in view of morally discrediting him.

Everything that is highlighted and used as incriminating evidence (the architect's presence in Vichy, for example, the main focus of the accusation) had already been known for a very long time. Conversely, other and also well-known information was set aside. This selective choice reveals one of the most obvious biases which structures every revisionist approach: the *congruence bias*. What is at work here is a heuristic of congruence which does away with anything that doesn't fit in with the new doxa. It is a way

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452 See my analysis in Robert Belot, *Le Corbusier, fasciste? Dénigrement et mésusage de l'histoire*, Paris, Herman, 2021, p. 43–56.

453 F. Chaslin, *op.cit.*, p. 97. But unlike Jarcy and Perelman (and many others), to the question 'By the way, was Le Corbusier a fascist?', he replies: 'He himself never affirmed, proclaimed or admitted it, either publicly or privately. Which is not to say that he was not part of a fascist spirit'.

of blocking access to the 'frightfully complex' nature of the figure that was Le Corbusier, who, besides, was less of a 'maker' than an intellectual, something which his corporation will reproach him for with remarkable consistency. The particularity of disqualification endeavors lies in the liberty (license, sometimes) they take to disregard the complexity of reality and to avoid acknowledging the contradictions they bring up. How can one maintain that Le Corbusier 'a notorious fascist and collaborator'<sup>454</sup>, should have been sentenced at the Liberation, when he refused to put his name on the cover of *Athens Charter*, published in 1943, so as not to jeopardize the success of the book and the ideas it supported, with his name being such a deterrent? How can anybody declare that Le Corbusier's thought was anti-humanist when he never ceased to proclaim that his ultimate ambition tended towards an 'exclusively human program, replacing Man at the center of architectural concerns'<sup>455</sup> and making housing one of the foundations of human rights? How can he be accused of organic anti-Semitism when the pre-war far right-wing pictured him as the embodiment of the "anti-France", supposedly for being at the service of the 'métèques' and 'international Jewry'? Why does this pervasive noise around Le Corbusier's alleged sympathies for Vichy (although he held no responsibilities and received no commissions from the regime) contrast so starkly with the silence regarding his master, Auguste Perret, a member of the honorary committee of the Arno Brecker exhibition in 1942, elected to the Académie des Beaux-Arts in 1943, appreciated by two of its successive directors<sup>456</sup>, an influent member of the Order of Architects (founded by Vichy and who was not purified, so to speak, at the Liberation<sup>457</sup>)? How can one have been a 'pro-Nazi' and a 'collaborationist' and then be celebrated as one of the figures of the renewal of France by a political power born of the French Resistance? These are all contradictions that one is tempted to reveal and endeavor to unravel.

As a historian who has researched the commitment of intellectuals, the issue of fascism and the socio-political construction of memory, I suggested an exercise to elucidate and refute the new black doxa against Le

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454 O. Barancy, *op.cit.*, p. 48.

455 Le Corbusier, « Entretien avec les étudiants des écoles d'Architecture », Paris, 17 octobre 1942, in *La Charte d'Athènes*, *op.cit.*, p. 140.

456 The conservative Louis Hautecœur and the extremist Georges Hilaire, a close friend of the fascist collaborationist writer Lucien Rebatet.

457 Voldman Danièle, « L'épuration des architectes », *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, n°39-40, 1995, p. 26-27.

Corbusier<sup>458</sup>. Between the myth and the emerging counter-myth, I believe it might be useful to reframe the controversy in terms of historicity for a necessary and healthy perspective on the issue. The aim here would not be to defend Le Corbusier and his memory (I do not belong to the category of the 'Master's' worshippers) but rather to defend a certain ethics of criticism.

The recent interpretations of Le Corbusier's thought and work are based on a triple assumption (or belief, rather) which produce cognitive biases and distort the comprehension thereof. First of all is the belief that such a complex (and contradictory) thought as Le Corbusier's could be ascribable and reduced to a political ideology, ideology which would be the point of convergence and congruence of his life's ambition and that would explain everything. Second, is the assumption that this ideology would be governed (whether consciously or not) by the adherence to the vision of the world promoted by fascism, which developed in Italy in the 1920s, then by Nazism, which took hold of Germany starting 1933, it being noted that the theory (unanimously criticized) at work here is that of France set up as a doctrinal laboratory of fascism. Finally, the historically attested proof that Le Corbusier's mental universe would have been structured by such an ideology (the third assumption) would be his involvement with Vichy and his sympathies with the regime's politics. This triple assumption forms a system because it proceeds from a *heuristic of congruence*: anything that is unlikely to fuel this thesis is occulted and despised. It imprisons the reader in a unequivocal interpretation and traps the destiny of the architect in a pre-determined vision.

### *Demystifying the demystifiers*

The new wave of attacks against Le Corbusier is part of the long history of denigration to which the architect and his theories have been subjected. What is new about this latest salvo, compared to the others, is that it targets the man and seeks his moral condemnation in the name of his supposed pro-fascism or pro-Nazism. He is said to have been involved with the worst ideologies that brought bloodshed to Europe, or even embodied them in his urban designs.

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458 R. Belot, *Le Corbusier, fasciste? Dénigrement et mésusage de l'histoire*, *op.cit.* I have only presented the main conclusions of this work here.

Four main types of anti-Corbu denigrators can be broadly identified and presented chronologically. The first came from the French far right. It stigmatised Le Corbusier as a 'Bolshevik' and an internationalist, a harbinger of world Judaism and a destroyer of French identity<sup>459</sup>; Le Corbusier's militant rationalism clashed with a culture that was critical of the Enlightenment heritage. The second type emerged during the Occupation. It included part of the previous category, which incorporated conservatives who favored a misoneist form of regionalism often found in Vichyist propaganda. This anti-Corbu front was more heterogeneous than it seems since it included the technocrats (who had nothing but contempt for this 'intellectual' who was disconnected from reality and out of control) and the guardians of the corporation, along with the new Order of Architects who despised this pretentious autodidact. The third type consisted of certain libertarians in the early 1960s. As pioneers of proto-ecologism and the return to an anti-statist and regionalist pre-industrial state, they cultivated mistrust towards the standardizing power of technology and denounced a violent philosophy marked by the rejection of history ('historiectomy') and inclined to totalitarianism and barbarism. The fourth type brings together those who recognize themselves in an ideologizing hermeneutic of Le Corbusier's writings. Postulating that the architect had a structural affinity with the liberticidal concepts embodied by fascism and Nazism, they strike out at him with a moral stigmatisation directed at the man himself, intended to topple his statue and tarnish his memory. This last wave differs from the previous ones in being deployed at an incomparable level of virality through the new communication system. There is therefore a risk that this new campaign of denigration will have a lasting impact on people's perception of Le Corbusier's work and thought, but also that it will paralyze real debate (*disputatio* is always necessary in a free system of knowledge) on the basis of moralistic presuppositions.

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459 His concern for modernity and 'rational organization' in view of attaining social well-being, together with the criticism of capitalism as the expression of the control of private interests over public interests was a permanent feature of Le Corbusier's thought. On the subject of Soviet Russia still, he wrote with uncharacteristic lyricism, such as on October 16, 1928, after a trip to Moscow: 'I am witnessing the birth of a new world (...). I am curbing my optimism so as to see things just as they are. Oh, blind Europe who lies to herself to flatter her indolence! One of the clearest monuments of human evolution is being achieved here, and generosity here is as big as selfishness over there'. Nicholas Fox Weber, *C'était Le Corbusier*, Paris, Fayard, 2009, p. 337.

It is quite astonishing that a type of reasoning can result in turning a man who never claimed to be a fascist into the embodiment of fascism. Le Corbusier, a fascist without knowing it. Sartre said that anti-Semitism created the Jew. Here, it is anti-fascism creating the fascist. This accusation has always stuck to his reputation. He noted it himself in May 1941, in a biographical note sent to Vichy to attest to his qualifications: ‘Never engaged in politics, but was alternately accused, as needed, of communism and fascism’<sup>460</sup>.

Perhaps we are living through a turning point in the production and dissemination of knowledge. Is the new general economy of the publishing world, faced with the competition of social networks and so-called ‘e-knowledge’, leading to works being brought to the knowledge market without any expert appraisal attesting to their intellectual reliability? For sure, we are seeing a move away from the ethos of academic culture, which is paving the way for fake knowledge. Polemics and personal attacks are ideally suited to the new modes of electronic communication and their power of virality, thriving in a race to the bottom. The conspiracy dialectic is extending its domain: claiming to demystify by creating new mystifications. This new ecosystem produces a lack of knowledge, even a state of de-knowledge, because it rejects complexity in favor of populist simplism, an open door to prejudice. It is also the shadow cast by the generalized blaming of legitimate bodies in the fields of knowledge and power. Through Le Corbusier, the ‘professors’ are the ones being targeted. The academic Jean-Louis Cohen, a world-renowned Le Corbusier expert, is viewed with suspicion. His detractors do not hesitate to refer to his ‘family connections with the Jewish community in La Chaux-de-Fonds’<sup>461</sup>. They explain to us that he ‘hid’ the fascist nature of the Vichy regime and that ultimately, historians have understood nothing despite 40 years of academic work on the subject. Why? They were supposedly protecting the ‘bourgeoisie’ that ‘betrayed’ itself<sup>462</sup>! Here ridicule and incompetence become the best proof of a will to harm

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460 Nicholas Fox Weber, *C’était Le Corbusier, op.cit.*, p. 508.

461 According to François Chaslin, *Un Corbusier, op.cit.*, p. 181. See also: ‘Cohen, who has family connections with the Jewish milieu in La Chaux-de-Fonds, acknowledged the antisemitic statements by Le Corbusier but adds: Le Corbusier’s friendship with certain Jewish clients, the sculptor Chaim Jacob; and, the presence in his office of architects who will emigrate to Palestine, like the Belarusian Shlomo Bernstein or Sam Barkai, and his apparent sympathy for the Zionist project.’ Simone Brott, ‘The Le Corbusier Scandal, or, was Le Corbusier a Fascist?’, Online Publication, 08 Dec 2017.

that no longer has anything to do with a will to know. Historical reality is bent to serve the obsession of anti-Corbusian debunking. If Vichy is not a fascist regime, the inner workings of the re-reading mechanism seize up. Vichy must be fascist (or even better, pro-Nazi), for the architect's stay in the spa town to become an event and a scandal, and for his whole life's work to be called into question.

This deviance of thought is what historian Gérard Noiriel wanted to react against in his book *Le Venin dans la plume*<sup>463</sup>. What is at issue in both cases is the status and impact of pamphleteering on public opinion and a disregard for the authorities and ethics of knowledge<sup>464</sup>. It is the hyper-mediatized vulgate of a cowardly, collaborating and non-resistant France that the historian Pierre Laborie wanted to decipher in his book, which is also about 'venom'. What he says about the mechanisms of imposture (which takes advantage of the knowledge of history to better delegitimize the producers of this knowledge) applies perfectly to the efforts being made to deconstruct and defame Le Corbusier's memory:

'A whole set of questions brings us back to the way in which conforming thought is constituted by referring to the key notions of *demystification* or *demythification*. They may concern their use – with respect for methodical doubt – or concern, more commonly, their exploitation for various purposes. In the latter case, the processes are well-known and are called amalgams, false analogies, anachronisms carrying retrospective judgments, displacements of meaning by shifting from the part to the whole, reversed readings of teleology, confinements in binarity, suspicion, omissions and denials... All serving to further manipulative methods of persuasion or objectives foreign to the search for the truth. Insinuation, intimidation, disqualification, shaming, switching from de-

462 According to X. de Jaray, 'France never admitted it's fascist past. President Chirac admitted only in 1995 the responsibility of the French State in the deportation of the French Jews. But most French historians still don't consider Vichy as a fascist regime. Why? Because that would mean admitting the treason of the French high bourgeoisie. Also, many historians have turned right wing, and they try to say Vichy was not so bad, or to whitewash some collaborationists.' Email from Xavier de Jaray to Simone Brott, 13 February 2017, in Simone Brott, 'The Le Corbusier Scandal' <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/114569/8/114569.pdf>

463 Gérard Noiriel, *Le Venin dans la plume*. Édouard Drumont, Eric Zemmour et la part sombre de la République, La Découverte, 2019.

464 Marc Angenot, *La Parole pamphlétaire. Typologie des discours modernes*, Paris, Payot, 1982.

facement or discrediting to sacralization as needed, are some of the characteristic means of influence of a tried-and-tested system. It could be seen as a kind of catalog of the stylistic devices of this painless venom which blurs the vision, obstructs the ears, creates confusion in judgment, enslaves to the norm, incites to self-censorship and paralyzes critical thought'.<sup>465</sup>

This remarkable analysis by one of the top specialists in the history of opinion and social construction of memory applies perfectly to the case of Le Corbusier. This affair has all the hallmarks of a false 'demystification', duped (perhaps) by the non-historical presuppositions of its approach which is a kind of mystification. It resonates with a very current trend towards conspiracy theories and populist thought. It was necessary, ethically and deontologically, to expose this illusion of demystification. Behind this controversy, a battle is underway: between knowledge and vulgate, between the patient search for intellection of the complexity of reality and the moralist-populist arrogance that tells us what is 'correct' to think.

### *The dangers of a decontextualised memory*

The current re-readings of Le Corbusier's thought and work are marked by an ideological-moral viewpoint and affected by a square of methodological and heuristic deviance: *anachronism-overdeterminism-decontextualisation-congruence*. Anachronism (and its corollary: teleology) is a patent sign of a lack of historical culture and mastery of the methods of historical science. Disdain for context (whether material or immaterial) is another tangible sign: this disdain is necessary to avoid taking account of the complexity of behavior and enable Manichaeism to assert itself unrestrictedly. This phenomenon of 'decontextualisation' is also evidence, in a subliminal and unconscious way, of an outdated conception of the architect's work and more generally, of the conditions of creation and innovation. This conception portrays the architect (or the artist, politician or intellectual...) as free from his environment, as untied from the connection to reality, as a pure inventor of reality, whereas he is often only its cast shadow. It quite simply forgets that 'complexity', in Edgar Morin's sense of the word, is at the heart of the social phenomenon. Therefore, those who go on the warpath

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465 Pierre Laborie, *Le chagrin et le venin*, op.cit., p. 279–280.

against Le Corbusier are objectively (and unwittingly) instituting him as a myth, an incarnation of the heroic-romantic myth of the solitary creator and the absolute origin. Sociology has taught us to keep our distance from 'the mystique of the creation and the creator'<sup>466</sup>. This mystifying logic, even when negative, also tends *a contrario* to exaggerate his impact and influence. It develops in a heuristic of congruence that rejects anything that does not support the theory pursued. We are in a simplifying and reductive pseudo-paradigm that sets little value on a 'protean, complex, paradoxical and contradictory'<sup>467</sup> body of work.

Reason, distance and relativity must be maintained. Le Corbusier's influence must be put back in its place. Admittedly, in the Liberation era, his wishes were granted with the creation of a Ministry of Reconstruction and Urban Planning. As a leading light of the renewal of France, he can be seen in the film of Nicole Verdès, *La vie commence demain* (1949) alongside the physicist André Labarthe, Jean-Paul Sartre, Daniel Lagache, Jean Rostand, André Gide and Picasso. He appeared in *Le mémorial de la Renaissance française* (The Memorial of the French Renaissance). However, it is generally agreed that his role in the saga of the rebuilding of urban France was modest<sup>468</sup>, and that a 'large number of his ideas in fact reflect long-established thinking in urban planning circles'<sup>469</sup>. For Françoise Choay, although Le Corbusier was seen as the face of utopia, he did not manage to put forward 'a global vision of society' and was part of 'a (progressivist) current that already existed'.<sup>470</sup> The myth has overtaken the man and his achievements.

To read Le Corbusier through an ideology-centric prism is to presuppose that political ideas have the power to transform minds (and reality...) and structure the field of social creation. Historians learned long ago that this approach is outdated and that politics does not have a monopoly on progress and innovation, which follow multiple and often unexpected paths.

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466 « Résumés des cours parus dans l'Annuaire du Collège de France », in Pierre Bourdieu, *Manet. Une révolution symbolique*, Éditions Raison d'agir/Éditions du Seuil, 2013 (rééd.), p. 808.

467 Gilles Ragot, « Une Œuvre irréductible. À propos du cinquantième anniversaire du décès de Le Corbusier », Critique d'art [En ligne], 46 | Printemps/Été 2016.

468 Bruno Vayssière, *Reconstruction déconstruction*, Paris, Picard, 1988.

469 Michaël Darin, *La Comédie urbaine*, collection Archigaphy, Gollion (C.H.), 2009, p. 395.

470 Françoise Choay, *La règle et le modèle. Sur la théorie de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme*, Seuil, Paris, 1980, p. 319 et p. 312.



‘The progressivist and modernist current has no exclusive connection with a political sensibility, any more than expressionism does in art’<sup>471</sup>. Those who postulate the existence of a ‘conceptual unity’ of Le Corbusier reducible to a political ideology refuse to admit that reality is always complex, evolving, and cannot be reduced to formulas, models or moments. They also forget that ‘Le Corbusier is full of contradictions, he wrote so much that he said everything and its opposite’, adds Guillemette Morel Journal: ‘There is not one Le Corbusier, but many’.<sup>472</sup> This does not mean there are no lines of intuition and loyalty in his work, or any metapolitical ambition furthered by his thinking as an urbanist who had plenty of time to express himself (for which his colleagues reproached him so much). In April 1939, he expressed the heart of his ‘doctrine’ that we find to the word in *The Home of Man*, published in 1942: ‘It was then that “The Radiant City” was born, a theory, a modern doctrine of the urbanization of the machinist civilisation, to replace the unspeakable misery of the dwellings in the cursed zones with the “radiant dwelling”, the dwelling decreed to be the center of urbanistic preoccupations (CIAM Congress of Athens, 1933)’<sup>473</sup>. And the CIAM program of 1933 was published in 1943<sup>474</sup>. Everything happened as if Le Corbusier were placing himself in relation to an epiphanic horizon (rebuilding cities in harmony between man and nature) on which the event of the war and the advent of Vichy would have no hold. Beyond his opportunistic flatteries, he was outside the political field, and proclaimed it, while being aware that only the political (‘the authority’) could allow the change of legislative framework required for the implementation of a large-scale urban planning policy. Full of ‘contradictions’ but faithful to a conception of the evolution of the man/city/housing relationship situated in a long-time frame and thought of on a metapolitical scale: his aim was nothing less than to prepare for the advent of “the second era of the machinist civilisation”. His friend Wogenscky accurately

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471 Pierre Le Vigan, *Inventaire de la modernité, avant liquidation : au-delà de la droite et de la gauche, études sur la société, la ville, la politique*, Avatar Éditions, 2007, p. 228.

472 Guillemette Morel Journal, « Le Corbusier, l'écrivain. Arpenter Sur les 4 routes », PhD thesis directed by Jean-Louis Cohen, École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris, 2010.

473 Le Corbusier, « L'urbanisme et le lyrisme des temps nouveaux », *Le Point*, n° 20, Colmar, avril 1939, in *Le Corbusier. Un homme à sa fenêtre. Textes choisis 1925–1960*, *op.cit.*, p. 95.

474 Eric Paul Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928–1960*, Cambridge/London, MIT Press, 2000.

described his character as ‘the meeting of opposites’ and the man as a being in the making, ‘committed but free, and alone’.<sup>475</sup> A ‘free researcher’, as Le Corbusier defined himself, who thought that ‘the city of today must be classless, simply human’. Yet the ultimate ambition of this man, who felt like and strove to be only a painter and artist, was to make urban planning a poetic gesture. Everything was based on the observation he made in 1942: that cities ‘are sick because poetry left the heart of the professions generations ago’<sup>476</sup>. Beyond rationalism and technicism, there is ‘Poetry, leader of the economic and mistress of the social’.

It is time to reintroduce Le Corbusier into a regime of historicity, to ballast him with the weight of his time and the currents that run through his professional environment. We must therefore avoid being misled by the pride that transpires in his writings and relationships with other people. His stay in Vichy shows the limits of his influence. His pre-war detractors were in a dominant position, favored by an anti-modernist and xenophobic cultural wave. The anti-Semitic prejudices of Camille Mauclair were what survived in a defeated France. Likewise for Auguste Perret (bizarrely protected by Le Corbusier’s detractors). While the latter had no responsibility under Vichy and never showed any anti-Jewishness<sup>477</sup> during this tragic period for the Jews, Auguste Perret did not openly object to the measures taken to exclude Jews, freemasons and communists. He was typical of his profession: ‘few well-known names in architecture among the declared opponents of Vichy, and no more among “ordinary” practitioners’<sup>478</sup>. The denunciatory discourse turns on itself, in a solipsistic manner, without bothering to refer to reality and its viscosity. It claims to tell the ‘truth’, allegedly hidden from us until now, in order to better distance itself from that ‘truth’. The conspiracy rhetoric follows the same demagogic and populist approach; it participates in the same way in the defeat of thought and in the ‘treason of the intellectuals’.

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475 André Wogenscky, *La main de Le Corbusier*, Paris, éditions du Moniteur, 2006, p. 29.

476 Le Corbusier, *Poésie sur Alger*, Paris, éditions Falaize, 1950 (written in 1942), p. 11.

477 It is true that before the war, traces of a ‘anti-Semitism class culture’ stemming from his background can be found in his private correspondence (to use the formula of Jean-Louis Cohen, *La République du Centre*, 8 mai 2015).

478 Danièle Voldman, « Les architectes en France dans la première moitié du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle », in R. Baudouï (dir.), *Le Corbusier 1930–2020. Polémiques, mémoire et histoire*, Paris, Tallandier, 2020, p.197.

Le Corbusier remains the symbol of a progressivist and internationalist culture against which is deployed a backward-looking and conformist discourse, that of his lifelong enemies. Enemies who knew very well how to build on his provocations and his polemics. André Chastel saw that ‘the Picasso of modern architecture’ ‘was for a long time more famous and more loved abroad than in France’<sup>479</sup>, his country of adoption, and that he remained ‘misunderstood’. He suggested that the ‘insufficient artistic culture’ of the French was perhaps why they struggled to appreciate what the man brought to the way we think about architecture, in other words his attempt to reconcile technological precision with poetic intuition. But another factor must also be taken into account: the insufficient technical culture among the so-called men of culture who remained imprisoned by an imaginary which viewed culture, in the words of Gilbert Simondon, ‘as a defense system against technics’, supposing ‘that technical objects do not contain a human reality’<sup>480</sup>. Hence the ritual opposition between technicism and humanism deployed by the heralds of the struggle against machinist alienation, an opposition that is no more than an updated, ecologized and moralized form of the reactionaries who were contemptuous of technical progress.

The Moderns are no longer in fashion, they are stigmatised as the scapegoats of a world that mass-produced housing and destroyed people’s ability to live together. Le Corbusier’s road is blocked. Ignorance and malice join hands to bypass what Le Corbusier was and wanted. His psychology tells us more than his own discourses, perhaps, about his inability to be instrumentalized and fascinated by power, whatever its forms. Although he was opportunistic, he was above all faithful to his vision of architecture and the architect, confident in his genius: ‘But he never adjusted his architecture to his interlocutors nor did he compromise. He firmly accomplished a work of freedom’<sup>481</sup>. His modernity meant he could never have been inclined to the technophobia that the famous biologist Marcel Prenant saw as inherent in Nazism’s ‘philosophy of despair’<sup>482</sup>. His optimism and his faith in humanity protected him against the fascist temptation and its agonistic and crepuscular culture<sup>483</sup>.

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479 André Chastel, *Architecture et Patrimoine*, *op.cit.*, p. 170.

480 Gilbert Simondon cité par Jean-Hugues Barthélémy, *Penser la connaissance et la technique après Simondon*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2005, p. 156.

481 Jean-Louis Cohen, *Le Temps*, 24 septembre 2012.

482 Marcel Prenant, « Pas d’humanisme sans la technique », *Les Lettres Françaises*, 2 septembre 1948.

To counter the catastrophic discourses of those who see his work and thought as an example of the 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarian temptation, one need only read his *Poésie sur Alger* (Poem on Algiers), in particular this passage on the freedom of man written in 1942: 'Elevating men above platitudes and clearing before them the path of discovery of the heart, where everyone is their own master, a free harvester of the riches that are life'. It is not insignificant that this little-known book was initially written at the request of Max-Pol Fouché, who directed the valiant *Fontaine* magazine (but he did not follow up on it). Le Corbusier saw this magazine as 'a haven open to the poetic vessels of a France stunned by the consequences of a strange defeat'<sup>484</sup>. We know that *Fontaine* was censored by the Vichy and German governments and later became the tribune of the French intellectual resistance.

By returning him to his historical reality, in other words to his environment, his time and the systems of influences and *epistemes* that conditioned him, we will avoid the excesses of adoration or detestation. It is a question of defending not a man and his work but a way of thinking and transmitting knowledge, at a time when conspiracy pseudo-theories and the fashion for systematic denigration are developing dangerously. The Le Corbusier affair goes beyond Le Corbusier: it is a new aspect of the 'doxa of France's murky past'<sup>485</sup> that is lastingly attached to the memory of the 'dark years'. The 'treason of the intellectuals' today is perhaps characterized by the absence of the 'courage of nuance'<sup>486</sup>.

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483 In 1948, one of the leading characters of the academic world, the communist Marcel Prenant, embarked upon the adventure of the *Encyclopédie de la Renaissance Française* (Encyclopedia of the French Renaissance). The project, ideated by Paul Langevin before his death, 'represents for our century the effort at scientific rationalization undertaken by Diderot and the Encyclopedists.' Le Corbusier was invited to participate in this endeavor precisely because he embodied this sense of progress and faith in rationality. He was to write the article on the Modulor. In a letter to Le Corbu, whom he invited to sit on the committee of honor, he presented the philosophical stakes of the project in the following manner: 'dialectical materialism shall be our underlying theme, just as the mechanist materialism of the philosophers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was Diderot's guideline.' Letter of Marcel Prenant to Le Corbusier, mars 1948. Archives of the Le Corbusier Foundation, FLC, F2-7-93.

484 Le Corbusier, *Poésie sur Alger*, *op.cit.*, p. 9. Of course, this does not allow Le Corbusier to consider himself as a 'Resistance fighter'.

485 Pierre Laborie, *Le chagrin et le venin*, *op.cit.*, p. 57.

486 Jean Birnbaum, *Le courage de la nuance*, Paris, éd. du Seuil, 2021.



## 7 The UNESCO World Heritage ‘black’ list: Uses and misuses<sup>487</sup>

For many countries, the inclusion of cultural, natural, or mixed property on the UNESCO World Heritage List is a crucial issue, less in terms of recognition of the property's value (cultural, historical, or landscape) than in terms of the prospects for asserting identity or reaping economic and tourism benefits. In many respects, being included in the list is a geopolitical issue, particularly for emerging countries. States compete based on their ability to list national properties recognised as ‘outstanding universal value’.<sup>488</sup> This has resulted in an exponential increase in the number of applications, and it is becoming increasingly difficult for UNESCO and the specialised consultative structures to carry out effective monitoring.<sup>489</sup> In 2022–2023, 42 new properties (33 cultural properties and 9 natural properties) were added to the list. As a result, the number of sites to be listed each year is now limited to 45, and each State Party to the World Heritage Convention is entitled to apply for a maximum of two sites per year. The World Heritage List has just passed the symbolic milestone of 1200 sites.

Yet this ‘outstanding universal’ value is not eternal! Indeed, the famous ‘label’ may be withdrawn under certain conditions. So, alongside the pres-

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487 This text is based on the reports written by the students in class 3 of the Erasmus Mundus DYCLAM+ master's degree I supervised from 2018 to 2024. I would like to thank them all: Djimmy Edah, Maxence Bouquet, Amira Ftaita, Denise Navarro Bercera, Alexandra Egorova, Honora Rijaniaina Raveloson, Yosra Maatallah, Quentin Prigent, Gaël Goualandiangou, Boris Kougba, Anastasiia Kleshchenko, Raïssa Rangel Damiano, Marie-Line Farah, Léonie Petitclerc, Bochra Rzaigui, Océane Lesot, Martine Ndo, Mailane Messias-Sampaio. See: Robert Belot, Philippe Martin (dir.), *Patrimoine, Pêril, Résilience*, Paris, Maisonneuve & Larose/Hémisphères, 2022.

488 Chloé Maurel, « Les prémices de la convention sur le patrimoine mondial de l'Unesco de 1972 », in *L'invention de la valeur universelle exceptionnelle de l'Unesco. Une utopie contemporaine*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2015, p. 43–60

489 This increase is also linked to UNESCO's will to account for the issue of representativity. In the 1990s, it was observed that there was an over-representation of one type of Western property (essentially historic towns and monumental properties with elitist architecture in Western countries). In 1994, the World Heritage Committee adopted a strategy to draw up a ‘balanced, representative and credible World Heritage list’. See: Sophia Labadi (2005), ‘A review of the Global Strategy for a balanced, representative and credible World Heritage List 1994–2004, Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites’, 7:2, p. 89–102, DOI: 10.1179/135050305793137477.

tigious list, there is a 'black' list of properties that are in danger of being de-listed, the 'List of World Heritage in Danger', the purgatory of World Heritage sites. As of 2024, 56 sites were included on this list. Its purpose is to inform the international community that the criteria that justified a property's inclusion on the World Heritage List are no longer met because the property is endangered. The causes may be grouped into three categories: failure to respect commitments made by the community (poor management, choice of infrastructure that affects the landscape); external circumstances (armed conflicts, wars, natural disasters, pollution, poaching, uncontrolled urbanisation, etc.); overtourism (unchecked growth in the number of visitors to the site, a victim of its success). In 2019, during its 43rd session in Baku, the World Heritage Committee reiterated that the purpose of including a property on the List of World Heritage in Danger was to mobilise international support to help the State Party respond effectively to the challenges facing the property.

However, further analysis of this little-known and little-studied system is required.<sup>490</sup> We propose to examine how it is implemented (or not) using practical cases to identify the threats that weigh on cultural properties. What kind of damage to UNESCO-labelled heritage would justify the implementation of such a list? Have stable criteria been set? Are the procedures efficient? How do the stakeholders, and especially the politicians, behave towards UNESCO? Can UNESCO, which is nothing more than an assembly of States, resist pressure and geopolitical challenges that can be disruptive factors?

### *How to define 'threats' and 'danger'?*

The List of World Heritage in Danger alerts the international community in the hope that it will act to save the sites in question. UNESCO must ensure compliance with the preamble to the 1972 Convention, which stresses the need to establish 'an effective system of collective protection of the cultural and natural heritage, organised on a permanent basis and in accordance with modern scientific methods'. Typically, the mere perspective of the inclusion of a site on this list is likely to trigger the speedy adoption of her-

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490 With the exception of Nicolas E. Brown, Claudia Liuzza & Lynn Meskell, 'The Politics of Peril: UNESCO's List of World Heritage in Danger', *Journal of Field Archaeology*, 44:5, 2019, p. 287–303, DOI: 10.1080/00934690.2019.1600929

itage conservation and protection measures. Some States perceive the List of World Heritage in Danger as a 'black' list and consider the inclusion of one of their properties on this list a humiliation in the international arena. The worst situation is when a property on the World Heritage List shortly thereafter finds itself on the 'black' list due to negligence and failure to honour community commitments. Such was the case of the archaeological site of Butrint in Albania. It was added to the World Heritage List in 1992 and, five years later, on the List of World Heritage in Danger until 2007 due to pillage and a lack of protection, management, and conservation of remains from the Greek, Roman, Byzantine, and Venetian periods. However, if it has identified the threat, a state can and must request the inscription of one of its properties on the List of World Heritage in Danger. This means that it can use the World Heritage Fund to help conserve the property. Every year, 4 million dollars are disbursed through contributions from States Parties and private donations.<sup>491</sup>

The *World Heritage Policy Compendium* identifies two main categories of threat: 'In the case of cultural properties, danger factors may be due either to nature or to human action, whereas in the case of natural properties, most of the factors emanate from human action and it is infrequent for a factor of natural origin (such as an epidemic) to threaten the integrity of a property'.

Following the bombing of Dubrovnik in 1991 and its inclusion on the List of World Heritage in Danger, the 2008 'guidelines' expanded and clarified the criteria for including a property on the List in Danger. The threat is defined by the emergence of a specific danger or by the existence of significant operations for which a request for international assistance has been issued. Consider the example of the historic centre of Shakhrisabz in Uzbekistan, located on the Silk Road in southern Uzbekistan. It is a unique testimony to the architectural heritage of Central Asia and the Islamic world (15th and 16th centuries). UNESCO considered that the destruction of medieval buildings and the erection of modern buildings had 'caused irreversible damage to the appearance of the historic city' and decided to include the site on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2016.

Conversely, spectacular disasters to listed properties have not always triggered the endangerment procedure. One of the most striking examples

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491 Claire Thoizet, « Un site peut-il être retiré de la liste du patrimoine mondial de l'Unesco? », *La Croix*, 4 July 2018. <https://www.la-croix.com/Culture/site-peut-etre-retire-liste-patrimoine-mondial-lUnesco-2018-07-04-1200952580>



is the fire that almost destroyed Notre-Dame de Paris in April 2019. The 43rd session of the World Heritage Committee 'expressed its full support for the State Party (...) and congratulated the State Party for the efforts made by the competent national services to ensure the safeguarding of the property despite the difficulties encountered'. There was never any question of including Notre-Dame de Paris on the list of properties 'in danger'.

The approach is trickier when the threats are more diffuse and are not caused by a sudden event. Thus, it is necessary to distinguish between 'proven perils' (specific and established imminent threats, such as armed conflict or earthquakes) and 'endangerment', i.e., threats that could have indirect harmful effects on the integrity of the heritage (overcrowding, the passage of time, bad weather, pollution, climate change). In some instances, the threats are 'mixed', both human and environmental. This is the case for the heritage of the tropical forests of Sumatra (Indonesia). This vast area of 2.5 million hectares of national parks is one of the largest biodiversity reserves in Southeast Asia. It shelters critically endangered species (orangutans, Sumatran tigers, rhinoceros, elephants, and bears). UNESCO decided to include this natural site on the List of World Heritage in Danger to help it 'overcome the threat of poaching, illegal logging, deforestation for agriculture and plans to build roads through the park.'

A distinction is drawn between 'proven threat' (the property is threatened by a proven, specific and imminent danger) and 'endangerment' (the property faces severe threats that could hurt its essential characteristics).

### *For cultural property*

<b>Proven threat</b>	<b>Endangerment</b>
severe degradation of the materials	a change in the legal status of the property which may reduce the level of protection
severe degradation of the structure and/or landscape	lack of a conservation policy
severe alteration in architectural and urban cohesion	threats from development projects
severe alteration of the urban or rural landscape or the natural environment	threats from urban planning
significant loss of historical authenticity	ongoing armed conflict or conflict about to break out
serious alteration of cultural significance	threatening impacts of climatic, geological or other environmental factors

## For natural property

Proven threat	Endangerment
serious decline in the population of endangered species or other species of outstanding universal value that benefit from protection (natural or human factors)	change in the legal status protecting the property; population resettlement or development projects; ongoing armed conflict or conflict about to break out
severe deterioration of the natural beauty or scientific interest of the property, caused, for example, by human settlement, adventitious construction or miscellaneous development	lack of a management plan or system, inadequate or incompletely implemented plan
encroachment of human settlements on the boundaries or upstream of property whose integrity they threaten	threatening impacts of climatic, geological or other environmental factors.

It should be noted that the assessment is sometimes based on vague and subjective criteria. For example, the 'natural beauty' or aesthetics of a landscape. A good illustration is that of the wind turbines that were to be erected near Mont Saint-Michel (in 2011–2012). UNESCO asked the French government to extend the exclusion perimeter, considering that 'the construction of wind turbines in the vicinity and within the visual environment of the Bay of Mont-Saint-Michel presents a threat whose impact is the most negative and serious'.<sup>492</sup> In this case, the threat was intangible. It was, so to speak, a matter of 'perspective', in both senses of the term.

Article 11 of the 1972 Convention provided for including a site on the 'in Danger' list 'whenever circumstances shall so require' or 'in case of urgent need'. What may seem clear is much less so when it comes to implementing this chapter. We will demonstrate what has already been observed, i.e., that 'the assessment of these situations is extremely variable; in almost 50 years of existence, the World Heritage Committee has not succeeded in establishing fairly stable criteria for assessing danger'.<sup>493</sup>

492 UNESCO, Mission Report, 22–24 November 2011. See also: D. DEHARBE. *Les représentations imagées du paysage devant le juge administratif. L'exemple du contentieux éolien* In : *Image(s) & Environnement*. Toulouse : Presses de l'Université Toulouse 1 Capitole, 2012 <<http://books.openedition.org/putc/2567>>. ISBN: 9782379280122. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.putc.2567>.

493 Mélanie Duval, Ana Brancelj et Christophe Gauchon, « Élasticité des normes et stratégies d'acteurs : analyse critique de l'inscription au patrimoine mondial de l'UNESCO », *Géoconfluences*, juin 2021. <https://geoconfluences.ens-lyon.fr/informations-scientifiques/dossiers-thematiques/patrimoine/articles/analyse-critique-inscription-unesco>.

*How to assess? The role of UNESCO's partner institutions and their limitations*

A relevant and regular monitoring policy should be devised in light of the ever-increasing number of World Heritage properties. The requirement for State Parties to produce a management and monitoring plan demonstrates the need for a monitoring protocol. It should be noted that the States debate and sometimes challenge this requirement because they do not wish to forfeit their sovereign right over their territory's heritage.<sup>494</sup> Self-assessment is encouraged. The World Heritage Committee relies on the expertise of specialised partner institutions such as ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property), IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) and ICOM (International Council of Museums). These institutions play a crucial role in the implementation of the Convention through research and the publication of results. ICOMOS and ICCROM have developed guides to help the States manage their heritage and provide a framework that may later serve as a reference for assessment.<sup>495</sup>

These bodies have the power to trigger the alert procedure, including for properties not on the World Heritage list. The 'World Heritage Alert' process uses ICOMOS professional and public networks. The Historical Centre in Colón (Panama) is a recent example of the implementation of this process. ICOMOS International issued a heritage alert that relayed the national alert issued by ICOMOS Panama on 7 March 2022.<sup>496</sup> Colón is a 'historical urban landscape' that was deteriorating due to the local authorities' negligence and was at risk of demolition after a change in the law protecting the site. This law, passed in September 2021, does not incorporate the modifications suggested by heritage conservation organisations. ICOMOS issued a 'Global Heritage Alert' to raise awareness, put pressure

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494 In 2019, a UNESCO workgroup produced a report on world heritage stakeholders' perception of reactive monitoring, <https://whc.unesco.org/fr/suivi-reactif/>. See also: Chloé Maurel, « L'Unesco de 1945 à 1974 », Thèse de doctorat, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2006, p. 814.

495 B. M. Feilden & J. Jokilehto, *Guide de gestion des sites du patrimoine culturel mondial*, Rome, 1993; as well as: Herb Stovel, *Risk Preparedness: A Management Manual for World Heritage*, ICCROM, Rome, 1998.

496 [https://www.icomos.org/images/DOCUMENTS/Secretariat/2022/Heritage\\_Alerts/ICOMOS\\_HERITAGE\\_ALERT\\_COLON\\_UPDATE.pdf](https://www.icomos.org/images/DOCUMENTS/Secretariat/2022/Heritage_Alerts/ICOMOS_HERITAGE_ALERT_COLON_UPDATE.pdf)

on the Panamanian government and recommend conservation measures. These alerts are mentioned on the UNESCO website.

Three types of monitoring have been identified: systematic, administrative and *ad hoc*. 'Systematic monitoring' is an ongoing process of monitoring the condition of world heritage sites. It requires periodic reporting on their state of conservation. 'Administrative monitoring' involves control actions carried out by the World Heritage Centre to ensure the proper implementation of the recommendations and decisions of the World Heritage Committee and its Bureau at the time of inscription of the properties or subsequently. 'Ad hoc monitoring' is the presentation of reports to the Bureau and the Committee by the World Heritage Centre on the state of conservation of specific World Heritage sites at risk. This mechanism is mobilised whenever exceptional circumstances arise or works may impact the state of conservation of the sites.

ICOMOS produced the 'Heritage at Risk' programme, which was approved by the General Assembly in Mexico in 1999.<sup>497</sup> National and international scientific committees are invited each year to produce short reports describing the risks in their country or field of expertise, complete with case studies. This programme's reports aim to identify World Heritage properties at risk and present real-life case studies. In November 2011, ICOMOS published the 'Heritage Alert'<sup>498</sup> procedure to establish a reliable database for keeping an updated 'list of properties at risk'. UNESCO does not always follow these bodies' recommendations. In addition to the technical and scientific parameters, there are also non-rational or, in other words, political parameters to consider. And strategies of influence and lobbies exist in this field, as they do everywhere. Let us consider an example of the distortion of ICOMOS recommendations by UNESCO. It concerns Ichkeul Park in Tunisia.

This park, which was a hunting reserve in the 12th century, became part of the public domain in the 20th century. UNESCO listed it as a 'biosphere reserve' in 1977 before adding it to the World Heritage List in 1979. It became a 'national park' in 1980. In 1996, the site was included on the List of World Heritage in Danger due to a sharp rise in the salinity of the water (as a result of the construction of dams on upstream rivers), which posed

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497 Reports and special issues on monuments and sites at risk published by ICOMOS. <https://www.icomos.org/fr/notre-action/anticipation-des-risques/rapports-heritage-at-risk>

498 ICOMOS, « Alerte patrimoine », ICOMOS, 15 November 2011. <https://www.icomos.org/fr/simpliquer/nous-informer/alerte-patrimoine>

a threat to hundreds of migratory birds. An emergency plan was devised to better manage the site's water resources. In 2006, UNESCO withdrew the park from the 'black' list. However, what Wikipedia (accessed on 10 May 2024) fails to mention is that the International Union for Conservation of Nature considered that not all the benchmarks and objectives had been achieved, in particular, the creation of an independent and permanent management structure and the development of a participatory management plan. Consequently, the organisation issued an unfavourable opinion regarding the removal of the property from the World Heritage in Danger list, which the World Heritage Committee did not heed.

Independent bodies and researchers spoke out against this decision. On 16 April 2016, the webzine 'NATURA Sciences. L'information scientifique de l'urgence climatique' published a critical analysis: 'Le parc national d'Ichkeul toujours menacé!'<sup>499</sup> (Ichkeul National Park is still at risk!). The webzine quoted Fathi Ayache, senior lecturer in biogeography at the University of Sousse (Tunisia), who believed that 'the removal of the Ichkeul nature reserve from the List of World Heritage in Danger by UNESCO in 2006 is an aberration', because, in reality 'the lake and marshes in the park have still not been saved'. NATURA Sciences echoed the report of the World Wide Fund (WWF) organisation published on 6 April 2016.<sup>500</sup> This report claims that Ichkeul Park is one of the 114 natural sites on the World Heritage list that are 'threatened by deleterious industrial activities'. The purpose was to raise awareness among the public and, more importantly, with the relevant authorities that more than half of the sites listed by UNESCO for their biodiversity (229 sites in 2016 across 96 countries and occupying 279 million hectares, or 0.5 % of the earth's surface) are facing real threats as a direct result of human activity.<sup>501</sup> In this report, the NGO advocated expanding the annual session of the World Heritage Committee to include organisations with practical experience in the conservation and management of natural World Heritage sites.

This touches on the limits and challenges of UNESCO's heritage policy and its constant efforts to find a compromise between the political and

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499 <https://www.natura-sciences.com/comprendre/parc-national-ichkeul-tunisie-menaces941.html>

500 [file:///Users/br78662h/Desktop/Livre%20PROJET%20Etu-des%20PAT%202024/UNESCO%20Pe%CC%81rils/1602\\_rapport\\_proteger\\_hommes\\_en\\_protegeant\\_nature.pdf](file:///Users/br78662h/Desktop/Livre%20PROJET%20Etu-des%20PAT%202024/UNESCO%20Pe%CC%81rils/1602_rapport_proteger_hommes_en_protegeant_nature.pdf)

501 <https://www.lesechos.fr/2016/04/le-patrimoine-mondial-victime-des-activites-industrielles-206325>

economic importance of World Heritage and scientific considerations. Heritage issues are an endless source of conflicts of interest and clashing of rationales. Lastly, there is a growing gap between recommendations and inscriptions.<sup>502</sup> This gap has not escaped UNESCO's notice, which, for the first time in 2021, lamented that in nine cases, the Committee had not followed the recommendations of the Advisory Bodies.<sup>503</sup>

This raises the broader issue of UNESCO's ability to ensure that States respect their commitments and the ideal behind the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by UNESCO on 16 November 1972, to which 195 countries are signatories. One example among others. In July 2020, Turkey ignored the World Heritage Committee's recommendations by turning the Basilica of Saint Sophia Museum in Istanbul into an active mosque.<sup>504</sup> Despite the risk of the site being delisted by UNESCO, the political significance of this action seemed more important to the head of state, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who thereby sought to strengthen the national spirit and increase his political capital. He claimed that he meant to 'give it back to the Turkish Muslims' and open it to everyone free of charge. This change has not been without consequences for the property's governance, shared between players, each with its own rationale. Whereas it was previously the sole responsibility of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, it must now involve the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Dinyanet), the Foundation's Directorate and the Istanbul Prefecture. Maintenance work on the property will be more complex and time-consuming. Yet, the most serious issue concerns the arrangements for welcoming the public.

As the site is now used for cultural and religious purposes, the decision not to charge an entrance fee resulted in a drop in income for the Turkish state, which is detrimental to maintaining the property. This is why the Ministry of Culture decided to charge an entrance fee (a hefty €25) for foreign visitors only as of 2024. One can only imagine the organisational

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502 Tim Badman (*et. al.*), « Patrimoine mondial en péril », *Études de l'UICN sur le patrimoine mondial*, Union internationale pour la conservation de la nature, Septembre 2009, p. 1–50.

503 UNESCO Archives, Comité du patrimoine mondial, Quarante-quatrième Session, « Point 8 de l'Ordre du jour provisoire : Établissement de la Liste du patrimoine mondial et de la Liste du patrimoine mondial en péril », WHC/21/44.COM/8B, Fuzhou, Chine, 2021, p.25 – 40.

504 « Sainte Sophie à Istanbul : l'UNESCO regrette la décision des autorités turques », *ONU info*, 20 juillet 2020. <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2020/07/1072801>

problems involved in implementing something that is obviously a form of discrimination. One likes to say that heritage brings people together; here, it is divisive and has become an arena for civilisational confrontation.

Concerned by Turkey's refusal to negotiate on this issue, UNESCO experts requested a detailed report on the basilica's current state from the Turkish government by 1 February 2022. Meanwhile, this situation, which affects not only the heritage but also the religious field, has received negative comments from the Orthodox Church of Constantinople and the Greek and Russian Patriarchates, who fear, in particular, the loss of the unique Byzantine frescoes. Hence, the religious dimension has further added to the complexity of a political issue. Ironically, given what Russia did to Ukraine in February 2022, President Erdogan assured Vladimir Putin, who at the time was very concerned about protecting Orthodox heritage, that the Christian relics of Saint Sophia would be safeguarded. This shows how the states' strategic positioning within the context of UNESCO can influence the perception of the List of World Heritage in Danger. With few means available to impose strict obligations on the States Parties, the organisation has become the scene of serious tensions and political rivalries. Conflicts of interest intersect with social and cultural issues, condemning UNESCO to impotence.

Another factor could be considered and examined, which raises the question of the Committee's neutrality. Australian researcher Lynn Meskell has pointed to changes in how the Committee's elected experts are selected: ambassadors and diplomats are increasingly replacing archaeologists, historians and scientists. State Party representatives would develop strategies for political influence in the name of heritage.<sup>505</sup> According to her, the Assemblies' sessions are akin to 'gifts and exchanges on a global stage' and have thus become a stage for playing out strategic political alliances.<sup>506</sup> Lobbying and pressure to adopt favourable measures undermine the importance of heritage expertise, UNESCO's original mission.

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505 Camille Rondot, « L'Unesco au risque de sa politisation : symptômes d'une incommunication dans les relations internationales », *Hermès, La Revue*, vol. 81, 2018, p. 166–168.

506 Lynn Meskell, Claudia Liuzza, Bertacchini Enrico, Donatella Saccone, 2014, 'Multilateralism and UNESCO World Heritage: decision-making, States Parties and political processes', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, volume 21, issue 5, p. 423–440; Lynn Meskell, 2015, 'Transacting UNESCO World Heritage: gifts and exchanges on a global stage', *Social Anthropology*, volume 23, issue 1, p. 3–21.

Why enter the 'black' list, and how to be removed from it?

What is required to have a property removed from the List in Danger and reinstated on the World Heritage List? That's the happy ending! We will also analyse the cases where UNESCO has had to launch the ultimate and unfortunate procedure: removal from the World Heritage List, i.e., delisting. It may seem obvious that any property included on the World Heritage List in Danger would automatically be included on the World Heritage List. Overall, this is the case. Yet, there are a few exceptions. While inclusion on this list may be a sanction, it can also be an opportunity. This is known as a 'simultaneous inscription' on both lists: the World Heritage List and the World Heritage in Danger List. It requires an emergency context. Three examples.

The natural and cultural-historical region of Kotor, located on the bay of Boka Kotorska on Montenegro's Adriatic coast, was hit by an earthquake in 1979. It is a natural harbour which used to be a significant trade and art centre in the Middle Ages (with a school of masonry and icon painting), and the town of Kotor is home to four Romanesque churches. Decision was taken to inscribe the city on both lists, so that UNESCO could launch a restoration programme. It should be noted that this was the first site to appear on the List of World Heritage in Danger. In 1985, following severe hurricane damage, the Royal Palaces of Abomey (Benin) site was simultaneously inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List and the List of World Heritage in Danger. A vast restoration and safety plan was devised. It received substantial funding, partly from the World Heritage Fund and partly from Japan in 2002–2003. In 2007, the site was removed from the List of World Heritage in Danger. France is returning works of art, and the French Development Agency is providing substantial support to develop the site.

The site of Ashur in Iraq, the first capital of the Akkad Empire (3rd millennium AD), has suffered from a combination of dramatic events: war, occupation by the Islamic State,<sup>507</sup> natural erosion, and a dam project threatening to flood the site.<sup>508</sup> In 2003, an 'International Coordination

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507 Helga Turku, *The Destruction of Cultural Property as a Weapon of War. ISIS in Syria and Iraq*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

508 Noam Raydan, 'How Iraq's Race for Water Security Impacts Cultural Heritage and Environment', Iraq Energy Institute, 5 May 2021. <https://iraqenergy.org/2021/05/05/how-iraqs-race-for-water-security-impacts-cultural-heritage-and-environment/>



Committee for the Safeguarding of Iraqi Cultural Heritage' was created.<sup>509</sup> The same year, this site was added to the World Heritage List and the List of World Heritage in Danger.<sup>510</sup> We could mention other cases, such as Chan Angkor, Tipasa, the Bamiyan Valley, the Iranian city of Bam, and Samarra. Of course, in these cases, the country concerned requested UNESCO's intervention.

Typically, there are two possible scenarios when a property is added to the List of World Heritage in Danger. Either the property is removed from the list and reinstated on the World Heritage List or withdrawn from the Heritage List altogether. Let us look at the first scenario.

A site may even be included twice on the 'black' list. It happened with the Djoudj National Bird Sanctuary in Senegal. The world's third-largest bird sanctuary, it was listed as a World Heritage Site in 1981, then placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger from 1984 to 1988, and again from 2000 to 2006.<sup>511</sup> The recurring problem was the proliferation of invasive species and the reduction in the amplitude of water levels, which threatened the ecological balance of the property and the survival of the birds. It was, of course, necessary to assess the causes, direct and indirect. Firstly, rice baskets had been installed around the site following the launch of the national rice self-sufficiency programme in the Senegal River Delta. Then, the construction of the Diama and Manantali dams severely disrupted the park's hydrological balance. As a result, there was a proliferation of invasive aquatic plants, as well as a decline in certain bird colonies. A large number of missions were carried out,<sup>512</sup> some involving the European Union, and substantial funding was mobilised. This example illustrates how difficult it is, as is the case everywhere, to find a compromise between heritage protection and economic development. It is also a way of measuring just how much effort and goodwill UNESCO invests in maintaining the label and helping countries to avoid the worst-case scenario, i.e. removal from the World Heritage List.

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509 Évaluation de l'état de conservation du site d'Assur (Iraq), No.1130, mars 2003, p.1. UNESCO. Centre du patrimoine mondial <https://whc.unesco.org/document/151823>

510 ICOMOS, World Heritage Center, *Report on the Joint World Heritage Centre-ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring Mission to Ashur (Qal'at Sherqat), Iraq (C 1130), from 5 to 9 June 2011*, Paris, UNESCO, 2011; adopted at the 38th session of the World Heritage Committee, June 2014. Ashur (Qal'at Sherqat), Iraq, C 1130).

511 <https://whc.unesco.org/fr/soc/4135>

512 RAMSAR, *Rapport de mission au Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj, Sénégal et au Parc National du Diawling, Mauritanie du 14 au 21 septembre 2000* [https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/ram42f\\_senegal\\_djoudj\\_0.pdf](https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/ram42f_senegal_djoudj_0.pdf)

Analyses have shown that the average time a property spends on the list of heritage in danger, all types of sites included, is ten years. However, there is a big difference between the minimum and maximum time spent on this 'purgatory' list. Many properties were removed from the list in less than five years: Cologne Cathedral (2 years), Djoudj National Bird Park (4 years), Tipasa (4 years), Ngorongoro Conservation Area (5 years), Iguazu National Park (2 years), Galapagos Islands (3 years). The site which stayed the longest time on the List of World Heritage in Danger was the Natural and Culturo-Historical Region of Kotor (located on the Bay of Boka Kotorska, on the Adriatic coast of Montenegro), which suffered an earthquake, as we saw earlier: the process took 24 years (1979–2003).

Removal from the List of World Heritage in Danger concerns every area of the world with properties.

Areas	Number of sites removed	% per area
Africa	99	24 %
Latin America and the Caribbean	6	16 %
Asia & the Pacific	7	18 %
Arab States	4	1 %
Europe and North America	12	32 %
Total	38	-

We should mention a unique case of double inscription, which shows that a country's civil society may weigh on this process, including against national authorities.

This case concerns the Roşia Montană site in Romania, the largest Romanian gold mine preserved. In July 2021, Roşia Montană was added to the World Heritage List and the List of World Heritage in Danger.<sup>513</sup> This double listing was the result of a long political, economic and legal battle. The source of the conflict was a purely economic project to resume gold mining entrusted to a Canadian company. The Roşia Montană Gold Corporation (RMGC), also known as Gabriel Ressources, was awarded an open-pit gold mining concession in 1997.<sup>514</sup> This created a flagrant conflict

513 Marcel Gascó Barberá, 'Ancient Romanian Gold Mine Given UNESCO Protection', *BalkanInsight*, 2021. <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/07/27/ancient-romanian-gold-mine-given-unesco-protection/>

514 GABRIEL RESOURCES, 'Corporate Update – UNESCO Inscription of Roşia Montană', 27 July 2021: [https://www.gabrielresources.com/site/documents/GB\\_U\\_PR\\_re\\_UNESCO\\_filing.pdf](https://www.gabrielresources.com/site/documents/GB_U_PR_re_UNESCO_filing.pdf)

of interest between heritage protection and economic stakes: 300 tonnes of gold, 1600 tonnes of silver, worth 16 billion dollars, and the creation of 3000 jobs.

In the early 2000s, ICOMOS urged the interested parties to acknowledge the project's severe threats to the region's natural and cultural heritage.<sup>515</sup> However, the Romanian state seemed unmoved. In 2004, it gave in to pressure from the Canadian company by withdrawing the protected site status granted in 2000 to one of the four massifs that the Roman mine, the Massif Carnic, arbitrates. A year later, the Romanian courts annulled the procedure, prompting appeals from the Ministry of Culture and RMGC. The Romanian Supreme Court then referred the case for retrial to the Brasov Court of Appeal on 11 July 2006.<sup>516</sup> The NGOs Alburnus Maior and Pro Europe League rallied behind ICOMOS's position. A significant change occurred on 1 January 2007 when Romania joined the European Union. Indeed, the protection of cultural heritage is a critical aspect of the EU's cultural policy. Pressure in favour of preserving the site forced the Romanian government to change positions, specifically as the Court of Brasov, on 27 November 2007, overturned its decision to 'de-protect' the site. The government hesitated. The massive cost of potential compensation to Canadian society was a deterrent. However, it could not ignore the tens of thousands of people who, in 2013, took to the streets for three weeks to demonstrate against gold mining in Roşia Montană.

The government eventually dropped the project and withdrew the operating licence. This decision was challenged by Gabriel Ressources. With the help of an American pension fund, the Canadian company filed a complaint against the Romanian government with the World Bank's arbitration tribunal. The World Bank's International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes delivered its verdict on 15 March 2024, ruling against Gabriel Ressources. Pro Patrimonio, ICOMOS Romania and the Romanian Academy prepared a defence and are taking the case to UNESCO. Civil society successfully mobilising to defend its heritage is now known as the 'Rosia Montana effect'.<sup>517</sup> It played a decisive role in UNESCO's decision to

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515 ICOMOS Romania, 'Romania: Heritage at Risk in Rosia Montana', M. Truscott, M. Petzet, J. Ziesemer, *Heritage at Risk ICOMOS World Report 2004–2005 on monuments and sites in danger*, Munich, K.G. Saur, 2005, p. 201.

516 *Ibid.*, p. 129.

517 Ioana Iosa, « L'effet Rosia Montana : montée en confiance et en compétence de la société civile roumaine », Actes du colloque international « Les expérimentations

list Roşia Montană as a 'mining landscape' on the World Heritage List and the List of World Heritage in Danger.

UNESCO's ultimate weapon is the threat to remove properties from the World Heritage List. This is known as 'delisting'. Yet, the deterrent effect seems to be ineffective. To date, only four sites have been involved in this procedure. In 2007, for the first time, UNESCO's World Heritage Committee delisted a site from the List: the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary in Oman, Middle East. The reason given was the country's 'unilateral decision to reduce by 90 % the surface area of the area protecting the Arabian Oryx, an endangered antelope species, in violation of the guidelines laid down by the World Heritage Convention'.<sup>518</sup> The Elbe Valley in Dresden (Germany) was added to UNESCO's World Heritage List as a cultural landscape in 2004 and to the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2008. A year later, in 2009, the site was delisted following the building of a bridge (Waldschlößchenbrücke) in the heart of the protected area.<sup>519</sup> Bagrati Cathedral in Georgia was built in the 12th century in the town of Kutaisi (Imerethia region). It is a masterpiece of Georgian medieval architecture. It was included on the World Heritage List in 1994, along with Ghelati monastery.<sup>520</sup>

In 2010, the members of the 34th session of the World Heritage Committee expressed 'deep concern regarding the irreversible work being carried out on the site as part of a major renovation project launched by the Georgian State Party'.<sup>521</sup> The Committee, therefore, decided to place the site on the List of World Heritage in Danger, considering that the renovation project would affect 'the integrity and authenticity' of the property and that it should be stopped without delay. During the World Heritage Committee's 37th session in 2013, the State Party was asked to present a request for a

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démocratiques aujourd'hui. Convergences, fragmentations, portées politiques », 26-28 janvier 2017, Saint-Denis, GIS Démocratie et Participation, 2017.

518 UNESCO Archives, Centre du patrimoine mondial, « *Décisions adoptées lors de la 31<sup>e</sup> session du Comité du patrimoine mondial* », WHC-07/31.COM/24, Christchurch, Nouvelle Zélande, 23 juin-2 juillet 2007.

519 Bénédicte Gaillard, « Développement urbain et protection des paysages culturels du patrimoine mondial de l'UNESCO. Une étude de la désinscription de la vallée de l'Elbe à Dresde en Allemagne », *Bulletin de la Société Géographique de Liège*, 65 (2015/2) – Varia, URL : <https://popups.uliege.be/0770-7576/index.php?id=4142>.

520 AIRGEO, *Cathédrale de Bagrat* : <https://www.airgeo.org/fr/regions/imereti/kutaisi/bagrat-cathedral/>

521 UNESCO, La cathédrale de Bagrati et le monastère de Ghelati (Géorgie) inscrits sur la Liste du patrimoine mondial en péril. UNESCO Centre du patrimoine mondial. <https://whc.unesco.org/fr/actualites/637/>

major change to the boundaries by 1 February 2014 at the latest for the Ghe-lati Monastery to justify the criterion on its own. In 2017, the 41st session of the World Heritage Committee ruled to remove Bagrati Cathedral from the World Heritage List and leave only the monastery, eight kilometres away from the town. It was a form of compromise. One last case: on 21 July 2021, UNESCO's World Heritage Committee removed the Port of Liverpool from its list of World Heritage sites. The reason was overdevelopment, which was robbing the building of its authenticity. Thirteen Committee delegates voted at the 44th enlarged session to delist this historic port in the north-west of England, an emblem of the industrial era that had been listed in 2004. Permanent removal from the list is extremely rare. Consensus is always given priority, even if this may sometimes be detrimental to the principles of World Heritage listing and the long-term general interest.<sup>522</sup>

### *How to avoid the blacklist? Political manoeuvring*

Some, mainly Western countries, regard the 'black' list as a terrible threat. Such an infamous measure must be avoided at all costs. Given the stakes involved, heritage at this level is closely tied to the political issues of the countries concerned. Here are a few examples to better understand how this avoidance strategy can be implemented.

Spain is a good example. In 1994, Doñana National Park in Andalusia was included on the World Heritage List. Several events would threaten the property's integrity: significant pollution linked to a settling tank from a nearby mine, only four years after the site was listed; a major fire in 2007 that affected the park's surrounding area; plans to extend intensive cultivation and extraction projects. Yet the property was never declared 'in danger'. The Spanish state produced numerous reports to convince the experts of the efforts produced and the results expected.

France follows the same lines. In 2001, then in 2006–2007, the Lascaux cave suffered bacteriological attacks likely to endanger the Magdalenian paintings. An association decided to ask UNESCO to include the site on the List of World Heritage in Danger. However, the French Ministry of Culture reacted to block the procedure. In February 2009, it organised an

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522 Eike Albrecht, Bénédicte Gaillard, 'Procedure for Delisting a Site from the World Heritage List: Is Delisting With Consent or Against the Wish of a State Party Possible?', *Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Management*, Vol. 3, No. 1–2, 2005, p. 15–21.

international symposium, with the support of the International Federation of Rock Art Organisations, to demonstrate that every measure was in place to resolve the problem and avoid such a listing, which would have been perceived as humiliating. In 2014, the Fondation du Patrimoine launched a national subscription campaign in support of the project to make Lascaux Hill a sanctuary. At the foot of the site, the Montignac-Lascaux International Centre for Cave Art, known as Lascaux 4, would be built: a complete facsimile of Lascaux with rooms dedicated to cave art.

The fear of being 'blacklisted' can have certain benefits. Two examples illustrate this: Saint Petersburg and Venice.

Before the war against Ukraine, Russia was keen to be an exemplary case of close collaboration with UNESCO. It was a means of making a positive impression on the international stage despite violent actions that ran counter to international law and humanist values (Chechnya, Georgia, Syria, Crimea...). Hence, the country's ongoing support for UNESCO programmes and participation in expert bodies. And Russia's determination not to question UNESCO's recommendations. For instance, in 2007, UNESCO officially asked the Russian authorities to halt plans to build a tower in the historic centre of St Petersburg because the project could threaten the site's outstanding universal value.<sup>523</sup> Gazprom, a very influential company in Russia close to President Vladimir Putin, had launched a project to build Europe's tallest skyscraper. At first, the company refused to move the tower's central location despite strong criticism from the people of St Petersburg. However, during an official visit by UNESCO experts to St Petersburg, officials indicated that this was only an 'architectural concept' and that Russia was prepared to look for alternative solutions. The project was immediately reviewed, and construction of the tower was moved outside the city.

Both China and Russia supported Australia in its determination to do the utmost to prevent the Great Barrier Reef from being blacklisted. Consequently, Australia succeeded in avoiding the fateful listing twice. The Australian authorities were torn between preserving the country's natural heritage and the significant economic stakes in tourism and the energy industry. Yet, IUCN had already issued alerts as early as 1985. There were three risk stages and types (in addition to site management issues): human

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523 « Le Centre du patrimoine mondial de l'UNESCO confirme l'opposition du Comité à la construction d'une tour dans le Centre historique de Saint-Petersbourg », UNESCO. Centre du patrimoine mondial: <http://whc.unesco.org/fr/actualites/411/>.

activities on or near the site (tourist, industrial, and agricultural activities, maritime transport, mining); climate change and pollution (storms, surface and groundwater pollution, warming of waters).<sup>524</sup> And finally, the threat to the Great Barrier Reef's fragile ecosystems (1500 species of fish and 4000 types of molluscs under threat). Still, Australian authorities resisted by implementing a large-scale diplomatic counter-action. In 2021, the Minister for the Environment, Sussan Ley, travelled to Europe to lobby the States sitting on the World Heritage Committee. She was in contact with 18 States.<sup>525</sup> Twelve ambassadors from twenty-one States went diving in the Great Barrier Reef on Canberra's dime.<sup>526</sup> Australia has been trying to gain support from fossil fuel-producing countries or countries that are only marginally committed to the fight against climate change. As a result, the country was able to count on Bahrain to table an amendment cancelling the site's downgrading, followed by Nigeria, Spain, China, Hungary, Oman, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Thailand, Russia, and Saudi Arabia.

On 23 July 2021, the matter was referred to the World Heritage Committee assembly. Nineteen out of twenty-one members spoke in favour of a lenient approach towards Australia. Initially, only Norway supported placing the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger. Still, it had to face the facts: the Great Barrier Reef would not be included on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2021. However, the Scandinavian country has secured a reassessment for the 45th session of the Committee in 2022. In May 2023, the new Minister for the Environment, Tanya Plibersek, announced a 4.4 billion Australian dollar (€2.7 billion) 'investment' to 'secure the future' of the Great Barrier Reef. In 2024, UNESCO demonstrated a benevolent attitude, offering the country 'enhanced support', reassured by the new government's measures.

Another example worth mentioning is Venice.<sup>527</sup> The negative impact of tourism prompted UNESCO to place the city and its lagoon on the List

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524 UNESCO, « La Grande Barrière », UNESCO <https://whc.unesco.org/fr/list/154/>

525 Amy Gunia, 'UNESCO Says Australia's Great Barrier Reef Isn't In Danger Yet. Many Environmentalists and Divers Disagree', *Time*, 27 July 2021 <https://time.com/6083753/great-barrier-reef-unesco/>

526 Graham Readfearn, Daniel Hurst, 'Australia to host ambassadors at Great Barrier Reef ahead of in "danger" list vote', *The Guardian*, 14 July 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jul/14/australia-to-fly-ambassadors-to-great-barrier-reef-ahead-of-in-danger-list-vote>

527 « Venice, Budapest, vallée de Katmandou : ces sites qui pourraient disparaître de la liste du Patrimoine mondial de l'Unesco », *Géo*, 24 juin 2021. <https://www.geo.fr/vo>

of World Heritage in Danger several years ago. In the summer of 2021, the last corresponding proposal was put to the session of the World Heritage Committee meeting in China. However, the Venetian administration did its utmost to avoid this unfavourable listing. Just before the UNESCO announcement, Italy banned large cruise ships from entering the San Marco basin. With this step in the right direction, UNESCO experts asked for an updated report on the city's conservation status by 1 December 2022.<sup>528</sup> The city then decided to launch a new project to regulate visitor flows and encourage slow tourism. The prospect of a property being listed as in danger can have beneficial effects: it can encourage States to react and ask for help to avoid listing. A radical measure has now been taken to regulate tourist flows: starting 25 April 2024, tourists will be charged an entrance fee of €5.

*The 'blacklist', a symbolic and geopolitical weapon?*

The list of endangered heritage may also be analysed as a reflection of geopolitical issues or even as a geopolitical weapon. Indeed, heritage has become a component of 'soft power'.<sup>529</sup> The virtues of heritage 'resilience', a current topic of UNESCO discourse, are not without their limits.

One dramatic and all too familiar case: the Old City of Jerusalem, listed as a World Heritage Site in 1981, was 'blacklisted' the following year. It is the longest-listed property on the List of World Heritage in Danger, having been continuously included since 1982. Many people overlook the fact that the Kingdom of Jordan initiated the proposal. Strangely enough, UNESCO had failed to see a major diplomatic problem there: the UN had not recognised Jordan's sovereignty over East Jerusalem, which was under its trusteeship between 1948 and 1967. Nor would the UN recognise Israeli sovereignty from the moment of its occupation in 1967. This situation and the conflicts it sparked do not mean that there is no threat to the Old City's integrity. Hence, the question remains: what is the name of the State that UNESCO can attach to the property? One would be hard-pressed to

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yage/venise-et-budapest-bientot-sur-la-liste-du-patrimoine-mondial-en-peril-de-unesco-205211

528 UNESCO Centre du patrimoine mondial. Venise et sa lagune. UNESCO. Centre du patrimoine mondial : <https://whc.unesco.org/fr/list/394/documents/>

529 Itamar Even-Zohar, « Le patrimoine qui attise les conflits », *Géopolitique, conflits et patrimoine*, 2017, vol. 39, no. 1, p. 253.



find it on the UNESCO website! A subsidiary question: who has jurisdiction? UNESCO now refers to 'Israel, the occupying power'. The 'danger' is bound to last a long time still.

Moreover, the problem is further complicated by the Palestinian Authority's efforts to use heritage as a diplomatic lever. Palestine has been a member of UNESCO since 2011 (even though it is not a State, legally speaking, and is therefore not a UN member). However, the Palestinian Authority has had three properties in the occupied territories placed on the World Heritage List: the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem (despite a reserved opinion from ICOMOS), the terraced hills around the village of Battir and the Old City of Hebron. Opponents of the recognition of the Palestinian State (the United States and Israel) were quick to point out the problem and criticise UNESCO. The latter is far from having found a way out of this imbroglio. Following the decision to welcome the Palestinian Authority, the United States stopped funding UNESCO but continues to sit on UNESCO's Executive Board.

The first source of conflict concerned the project 'Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines – Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir'. The listing was made under the emergency procedure in response to a threat to the quality of the landscape and the lobbying of environmental associations. This listing had a direct geopolitical reason: the construction of a separation wall initiated by the State of Israel. ICOMOS' reservations failed to convince the World Heritage Committee, which voted in favour of the site's inclusion in July 2014. Three years later, UNESCO committed another offence, triggering a diplomatic explosion with the Hebron affair. On 2 July 2017, the World Heritage Committee included the Old Town of Hebron/Al-Khalil (Palestine) on the World Heritage List as a site 'of outstanding value in danger'. The town of Hebron has great emotional potential because it is home to the Tomb of the Patriarchs, where the biblical patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their wives) are said to be buried. Muslims call it the Mosque of Ibrahim (the Arabic name for Abraham). Twelve States on the Committee voted in favour of listing the town as a Palestinian site, six abstained, and three voted against. It was a bombshell.

The Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Foreign Affairs described the event as 'a success in the diplomatic battle waged by the Palestinians on all fronts in the face of Israeli and American pressure'. The Islamist Hamas movement welcomed 'a new confirmation of our full rights over Hebron and all Palestinian land'. The Israeli government reacted by describing the

decision as a 'negation of the city's Jewish history', mentioning a 'moral smear' and 'one of the most dishonourable moments in UNESCO's history'.<sup>530</sup> Following this listing, the American and Israeli governments left UNESCO on 12 October 2017. A large-scale diplomatic counter-offensive was organised. On 6 December 2017, the United States decided to *de facto* recognise Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel. The American embassy was thus transferred from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Christians were somewhat forgotten in this controversy. Indeed, Hebron is a 'thrice holy' city, and the three monotheistic religions have a share in its history. But it is the confrontation between the Jews and the Arabs that occupies people's minds and makes the headlines. It has been a bloody situation since the beginning of the 20th century, reaching a climax in February 1994 when an American-born Jewish settler, Baruch Goldstein, shot dead 29 Muslims during prayer inside the Ibrahim mosque in retaliation for the massacre of 67 Israelis. Since then, it has become virtually impossible to develop the site. The Palestinians feel that their heritage development policy is being blocked by the security system imposed by the Israelis. Hebron has become 'a synthesis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict'.<sup>531</sup> In this specific case, heritage does not unite; it divides.

The heritage issue is inevitably affected by global geopolitical divisions. Interestingly, Russia and China shouldered part of the financial burden for UNESCO after the United States withdrew from the organisation. Russia sought to benefit from the United States and Israel's departure from UNESCO and reinforce its image as a protector of heritage-related values. The country was keen to host the World Heritage Committee's 45th session. The meeting was initially to be held from 19 to 30 June 2022. Still, it was postponed on account of Russia's war against Ukraine, a war in which heritage is particularly exposed and destroyed. China enjoys a privileged position among UNESCO members. China and Russia were given free rein, even though both countries pursue policies that violate freedoms, the rights of minorities, dominated cultures, human rights and peace: the very opposite of what UNESCO advocates.

UNESCO cannot do anything (or very little) when a heritage property is located in an area of conflict. The full context must be taken into

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530 *Le Monde*, 7 July 2017.

531 Pauline Bosredon, « Le processus patrimonial à Hébron, dans les territoires palestiniens occupés ». *L'espace en partage*, édité par Yves Bonny *et al.*, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pur.141687>.

account. Mali is a case in point. Mali was once one of the largest tourist destinations in Africa. UNESCO had initiated significant operations to value and secure this property representative of earthen architecture.<sup>532</sup> Yet, since the outbreak of armed conflicts in the Sahel and terrorist threats, the country has become a shadow of its former self. Tourist numbers in Mali fell drastically following the destruction of the mausoleums in Timbuktu and the inclusion of the Tomb of Askia on the List of World Heritage in Danger. This led to the local population's impoverishment. The action plans that UNESCO developed to restore and safeguard the Tomb of Askia from 2012 to 2021 could not succeed without a radical change in the geopolitical context.

Indeed, when UNESCO ventures into 'disputed areas where the various stakeholders hold contradictory values', conflict is intensified, and the UN body's mission becomes impossible. While heritage has analgesic properties and, in some cases, facilitates reconciliation and resilience, it is also a source of conflict and antagonism.

We could carry out a symmetric analysis in a wholly different context of the geopolitical instrumentalisation of world heritage and UNESCO's inability to reach a solution: the 'Medieval Monuments in Kosovo' case. In 2004, shortly after the collapse of Yugoslavia, the monastery of Dečani, located in the autonomous province of Kosovo, was listed as a World Heritage Site. Serbia-Montenegro submitted the candidacy. Two years later, Serbia requested the addition of three other monasteries and churches. However, following a referendum (2006) in which Montenegro seceded from Serbia, only Serbia applied for this addition. A new event reflecting the geopolitical instability of this region of Europe occurred on 17 February 2008: Kosovo declared its independence following a war that had begun in 1998 and highlighted the tensions between the Albanian Muslim majority and Kosovo's Serb minority. Unfortunately, this application spotlighted the existing historical links between Serbia and Kosovo, but from a Serbian perspective. In their brief, the Serbs did not conceal a nationalist point of view. They referred to 'Serbian national consciousness' and 'the magnificent monuments of Serbian culture and history'. It seems rather evident that, in this case, heritage was used as a geopolitical instrument meant to legitim-

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532 Leslie Rainer (ed.), *Terra 2008: Proceedings of the 10th International Conference on the Study and Conservation of Earthen Architectural Heritage, Bamako, Mali, February 1 - 5, 2008* (International Conference on the Study and Conservation of Earthen Architectural Heritage), Los Angeles, Calif: Getty Conservation Inst, 2011.

ise Serbia's presence in Kosovo. However, Serbia capitalised on the threat posed by the Kosovars' negligence and their policy of withholding information from the Serbian cultural authorities, who had allegedly been denied access to the sites from 1998 to 2001. In 2006, UNESCO was persuaded to recognise the extension of the property, and Kosovo's medieval monuments were immediately placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger. But a new threat emerged from this affair. As a result of Serbia's failure to recognise Kosovo's independence, KFOR troops were now patrolling the area.

There is (or should be) a question for the institution: how can the nationalist presuppositions at the root of many listing requests be considered compatible with the idea of universality underpinning World Heritage? Clearly, the race to be listed has become a political tool enabling nations to support their sovereign interests by using World Heritage as a means of promotion.

### Conclusion

Unfortunately, there is reason to fear that the number of properties included on the List of World Heritage in Danger will continue to rise. Several factors play a part in this: the increase in the number of properties added to the World Heritage List, given the stakes (political, economic and tourist) that these properties represent and the notoriety that their inclusion brings; the prevailing geopolitical insecurity linked to religious extremism, terrorism and territorial conflicts; the disruptive impact of climate change and pollution of various kinds.

The 'blacklist' is a warning device that helps implement prevention and safety measures to preserve a property's value and the credibility and legitimacy of its inscription on the World Heritage List.<sup>533</sup> UNESCO's very reputation is at stake in this matter. We saw how this 'blacklist' could be used as a tool. Is UNESCO able to resist diplomatic pressure in favour of the general interest? Indeed, such pressure means that the 'blacklist' is far

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533 Duval Mélanie, Brancelj Ana, Gauchon Christophe, Malgat Charlotte, Potin-Finette Aurélie, « Un label qui ne dit pas son nom : l'inscription au patrimoine mondial. Examen critique et enjeux territoriaux d'une terminologie ». In : Philippe Tanchoux et François Priet (dir.), *Les labels dans le domaine du patrimoine culturel et naturel*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2020, p. 45–70.

from including all the sites under serious threat, even though some sites on the World Heritage list deserve to be on it. Is UNESCO willing to follow the recommendations of specialist bodies without which the process would have no scientific backing and deal with the 'shortcomings'<sup>534</sup> of current devices in biodiversity conservation? Does it have the power and the means to do so? That is the question.

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534 <https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2013-016-Fr.pdf>

## 8 The Charles de Gaulle's Appeal of 18 June 1940 as a 'lieu de mémoire'

Between the categories of material and immaterial heritage, whose fundamental distinction is well-established, intermediary forms of heritage exist. The historian Pierre Nora conceptualised, developed, and popularised the theory of 'lieux de mémoire'<sup>535</sup> (sites of memory). According to Nora, memory does not only materialise in localised spaces or in a designated territory. It can also be 'unrooted', abstract, and can take all imaginable forms: a flag, a hymn, a slogan, even a speech. Certain speeches have created heritage and become inscribed in collective memory.<sup>536</sup>

To examine this process, this chapter focuses on Charles de Gaulle's famous 'Appeal' launched from London on 18 June 1940 to urge the French people to resist as Maréchal Pétain was about to sign the armistice that would hand military victory to Nazi Germany. What makes this a particularly useful case study is that the speech has also become a myth. It is a 'monument' within the memorial fabric of France. It has been designated the origin of the resistance movement against the Vichy regime and the German occupation (which is not entirely accurate). It is commemorated each year in France. All school children are supposed to know about it. In short, it is a cornerstone of French patriotic heritage. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the memory of the Appeal was institutionalised. On 19 March 2006, the *Journal Officiel* n° 67 published a decree establishing 18 June as a 'national day commemorating Charles de Gaulle's historic appeal to refuse defeat and pursue combat against the enemy'. It also received international recognition when it was inscribed on UNESCO's Memory of the World Register in 2005.

Memory, which arises from affect, is not history whose starting point is intellect. The historicization of memory can provoke an effect of desac-

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535 Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire*, Paris, Gallimard/Quarto, 1997. Published in English in a 3-volume edition by Columbia University Press as *Realms of Memory* (1996–98).

536 An example is the speech that Winston Churchill gave to students in Fulton, Missouri on 5 March 1946, during which he proclaimed: 'From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.'

realisation. As Pierre Nora states: 'Memory installs remembrance within the sacred; history, always prosaic, releases it again.'<sup>537</sup> Recent work by historians has revealed that the file submitted to UNESCO contained two serious errors. The submission was said to include the 'manuscript text of the Appeal broadcast on BBC radio on 18 June 1940', and that its 'authenticity' is confirmed by a handwritten line and de Gaulle's signature in the margin on the reverse side of the second sheet ('Authentic manuscript of my Appeal of 18 June 1940. C. de Gaulle'). A hand-written calling card from Madame de Gaulle, front and back, was also submitted: 'Manuscript of the Appeal of 18 June (which is at the B. de F. at Chaumont). This manuscript was given to me by the General in London on 19 June 1940. He told me: Carefully preserve these manuscripts. If I succeed, they will form part of our children's heritage'.

As surprising as it seems today, unlike other speeches delivered by de Gaulle at the BBC during the Second World War, no recording of the Appeal of 18 June 1940 was preserved. It could thus be said that there is no definitive proof that this speech was delivered. This 'monument' has been the subject of recent discussions amongst historians, leading to new research and interpretations. The discovery of new documents has revealed that the text presented for submission to UNESCO was not the one delivered at the BBC on 18 June 1940. For the first time, it has been possible to establish an 'authentic' version of the speech. Moreover, artificial intelligence has made what seemed unimaginable some years ago a reality: this speech can now be heard. Reflecting on this example reveals the new perspectives opening up within the study of heritage.

### *June 1940: Winston Churchill welcomes Charles de Gaulle to London*

The Appeal of 18 June 1940, launched by Charles de Gaulle in London, has become a myth and the cornerstone of the French Resistance's heritage. As France succumbed body and spirit to defeat, one man alone on foreign soil tried to tell the French people that hope was not lost. It was an incredible act of defiance representing unparalleled foresight and maximum risk, and de Gaulle was aware of it, writing in his memoirs: 'I seemed to myself,

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537 Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations*, No. 26, Special Issue: 'Memory and Counter-Memory' (Spring, 1989), pp. 7–24, (p. 8).

alone as I was and deprived of everything, like a man on the shore of an ocean, proposing to swim across.<sup>538</sup> Very few French people heard this extraordinary speech. For those that did, the words of an unknown general in exile were not viewed as credible and no one flocked towards him. Establishing the circumstances that led to this speech offers better understanding of its historical context.

On 3 June 1940, de Gaulle wrote to then-Prime Minister of France Paul Reynaud: 'Our initial defeat comes from the enemy's application of my own ideas and our command's refusal to apply those same ideas. After this terrible lesson, you were alone in supporting me, you found yourself in power partly because you supported me and it was known. But having gained power, you abandoned us to men of the past...'<sup>539</sup> De Gaulle had known Reynaud well from 1935 onwards. In the National Assembly, Reynaud was spokesperson for de Gaulle's ideas in favour of creating tank corps to relaunch the offensive. De Gaulle had developed these ideas in *Vers l'armée de métier* (1934) and *Le fil de l'épée* (1932), but the French high command, under the influence of Pétain's conservatism, did not judge them useful enough to consider. France's defeat in the space of weeks, followed by the invasion of two thirds of its territory, gave weight to them. It was a long time before historical analysis was heard in France that recognised it was less 'the insufficiency of means than the manner of making use of them that penalised the French army'.<sup>540</sup> The men were indeed defeated. They lacked material, the strategy was ill-adapted, and the government was unstable.

On 5 June 1940, de Gaulle was named Under Secretary of State for National Defence and War in a government led by Paul Reynaud (March 1940–16 June 1940) that had been voted in by a parliamentary majority. De Gaulle immediately requested to meet with the new British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to help give a more dynamic image of the French government. Reynaud instructed him: 'You will see Mr Churchill and you will tell him that the reshuffling of my cabinet and your presence at my side are the signs of our resolution'.<sup>541</sup> By 9 June, de Gaulle was in London where he met the British Prime Minister at 10 Downing Street

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538 *Complete War Memoirs of Charles de Gaulle*, trans. by Jonathan Griffin, 3 vols, Simon and Schuster, 1968, vol. 1, p. 80.

539 Cited in Jean Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, t.1, Paris, Seuil, 1984, p.320.

540 Jean-Pierre Azéma, « Le choc armé et les débandades », in Jean-Pierre et Bédarida, François (ed.), *La France des années noires. T.1 : De la défaite à Vichy*, Paris, Seuil Points-Histoire, 2000, p. 105.

541 *Complete War Memoirs of Charles de Gaulle*, p. 54



for the first time. Of this meeting, he later wrote, 'That day I explained to the British Prime Minister what the French Premier had instructed me to tell him as regards our government's will to continue the struggle even, if need be, in the Empire.'<sup>542</sup> Churchill told the French government's envoy that he did not believe in the possibility of a victory in France and that he could not send any new RAF squadrons. De Gaulle was disappointed but comforted by Churchill's determination, writing 'The impression he gave me confirmed me in my conviction that Great Britain, led by such a fighter, would certainly not flinch.'<sup>543</sup> In the Prime Minister's circle, it was said that this young and energetic man made a good impression. The two men, against all reason, against the ruthless admission on the French army's fate, had the same faith in peoples' capacity to resist domination by Hitler.

The German army reached Paris on 14 June 1940. The final hour was near. The French government took refuge in Bordeaux. On 15 June, de Gaulle headed to Brittany to carry out a mission. At dawn the next day, he boarded the navy destroyer *Milan* in Brest bound for London. His mission: discuss with the British the conditions for transferring the French government to North Africa. At the Hyde Park Hotel, he met Jean Monnet, head of the Anglo-French Purchasing Committee, and Charles Corbin, the French ambassador in London. They presented him with a proposal of a 'Franco-British union' foreseeing the complete and immediate fusion of the two countries and their institutions. This incredible proposal could only clash at full force with the anglophobia within the upper echelons of the military hierarchy, symbolised by Maréchal Pétain and influenced by the nationalism of Charles Maurras. De Gaulle understood that it could create an advantageous psychological shock, 'an element of comfort'<sup>544</sup> at a time when all seemed lost. Before going for lunch with the British Prime Minister at the Carlton Club, de Gaulle learnt that Reynaud had summoned his cabinet to examine a request for an armistice. Churchill responded to Reynaud that his government was not against an armistice on the condition that the French navy fleet was immediately transferred to English ports. The lunch focused on this question of the fleet. De Gaulle felt obliged to tell Churchill the fact he did not oppose an armistice between France and Germany was 'an unpleasant surprise': it was a sign of resignation and that

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542 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

543 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

544 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

Britain 'attach[ed] little value to [the two countries'] alliance'.<sup>545</sup> Despite everything, de Gaulle put forward the proposal of a Franco-British union, which Churchill and his cabinet accepted. De Gaulle called Reynaud to let him know. Churchill took the phone from de Gaulle's hands: 'Hullo, Reynaud! De Gaulle is right! Our proposal may have great consequences. You must hold out!'<sup>546</sup>

That very evening, de Gaulle returned to France. When his flight landed in Bordeaux at nine-thirty, he was told that Reynaud had just resigned and Pétain had been invited to form a government. The news profoundly affected De Gaulle. He did not yet know that his destiny would dramatically change. He met with Reynaud and confided that he wanted to leave for England to conceive a new plan. Reynaud gave him 100,000 francs in secret funds. De Gaulle then went to a hotel where he met with the British ambassador Sir Ronald Campbell, who, with Churchill's agreement, decided that General Spears would accompany him on the flight. On 17 June 1940 at 10 o'clock in the morning, de Gaulle flew to London. Just before boarding the flight, he is said to have proclaimed: 'The Germans have lost the war. They have lost and France must pursue the fight'.

In the early afternoon on 17 June, Churchill welcomed the two generals, de Gaulle and Spears.<sup>547</sup> It was the fifth meeting between de Gaulle and the British prime minister. Churchill had the immediate intuition that this man, who had shown perseverance and courage, who in some respects had saved France's honour, would be the face of a France that refused to accept defeat, and perhaps even the France of tomorrow. When later contemplating this meeting, De Gaulle wrote: 'Washed up from a vast shipwreck upon the shores of England, what could I have done without his help? He gave it me at once'. His first action was to make himself known: 'The first thing to do was to hoist the colours. Broadcasting was to hand for that'. Churchill immediately put the BBC at his disposal: 'We agreed that I should use it after the Pétain government had asked for the armistice.'<sup>548</sup>

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545 *Ibid.*, p. 76.

546 *Ibid.*, p. 77.

547 L Spears, *Two Men who Saved France*, London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1966, p. 157.

548 *Complete War Memoirs of Charles de Gaulle*, p. 83

*General de Gaulle's Appeal of 18 June 1940 at the BBC was not recorded*

De Gaulle spent his first night of exile in London. The next day was 18 June, the day it would all begin. The myth would be born. Yet, the road that led to this famous Appeal was fraught with difficulties.

The first difficulty came from the members of the War Cabinet who, towards midday, judged that an untimely intervention might have an impact on the actions of the new French government whose politics were not yet known. The British feared the surrender of the French navy and could not risk a complete break with Maréchal Pétain. Negotiations were held. It was necessary to consider the Foreign Office's view. Contrary to what de Gaulle suggests in his memoirs, he could speak on the BBC on the condition that his speech was submitted to the Foreign Office beforehand. The Foreign Office feared that a subversive speech from de Gaulle would compromise relations between the British government and Pétain's new government. The Appeal of 18 June was therefore reviewed by British authorities. At the beginning of the afternoon, over a late lunch, General Spears and the Minister of Information Alfred Duff Cooper informed de Gaulle of the British government's position. A modification to the text needed to be made, a fact that de Gaulle never wanted to be known. At around five o'clock in the evening, Churchill gave his agreement on the condition that cabinet members also agreed. Above all, de Gaulle's untimely speech could not compromise the mission that the British Minister for Colonies Lord Lloyd was to carry out in Bordeaux on 19 June.

The Appeal is a myth that was forcefully extracted from a set of complicated circumstances. Since its radio broadcast was not preserved, little is verifiably known about it, and it is often confused with the speech de Gaulle made on 22 June, which was recorded. The 18 June speech is the first appeal from London that de Gaulle made to the French people. The Appeal's four-page manuscript was preserved. Given the British government asked for changes, whether it was read in its entirety on the radio cannot be proven. After Elisabeth de Miribel typed up this manuscript,<sup>549</sup> were subsequent modifications made by de Gaulle and/or the British authorities? It is perhaps more apt to speak of the *Appeals* of 18 June. For a long time, there was no concrete evidence for the precise time that the speech was made, with suggestions of 6 o'clock, 8 o'clock, 10 o'clock.<sup>550</sup> The memories

549 Elisabeth de Miribel, *La liberté souffre violence*, Paris, Plon, 1981, p. 38.

550 Aurélie Luneau, *Radio Londres, 1940–1944*, Paris, Perrin-Tempus, 2010, p. 40.

of the main actors vary. There is further confusion with the text published in *The Times* on 5 August 1940, which, even today, is frequently presented as a poster with two tricolour flags and the title: 'To the French people. France has lost a battle! But France has not lost the war!' This magnificent and heroic maxim was immortalised in the commemorations and forever inscribed into French patriotic heritage. De Gaulle, however, did not utter these words on 18 June 1940. These conflicting versions demonstrate the central tension that exists between simplifications of heritage narratives, the power of myth, and the demands of historical knowledge.

Recent historical research has identified tangible contemporary traces of fact. The Appeal of 18 June 1940 did indeed exist as numerous direct witnesses have attested: de Gaulle's aide-de-camp Geoffroy Chodron de Courcel; Elisabeth de Miribel who typed up the text; Stephen Tallents, Controller of Public Relations at the BBC; the young English journalist Patrick Smith who checked the text of the Appeal for the censor; and Elizabeth Barker, a British assistant who was tasked with accompanying de Gaulle in the studio. Barker later recounted, 'He appeared very calm but quite tense as if he was concentrating all his strength in that one moment. I am sure that he didn't see anyone else who was in the studio, nothing but the microphone, which he stared at as if he could see beyond the device.'<sup>551</sup> French speakers present, amongst many others, also vouched for its existence.<sup>552</sup> Without knowing it would become 'historic', one of them said the 'historic' phrase: 'And now, General de Gaulle, former Under Secretary of State, speaks to you'.

Some journalists in France heard the Appeal and transcribed it for their newspapers —a somewhat surprising fact considering that de Gaulle, outside of the small circle of experts on questions of defence, was largely unknown to the French people. He had only just 'provisionally' been made brigadier general. The 19 June 1940 edition of the newspaper *Le Petit Provençal*,<sup>553</sup> presents its own transcription of de Gaulle's speech. This version of the Appeal begins with two sentences: 'The French government has asked the enemy for the conditions to cease fighting. It declared that if

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551 Account by Elizabeth Barker, *Le Figaro littéraire*, 17 June 1965. After the war, Barker confirmed that de Gaulle's speech had not been recorded. This indifference sums up how little importance was given to his intervention.

552 Such as Jean Marin and Jean Oberlé (one of the regular presenters of the BBC programme « Les Français parlent aux Français »).

553 Other newspapers mentioned the Appeal, including *Marseille-Matin*, *Le Petit Marseillais*, and *Le Progrès de Lyon*.

these conditions were contrary to the honour, dignity, and independence of France, combat must continue.'

These two phrases, however, do not appear in the 'canonical' speech of 18 June 1940 found on the official website of the Fondation Charles de Gaulle in Paris.<sup>554</sup> The 'official' version of the Appeal was published in the first *Bulletin Officiel des Forces Françaises Libres* on 15 August 1940, under the title 'Le premier appel du général de Gaulle' (General de Gaulle's First Appeal).<sup>555</sup> It begins with two sentences that are different to those from *Le Petit Provençal*: 'The leaders who, for numerous years, have been at the head of the French armed forces, have formed a government. Alleging the defeat of our armies, this government has entered into negotiations with the enemy with a view to cease fighting.' Its tone is more offensive and stigmatises the upper echelons of the military hierarchy. The phrase 'cease fighting' (cesser le combat) is taken directly from Pétain's speech.

Transcribed text after listening to the BBC	'Official' text of the Appeal of 18 June 1940
The French government has asked the enemy for the conditions to cease fighting. It declared that if these conditions were contrary to the honour, dignity, and independence of France, combat must continue.	The leaders who, for numerous years, have been at the head of the French armed forces, have formed a government. Alleging the defeat of our armies, this government has entered into negotiations with the enemy with a view to cease fighting.

It is important to note that the complete manuscript version of the Appeal was only released by de Gaulle's son Admiral de Gaulle in 2010.<sup>556</sup> It is easy to understand why: if General de Gaulle, the incarnation of the Resistance against Vichy and the Germans, thought that the so-called 'Vichy'<sup>557</sup> government could act with 'honour' and 'dignity', it then follows that this government was not intrinsically dishonourable, the polar opposite of what de Gaulle's subsequent speeches would attempt to demonstrate.

554 Henri Amouroux was the first to raise this inconsistency in *Le 18 juin 40*, Paris, Fayard, 1990, p. 341–342.

555 Facsimile reproduction in Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac, *L'Appel du 18 juin et les appels du général de Gaulle des mois de juin à juillet 1940*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2010, p. 124.

556 Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac, *De Gaulle, la République et la France libre, 1940–1945*, Paris, 2014, p. 49.

557 Following the defeat of the French military and German occupation, France was divided into two with the Loire River acting as a demarcating line: the Occupied Zone was governed directly by the enemy in the North (including Paris) and in the non-occupied, so-called 'free', zone in the South. The spa town Vichy, with its many hotels, was in the southern zone.

For the British government, this appeal would appear too violent towards a government that had not yet signed the armistice and over whom they still hoped to exert some influence. It was necessary to avoid any potential provocation in the eyes of the French military leaders, even if events would show de Gaulle's pre-war predictions against the French army were correct. The British thought that it would be possible to negotiate with the newly formed Pétain government and influence its politics. One of the crucial issues was the fate of the French fleet. It was necessary to impose moderation, silence even, on the impulsive de Gaulle. For this reason, it seems certain that these two sentences had to be removed at the request of the British government. New evidence that proves these sentences were not pronounced on 18 June has recently been uncovered.

### *A (Self-)Censured Text?*

The Swiss Federal Archives hold a contemporary institutional account of de Gaulle's Appeal from London on 18 June 1940, which was discovered purely by chance by doctoral student Christian Rossé during a research trip to Bern in 2008.<sup>558</sup> The text was transcribed after the BBC broadcast and appeared in the Bulletin n°153 published by *Gruppe Ohr* (the Swiss military's listening service for the press and radio). It was written in German on 19 June 1940 at 6 o'clock in the morning. The translation of the account reads: 'The French government has asked the enemy which honourable conditions could cease fighting. Moreover, it declared that fighting must continue if these conditions were *contrary to the honour, dignity, and independence of France*' (my italics). Whilst this formulation is very close to the version found in *Le Petit Provençal* newspaper, it is completely different to the text that is part of the 'official' heritage, which begins: 'The leaders who, for numerous years, have been at the head of the French armed forces, have formed a government. Alleging the defeat of our armies, this government has entered into negotiations with the enemy with a view to cease fighting.'

These two very different sources corroborate that the Appeal of 18 June started with the notion of upholding France's 'honour', which was then removed from the 'official' version, the version that became part of the

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558 I supervised Christian Rossé's thesis on the Swiss special services during the Second World War. Rossé brought the account to my attention. He also mentioned his discovery on a website on 6 July 2008, but no one took any interest in it until 2023.

country's 'heritage'. It can thus be supposed that the Pétain's new government was able to ask itself the question of 'honour' and 'dignity' (whilst de Gaulle, according to witnesses, had immediately classed Pétain as a 'traitor') and would have been able to envisage continuing fighting. Consequently, if Pétain's government accepted the conditions to cease fighting, i.e. the armistice, it could do so all the while preserving France's 'honour' with the desire to continue fighting in a different way (for example, leaving for Algeria). This was the view of the British cabinet which did not share de Gaulle's more radical position. On the basis of all evidence, De Gaulle had to accept a compromise. Yet, admitting that would have meant recognising, by taking refuge in London, he was obliged to comply with the orders of British authorities, a fact that does not square with the legend of a heroic man who would not compromise on his principles. After the war, de Gaulle responded to a journalist who asked him if the text had been read by Churchill: 'In my life, I have never shown any of my texts. To no one.'<sup>559</sup>

This is the 'official' version of the Appeal of 18 June, which corresponds to the draft manuscript that was preserved:

'The leaders who, for numerous years, have been at the head of the French armed forces, have formed a government. Alleging the defeat of our armies, this government has entered into negotiations with the enemy with a view to cease fighting. It is quite true that we were, and still are, overwhelmed by the enemy's mechanised forces, both on the ground and in the air. It was the tanks, the planes, and the tactics of the Germans, far more than the fact that we were outnumbered, that forced our armies to retreat. It was the German tanks, planes, and tactics that surprised our leaders and led them to their position today. But has the last word been said? Must we abandon all hope? Is our defeat definitive? No! Speaking in full knowledge of the facts, believe me when I say that the cause of France is not lost. The very factors that brought about our defeat may one day lead us to victory. For France does not stand alone! She is not alone! She is not alone! Behind her is a vast empire, and she can make common cause with the British Empire, which commands the seas and is continuing the struggle. Like England, she can draw unreservedly on the immense industrial resources of the United States. This war is not limited to the territory of our unfortunate country. The outcome of the war has not been decided by the battle of France. This

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559 Interview with General de Gaulle by Henri Amouroux, *Paris-Match*, n°1124, 21 November 1970.

war is a world war. All the mistakes, all the delays, all the suffering, the fact remains that there still exists in the world everything we need to crush our enemies one day. Today we have been hit hard by the sheer weight of mechanised force hurled against us, but, in future, with an even greater mechanised force, we can be victorious. The destiny of the world is at stake. I, General de Gaulle, now in London, call on all French officers and soldiers who are at present on British soil, or may be in the future, with or without their arms; I call on all engineers and skilled workers from the armaments factories who are at present on British soil, or may be in the future, to join me. Whatever happens, the flame of French resistance must not and shall not die.

Tomorrow I shall broadcast again from London. Charles de Gaulle’.

This text is based on the original version typed up by Elisabeth de Miribel, but it was not the speech that de Gaulle delivered on 18 June 1940. Changes were introduced in the interim. All evidence suggests that de Gaulle’s proposal was tempered by the British government who wanted to wait to hear Germany’s conditions in response to Pétain’s request of an armistice. De Gaulle wrongly states in his *War Memories* that he recorded a speech the next day, 19 June 1940, as it was not broadcast.<sup>560</sup> The British government had no other choice but to block it. The speech begins as follows:

‘Frenchmen must now be fully aware that all ordinary forms of authority have disappeared.

Faced with the bewilderment of the French people, with the disintegration of a government fallen under the servitude of the enemy, with the fact that our institutions are incapable of functioning, I, General de Gaulle, a soldier and military leader, realise that I now speak for France. In the name of France, I make the following declaration: all French men who still bear arms are bound by duty to continue the resistance. For them to lay down their arms, to abandon any position of military importance, or agree to hand over any part of French territory, however small, to enemy control would be a crime against our country. At this time, I speak above all for French North Africa – for the whole of French North Africa. The Italian armistice is nothing but a clumsy trap. In the Africa of Clauzel, Bugeaud, Lyautey, and Noguès, all that represents

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560 J.-L. Crémieux-Brilhac, *De Gaulle, la République et la France libre, op.cit.*, p. 56.



honour has the strict duty to refuse to carry out the conditions imposed by the enemy. We will not tolerate the panic of Bordeaux crossing the sea. Soldiers of France, wherever you may be, arise!

In this speech, de Gaulle crossed a line. From now on, he spoke 'in the name of France'. Knowing how History turned out, it is difficult to determine how prophetic, but also how audacious this assertion was. He severely criticised the government: France's government had fallen into 'servitude'. He believed hope of a resistance movement could develop in North Africa. The British government could not support such a radical position. As J.-L. Crémieux-Brilhac stresses, up until 22 June 1940, the British cabinet was 'focused on the dual goal of ensuring that the French navy fleet evaded German hands and encouraging all or part of Pétain's government and the political French elite to take refuge in North Africa'.<sup>561</sup>

All would change once the conditions of the armistice, signed on 22 June, were known. The only appeal that was certainly broadcast in its entirety was that of 22 June 1940. Those who heard it subsequently confused it with that of 18 June. Indeed, it can be seen as a sort of mix of the first two. In addition to condemning the armistice, it presents the same theme of betrayal, enslavement and the demand for resistance and dignity: 'It can therefore be said that this armistice would not only mean capitulation, but also servitude.' The 'higher interests of the country' are put in danger. But, as de Gaulle explains, it is not only about France. What was at stake was France's word given to its allies, and therefore the country's honour: 'I say honour, for France has committed to only lay down arms with the agreement with her allies. As long as the allies continue the war, her government has no right to surrender to the enemy. The Polish, Norwegian, Belgian, Netherlands, and Luxemburg governments, though driven from their territories, understood their duty.' After a reminder of these principles, which de Gaulle, as a military man who wrote on army reform, was well placed to understand, he begins to speak about the causes of the defeat. Whilst he does not fail to mention 'the defeatist spirit shown by the government' in the final moments of the battle, blame is specifically attributed to the military: 'a faulty military system, mistakes in carrying out operations.'

After having denounced and criticised, the last third of the speech traces a potential route to hope in the final third of the speech. De Gaulle reminds listeners that France has resources, 'a vast empire', the 'fleet is intact', and

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561 J.-L. Crémieux-Brilhac, *L'Appel du 18 juin...*, *op.cit.*, p. 36.

the country possesses 'large sums in gold'. She also has 'allies with immense resources who dominate the seas', and there are 'the gigantic potentialities of American industry'. Neutral countries could also change their position and join the side of 'freedom', just as Germany's allies will not always remain her allies. De Gaulle asks listeners to abandon a Franco-French approach and understand that this war is a 'world war' that will not be decided in one single battle. The central and genius idea of this speech (and the actions of de Gaulle) is to consider that the French people must testify to the fact that France does not accept its submission otherwise, when 'powers of freedom' prevail, France will be despised by the future victors:

'If the powers of freedom ultimately triumph over those of servitude, what will be the fate of a France that submitted to the enemy? Honour, common sense, and the higher interests of the country require that all free French people continue the fight, wherever they may be and as best they can.'<sup>562</sup>

Based on the two sources discovered (*Le Provençal* and the transcript from the Swiss secret services), it is evident that the two mythical sentences at the beginning of the Appeal, found on the posters distributed in August 1940, were not pronounced on 18 June 1940: 'France has lost a battle! But France has not lost the war!' The same is true for the following sentence: 'I, General de Gaulle, am undertaking this national task here in England.'<sup>563</sup>

### *Can AI reproduce the truth?*

*Le Monde's* video service<sup>564</sup> had the idea of reconstructing the radiophonic version of de Gaulle's famous speech of 18 June 1940 and approached the music technology institute IRCAM and its spinout company Iqram Amplify, which specialises in new artificial intelligence technology.<sup>565</sup> IRCAM had already tested out a method that aims to make the archives speak in the documentary *Juger Pétain* produced by the TV channel Arte. The

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562 The translations of these three speeches were adapted from English versions of the transcripts available here: 'The flame of French resistance', *The Guardian*: <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2007/apr/29/greatspeeches1>

563 Aurélie Luneau, *Radio Londres, 1940–1944, op.cit.*, p. 43.

564 The project was initiated by Charles-Henry Groult, director of video services at *Le Monde*. [https://www.lemonde.fr/videos/video/2023/01/18/moi-general-de-gaulle-l-appel-du-18-juin-peut-il-etre-reconstitue\\_6158301\\_1669088.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/videos/video/2023/01/18/moi-general-de-gaulle-l-appel-du-18-juin-peut-il-etre-reconstitue_6158301_1669088.html)

project sought to give voice to silent archival images from Pétain's trial, so researchers at IRCAM reconstructed the voices of Pétain and other actors. To develop *Le Monde's* idea, the team employed 'voice cloning' technology, which uses artificial intelligence. Axel Roebel, Research Director at Ircam, explains: 'We developed an information model that can automatically reproduce all the emotions and dynamic articulations of an existing voice.' The technology first needs to establish what could be called a 'sonorous DNA', which can then be reproduced or modified. That DNA distinguishes the technology from existing text-to-speech tools, which produce a synthetic and robotic voice. Vocal cloning offers an authentic reconstruction of a voice by conserving its characteristics and its naturalness, meaning its tessitura, rhythm, tone, mode of articulation, and volume. The emotive dimension of a speech can thus be reproduced. After all, the Appeal is not a written text, but a speech delivered in dramatic circumstances which has become a founding myth.

This experiment sought to reproduce the real Appeal of 18 June 1940, so historians played a central role. Rossé was contacted, and he took the journalist from *Le Monde* to the Berne archives to consult the transcript. The result is unquestionably a work of historical research, which shows, it should be noted, that artificial intelligence cannot surpass human intelligence and the specialist skill set of professional historians. The translation of the transcript from German to French was given careful attention and supported by researchers. The technology needed to be trained on samples from speeches given by de Gaulle at the BBC during the war to create a vocal identity. Finally, the actor François Morel lent his voice, so that it could be transformed into that of de Gaulle.

The ethical question, which sparked some debate, was to determine whether it is lawful to give voice to someone who is dead and to exchange voice identities.<sup>566</sup> Transforming de Gaulle into a voice clone may seem disrespectful to some, but it could also be seen as a resurrection that immortalises this rediscovered speech and gives it new life. In doing so, the experiment conducted by *Le Monde* also dispels with another myth: that

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565 Ircam Amplify/Equipe Analyse et synthèse des sons – Laboratoire STMS (IRCAM, CNRS, Sorbonne Université, Ministère de la Culture). With the support of the Agence Nationale de la Recherche as part of TheVoice and ARS projects.

566 Elsewhere, I have explored the question of whether it is appropriate to colourise film archives. See Robert Belot, « Apocalypse, un documentaire sur la Seconde Guerre mondiale », revue *Vingtième Siècle*, July–September 2010, p 171–175.

artificial intelligence can work without humans, based on machine learning alone, which will condemn historians to unemployment. Machine learning can offer a lot. In this case, the technology provides an important resource for history and its diffusion. As Fabienne Charraire writes: 'All is believable but not real. It cannot be described as a deepfake because, to dispel any potential criticism, the project is presented as it is: the voice of General de Gaulle recreated using a speech reviewed by historians and read by an actor. Nothing has been added to the text. The project team has not made this famous speaker say any words that he did not speak.'<sup>567</sup>

In their work reproducing 'historical voices', ICRAM aims to respect a protocol that guarantees the ethicality of its approach: 'What is said by the synthetic voice must have already been said or written in real life', explains Frédéric Amadu, Chief Technology Officer at Ircam Amplify.<sup>568</sup> Yet, he also interrogated the possible derivatives of similar technologies: 'How are open access tools used? Is there any oversight? Are their terms of use respected? Are these tools open to abuse or manipulation?' The problem is more delicate for historical figures for whom no sound source exists. The Centre des monuments nationaux, for example, gave voice to Francis I following the inauguration of the Cité internationale de la langue française at the Château de Villers-Cotterêts in 2023. The tour includes a reading by the monarch of the Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts, which imposed the use of French in administrative and legal deeds. Similarly, there have been suggestions to make an Egyptian mummy speak.

Artificial intelligence offers new perspective for archaeoacoustics,<sup>569</sup> establishing a path between science and fiction. Sound is a fundamental dimension of historical reality, but it is difficult to create heritage from it. Sound is rarely part of museum collections. A time will come when it will be unimaginable that a museum on, say, the Great War will not reconstruct a soundscape of what the soldiers had to endure at the front, or that an industrial museum would not recreate the noise of the infernal

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567 Fabienne Charraire, « Trois approches pour recréer les voix du passé » <https://balises.bpi.fr/recreer-les-voix-du-passe/>

568 « Comment l'appel du 18 juin 1940 du général De Gaulle a été reconstitué grâce à l'intelligence artificielle » <https://www.lesnumeriques.com/vie-du-net/comment-l-appel-du-18-juin-1940-du-general-de-gaulle-a-ete-reconstitue-grace-a-l-intelligence-artificielle-n205099.html>

569 Juliette Volcler, « Entendre le passé », *Syntone*, 23 novembre 2016. <https://syntone.fr/ecouter-le-passe/>

machine-tools that workers were subjected to during the triumphant age of industrialisation, currently only found in photographic reproductions.

### *Conclusion*

The example of the Appeal of 18 June 1940 offers important insight into the heritage making process. First, it encourages a questioning of the description 'historic' that the media applies with a disconcerting ease. The origin of the heritage is not necessarily always a spectacular event that arises, to the general surprise, from one day to the next. It can be a discreet event like the Appeal of 18 June 1940. Mythification happens retrospectively and is contingent on the author's predictions being confirmed by facts. De Gaulle was right to believe that Germany was going to lose the war, but it could have turned out to be false.

Second, this example attests to the gap that can exist between the heritage status that an event acquires and its contemporary reality. The risk of over-estimating or over-determining an event after the fact is inherent to the phenomenon of creating heritage whose goal is to spotlight, to over-expose. The philosopher Paul Ricœur recommends: 'For the professional historian there remains [...] the uncanniness of history, the unending competition between memory's vow of faithfulness and the search for the truth in history.'<sup>570</sup> This distinction should always be made, otherwise history and memory could be wrongly confused. History and memory are two different registers of relationship to the past. Despite its place in collective memory, the Appeal of 18 June had almost no impact at the time. Similarly, the beginning of 'Free France' in London was laboriously difficult. As Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac, one of the first men to join Free France, recognised, 'The start was less brilliant than what is remembered of the golden legend of Free France'. He also confirms the distortion between myth and reality: 'The contrast is immense between the immediate knock-on effects of the Appeal of 18 June and the importance that the passage of time has conferred to it.'<sup>571</sup>

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570 Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2001, p. 500.

571 Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac, *L'Appel du 18 juin*, Malakoff, Armand Colin, 2010, p. 61.

These circumstances only make the achievement of Charles de Gaulle, the lone man in London in 1940, all the more extraordinary and commendable. After the war, the number of French people who claimed to have heard the Appeal was incalculable: they wanted to be seen to have stood with reason against the majority and to have shared de Gaulle's unparalleled foresight, but it was purely a reconstruction of memory. Contrary to what a certain myth could lead us to believe, de Gaulle and Free France had to fight to establish themselves. In the first biography dedicated to de Gaulle published in London, Philippe Barrès underscores this 'rather cruel truth': 'it was not a great wave. Such a wave was not possible. France in July 1940 was too stunned, too beaten, too much a prisoner of the German invasion as well.'<sup>572</sup> De Gaulle, the unknown rebel, was also attacking a national treasure, the Maréchal Pétain. For that reason, the Appeal's short-term effectiveness was weak, but it plays an essential role as a source of legitimacy for wartime Gaullism and as a cornerstone of French Resistance heritage. It is necessary to guard against the bias of short-sightedness: the Appeal of the 18 June was not the point of departure for the French Resistance. The Resistance, as I have shown elsewhere, emerged in a complex and progressive way across the whole of the national territory.<sup>573</sup> Other appeals to the Resistance were made, but they remain in the shadows, victims of the memorial spotlight that retrospectively shines on the Appeal of 18 June.

Third, it is important to acknowledge the vital expertise historians can bring to the process of heritage recognition. Myth makers are always reluctant to accept the rational and distanced eye of the researcher. This reluctance explains why the file submitted to UNESCO in 2004 to recognise the Appeal on the Memory of the World Register contained errors. The file claims to include the 'manuscript text broadcast on BBC radio on 18 June 1940' and its 'authenticity' is proven, but that is not accurate. The myth, however virtuous and valued, cannot free itself from history.

Finally, it is necessary to remember that AI cannot do everything. The starting point for reconstructing the orality of the Appeal of 18 June 1940 was Rossé's discovery of the transcript produced by the Swiss authorities: the work and story of a researcher. A heritage approach can only be durable and credible if it is approached from a historical perspective and draws on

572 Philippe Barrès, *Charles de Gaulle*, Paris-Bruxelles, Librairie Plon-éditions Labor, 1941, p. 139.

573 Robert Belot, *La Résistance sans De Gaulle. Politique et gaullisme de guerre*, Paris, Fayard, 2006.

the work of historians, even if it means chipping away at the myth for the greater good of the truth.

## 9 Is a museum of European history possible? Heritage and European ‘narrative identity’

The historian Charles Seignobos was fond of saying: ‘Asking questions is very useful, but answering them is very dangerous’. Some seemingly simple questions have elusive answers. What is Europe? What is European history? Is there such a thing as a collective European memory? Can Europe be said to have a cultural identity? What would likely constitute a community of destiny and a common heritage? How can we devise a narrative for Europe that would be more than just the sum of its national histories? Can we avoid the risk of instrumentalising and idealising history if we consider that recourse to historical heritage serves to ‘ensure that the dynamics of convergence and solidarity prevail over the forces of division and rivalry’?<sup>574</sup> Such questions have been debated for decades and even centuries. The debate is divided between those who believe that ‘there is no Europe, there has never been’<sup>575</sup> and those who, like the medievalist historian Marc Bloch, believe that ‘there is no history of France, there is a history of Europe’ or even a history of the world.<sup>576</sup>

It is such a complex issue that Europe as an institution, whether the European Council or the European Union, has never really wanted to go down the slippery slope of the ontology of the European phenomenon. For this reason, Jean Monnet, a pragmatic follower of functionalism, thought

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574 Speech delivered by Jacques Chirac, President of the French Republic, on the political situation and democratisation of Yugoslavia, Belgrade, 7 December 2001. <https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-9860-fr.pdf>

575 André Malraux, « Après un silence de quatre ans, André Malraux expose pour notre journal ses vues et ses idées sur les problèmes du monde actuel », Interview with *Labyrinthe* (Genève), n°5, 15 février 1945, p. 1–2. [https://malraux.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/128jg\\_labyrinthe\\_interview\\_15021945.pdf](https://malraux.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/128jg_labyrinthe_interview_15021945.pdf)

576 To ‘dissipate the illusion of local causes’, Marc Bloch believed it was possible to identify ‘A European phenomenon that could only be attributed to European causes’. Marc Bloch, « Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes », *Revue de synthèse historique*, 1928, quoted in Marc Bloch, *L’Histoire, la Guerre, la Résistance*, *op.cit.*, p. 363. Yet, regarding Europe, the medievalist lamented ‘the lack of a serious attempt to leverage history to shed light on the concept’. Marc Bloch, « Problèmes d’Europe », *Annales d’histoire économique et sociale*, 1935, quoted in Marc Bloch, *L’Histoire, la Guerre, la Résistance*, *op.cit.*, p. 456. It should be noted that Marc Bloch was not afraid to use the term ‘European civilisation’.



that European unification should begin with the economy and industry, with 'de facto solidarities'. It explains why European identity can only be 'complex' and not easily *ascribable*, as the typical European 'unity in diversity' narrative reflects. It also shows that the European narrative is fond of leveraging 'European values' presented as an axiological and programmatic heritage: they are valid for the future, which seems odd when speaking of heritage as a legacy. The problem is that these values (human rights, democracy, freedom of thought, religious liberties, etc.) are not unique to Europe, given that history attests to the fact that Europe has shown very little respect for them (as stressed by the resurgence of colonial history since the turn of the third millennium).

Admittedly, a basic consensus has long been emerging around this European cultural *koine*, consisting of Greek philosophical, political, and artistic thought, Christianity and Judaism, the heritage of Rome, humanist philosophy, and the Enlightenment, embodied in the American and French revolutions of the late 18th century and the European Revolution of 1848.<sup>577</sup> Yet, it should be mentioned, on the one hand, that this *topoi* is questionable, historically speaking. On the other hand, during the debate triggered by the draft European Constitution (2005), it appeared that certain countries, including France and Belgium, did not accept the reference to Europe's Christian roots. Only the pluralist option was retained in the draft through the vague term of 'religions'.<sup>578</sup>

We might add that the intellectuals of post-war Europe, which had asserted itself against the Nazi and fascist past, made sure that Europe was seen first and foremost as a project and not as a closed identity. They were quick to brandish fear and the rejection of what some of them called 'European nationalism'. It was a rather useless fear. First, post-war European federalists consistently ruled out the idea of a European superstate by virtue of their federalist ideas. Then, 'European nationalism' would imply the possibility of a common narrative about the nature of Europe, the presence of a popular movement and a European self-awareness, all of which seemed unthinkable and perhaps impossible. Instead, the prevailing feeling was the difficulty in incarnating Europe (its history, ipseity, project), creating a European heritage, and identifying 'places' where European memory could

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577 Gérard Bossuat, « Des lieux de mémoire pour l'Europe unie », *Vingtième Siècle, revue d'histoire*, n°61, janvier-mars 1999, p. 56.

578 Chantal Delsol, Jean-François Mattéi, *L'identité de l'Europe*, Paris, PUF, 2010, p. 45–63.

appear in its singularity and irreducibility. Paul Valéry observed in his day: 'It is remarkable that the man of Europe is not defined by race, language or customs, but by desires and by the amplitude of will'. Philosopher Léon Brunschvicg made the same point at the same time. In *L'Esprit européen. Être et penser*, he insisted that culture was not a reality that was 'already here', an accomplished heritage that just needed to be uncovered; it was an aspiration, 'the effort of consciousness to possess itself'.<sup>579</sup> The historian Lucien Febvre, for his part, spoke of a 'conquest'.<sup>580</sup> How, then, to patrimonialise such 'desires', 'will', and 'effort'?

Supposing the thesis of an original and ipse-identity for Europe is inoperative as a myth. Should we settle for speaking of 'narrative fiction',<sup>581</sup> in other words, an identity constructed through the discourse on the nature of the history of Europeans and what the European project should be in ethical and political terms?

We have forgotten that the self-same Paul Valéry was behind the creation of the International Museums Office (1926), which was intended as a tool 'for bringing nations closer together after the First World War'.<sup>582</sup> We know the result. Yet the idea of narrativising European history was relevant as the promise and condition of a 'narrative identity', to use Paul Ricœur's expression.<sup>583</sup> If Europeanists shared the idea that museums could be a factor of cohesion and union, why did it take so long to build the House of European History?

### *The European Union's powerlessness to define the cultural 'identity' of Europe*

A museum is a narrative. A narrative presupposes a consensus on the answers to the questions I raised at the beginning of this introduction.

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579 Léon Brunschvicg, *L'Esprit européen. Être et penser*, Neuchâtel, La Baconnière, 1947.

580 Lucien Febvre, « Esprit européen et philosophie », *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*. 3<sup>e</sup> année, N. 3, 1948. p. 297–301. [www.persee.fr/doc/ahess\\_0395-2649\\_1948\\_num\\_3\\_3\\_1643](http://www.persee.fr/doc/ahess_0395-2649_1948_num_3_3_1643)

581 Paul Ricœur, *Temps et récit*, 1, *L'intrigue et le récit historique*, Paris, Le Seuil, coll. « Points-Essais », 1983, p. 288.

582 Nina Gorgus, *Der Zauberer der Vitriolen. Zur Museologie Georges-Henri Rivière*, Münster/New York/München/Berlin, Waxmann, 1999, p. 61.

583 Paul Ricœur, *Temps et récit*, 3, *Le temps raconté*, Paris, Le Seuil, coll. « Points-Essais », 1985, p. 442. 'The fragile offspring of the union of history and fiction is the assignation to an individual or a community of a specific identity that can be called their *narrative identity*'.

In its various manifestations and concepts, a history museum is always a more or less conscious way of echoing our 'fixation on origins', our 'embryogenic obsession'.<sup>584</sup> Is it epistemologically possible to envisage the construction of a unique narrative? How can such a narrative be protected from exploitation for the issues at stake? It is a difficult mission for a nation. In the same period, the project to create a 'Maison de l'Histoire de France' (2010–2012) foundered under fire from academic circles. The general *topos* was as follows: 'In the age of Europe, in the age of a world without borders, yet also increasingly divided and conflict-ridden, should we rebuild the reassuring wall of a mythical France that prevents us from understanding the complexity of the past and from preparing for the complexities of the future?'<sup>585</sup> From the outset, the threat of exploiting the French people's 'desire for history' and 'need for identity' was raised: 'As it stands, and despite all the efforts made to attract and win people over to this great need for identity, that it would be so urgent to satisfy by such a "pedagogic" means, the forthcoming creation of a House of French History augurs the worst for history, and nothing good for France and the French people'.<sup>586</sup> If a country like France, known for its Jacobin culture, was unsuccessful<sup>587</sup> in this endeavour, then for Europe, the mission might have seemed unachievable from the outset.

The project that gave birth in 2017 to the House of European History (use of the term 'museum' was cautiously avoided, and Europe only appears in adjectival form) clearly poses the 'challenge of the narrative on the unity of Europe'.<sup>588</sup> It is a museum disguised as a 'house'. This reflects a European bias that exists in other areas. This belated interest in museographing European history bears witness to the very hesitant and discreet way European institutions approach culture. How can we build a unique

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584 Marc Bloch, *Apologie pour l'histoire ou métier d'historien* (written in 1942 and published for the first time in 1964 by Armand Colin). Quoted in Marc Bloch, *L'Histoire, la Guerre, la Résistance, op.cit.*, p. 869.

585 Isabelle Backouche, Vincent Duclert, *Maison de l'histoire de France. Enquête critique*, Paris, Fondation Jean Jaurès, 2012, p. 102.

586 Jean-Pierre Babelon, Isabelle Backouche, Vincent Duclert, Ariane James-Sarazin, *Quel musée d'histoire pour la France?*, Paris, Dunod, 2011. The quote is taken from the publisher's presentation of the book.

587 But we should point to an exception: in 1987, the Federal Republic of Germany and the Land of Berlin founded the Deutsches Historisches Museum.

588 Étienne Deschamps, « La Maison de l'histoire européenne au défi du récit sur l'unité de l'Europe », 16 mars 2018. <https://www.c2dh.uni.lu/thinking/la-maison-de-l-histoire-europeenne-au-defi-du-recit-sur-lunite-de-leurope>

and shared narrative on such crumbly foundations as 'unity in diversity'? The current trend leans towards the pluralisation and communitisation of memory rather than its unification. Berlin's *Volkskunde-Museum*, a symbol, changed its name to the Museum of European Cultures (Museum Europäischer Kulturen) in 1999. The myth of Europe's 'spiritual unity' has given way to a secularised approach that prompted the sociologist Edgar Morin to say that 'European culture cannot be defined by an essence but by multiple conflicts' and that 'Europe is a notion that is all at once multiple, vague and diverse'.<sup>589</sup> The argument for an identity of non-identity (or 'non-identity in identity')<sup>590</sup> emerged, as well as the belief that the expression 'European identity' was an oxymoron. As early as 1978, the orientalist Edward Saïd argued that cultures were 'hybrid and heterogeneous' and 'defied any unitary description'.<sup>591</sup>

How can we pluralise identity and promote a common heritage? This was the challenge set for the House of European History.

Before the 1980s, Brussels's Europe had no interest in European culture. It was the remit of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. The principles that led to the creation of the Council of Europe remain unclear about the 'common heritage' that needed to be preserved:

'Unshakeably attached to the spiritual and moral values which are the common heritage of their peoples and which underlie the principles of individual freedom, political liberty and the rule of law, on which all true democracy is founded'.<sup>592</sup>

The preamble to its statutes mentions universal values: 'peace', 'justice', 'international cooperation', and 'preservation of human society and civilisation', which are not specific to Europe. The Council of Europe has very few means and perhaps very little ambition. It is only a 'consultative' body. A European Convention on culture was signed on 19 December 1954, which primarily stemmed from good intentions: 'The study of the languages,

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589 Edgar Morin, « De la difficulté de définir une "identité" culturelle européenne », *in Europe sans rivage. De l'identité Culturelle européenne*, Symposium international, janvier 1988, Albin Michel, 1988, p. 241, p. 244.

590 Edgar Morin, « Logique et contradiction », *Philosophie et société*, March 2019. <https://tiersinclus.fr/edgar-morin-logique-et-contradiction/>

591 Edward Saïd, *L'Orientalisme. L'Orient créé par l'Occident* (translated from the English), 1980, Seuil, préface de Tzvetan Todorov, p. 19. 1<sup>st</sup> edition: *Orientalism*, New York, Vintage Books, 1978, p. 7.

592 Quoted by Édouard Bonnefous, *L'Europe en face de son destin*, PUF, 1952, p. 249.

history and civilisation of the other Contracting Parties, as well as of their common civilisation.' The conception of culture remained quite traditional, as evidenced by the Council of Europe's first six exhibitions. They provided a highly academic chronological overview of the major stylistic movements from the 15th to the 20th century. The first exhibition, 'Humanist Europe', was held in Brussels's Palais des Beaux-Arts from December 16 to February 28. Only in the 1980s did a change come about, with the creation of the European Cultural Routes in 1987.

Around the same time, the Europe of Brussels began positioning itself in this area. It was a consequence of the general impetus given to the European project by François Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl. Let us consider the example of the Maastricht Treaty (7 February 1992). The tendency was to narrow it down to the decision to create a common monetary area. It would hence become a renewed source of inspiration for the anticapitalist and sovereignist *topos* of the anti-European narrative that would come with the rise of populism. The word 'Maastricht' would then be seen as an insult. Eventually, the other dimension of this treaty was written off. Removing the adjective 'economic' from the European Economic Community (EEC) was a sign that this new phase in Europe's history should not be limited to the economic dimension. The EEC thus became the 'European Community'. In fact, under this Treaty, the Community was granted powers in the field of culture. In this document, culture is presented as a constitutive 'factor in the integration of European citizens'. The treaty mentions that the European Union:

- Contributes to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States
- while respecting their national diversity
- at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore.

Of course, the limitations are immediately obvious, which once again demonstrates the European project's superego: it is still a state-national conception of culture. What we have 'in common' is the past.

For the first time, the Treaty on European Union included a chapter specifically dedicated to education, training, and youth. It was the express recognition of culture as a community competence. The Leonardo da Vinci, Socrates, and Youth for Europe programmes were launched in late 1994 and early 1995 to 'inspire in young Europeans a sense of active European citizenship, solidarity, and tolerance while involving them in shaping the future of the Union'.

Article 128 of the Treaty of Maastricht (it would become Article 151 of the Treaty of Amsterdam, with some slight amendments) reads as follows:

1. The Community shall contribute to the *flowering of the cultures* of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity.
2. Action by the Community shall be aimed at encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, supporting and supplementing their action in the following areas:
  - Improvement of the knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of the European peoples;
  - Conservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage of European significance;
  - Non-commercial cultural exchanges;
  - Artistic and literary creation, *including in the audiovisual sector*.
3. The Community and the Member States shall foster cooperation with third countries and the competent international organizations in the sphere of culture, in particular the Council of Europe.
4. The Community shall take cultural aspects into account in its action under other provisions of this Treaty.

It was a step forward in confirming the European institution's interest in culture and heritage. It was also a way of reducing the Council of Europe's monopoly in this area. The European Union could now award grants and prizes to certain cultural projects. Yet, it was also a step backwards. The drafters had very subtly refused to cross the Rubicon. Indeed, as Luuk van Middelaar pointed out, speaking of 'scant consolation', the expression 'European culture' was carefully avoided.<sup>593</sup> In fact, the Treaty article merely recognised the existence of a culture that was specific to Nation-States. The idea of a *common European culture* thus remained controversial. How could diversity lead to unity? How could unity respect diversity? The pending issue was how to square the circle.

The power of this indefinable identity, perhaps Europe's unsurpassable ontology, is also its weakness (and vice versa): it prevents a closed, clear, and popular identification. According to the sociologist Alain Touraine, this paradoxical situation is linked to the 'notion of modernity', which may be

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593 Luuk van Middelaar, *Le passage à l'Europe. Histoire d'un commencement*, Gallimard, 2012 (1<sup>ère</sup> édition 2009) p. 349.

used as a starting point for trying to define European cultural identity. His initial definition of identity is that it represents the ideal correspondence 'between culture, society and politics'.<sup>594</sup> Yet 'the fundamental characteristic of modern European culture has been to destroy the notion of identity', in other words, to disjoin culture, society and politics. And it was this conception of modernity that was rejected by totalitarianism. This brings us back to the argument put forward by the federalist historian Denis de Rougemont on the 'paradoxical unity' of European culture, based on the 'balance of opposites',<sup>595</sup> which philosophers such as Edgard Morin have updated by describing it as 'dialogical'. The inability to conceive of the monistic nature of European culture is precisely what would make it unique. Its unity would be its diversity. Therefore, European identity would be its 'complexity' and its aptitude for self-criticism, which would then be the source and guarantee of the value of freedom invented in Europe.

One can quickly see how difficult it is to build a policy around this aporia. 'What is simple is always wrong. What isn't is unfit for use.' as Paul Valéry would say. This is why national populism retains its performative power despite the growing interdependence of economies and cultures. For many years, European politicians had regarded culture as a mere spiritual complement. However, in the early 21st century, culture was revealed to be an explosive subject! As I mentioned earlier, this is demonstrated by the violent reactions to the attempt to include a section on the Christian origins of European civilisation in the Treaty establishing the European Constitution. Another related and hazardous issue is that of European identity. The Lisbon European Council (2007) came up with a compromise formula that merely acknowledged the impossibility of a definition:

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594 Alain Touraine *in Europe sans rivage. De l'identité Culturelle européenne, op.cit.*, p. 132.

595 Denis de Rougemont, one of the great thinkers on the idea of Europe, defined European culture as composite, contradictory, and dialectical, able to balance 'opposites'. He was fond of quoting Heraclitus: 'Opposites cooperate, and from the struggle of opposites comes the most beautiful harmony'. Rougemont would often refer to 'creative tension' (Denis de Rougemont, *Lettre ouverte aux Européens*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1970, p. 118–121). He argued that Europe is the 'homeland of diversity', the seat of 'inseparable antinomies' (faith/rationalism; authority/freedom; national/universal; tradition/innovation; myth/science; reformism/revolution). This explains its 'differentiated unity', or its 'paradoxical unity', which unfolds in the 'free interplay of its diversities', and which is the source of its 'dynamism' (Denis de Rougemont, 'La Cité européenne', speech given at the University of Bonn, on 15 April 1970, for the reception of the Robert Schumann Prize. <https://www.panarchy.org/derougemont/cite.html>).

'The term *European* combines geographic, historical and cultural elements that all contribute to the European identity. Such a sharing of ideas, values and historical links cannot be condensed into a final formula. On the contrary, it is constantly redefined by each successive generation.'

This definition should be considered in light of the latest push towards identity and ethnicism that occurred in the heart of Europe, in former Yugoslavia, in the 1990s. The Serbs had left 'historical time' to dive deep into the agonising myth of original purity and cultural homogeneity.<sup>596</sup> Nazism, a 'culturicide' historical movement, was a suicidal and genocidal attempt to break free from the common axiological heritage. The underlying message could be summarized as follows: Europe's complex genetic makeup makes creating a simplifying, unifying, and rallying narrative like 'national novels' difficult. Therein lies the challenge of making Europe understood and loved. How can complexity be made popular? How can it be something for which people would be ready to die? Yet, ultimately, this frustration-producing challenge might be seen as a safeguard against what Marc Bloch called 'the idol of origins'.<sup>597</sup>

### *The challenge of creating a unitas multiplex heritage*

There is a consensus among European historians that European culture is first and foremost governed by the 'dialectic of the one and the many, the general and the particular'<sup>598</sup> and that the history of Europe is, above all, marked by 'diversity and conflict'.<sup>599</sup> The historian Robert Frank offers an

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596 Ivan Čolović, « Les mythes politiques du nationalisme ethnique », *Transeuropéennes*, 1994, p. 61–67, quoted by Jacques Semelin, *Purifier et détruire. Usages politiques des massacres et génocides*, Paris, Seuil, 2005, p. 66. See also: Ivan Čolović, « Les prêtres de la langue ». Poésie, nation et politique en Serbie, *Terrain*, 2003, n° 41, p. 35–46; *Id.*, « L'espace spirituel et la communication interculturelle » in Aline Gohard-Radenkovic (dir.), *Intégration des minorités et nouveaux espaces interculturels*, Berne, Peter Lang, p. 17–27.

597 Marc Bloch, *Apologie pour l'histoire ou métier d'historien*, *op.cit.*, p. 868.

598 Nicolas Roussellier, « Pour une écriture européenne de l'histoire de l'Europe », *Vingtième Siècle*, Paris, no 38, avril-juin 1993, p. 89.

599 Jean-Pierre Rioux, « Pour une histoire de l'Europe sans adjectif », *Vingtième Siècle*, Paris, no 50, 1996, p. 106.



interesting interpretation of the thesis on the dialogical<sup>600</sup> and dialectical nature of European identity:

'The issue of "European dialogic" is very stimulating intellectually. But isn't it a truism endlessly repeated to please us Europeans, flattering the creative impulse of a superior Europe by virtue of its dialectical fertility? Great care must be taken to ensure that its use does not, in turn, become a tool for glorifying our culture in a teleological manner. (...) Are we not in danger of moving from the pink legend of European unity to the red and black myth of the unity-diversity of the "European genius" able to give birth to a European Union that harmoniously combines opposites in the most perfect subsidiarity?'<sup>601</sup>

Is European history impracticable? Is European history impossible to find? Is European culture impossible to grasp? There is a growing consensus that it is impossible to think of Europe as anything other than a '*unitas multiplex*'.<sup>602</sup> Hence, the need to conceive of unity in diversity to 'think identity in non-identity' and avoid 'the illusion of identity'.<sup>603</sup> This is why it is so difficult to envisage the heritagization of the dialogical nature of European culture.

A conflicting movement between diversity and unity is creating tension and inhibition, of which the timidity of European policies could be a symptom. However, there is one aspect I haven't yet touched on, and it is the over-emphasis on diversity. In the aftermath of the war, it could be interpreted as a beneficial break with the liberticidal and fusionist ideologies that had swept across Europe in the 1930s, which were particularism and difference killing machines. It could equally have been a way of protecting European culture against the two hegemonic cultural models of the time: the American and Soviet models. And later on, to protect against the destructive and standardising effects of globalisation. A fascinating semantic

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600 'Dialogics is precisely about including the third party: two opposing propositions are necessarily linked even while opposing each other. Each is wrong and false in partiality; while they tend to exclude one another, both become true in their complementarity. This is the dialogic we have seen at work, not always or everywhere, but *wherever there is complexity*. Edgar Morin, « Logique et contradiction », *Philosophie et société*, March 2019.

601 Robert Frank, « Une histoire problématique, une histoire du temps présent », *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, vol. n° 71, no. 3, 2001, p. 82.

602 Edgar Morin, *Penser l'Europe*, Gallimard, rééd. 1987–1990, p. 24.

603 Jean-François Bayard, *L'Illusion identitaire*, Fayard, Paris, 1996.

evolution occurred: 'cultural exception', 'cultural diversity', 'intercultural dialogue', 'cultural cohabitation'.<sup>604</sup> Diversity was no longer an expression exclusive to 'shelter identities' and 'bulwark identities'. It had been legitimised by Unesco in 2005, through the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. The development of intangible heritage reflected this new momentum.

This phenomenon coincided with the emergence, at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, of another paradigm on which European cultural construction policies attempted to reposition themselves: heritage. In and around the 19th century, heritage was primarily a device for constructing patriotic memory. It was culturally part of the right-wing imaginary realm,<sup>605</sup> even of the counter-revolutionary right, for whom the present was dictated by the past, with continuity as the ultimate value. The 1980s saw the triumph of a new approach to both the past and identity, based on the notion of long and sustainable time, and brought into the limelight by ecology. The primary aim was to 'protect'<sup>606</sup> the past and respect the environment in a non-productivist, even anti-capitalist, way. The heritage approach is also a way to ascribe a new and non-conservative value to the past.

Heritage and the idea of Europe progressively wended into the left wing's political and cultural notionalty. Edgar Morin's intellectual itinerary is very interesting in that respect. Morin comes from the anti-European Marxist left. He explains that the 'psychological moment' that triggered his Europeanist conversion came in the 1970s, with the oil crisis and its aftermath: 'I had the feeling then that Europe had become a poor old thing. (...) Yet Europe was becoming a less ambiguous concept to me in the sense that the colonisation period was over'.<sup>607</sup> This crisis spectacularly revealed Europe's 'organic' dependence on the outside world and validated the analysis that it no longer dominated the world. He mentioned in an

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604 Dominique Wolton, *L'autre mondialisation*, Paris, Flammarion, 2003, p. 175.

605 Jean-Pierre Chaline, « Le patrimoine », in Jean-François Sirinelli (dir.), *Histoire des droites en France. T.3 : « Sensibilités »*, Gallimard, 1992, p. 730–755.

606 When the European institutions tackled the cultural issue, they did it through architectural heritage and its protection. A charter of European architectural heritage was enacted in 1975. In March 1980, the European Commission and the Council of Europe jointly organised a symposium on the conservation of architectural heritage, which led to the creation of a European Monuments and Sites Fund.

607 « Edgar Morin. La nouvelle conscience européenne », *Défi pour l'Europe*, n°7, 1987, p. 5. Archives de Sciences Po Paris, Fonds UEF 5 / 1771.

interview that Europe 'has come to a point of infinite frailty' and that 'the true values that Europe had granted the world were threatened because it was threatened.' However, Morin's idea of European identity is anything but defensive: 'The nature of European identity is not in any particular one of its elements or moments, but in their dialogue, i.e., the fruitful convergence of conflicts, competition, dialogue, complementarities'.<sup>608</sup>

The late 1990s, as epitomised by Pierre Nora's project, bore witness to this newfound faith in heritage's capacity for political creation, repair, prevention and even reassurance. In 1994, in an issue of the journal *Le Débat* dedicated to heritage, Daniel Thérond discussed the reconfiguration of European memory following the fall of the USSR, setting out to find a 'European cultural model'. In imagining 'the reconstitution of a pan-European cultural area', he wrote: 'Should we not consider how knowledge and understanding of Europe's heritage can contribute to constructing a system of relations between communities based on acceptance of differences and other identities?' He believed in 'the educational value of heritage'.<sup>609</sup> Dominique Poulot, an astute observer, expressed this in 1993: 'Over the last ten years, the notion of heritage and associated social phenomena have taken on unprecedented importance in European cultural life and the Community's political and administrative discourse'.<sup>610</sup> Does this mean that heritage could adapt by shifting from patriotic memory to European memory? Here, heritage should be understood as the selection and hermeneutical process of the past by the present and for the future; this is 'reversed filiation' (Jean Pouillon) or 'invented tradition' (E.-M. Hobsbawm). I posit that it is a matter of proposing an *alternative narrative* to the heroic, unifying narrative that is less and less resistant to academic analysis.

During the international symposium organised by the French government in 1988 on the 'European cultural idea', Pierre Nora delivered a presentation on the theme 'Realms of memory in European culture'. Strik-

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608 *Ibid.* In this interview, Edgar Morin detailed what would be the salient feature of European culture, an 'open' culture that has integrated the fact that man is no longer at the centre of the world and that Europe is no more than a 'peripheral instance': 'He who believes must know that doubt exists; he who doubts must know that he cannot escape believing in certain myths.'

609 Daniel Thérond, « Grand Europe : les gageures du patrimoine », *Le Débat*, no 78, janvier-février 1994, p. 166.

610 Dominique Poulot, « Le patrimoine culturel, valeur commune de l'Europe », *Relations internationales*, no 73, printemps 1993, p. 43.

ingly, he avoided the title 'Realms of memory of European culture' from the outset. Why? A cautious approach to a concept that is difficult to control and which could lead to two pitfalls (inherent in any quest for identity): either the 'hegemonic overvaluation of a culture' or the defensive and comforting posture that would turn European culture into 'the sanctuary of rational and democratic humanism threatened today by the invasion of new barbarians'. His premise was that if there is a 'common cultural identity', it consists of a 'divided memory' and 'fragmented history', bearing in mind that the junction between national memories and European memory is difficult to find. Yet, he played along. He identified a few places that could be used to outline a 'topology of European memory, shared by all, and specific to each': military places (Lepanto), geographical places (The Rhine River), scientific places (The Tower of Pisa), economic places (The City), artistic places (Florence) and symbolic places (the Czestochowa pilgrimage). Defining the nature of cultural identity seemed impossible to him. However, not an inductive approach based on places of historical memory (and therefore on the particular) that could reveal, through 'so many different identities', the 'invisible thread' from which 'an unconscious organisation of European memory' and 'the latent truth of our history' would emerge. Ultimately, Nora settled for a difficult-to-avoid paradox: European cultural identity presents itself as both 'unobtainable and self-evident'.<sup>611</sup>

Eight years later, in 1996, the historian Jean-Pierre Rioux ironically commented on the 1960s, which had manufactured the myth of 'the glittering unity of art and mind', nevertheless acknowledged that Pierre Nora's 'Realms of memory' had yet to find 'a European expression'. In his article « Des lieux de mémoire pour l'Europe unie » (Realms of memory for a united Europe), Gérard Bossuat seemed to agree with him. Everyone knew that the concept of the nation had developed and been legitimised with the policy of inculcating and embodying a national memory through education, stories, monuments, symbols, and commemorations. It was even called the 'national narrative', so little did this ideological construction have to do with history and the history of historians. It was the price to pay to form a community and an identity, not to mention the tragic events of the wars. It takes time to manufacture a sense of nation. But as far as Europe

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611 Pierre Nora, « Les lieux de mémoire dans la culture européenne », in *Europe sans rivage. De l'identité Culturelle européenne*, op.cit., p. 38–42.

is concerned, is it possible to know whether or not there exist 'places of shared memory' capable of 'founding a European civic identity'?<sup>612</sup>

His two-pronged conclusion is similar to that of the creator of 'Realms of memory'. He looked for emblematic heroes but only came up with 'failed' heroes (Charlemagne or Napoleon), 'dangerous' heroes (Hitler), 'unsung' heroes (Monnet), or 'ambiguous' heroes (De Gasperi, Mendès France). He explored memorable shared events, yet he discovered that the memory of Europe 'nestles in the frightful inter-European confrontations', in 'the doctrines of intolerance' and the 'places of the suffering of Europeans'. Does this mean that only negative memory can unite? Then, he sought 'founding places of Europe', where populations 'intermingled', 'decisive' events in Europe's history, creative places, economical places, and symbolic places. He found the division of Verdun (843), the Congress of Vienna, the Rhine, the slave trade, university towns, works of art, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, Galileo and Max Planck, etc. In summary, Bossuat was convinced that the 'history of Europeans remains a source for European conscience'. It could be a means of education and 'accepting the diversities that are emerging or exploding all over Europe'. This leads back to the fine balance between unity and diversity that blocks any attempt at memorialisation and the creation of heritage for the purposes of identity and unity: 'Realms of memory can only reflect the dispersion and rivalry between the peoples of Europe. Hence, the Gordian knot, the fundamental contradiction in the history of European unity, rejects any national realm of memory as a European realm of memory, with a view to unity. This is why the European institutions are so reticent or cautious.

### *Can cultural heritage embody 'the common value of Europe'?*

One can see that it is as difficult to write a European history of Europe as it is to define European cultural identity. This observation begs the question of whether or not heritage could be seen as the missing link to connect to the ultimate source that would precede, transcend and reconcile national histories.

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612 Gérard Bossuat, « Des lieux de mémoire pour l'Europe unie », *Vingtième Siècle, revue d'histoire*, no 61, janvier-mars 1999, p. 57. See also: Sonja Kmec, Benoît Majerus, Michel Margue, Pit Péporté, *Dépasser le cadre national des « Lieux de mémoire »*. *Innovations méthodologiques, approches comparatives, lectures transnationales*, Peter Lang, Berne, 2009.

This is more or less what a theoretician of museography and heritage attempted to put forth. Observing, as many others, that the late twentieth century coincided with 'a veritable explosion of heritage enterprises', Dominique Poulot wondered whether cultural heritage was not about to become a 'common European value'.<sup>613</sup> The heritage approach may have one virtue: it steers clear of the ambition of grand teleological narratives that smooth out history to ignore the 'granites of identity'. This is history through object, detail and sequence. Nevertheless, it is still part of the dynamic of 'imagined communities'<sup>614</sup> and 'invented traditions'.<sup>615</sup> It always comes up against the question of selection and embodiment. On this journey, the European institution has encountered two challenges: building a European consensus around memory and producing an embodying effect. Indeed, heritage must be embodied, even though the focus is primarily on 'intangible' heritage nowadays. Pierre Nora had foreseen this: the shared European idea is 'what is less carnal and embodied in a cultural idea'. The most obvious example is the iconography of the European currency. The birth of the euro could have been an opportunity to combine culture with economics. It seemed a good idea to illustrate Europe's heritage in an accessible way. The belief that culture could strengthen the sense of belonging was still at work here. However, this project for the visual identity of euro banknotes failed. In November 1994, the European Monetary Institute commissioned a working group to develop proposals for cross-cutting visual themes that avoided national references.<sup>616</sup>

Three themes emerged from the eighteen initially proposed:

- 'Ages and style of Europe': Ordinary characters from iconographic works and architectural styles and monuments;
- 'Legacy of Europe': Illustrious characters and their achievements;
- 'Abstract and security': Geometric and non-figurative shapes to ensure that designers retain their freedom and convey an idea of the future.

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613 D. Poulot, « Le patrimoine culturel, valeur commune de l'Europe », *art.cit.*, p. 43.

614 Regarding this concept, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso, 1983. See as well: Christine Chivallon, « Retour sur "la communauté imaginée" d'Anderson. Essai de clarification théorique d'une notion restée floue », *Raisons politiques*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2007, p. 131–172.

615 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (dir.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

616 Claude Vigier, « Les billets en euro se dessinent », *Revue d'économie financière*, n°36, 1996. L'Union monétaire européenne, p. 69–78.

The theme 'Legacy of Europe' was eventually rejected as it was most likely to pose problems regarding historical choice (events, figures, movements, etc.). Thus, the 'Fathers of Europe'—key figures in art, science and thought—were discarded. History was eschewed in favour of European culture: abstract or archetypal architectural forms (triumphal arch, aqueduct, Ionic column, arch) and stylistic elements (Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, modern and contemporary) that show no reference to existing monuments. The symbolism of link and openness is reflected in the doors, windows, and bridges, which show that Europe is, first and foremost, a project and not a closed identity. With a view to enlargement, the European Central Bank launched a new series of banknotes named 'Europe' in 2013 to represent the European continent as a whole. This series consistently avoids historical markers in favour of mythology, such as the face of Europe on a Greek vase.

It wasn't until the early 2000s that the European Union positioned itself in the heritage field by creating the 'European Heritage' label (2005–2011). Heritage seemed to appeal to elite academic institutions such as Sciences Po Paris, which created the 'Sciences Po European Heritage Prize' in 2014. This process would culminate in 2018 with the European Year of Cultural Heritage.<sup>617</sup> It was an interesting initiative by the French Ministry of Culture, which opened up new perspectives despite its mitigated impact and the fact that the red line had not been crossed: this would not be the Year of Cultural Heritage. Similarly, European Heritage Days have yet to truly exist as such. The 'European Heritage' label, as officially presented on the French site (this was, in fact, a French initiative), 'aims to highlight the European dimension of cultural assets, monuments, cultural sites, places of memory, etc., that are witnesses to the history of Europe or European integration'.<sup>618</sup> The European Union website states: 'European heritage sites bring the European narrative and underlying history behind it to life'. The quest for a 'European narrative' is still ongoing, and there is a persistent belief that history can be used to serve the future.<sup>619</sup>

Analysing the list of cultural sites that have been awarded the 'European Heritage' label (awarded by the European Union since 2005) reveals that six of them symbolise Europe's tragic heritage. The 2020 selection includes

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617 Which referred to the European Year of Monumental Heritage (1975).

618 <https://www.culture.gouv.fr/Aides-demarches/Protections-labels-et-appellations/La-bel-Patrimoine-europeen>

619 <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/fr/cultural-heritage/initiatives-and-success-stories/european-heritage-label>

two rankings (out of 10) that have a direct connection with Europe at war: the Łambinowice Commemoration Site (Poland) and the Lieu de Mémoire at Chambon-sur-Lignon (France) dedicated to the memory of the Righteous (those who helped Jews during the Nazi period). There is also a classification linked to the care provided to victims: the Benevolent Colonies (Belgium and the Netherlands). The Sighet Memorial (Rumania), listed in 2018, is the first site dedicated to the commemoration of the victims of communism. However, the underpinning philosophy is to highlight the European dimension of cultural assets, monuments, cultural sites, places of remembrance, etc., as witnesses to a shared history and a 'common' culture that have led to the construction of Europe.

Yet this approach to heritage must be seen in light of two competing phenomena: the popularity of 'World Heritage' (UNESCO) and the unpopularity of the demand for the 'restitution' of 'spoliated' cultural property by Europe's museums.

A second attempt was made. As the boom in heritage coincided with an upsurge in the museum offer, the idea emerged that the realm of memory of European history and culture could be a museum. The fantasy of a grand European narrative was revived. Because a museum is a narrative. But as with any narrative, it is a choice, a point of view. Herein lies the challenge. A unique site, a unique narrative. The Graal of European identity finally embodied. This was moving away from heritage as a *substitutive narration* to face the issues of the *narrative*. And it was just as much of a challenge after so many years of denial. As one of the project contributors put it, the House of European History is 'the challenge of telling the story of the unity of Europe'.<sup>620</sup> Yet, as this contributor describes it, it is a narrative controlled by the institution because the aim is to 'instrumentalise the museum tool for the political use of the past beyond the state-national framework and to make institutionalised memory a category of public action at European level'.

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620 Étienne Deschamps, « La Maison de l'histoire européenne au défi du récit sur l'unité de l'Europe », 16 March 2018. <https://www.c2dh.uni.lu/thinkering/la-maison-de-lhistoire-europeenne-au-defi-du-recit-sur-lunite-de-leurope>



*The challenge of the European narrative: The House of European History in Brussels*

The House of European History in Brussels opened to the public on 4 May 2017.<sup>621</sup> It is located in the Eastman building in the centre of the Parc Léopold, close to the EU institutions. It is a major project with 4,000 m<sup>2</sup> for the permanent exhibition and 800 m<sup>2</sup> for temporary exhibitions. It was ten years in the making from the idea proposed by the President of the European Parliament, Christian Democrat Hans-Gert Pöttering (13 February 2007):

'I would like to suggest a locus for history and for the future, where the concept of the European idea can continue to grow. I would like to suggest the founding of a 'House of European History'. It should (...) be a place where our memory of European history and the work of European unification is jointly cultivated, and which at the same time is available as a locus for the European identity to go on being shaped by present and future citizens of the European Union'.<sup>622</sup>

This suggests, an idea which the Lisbon European Council would take up a few months later, an identity that is not closed but in the making. A committee of nine experts was created, including historians and museum experts. It was deemed to be an independent committee. In September 2008, it published the 'guidelines for a House of European History'. The project's purpose was indeed political (and not a purely intellectual exercise), in other words, to participate in the formation of a European civic spirit:

'The idea and desire to associate freely in supranational institutions at the European level is a feature of the continent's recent history. The rejection and almost total overcoming of nationalism, dictatorship and war, and the desire, which emerged in the 1950s, to live in peace and freedom throughout Europe, the supranational union with a civil character, must be priority messages from the House of European History. The exhibitions must show that Europe, united through shared values,

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621 I am basing my analysis partly on the master's thesis of a student I supervised, Lionel Van Vyve (Erasmus Mundus DYCLAM+ master's degree), 2022, and on my visits to the House of European History.

622 Hans Gert Pöttering, 'Inaugural address by the President of the European Parliament', 13 February 2007. Parliamentary documents. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-6-2007-02-13-ITM-003\\_EN.html?redirect](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-6-2007-02-13-ITM-003_EN.html?redirect)

can live freely and peacefully in a world of progress. The House of European History must encourage better participation of citizens in the decision-making process of Europe united.’

The House of European History would not be a museum in the traditional sense but a dynamic exhibition, documentation, and information centre with an educational aim. In addition, care had to be taken to ensure that there was no duplication with the *Parlamentarium*, inaugurated in 2011, which focuses on the history of the ‘construction of Europe’ and the workings of the European Parliament. Yet this all-in-one approach was overwhelming! It implied bringing together the past and the present, evoking the links between the present and the future, combining history, values and the politics of European integration, and providing a forum for European citizens to debate and confront current issues. It was meant to serve as a mirror, a showcase and a window all at once.

An international competition was launched in July 2009 for the design of the museum: in 2011, the contract was awarded to the architectural studio Chaix & Morel et Associés (France), JSWD Architekten (Germany) and TPF Engineering (Belgium). The project’s scientific team was created in January 2011 to tackle the content, collection, and future exhibition policies. An advisory body (Scientific Committee) was set up, chaired by the Polish historian Włodzimierz Borodziej (1956–2021), in charge of advising the scientific team. Naturally, the contentious issue was whether the independence proclaimed was genuine, given that the Parliament’s Bureau (comprising the President and 14 Vice-Presidents) approved all the significant decisions and that the Governing Board, the supervisory body, was placed under the responsibility of the former Secretary General of the European Parliament, and then of Hans-Gert Pöttering, its ideator.

How was this narrative organised? The project’s scientific team chose three criteria:

- The event (or the idea) must have a European origin
- Have disseminated throughout the continent
- Must be relevant to this day.

The approach had to be transnational and interdisciplinary (history, sociology, archaeology, museology, etc.), incorporating political, technical and cultural aspects. The background is chrono-thematic, and despite some venturing into the Middle Ages or mythology, it runs from the 19th century (with the Industrial Revolution) to the present day, with a punctum on the

unification process after the Second World War. Based on these criteria and presuppositions, the project team proposed six themes on five levels, in line with the following axonometry:

Shaping Europe<sup>623</sup>

Europe: a global power (1789 to 1914)

Europe in ruins (1914–1945)

Rebuilding a divided continent (1945–1970s)

Shattering certainties (from the 1970s to the present day)

Europe now<sup>624</sup>

The scenographic approach is perfectly designed from an educational and kinetic standpoint. It forces visitors to ponder the matter. It begins with two simple yet huge questions: What is Europe? Where does it stop? We are, correctly, told that 'Europe has never been a clearly defined space'. Another question is: 'If we remember the past, can we avoid reproducing its errors?' A pretty bold question at the very core of a place of remembrance! It is a departure from the usual doxa and conventional narrative. The guide to the permanent exhibition was updated in 2022 to include a crucial element compared with the 2017 version: it explains that memory is not absolute and that it can be 'a form of imprisonment in the past'. Its prophylactic virtues, so to speak, can thus have pernicious effects and act as an 'obstacle to future progress'.

Fortunately, the concept designers avoided the pitfall of a complacent and self-glorifying narrative. For example, they had no qualms about mentioning the failure of the draft European constitution, or the BREXIT. The darkest moments of European history (wars, colonisations, racism, 'ethnic cleansing', etc.) feature alongside the most enlightened moments (democracy, social security, education, housing, medical progress, rising standard of living, etc.) The coverage of the post-Cold War renaissance in Eastern Europe and the section on how Europeans and non-Europeans perceive Europe are welcome surprises. The project's civic and interactive (or demagogic, depending) dimension becomes apparent at the end of the tour when visitors are invited to voice their opinion on what Europe should be doing in different areas (defence, trade, forms of democracy, etc.). The

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623 This objective encompasses three elements: the cartography of Europe, the myth of Europe, and European memory and heritage.

624 This objective was strangely named 'Praise and Criticism' without the guide of the 2017 permanent exhibition.

temporary exhibitions, meanwhile, feature themes that encourage critical reflection. For instance, the exhibition on waste ('Throwaway', 2022–2023) or on information overload ('infodemic') that is characteristic of our current environment: 'A History of Forgery and Falsification' (October 2020 to January 2022).<sup>625</sup>

It was a sizeable challenge. It wasn't all plain sailing. The eurosceptics in the European Parliament pursued a strategy of stalling the process by firing on all cylinders (budget, conflict of interest, etc.). The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) representatives were particularly prominent in this endeavour. For Marta Andreasen MEP (UKIP), 'It is bad enough that this ill-conceived, pointless and ridiculously expensive project has been allowed to go ahead'.<sup>626</sup> However, non-political criticism and objections echoed this opinion. Some felt the presentation was too optimistic, while others felt it was too negative. What unites was given greater prominence than what divides (and vice versa). The prism of anti-totalitarianism favoured the East-West division to the detriment of southern Europe.<sup>627</sup>

Inevitably, historians found much to criticise and be frustrated by. Even when it was only at the project stage, some academics expressed contempt, such as Frank Furedi, a professor of sociology at the University of Kent, who spoke of the 'Museum of the lowest common denominator'.

I was surprised that the narrative should begin in the 19th century, the century of the formation of nationalism that would lead to three European wars. I would have started at the time of the fall of the Roman Empire (according to the medievalist Marc Bloch) or with the expansion of Islam (according to the medievalist Henri Pirenne) when Europe was cut off from the Mediterranean. I would have dedicated a special section to the Europe of the Enlightenment, i.e., the 18th century. This is when the famous values that constitute, in the words of the official guide, 'certain basic and typically European' were developed. One could point to omissions, clumsy comparisons, and under-representations (i.e., labour struggles, migrations, decolonisation). One might wonder why the Munich Agreement (September 1938) is missing while the German-Soviet Pact (September 1939) is

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625 <https://historia-europa.ep.eu/fr/fake-real>.

626 <https://www.euractiv.fr/section/politique/news/une-maison-de-l-histoire-europeenne-trop-couteuse-pour-les-eurosceptiques/>

627 Christine Dupont, 'Between Authority and Dialogue. Challenges for the House of European History', in Paul Ashton Paul, Tanya Evans, Paula Hamilton (dir.), *Making Histories*. Berlin/New York, Walter de Gruyter, 2020.

featured prominently. One might, for example, take issue with the choice of associating Nazism and Stalinism under the common banner of 'totalitarianism', which is directly linked to a politico-commemorative resolution of the European Parliament that did not win the support of historians.<sup>628</sup> Some date choices may seem surprising, such as 1917, allegedly marking the beginning of the 'Cold War'.

Criticism was inevitable because any narrative is a choice, and choices can be criticised. Like truth, history does not exist in itself: it is the product of confrontation, provided that the historian's ethics are respected. Some said it was a 'propaganda'<sup>629</sup> museum. However, the fact of presenting events while criticising them should not be dismissed as meaningless. For instance, in a display case is the Nobel Peace Prize medal awarded to the EU in 2012 and, next to it, a red banner reading, 'Europe in 2012: crisis, chaos and unemployment', a slogan used in Oslo when the prize was awarded. Another example is a Dutch architect's work, consisting of a six-metre-long 80,000-sheet white paper intended to represent the cumbersome nature of the Community's technocratic process (i.e., the legal texts that the Member States must transpose into their national law). The same goes for the Brexit referendum.

Like any museum, it is a product of the culture of 'negotiated reality'<sup>630</sup> and 'fiction'<sup>631</sup> in the anthropological sense. It does not offer ready-made history, and 'visitors must be aware of the relativity of the choices made'.<sup>632</sup> And this is what makes this project so unique. This brings us back to the notion of a complex history, of a European identity made of its own contradictions, the essence of which is perhaps not to have one. Does the

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628 European Parliament resolution on European conscience and totalitarianism, Resolution P6\_TA (2009)0213, European Parliament (2 April 2009). This resolution states 'that the dominant historical experience of Western Europe was Nazism, and (...) Central and Eastern European countries have experienced both Communism and Nazism'. It introduces 23 August (the day the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was signed) as a joint day of 'commemoration of the victims of Stalinism and Nazism' (which, after much criticism, will become the 'European Day of Remembrance').

629 Jean-Baptiste Malet, « Bienvenue au musée de la propagande européenne », *Le Monde diplomatique*, mai 2021, p. 28.

630 'Negotiated reality'. Jeanne Cannizo, 'Exhibiting Cultures: Into the Heart of Africa', *Visual Anthropology Review*, Volume 7, Spring 1991, p. 151.

631 Sophie Wahnich (dir.), *Fictions d'Europe, la guerre au musée, Allemagne, France, Grande-Bretagne*, Paris, Éd. des Archives contemporaines, 2002.

632 Taja Vovk van Gall, « Comment forger un récit européen? La Maison de l'histoire européenne : travaux en cours », in Antoine Arjakovsky (dir.), *Histoire de la conscience européenne, op.cit.*, p. 59.

House of European History offer visitors the chance to experience this shared culture and develop their awareness as Europeans? It remains to be seen what impact the House of European History has had on the civic and historical awareness of Europeans. After all, it should be explained why, just two years after the House opened, on 19 September 2019, the European Parliament felt compelled to adopt an (interminable and inaudible) resolution on the ‘importance of European memory for the future of Europe’. Cultural time is not political time. It takes more than a museum and resolutions to develop the ‘European spirit’.

The whole issue of the narrative's feasibility (or otherwise) is at stake here: ‘How can we reconcile diverging perspectives while allowing different points of view to be expressed without negating the national’?<sup>633</sup> In a more general way, the House of European History raises the fundamental question of whether post-national societies that tend to become ‘transnational’ can produce a ‘collective identity’. This question is all the more challenging to analyse because the institutional discourse mirrors the concerns that identity issues inevitably raise. Institutions tread cautiously in this field, similar to the House of European History concept designers, for whom ‘It is first and foremost a matter of discarding the concept of identity, seen as too restrictive, in favour of the concept of collective memory’.<sup>634</sup> A more neutral and consensual concept. In fact, the project initiator used the word ‘identity’ only once in his speech. In contrast, the term ‘culture’ appears 19 times: ‘Europeans can be proud of what they have achieved over the centuries in terms of values, freedom, law and democracy’. He mentioned ‘our common European culture’, suggesting we ‘rediscover what we have in common’. It is as if the less connoted term culture had become a politically correct alternative to the term identity, following the similar shift that occurred between European ‘exceptionalism’ and ‘diversity’.

I would like to conclude by acknowledging the impressive sculpture entitled ‘The Vortex of History’. It stands 25 metres tall at the centre of the museum, under the glass roof, and connects all the levels of the building.

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633 Camille Mazé, « Des usages politiques du musée à l'échelle européenne. Contribution à l'analyse de l'europanisation de la mémoire comme catégorie d'action publique », *Politique européenne*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2012, p. 72–100. *Id.*, Camille Mazé, *La fabrique de l'identité européenne. Dans les coulisses des musées de l'Europe*, Paris, Belin, Socio-histoires, 2014.

634 Christine Dupont, « La Maison de l'histoire européenne », *Biens Symboliques / Symbolic Goods* [Online], 6 | 2020, on line since 30 April 2020. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/bssg/436>.

It is made of an inextricable weave of metal ribbons. There is no better way of representing the complexity of Europe! These ribbons feature quotes from intellectuals and artists. Among these quotes, I would like to mention the one by linguist Julia Kristeva: 'Europe is the only place in the world where identity is not a cult but a question'. Yet, how can 'a question' be patrimonialised? Herein lies the challenge. Marc Bloch has raised the ultimate question: 'Can history really serve as a foundation for solidarity?' he answers that 'it is doubtful'.<sup>635</sup>

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635 Marc Bloch, « Une nouvelle histoire universelle : H.G. Wells historien », *Revue de Paris*, 15 août 1922. Quoted in Marc Bloch, *L'Histoire, la Guerre, la Résistance*, *op.cit.*, p. 869.

## 10 Did Europeans steal non-European heritage?

In the 1960s, Europeans were reproached for idealising Europe, imposing their cultural model on the world and ignoring all things non-European. Yet, forty years later, Europeans were accused of having ‘plundered’ and ‘despoiled’ non-European cultures. Paradox or contradiction? Is it possible to ignore and despise foreign cultures while wishing to appropriate or draw inspiration from them? The matter of the restitution of ill-gotten cultural property has become the main focus of the decolonial ideology that developed in the 1990s with the emergence of the figure of the victim at the expense of the hero’s.<sup>636</sup> It was the harbinger of the advent of the ‘duty of memory’ and ‘the rhetorics of denunciation’<sup>637</sup> The confusion between memory and history redefines the borders between morality, justice and knowledge. It triggers what has been called the ‘abuses of memory’.<sup>638</sup> A profound anthropological shift has been underway since the 1970s, and the wave of ‘woke culture’ is perhaps its most recent and popular expression. Today, the European narrative is primarily presented through the history of the victims of European power, with the scope of victimhood including non-European cultures and the historical narrative focusing on these cultures. The restitution of ill-gotten cultural property has become both a moral and geopolitical issue.

The forerunner of this movement was the appeal launched on 7 June 1978 by Amadou-Mahtar M’Bow, Director-General of UNESCO, advocating for the ‘return of irreplaceable cultural heritage to those who have created it’, arguing that ‘the men and women of these countries are entitled to recover these cultural assets that are part of their very being’. He quoted the Greek historian Polybius, who 2000 years ago had urged us ‘to stop making the misfortune of other peoples the ornament of our homeland’.

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636 François Azouvi, *Du héros à la victime : la métamorphose contemporaine du sacré*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. « NRF essais », 2024. See also: Jean-Michel Chaumont, *La concurrence des victimes. Génocide, identité, reconnaissance*, Paris, éd. La Découverte, 1997.

637 Sébastien Ledoux, *Le devoir de mémoire. Une formule et son histoire*, Paris, CNRS éditions (Biblis), 2016–2021, p. 129.

638 Emmanuel Terray, *Face aux abus de mémoire*, Actes Sud, 2006; Tzvetan Todorov, *Mémoire du mal, tentation du bien*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 2001.



Four months later, the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property<sup>639</sup> to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation was established, with Salah Stétié of Lebanon as its first chairman. The word 'Europe' is not mentioned in the founding text, yet Europe was targeted (and subsidiarily America) in its relationship to Africa. The 'battle' was launched by Paul Joachim, a journalist born in Cotonou in Dahomey (now Benin) who had studied in France. In January 1965, in the monthly magazine *Bingo* published in Senegal, he wrote: 'There is one battle that we will have to fight valiantly on all fronts in Europe and America once we have found a final solution to the issues of property that are gnawing away at our minds: the battle to recover our works of art dispersed around the world'.<sup>640</sup>

### *Reclaiming heritage as a guarantee of authenticity and identity*

Countries that have achieved independence need a cultural imaginary realm to establish themselves as nation-states (in imitation of the European model that founded the 'invented tradition'). Reclaiming one's heritage, which guarantees 'authenticity' and identity, is part of this dynamic. The sociologist Gilles Lipovetsky argued that what is authentic is no longer merely what is 'true'; it is also what is ancient, the bearer of memory and collective identity'.<sup>641</sup>

One could say that the second historical phase of the decolonisation process was inaugurated then; after the political conquest, the cultural reconquest.<sup>642</sup> A special issue of UNESCO magazine, *Museum* (Vol XXXI, n° 1, 1979), was published with the title: 'Return and restitution of cultural property'.<sup>643</sup> This comprehensive issue covers all the issues driving intellectual circles today, from the facts to technical and diplomatic solutions. It

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639 'Cultural property' includes objects, historical and ethnographic documents, manuscripts, visual art and decorative objects, palaeontological and archaeological objects, and zoological, botanical, and mineralogical specimens.

640 Quoted by Bénédicte Savoy, *Le long combat de l'Afrique pour son art. Histoire d'une défaite post-coloniale*, Paris, Seuil, 2023, p. 21.

641 Gilles Lipovetsky, *Le sacre de l'authenticité*, Paris, Gallimard, 2021, p. 323.

642 As early as 1959, the cultural dimension of the decolonial struggle was emphasised at the International Congress of Black Artists held in Rome on the topic 'The unity of black African cultures.'

643 Incidentally, the term 'despoilment' is used several times throughout the issue.

reveals that diplomatic discussions on this subject had been underway for several years (for example, between the Netherlands and Indonesia) and that restitution initiatives had occurred (between Belgium and Zaire, for instance). Jeannine Auboyer, the curator at the Musée Guimet (French National Museum of Asian Art), explained how France and Japan achieved 'reciprocal donations' and how a 1956 French law waived the principle of the inalienability of heritage collections. In fact, in August 1977 already, the International Council of Museums examined the issue in a report entitled '*Étude relative aux principes, conditions et moyens de la restitution ou du retour des biens culturels en vue de la reconstitution des patrimoines dispersés*'<sup>644</sup> (Study on the principles, conditions and means for the restitution or return of cultural property to reconstitute dispersed heritages).

Without harking back to the old Greek-British dispute over the Parthenon frieze or to Napoleon's forced requisitions in Italy or Germany, he who dreamt of a 'universal museum', the issue of the restitution of cultural property in the second half of the 20th century<sup>645</sup> primarily affected Europe and Europeans before it became a North-South issue. It is a well-known fact that Nazi Germany carried out a colonisation (and 'collaboration') policy and a policy to eradicate Judaism, which led to the systemic plundering of works of art, books and archives throughout subjugated Europe. Identification, compensation and restitution procedures are still underway. If you visit the Musée de Grenoble, for instance, you will see a painting by Gustave Courbet *Paysage sous la neige* (Landscape in the snow) (1867). This painting is flanked by a notice bearing a red seal mentioning: 'Recovered in 1945'. It is explained that this work was one of 60,000 others despoiled by Nazi Germany with the collaboration of the Vichy regime and returned to France in 1945. Around 45,000 artworks were returned to their owners before 1950. Of the 15,000 remaining items, 13,000 were sold for the benefit of the *Domaines* without a catalogue, making them virtually impossible to identify. The remaining 2,000 were selected by a committee to be deposited with museums under the name '*Musées Nationaux Récupération*' (MNR), with the task of continuing the search for any rightful claimants. However, silence shrouded these artworks between 1950 and the late 1990s.

In the early 2000s, the question of the restitution of works despoiled during the Second World War re-emerged, particularly at the instigation

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644 <https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/15839.pdf>

645 It should be pointed out that the study in this book is limited to the post-WWII period.

of the United States. In France, a database of 'MNR' items was created to facilitate their dissemination and record all the information on the provenance of each work. This database was named Rose Valland in honour of the curator of the *Jeu de Paume* museum, who recorded in her notebooks all the information she was able to glean concerning the looting of works of art stolen from Jews organised by the Nazis and overseen by the Rosenberg General Staff. This notice provides a complete history of the painting from 1933 until it was transferred to the Musée de Grenoble in 1976. Scholarly literature on the matter is extensive. The issue of the restitution of cultural property has been revived. It has gained momentum lately with the rise in the anti-colonial narrative and the increasing importance (political as well as economic or touristic) of cultural heritage worldwide. The 1990s marked the beginning of a 'heritage explosion'<sup>646</sup> and societies (both Western and non-Western) were all affected by the same 'fever of authenticity'.<sup>647</sup>

The West, i.e., Europe and North America, is on the front line because restitution initiatives have been too consequential. Europe, in particular (whose history is inseparable from that of Canada and the United States), has drawn heavily on the heritage of colonised countries. We know that it dictated its narrative to the world (in his 1950 *Discourse on Colonialism*, Aimé Césaire denounced 'Humanity reduced to monologue') and built a monumental heritage that was slow to consider the point of view of the colonised. However, yesterday's heroes no longer fit in with today's anthropological revolution, which has placed the victim and justice at the heart of new representations of history. This is why anti-colonialists fiercely and repeatedly contest the statues of Leopold II in Belgium; why the figure of Jules Ferry in France, who is also linked to colonial policy, is increasingly pilloried; why the statue of Edward Colston, a significant slave trader who died in the 18th century was taken down in 2020 in Bristol, a city in the southwest of England with a history of slavery.

But one could go back further in time. The Italian navigator Christopher Columbus, who was long hailed as a 'hero' for having 'discovered America', is now regarded as one of the figures behind the 'genocide' of the Native Americans and indigenous peoples in general, as well as of the European colonisation of America. Columbus Day, a public holiday in the United States since 1934, has been replaced in many American cities by a day in

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646 Pierre Nora, « L'ère de la commémoration », in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, t.3, Quarto, Gallimard, 1997, p. 4707.

647 Gilles Lipovetsky, *Le sacre de l'authenticité*, op.cit., p. 9.

honour of 'indigenous peoples'. Europe, like North America, has had to face the issue of the 'statues of discord' through the demand to reconsider the history of slavery and colonisation, which led to vandalism and destruction.<sup>648</sup> A movement has developed throughout the world to 'de-heroise' and 'de-condition' memory, affecting figures thought to be beyond 'suspicion' (including Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Victor Schœlcher, Churchill and Gandhi).

*The Quai Branly Museum of Primitive Art, an untimely emergence*

The issue of restitution has recently been reintroduced into the rekindled debate on the colonial heritage involving Europe and the countries it colonised. This is not the place to review the history of this issue and the controversies it has generated. I will merely examine the rationale that transformed European interest in the culture of non-Europeans in the 19th and 20th centuries into a process of predation and domination. How was it that what might have been perceived as a way of recognising other cultures was eclipsed in favour of a moral condemnation centred on the accusation of 'despoilment'? This development on opposite fronts occurred in a very short space of time and, paradoxically, at virtually the same time as in Asia, the Middle East and Africa, specific extremist movements with religious pretensions were carrying out outright destruction of the heritage of these regions: from the explosion of the Buddhas of Bamiyan (2001) to the destruction of the Arch of Triumph in Palmyra (2015).<sup>649</sup> Incidentally, Europe did not stand idly by in the face of this non-European heritage nihilism. The 47 ministers in charge of heritage at the Council of Europe launched an appeal in Namur (April 2015) for greater 'international solidarity'. At the behest of French President François Hollande, on 20 March 2017 in Abu Dhabi, in collaboration with UNESCO, a new foundation was created (*Aliph*) whose purpose is 'the protection of endangered heritage'.

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648 Jacqueline Lalouette, *Les statues de la discorde*, Passés/Composés-Humensis, 2021. See also: Bertrand Tillier, *La disgrâce des statues : Essai sur les conflits de mémoire, de la Révolution française à Black Lives Matter*, Paris, Payot, 2022.

649 In addition to smuggling and pillaging for business purposes, we could add: the destruction of several mausoleums in Timbuktu and a mosque in Mali, including the main mosque in the city, and the burning of manuscripts (June-July 2012); the demolition and desecration of the mausoleum of the sage al-Chaab al-Dahmani in Tripoli, Lybia (August 2022); the ransacking of the pre-Islamic heritage of the Mosul museum and a vast auto-da-fé (February 2015), etc.

The European Commission bolstered intra-European cooperation by committing to protect 'World Heritage' (July 2017). It has decided to modify the regulatory environment by proposing a specific offence relating to cultural goods (in connection with the fight against the financing of terrorism) and a European regulation to combat the illicit import of cultural property into the European Union in connection with developing countries.

At this point, we should mention the project announced in 1998 by Jacques Chirac, President of the French Republic, to create a museum dedicated to the arts of the civilisations of Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas. At long last, non-Western art was being recognised for its true worth. This ended what was described as a long period of denial, contempt, and even a lingering colonialist attitude. Indeed, created in 1938, the *Musée de l'Homme* was the only place where these non-European works were exhibited, but the rationale behind this approach was primarily anthropological, not artistic. The objects represented were essentially regarded as objects of study that provided information about a given community. The museum offer on this issue was twofold. Non-European works already had a place of exhibition: the *Musée des Arts africains et océaniens* (Museum of African and Oceanian Arts) in the *Palais des colonies*, inaugurated in 1931. With some difficulty, this museum attempted to implement its original mission: to reconcile ethnographic and artistic approaches. In their famous short film, *Les statues meurent aussi* (Statues Also Die), shot at the dawn of decolonisation (1953), Alain Resnais and Chris Marker drew attention to this issue: 'We had been commissioned to make a film about Negro art', Resnais explains. 'Chris Marker and I started with the following question: why is Negro art in the *Musée de l'Homme*, while Greek or Egyptian art is in the Louvre?'<sup>650</sup>

The ambition behind the Quai Branly project was to end this ambiguity and reinstate non-Western art into the history of the arts. Thanks to considerable resources and constant political commitment, the *Musée des Arts Premiers Quai Branly* was inaugurated with great fanfare on 20 June 2006. On this occasion, its initiator, Jacques Chirac, declared: 'There is no more hierarchy between the arts than between peoples. This conviction in the equal dignity of the world's cultures is the cornerstone of the Quai Branly

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650 R. Vautier, N. Le Garrec, « *Les Statues meurent aussi* et les ciseaux d'Anastasia », *Téléciné*, vol. 175, n° 560, 1972, p. 33. Quoted by: M. De Groof, « *Les Statues meurent aussi* (Chris Marker et Alain Resnais, 1953) – mais leur mort n'est pas le dernier mot », *Décadrages*, 40–42 | 2019, 72–93.

Museum.’ This museum shelters two-thirds of the 90,000 works of African art conserved in French public collections. And yet, in a matter of a few years, this museum has become ‘one of the most divisive museums in recent European history’,<sup>651</sup> a symbol of neo-colonialism.

Why? In parallel, studies explored the conditions under which these works had been acquired. They reveal the inequalities specific to the colonial regime: acquisitions were generally made under duress (in a proportion that is difficult to ascertain precisely and document), if not through theft or spoliation. Michel Leiris drew attention to this phenomenon as early as the 1930s. While participating as an ethnologist in the Dakar-Djibouti Scientific Mission (1931–33) led by the eminently reputable scientists Marcel Griaule, Paul Rivet and Georges Henri Rivière, he wrote in his diary (published from 1934 and regularly reissued): ‘Nine times out of ten, the methods used to collect objects are those of forced purchase, not to say requisition. All this casts a shadow over my life, and my conscience is only half clear’. He points to a vicious circle: ‘...we plunder Negroes, on the pretext of teaching people to know and love them, that is to say, in the end, to train other ethnographers who will also go “love” and plunder them...’. On 28 September 1931, he wrote: ‘What a sinister thing it is to be a European’.<sup>652</sup> However, Leiris would overcome his guilty conscience to participate in the initiatives of French anthropologists and historians (whom it would be unfair to forget) who sought to promote the history and culture of Africa, starting in the 1950s.<sup>653</sup>

The issues of restitution and acquisition have overshadowed the generous intention behind the creation of the Quai Branly Museum. This was the dawn of a new legal-diplomatic issue that would affect almost every country in Europe at a time when they were trying to stop the nihilistic madness of the destroyers of non-European heritage in Asia, the Middle East and Africa. The difference was that European countries had not destroyed the heritage they were harvesting in unequal conditions. They preserved it according to the standards in force for all heritage (Western or otherwise)

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651 Alex Greenberger, ‘Jacques Chirac, Former French President Who Supported Controversial Museum of Non-Western Art, Dies at 86’, *Art News*, September 26, 2019.

652 Michel Leiris, *L’Afrique fantôme*, Gallimard, 1934, p. 343.

653 Georges Balandier and Jacques Maquet (dir.), *Dictionnaire des civilisations africaines*, Paris, Hazan, 1968. This reference dictionary aims to reveal Africa’s creativity in its cultural works, techniques, and the extreme variety of its social relationships. Michel Leiris is one of the contributors.

and even promoted it through exhibitions, documentaries, studies, and publications.

In fact, the issue at stake was beyond mere restitution. It was the Europeans' claim to build the museography narrative of non-European art through the Quai Branly Museum, which then became the symbol of European cultural imperialism. This was the other aspect of what has been called the theft of history, i.e., the history of non-Europeans by Europeans, who were at this time urged to keep to their own history and focus on Europe. In this moral questioning of Europe, which implies a reversal of perspectives, it has been argued that European art's 'modernity' stems from borrowing from African art. Some Americans feel that Pablo Picasso drew inspiration from African masks to create a 'primitivist' form of art, which would have constituted the 'cornerstone of modernism'<sup>654</sup> whereas the current African trend, in the name of 'the emancipation of the gaze' and forgetting Cézanne,<sup>655</sup> sees it as the source of Cubism.<sup>656</sup> This type of statement shows the limits of the extrapolations to which the question of restitutions gives rise. This fundamental question should be treated seriously, free from moralising statements, the consensus of the moment and geopolitical instrumentalisation. In fact, in the first part of the 20th century, interest in African art was confined to a small but non-conformist cultural avant-garde. In 1907 and 1908, Picasso, Apollinaire, and Le Corbusier's accounts pointed to the deserted state of the Trocadéro Museum of Ethnography. In the 1920s, nothing had changed. In 1924, Le Corbusier wrote,

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654 'But almost immediately, art historians and politicians accused the museum of having colonialist and imperialist overtones—especially in a city where artists such as Pablo Picasso once looked to African masks to create 'primitivist' art that was a cornerstone of modernism.' Alex Greenberger, 'Jacques Chirac, Former French President Who Supported Controversial Museum of Non-Western Art, Dies at 86', *Art News*, September 26, 2019.

655 In 1907, a Cézanne retrospective was held in Paris, which certainly influenced Georges Braque, a friend of Picasso, to turn towards what was gradually being called 'cubism'. Yet, what mostly animated these avant-garde circles at the time was the dispute about the nude. It was Picasso who 'joined Braque in his work of geometrisation and highlighting of volumes'. Braque, the inventor of cubism, mainly focused on still lifes, which didn't stop him from buying an African mask in 1905 and 1910. See: Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, *Les Avant-gardes artistiques, 1948–1918*, Paris, Gallimard, 2015, p. 367–369.

656 A thesis defended, for example, by the Senegalese artist Kiné Aw. See: « Le cubisme est né en Afrique » : entre Pablo Picasso et l'art africain, une histoire d'inspiration », <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/culture/20230408-le-cubisme-est-n%C3%A9-en-afrique-entre-pablo-picasso-et-l-art-africain-une-histoire-d-inspiration>.

'I was always alone... with the guards'.<sup>657</sup> He lamented this because the 'so-called primitive arts' were apt to make people understand 'that there have been other civilisations of great cycle and things of great splendour and that they have always been hidden from us or revealed to us simply under the heading of ethnography, that is to say, a purely technical science'.<sup>658</sup>

This elite was very favourable to recognising what, at the beginning of the century, was called 'the distant arts' and, on the initiative of Félix Fénéon, advocated for their admission to the Louvres Museum.<sup>659</sup> Today, the Quai Branly Museum—Jacques Chirac houses the exhibits from the Trocadéro Museum (created in 1882 and which would become the *Musée de l'Homme* in 1938) and attracts 1,410,000 visitors.

### *The Declaration of Ouagadougou and the new topoi: 'spoliation'*

At the beginning of his mandate, young President Emmanuel Macron tackled the issue of the restitution of cultural property. On 28 November 2017, he delivered a committed speech at the University of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, on the restitution of African heritage and promised to instigate a political process ('I cannot accept that a large part of the cultural heritage of several African countries is in France'). This would lead to the Sarr/Savoy Report (*Restituer le patrimoine africain : vers une nouvelle éthique relationnelle* —Restoring African heritage: towards a new relational ethic) submitted to President Macron on 23 November 2018. This report delivers a perceptive diagnosis and opens some very interesting avenues. The French President's pledge has already produced concrete restitution measures. Along with the international students in my Erasmus Mundus Masters course, I attended the very brief exhibition (October 2021) at the Quai Branly Museums of the works that France has returned to Benin. Heritage may be divisive, but it can also be a source of resilience and a symbolic factor for rapprochement, reconciliation, and even moral reparation. Thus, in 2010, the French government had already returned—under

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657 Quoted by Maureen Murphy, « Le Corbusier et les arts du Danhomè : primitivisme ou retour à l'ordre? », in Christine Mengin (dir.), *Le Corbusier et les arts dits « primitifs »*, Paris, Fondation Le Corbusier/éditions de la Villette, 2019, p. 48.

658 Letter written by Le Corbusier to Paul Rivet, 7 October 1935, quoted in Christine Mengin, *op.cit.*, p. 163.

659 *Le Bulletin de la vie artistique*, 15 November 1920. Reedition: Félix Fénéon, *Les arts lointains iront-ils au Louvre?*, Paris, Espaces & Signes, 2019.



particular conditions—<sup>660</sup> 297 manuscripts that had been seized in Korea by the French fleet in 1866, and Māori heads claimed by New Zealand. This led to protests from cultural and heritage stakeholders, who brandished the argument of inalienability, fearing for the integrity of the collections.

However, I would like to point out the ideological presupposition of the co-author of this report in light of a case that I know rather well from investigating and publishing about it. She is not alone in sharing this presupposition. It is a contemporary symptom of decolonialist activism and of the media and editorial interest in the renewed attention to the evils of colonialism. Bénédicte Savoy's intellectual career is symptomatic of this evolution. Her outstanding doctoral dissertation (defended in 2000) focused on the 'cultural goods seized' by France in Germany around 1800. It was published with the title: *Le Patrimoine annexé. Les biens culturels saisis par la France en Allemagne autour de 1800*<sup>661</sup> (Annexed Heritage: Cultural assets seized by France in Germany circa 1800). In the preface, Pierre Rosenberg, a jury member, expressed surprise that the publication's title should differ from the dissertation's '*Les spoliations des biens culturels...*' (The spoliation of cultural assets ...). His perplexity is apparent. Why was the term 'spoliation' removed? He ventured an explanation: 'The term *spoliation*, which was obsolete until recent years, has come back into fashion with the spoliation of Jewish property by the Germans during the last war. *Seized*, with its more historical resonance, refers primarily to property seized during the French Revolution. The term does not have the controversial contemporary ring that the word *spoliation* has. To put it simply: would it have been possible to compare Napoleonic France with Nazi Germany (...)?'

In the space of twenty years, this 'unfortunate contemporary tone' has become mainstream and now allows the use of the term 'spoliation' without reference to Nazism unless 'Nazism' has entered a process of trivialisation. It should be noted that the term 'spoliation' is mostly absent from the 'Sarr/Savoy Report'. It appears only once in the chapter: '*Les formes historiques de la spoliation*' (Historical forms of spoliation). Current events have

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660 To circumvent the problem posed by the inalienability principle of public collections, these manuscripts were loaned for five years, renewable. At the time, the intention was to facilitate trade negotiations with South Korea. President Sarkozy's government sidestepped the obstacle of the law by creating an awkward situation, with the manuscripts remaining the property of France.

661 Bénédicte Savoy, *Le Patrimoine annexé. Les biens culturels saisis par la France en Allemagne autour de 1800*, Paris, Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2003, 2 volumes, préface de Pierre Rosenberg.

prompted this specialist in Franco-German cultural history to 'seize' upon the anti-colonial *topos* and use titles that move away from the 'wisdom' ascribed to her by Pierre Rosenberg and reflect an ideological stance: *Le long combat de l'Afrique pour son art. Histoire d'une défaite post-coloniale*<sup>662</sup> (Africa's enduring struggle for its art. History of a post-colonial defeat). However, it is fair to say that this latest book provides essential insights into the phenomenon.

It is an interesting study because it provides a closer look at how current events and morality (or convictions or prevailing opinions) interfere with the field of knowledge in the history of European culture. This is what I would call the 'Champollion syndrome'.<sup>663</sup>

### *The statue of 'Champollion' in the courtyard of the Collège de France*

In the inaugural lecture for her chair in 'The Cultural History of Artistic Heritage in Europe, 13th-20th centuries', Bénédicte Savoy commented that she had been appalled to discover a new meaning in the statue of Champollion, by Auguste Bartholdi (1834–1904), when she walked into the courtyard of the *Collège de France* in 2017. A pensive Champollion, standing, rests one foot on the head of a pharaoh on the ground. Using a subjective and moral register, she described her 'dismay' and 'stupefaction' at this 'decapitated statue of ancient Egypt, the majestic, broken head of a pharaoh who could be Ramses II'.<sup>664</sup>

She was tempted to see it as a symbol of the predatory Europe that had built its heritage by dispossessing other cultures, which led her to consider that this statue 'says more about the history of heritage in Europe than any book'. However, she admitted that she did not try to find out the

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662 Bénédicte Savoy, *Le long combat de l'Afrique pour son art. Histoire d'une défaite post-coloniale*, Paris, Seuil, 2023 (1<sup>st</sup> edition published in Germany in 2021).

663 Robert Belot, « Le syndrome Champollion. La mésinterprétation de la statue de Bartholdi au Collège de France comme révélateur de la difficulté à aborder sereinement la question de la restitution des biens culturels », Communication au colloque *L'Europe face à la revendication de la restitution des biens culturels mal acquis*, Saint-Étienne, Université Jean Monnet, 20 janvier 2020. See also Markus Messling's excellent article, « Champollion devant l'universalisme républicain », *La Vie des idées*, 27 Septembre 2022. ISSN : 2105–3030. URL : <https://laviedesidees.fr/Champollion-devant-l-universalisme-republicain>.

664 Bénédicte Savoy, *Objets du désir, désir d'objets*, Paris, Collège de France / Fayard, 2017, p. 42–47.

artist's intention: 'What did Bartholdi mean to say? I do not know'. This was forgetting the boundary between emotion and knowledge. Although there can be no knowledge without a knowing subject, and although every researcher is the product of their environment and times, the act of knowing implies distancing oneself from one's feelings or forebodings, remaining as neutral as possible in the face of the political or moral pressures that dominate the news, and resisting the excessive mediatisation that has latched on to the issue of the restitution of ill-gotten cultural property. Mostly, it implies gathering information. The risk here would be to produce 'de-knowledge' and injustice. Does Auguste Bartholdi, the statue's creator, deserve such a peremptory judgment? Is the foot resting on the head an 'act of domination'? To understand, it is important to contextualise, guard against anachronisms, research, and, above all, not give in to the teleological and retrospective illusion of lending 19th-century people our present-day feelings. To appreciate Champollion's statue and overcome any misunderstandings, it is essential to understand its creator, his republican commitments, his work and the environment in which he evolved. This is what I have tried to achieve through a dozen of publications devoted to the sculptor.

Auguste Bartholdi fell in love with Egypt during his first trip there<sup>665</sup>. In 1854, he had just turned twenty. Together with the painter Jean Léon Gérôme, he set off on a photographic mission sponsored by the French government. The purpose was to photograph the heritage of Ancient Egypt, which was extremely popular in France. Painters, writers and architects flocked to this civilisation, whose writing Champollion had discovered three decades earlier. He was fascinated with the discovery of a new world very far from Europe. The mythological universe of this pre-Judeo-Christian civilisation resonated mysteriously with him. Bartholdi would experience the revelation of the challenge of monumentality in Egypt: the art of controlled excess that uses the landscape and brings sculpture closer to architecture. Between 1865 and 1867, he developed a project for a colossal creation to flank the entrance to the future port of Suez (the canal linking Europe and the Middle East was to be inaugurated in 1869). The first terracotta model features a lighthouse with a woman holding a torch on its pedestal. She was a *fellahin*, as they were called at the time, i.e., a

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665 Robert Belot, « Bartholdi, l'Égypte et la première mondialisation », *De la Vallée des Rois à l'Arabie heureuse. Bartholdi en Égypte et au Yémen - 1855-1856*, Paris, éd. Snoeck-musées de Belfort, Gand-Courtai (Belgium), 2012, p. 130-167.

Muslim peasant woman, such as the ones the traveller often met and drew. Ismaïl Pacha, Vice-King of Egypt, refused the project. This is the project that would be repurposed to become the Statue of Liberty.<sup>666</sup> Such was Bartholdi, the man who wanted to reconcile cultures and unite continents.

In this context, in 1867, at the Paris World Fair, where Egypt was featured, the Alsatian statue-maker presented the model for the statue of Champollion that now stands in the Collège de France entrance courtyard. Bartholdi was an admirer of both the Egyptologist and Egypt. It is interesting to consider how the press viewed this sculptural gesture at the time. For instance, the magazine *Le Journal illustré* (25 August-1 September 1867) wrote:

'It is impossible to convey with more striking truth the profound *meditation* of the scientist, transfixed before the mystery that had been questioned in vain before him and that his genius would unveil. His gaze locked on this sphinx-like head, with its strange combination of stern gravity and I know not what mocking finesse that seems to challenge human intelligence. Champollion is following within himself the awakening of a thought in whose depths the truth was beginning to emerge. *His foot placed on the silent witness of the past*, whose silence he has sworn to break, is already a sign of triumph. It is the patient struggle of the genius who is aware of his strength and knows that he will triumph. (...) It is man, timeless man, with his *thirst for knowledge*, with his great and proud curiosity, and that secret instinct which warns him of his power and arms his will against the most impenetrable mysteries'.

The statue of Champollion evoked, first and foremost, the disinterested pursuit of science, the quest for truth, the thirst for knowledge and a respect for other cultures. And now, it should be seen as an 'unbearable and affected document', proof of European cultural domination and that 'the shiny, golden medal of culture and knowledge almost always has, in the West, a reverse side of symbolic and true violence'. Champollion's foot resting on the head of the pharaoh or the sphinx would reveal Europe's rapacity for accumulation toward other cultures and symbolise colonial hegemony. However, Bartholdi's intent was the opposite. This foot is the triumph of the desire to know, the success of science in the service of the

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666 The Americans would learn of this unexpected origin only many years later. On 2 February 2017, the leading American daily, *US TODAY*, ran the headline, 'The Statue of Liberty was modelled after an Arab woman'.

discovery of pre-Judeo-Christian cultures. Precisely, his fascination with non-European cultural heritage allowed the celebrated statue-maker to resist the nationalist overtones that gripped Europe at the end of the 19th century. This illustrates how good conscience does not always mix with science. However, as Plato recommended, combining 'true opinion and science' is the most challenging thing of all. Behind the rhetorical effect of this moral rebuke, which is very much in tune with the spirit of the times, and despite the anachronism of the analysis that underlies it, there is a tendency among European scholars to 'right the wrongs' and to propagate among their European contemporaries, even through what their ancestors did best (such as the discovery of hieroglyphics), the Christian culture of repentance and resentment, as Nietzsche would say, in the name of the victims.<sup>667</sup>

### *Conclusion: The paradox of reclaiming heritage*

The appeal for the restitution of cultural property by formerly colonised countries and their ambition to 'museograph' their history and arts are ultimately marked by a strange paradox that has not been adequately brought to light, probably because of the ideological context in which it developed. In a way, one might see the triumph of the European cultural model in these claims. Indeed, heritage (both as a concept and politically) was invented by Europe, such as the museum,<sup>668</sup> according to Krzysztof Pomian, was 'born in Rome in the last third of the 15th century ...'<sup>669</sup> Yet this model has its limits and drawbacks. The present consensus around heritage and authenticity as the ultimate metapolitical issue implicitly proceeds from a kind of 'abusive substantialisation'<sup>670</sup> that is incompatible with historical reality.

Yet, intellectuals who sought to ideate Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War (for example, the *Rencontres Internationales de Genève*)

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667 Pascal Bruckner, *Un coupable presque parfait. La construction du bouc émissaire blanc*, Paris, Le livre de Poche, 2022.

668 The museum not as a 'treasure', but as a 'specific institution' in charge of 'preserving continuity'. See Krzysztof Pomian, *Le musée, une histoire mondiale. I. Du trésor au musée*, Paris, Gallimard, 2020, p. 19.

669 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

670 Heinz Wismann, *Lire entre les lignes. Sur les traces de l'esprit européen*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2024, p. 30.

understood that Europe could not be defined as a kind of patrimonial essence, through a genetic 'prior existence'. They did not particularly 'idealise' Europe, as Léopold Sédar Sengor criticised, as they made self-criticism one of the distinctive features of the European spirit. The philosopher Heinz Wismann aptly understood that Europe, although it had invented museums, 'is not the museum of European achievements',<sup>671</sup> it is 'movement' and 'each rebirth is an alteration, a disruption.' Hence, his heterodox definition of heritage is that it is a 'disposition of the mind' instead of an accumulation of cultural property to be enshrined, valorised, and kept for eternity.

One could go so far as to think that the fight for cultural heritage is almost a rear-guard battle. Those who seek authenticity, questing an 'ontological memorial', are in for a disappointment. The European spirit is to be achieved through 'gesture,' successive transformations, and, above all, *crisis*: 'There can be no European culture without this crisis in which it separates from itself'. Should we then dissociate cultural identity from its heritage (and our idea of our heritage)? Or should we reformulate the question of identity as a process to activate differences instead of a mausoleum freezing them in place? Such is the excellent question he poses.

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671 *Ibid.*, p. 10–11.



## 11 Russia and Ukraine: The Battle of memory and historical Heritage

Are we now living in a post-truth era? This is the crucial question for human and social sciences concerned with the sudden return of war to the European continent, and one I will endeavour to begin exploring in this chapter.

The President of the Russian Federation has continued to argue that the war is justified on historical grounds. However, his rhetoric has nothing to do with seeking ‘historical truth’ and even less the code of ethics observed by any professional historian. In fact, it is an abridged version of the historical falsehoods contained within the article he published a few months before the invasion of Ukraine, on 12 July 2021: ‘On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians.’<sup>672</sup> It is this manipulation and falsification of history that I will analyse.

Such falsehoods are an indication of the contempt for history and the Other (their history, their identity, their culture, their heritage) that is the striking feature of this war. It stems from a longstanding collective depiction of Ukraine that dates back to the birth of the Russian Empire at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and its policy of regional domination. It continued under Sovietism and has been given a new lease of life under Vladimir Putin in the form of various territorial assaults and annexations. The Russia-Ukraine war is not just about territory; it is also about memory. It is a war of culture. It is a reminder that heritage is an element in the matrix forming the representational system of society and is therefore a geopolitical issue. The relationship with memory is indicative of and a potential cause of confrontations based on identity.

My purpose is to examine this notion from the perspective of the symmetry to be found between Putin’s counternarrative<sup>673</sup> of Russia and Ukraine’s history and the problems and failures encountered by the independent Ukraine in its attempt to create its own collective memory and

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672 Vladimir Putin, ‘On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainian’, 12 July 2021. The English version of the document contains 6,885 words. Throughout the document, I have used the official English language version of this chapter for reference: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>

673 I mean ‘alternative narrative’, or ‘false narrative’.



its own heritage – such problems and failures being one of the sources of Russia’s counternarrative.

*An example of historical ‘gaslighting’*

The article published by the Kremlin on 12 July 2021 is an excellent example of what is today known as ‘gaslighting’ (*Merriam-Webster’s* 2022 word of the year). The term comes from the film *Gaslight* directed by John Cukor in 1944. A man (Charles Boyer) manipulates his wife (Ingrid Bergman), making her believe she is losing her mind in order to steal the precious jewellery she had inherited. By extension, it might be said that it is a form of cognitive hijacking or a hijacking of history/memory in an attempt to invert reality. The aggressor is presented as the aggrieved, accusing the victim of being guilty of a crime they have not committed.

In his article, Putin describes Ukraine as an ‘aggressor state’ which, he alleges, has forgotten (and betrayed) its historic ties with Russia. He accuses the Ukrainian authorities of *denialism* when his own narrative is a perfect example of denialist construction. He claims that the Ukrainian authorities are suffering from a serious disease (‘Nazism’, weakness, corruption, negligence, cultural inexistence, lack of identity, etc.). ‘Gaslighting’ in general is a form of manipulation serving to make the victim doubt their own memory, their heritage, their perception of reality and their mental health. Putin’s narrative is in fact a continuation of a longstanding collective depiction of Ukraine as a province of Russia with its own dialect but unworthy of being recognised as a nation state with an indigenous history and culture. This is a strategy seeking to establish subordination.

The combination of gaslighting and denialism is perfectly illustrated in an episode which will go down in history as a disinformation howler. On 23 May 2023, Putin received Valery Zorkin, President of Russia’s Constitutional Court, at the Kremlin. Zorkin had something important to reveal to the world. The moment was filmed by the Kremlin and posted on social media. This senior figure from Russia’s state institutions indicated a French map of Europe dating back to the time of Louis XIV and explained, ‘I would like to take this opportunity to say that we found a copy of a map from the 17<sup>th</sup> century at the Constitutional Court. It was made by the French during the reign of Louis XIV and dates from the middle or the beginning of the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Why have I brought it with me today?’

Mr President, there is no Ukraine on this map...' Putin appeared delighted and hastened to recite his anti-history catechism: 'The Soviet Government created Soviet Ukraine. This is very well-known by all. Until that time, Ukraine had never existed in the history of humanity.'<sup>674</sup>

This was the supposed proof that Ukraine did not exist at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when Russia was already a recognised power. Propaganda is a weapon of mass destruction of the truth. As Peter Pomerantsev wrote, 'Nothing is True and Everything is Possible.'<sup>675</sup>

In my view, it has been difficult for Ukraine to emerge as a nation state because of its complex history. Putin uses this complexity as the basis for his argument that a Ukrainian identity separate from Russia does not exist. It is true that Ukraine's history has been marked by a 'lack of continuity'.<sup>676</sup> Before 1991 and access to independence, it is generally accepted that 'Ukrainians' only existed in political and state terms on three occasions: as part of the Kievan Rus between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries; within the autonomous republic of the Zaporozhian Cossacks from the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century; and from 1917 to 1920 in chaotic conditions owing to the war and the Bolshevik Revolution. This is why Ukraine sought to reconstruct its history and redefine its cultural heritage after 1991. However, constructing heritage on the basis of 'heroes'<sup>677</sup> risks falsification, denial and exoneration of the most deplorable episodes in the history of the Ukrainian nationalist movement. Putin has been able to use for his own purposes the excesses and aberrations of the national/nationalist story Ukraine has sought to write to construct a memory-based identity following independence.

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674 <https://www.businessinsider.com/putin-claims-map-proves-ukraine-not-real-despite-saying-ukraine-2023-5>

675 Peter Pomerantsev, *Nothing Is True and Everything Is Possible: The Surreal Heart of the New Russia*, New York, PublicAffairs, 2014. Pomerantsev was born in Kyiv. He went on to acquire British nationality before becoming a researcher at Johns Hopkins University.

676 Jean-Bernard Dupont Melnychenko, « Naissance et affirmation de la conscience nationale ukrainienne, 1850–1920 », *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, No. 43, 1996. « Nation, nationalités et nationalismes en Europe de 1850 à 1920 (II) », edited by René Girault, p. 36. Unless otherwise stated, all translations of cited foreign language material are the translator's own.

677 David R. Marples, *Heroes and Villains: Creating National History in Contemporary Ukraine*. New edition [online]. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007 (generated on 10 December 2023). Available online: <<http://books.openedition.org/ceup/523>>. ISBN: 9786155211355.

### Ukraine's 'Memorial Building'

This conflict is also a *conflict of memories* underpinned by two contradictory and clashing readings of history. Putin's aim is to discredit the way in which post-Communist Ukraine is attempting to reclaim its past, liberating it from the Soviet historical narrative. Ukraine has begun the 'nation building' process, i.e. constructing (or reconnecting with) an indigenous historical narrative responding firstly to a pressing need for political, or even ontological, affirmation. I have suggested that this approach might be called 'memorial building'.<sup>678</sup> This does not refer simply to an academic exercise in historical clarification or involve casting a nostalgic gaze over a distant heritage. The aim is to create a collective memory establishing the virtues of national unity, as well as redress for a past which denied Ukraine its right to political/cultural existence and geographical recognition. In this instance, it is my view that the meaning of *memorial* exceeds the usual idea of a monument constructed to represent a memory frozen in time within a tangible object. Rather, this memorial is a (re)founding moment creating a system and a presence through a narrative identity imagined as a resource of resilience and palingenesis. Ukraine's case is unusual – according to the historian Volodymyr Kravchenko, as its existence as a sovereign state has been episodic and limited, it is 'seeking its "golden era" and "usable past" that would provide it suitable symbolic capital for its current nation- and state-building process.'<sup>679</sup> Moreover, it should be noted that to a certain extent its history was 'stolen' as a result of Soviet/Russian cultural domination/colonisation, something demonstrated in school textbooks and Ukraine's scant historiography.<sup>680</sup>

It is important to recognise that Ukraine's memory has long been 'confiscated, if not obscured.' However, it should also be acknowledged that its attempts to reclaim its memory have been 'imperfect': 'In seeking to establish a definitive separation from Russia and highlight the longstanding resistance of a nation, Ukraine has seized upon powerful figures and sym-

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678 Robert Belot, Philippe Martin (eds.), *Patrimoine, Périel, Résilience*, Paris, Maison-neuve&Larose/Hémisphères, 2022.

679 Volodymyr Kravchenko, 'Fighting Soviet Myths: The Ukrainian Experience', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 34 (1/4), 2015, p. 447–484.

680 Georges Nivat, Vilen Horsky and Miroslav Popovitch (eds.), *Ukraine, renaissance d'un mythe national*, Proceedings of the Poltava Conference edited by the Institut européen de l'Université de Genève, Geneva, 2000.

bols from its tormented past. Although considered heroic, some of those individuals nonetheless remain controversial.<sup>681</sup>

Ukraine's quest for pre-Russian origins and its attempt to create a new national mythology were reflected, for example, in Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's decision to award the Order of Prince Yaroslav the Wise to Thomas Bach, President of the International Olympic Committee, on 11 September 2021. Brought to power by the Polish, Yaroslav the Wise (1019–1054) reigned at a time when the Kievan Rus was at its peak. The fact that he was nicknamed 'father-in-law of Europe' speaks volumes.<sup>682</sup> In 2008, viewers of a popular Ukrainian television programme voted him 'greatest Ukrainian of all time' and his achievements were depicted in a film two years later. In this instance, the aim was to provide a narrative that, unlike Putin's, did not freeze Ukraine's history in 1654 (the date of the Pereyaslav Agreement), the year which marked the beginning of Russia's attempts to subordinate the Kievan Rus.<sup>683</sup>

However, its other borrowings from the past have been more problematic. Some of its 'revivals' (such as Stepan Bandera and Symon Petlyura for example) have caused a scandal and bolstered Putin's narrative of the 'Nazification' of Ukraine and the need to 'denazify' its history. It is accepted that national identities are not natural but rather 'constructions.'<sup>684</sup> All forms of nationalism are a construction of a founding myth where history is pieced together and arranged into the correct order. All forms of nationalism, both in the past and today, worship at the altar of the 'idol of origins' to quote Marc Bloch in his wise *Apologie pour l'histoire ou métier d'historien*. To borrow the distinction made by the American historian Timothy Snyder, 'modern' forms of nationalism seek to establish *ex-post* historical/cultural linearities with 'proto-modern nations', at the risk of resorting to 'metahis-

681 A remarkable conference was held in Poltava in the spring of 1997. Its proceedings were published in Geneva in 2000, i.e., before Putin's regime. It was the first entirely independent attempt by academics to shed light on Ukrainian history and its relationship with Russia. See also: Bertrand de Franqueville & Adrien Nonjon, 'Mémoire et sentiment national en Ukraine', *La vie des idées*, 17 May 2022: [lavedies.dees.fr](http://lavedies.dees.fr)

682 James S. Olson (ed.), *An ethnohistorical dictionary of the Russian and Soviet empires*, London, Greenwood Press, 1994, p. 676.

683 However, it should be acknowledged that protection was required against the Polish who were pursuing an expansionist policy at that time.

684 See Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales. Europe, XVIII<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, éd. du Seuil, 1999.

torical' myths<sup>685</sup> or, as Henry Corbin (Martin Heidegger's translator) put it, 'hiero-historical' myths.<sup>686</sup> In this instance, Ukrainians want to suggest that they are the only heirs to the Kievan Rus. At the centre of pan-Russian nationalism lies the ancient myth of the Russian 'triune' created by metropolitan and archbishop Feofan Prokopovich (1681–1736), a professor at Kiev Mohyla Academy. He was adviser to Peter the Great who had given himself the title of 'Tsar of Great, Little and White Russia.' This historical myth has surfaced again today as the basis for Russia's ancient 'right' to possess Ukraine.<sup>687</sup>

### *Cultural war and battle for origins*

In his article 'On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians', Russia's President proposes a counternarrative of the history of Russia and Ukraine's relationship.

Russia's current official narrative rests on a presupposition that Putin presents as historically undeniable: 'historical unity between Russians and Ukrainians.' In brief, Ukrainians and Russians form 'one people – a single whole' whose separation can be explained only by Western strategy, thanks to which 'step by step, Ukraine was dragged into a dangerous geopolitical game aimed at turning Ukraine into a barrier between Europe and Russia.' According to Putin's reading of history, at the centre of this unity lies the ancient Rus.<sup>688</sup> This was not purely a political space. It was also, according

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685 Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1559–1999*, Newhaven, Yale University Press, 2003, p. 28–29.

686 Riyad Dookhy, « Un messianisme historial? », *Les Cahiers philosophiques de Strasbourg* [Online], 37 | 2015, placed online on 3 December 2018, consulted on 15 April 2024. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/cps/480>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/cps.480>.

687 On the history of this myth and its historical manipulations, see: Denis Eckert, « D'où vient l'idée que Russes et Ukrainiens forment un seul peuple? », *Mondes sociaux*, published on 04/04/2022, <https://sms.hypotheses.org/29931>. Denis Eckert also translated a seminal book by Andreas Kappeler (in German): *Ungleiche Brüder: Russen und Ukrainer vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, Munich, CH Beck, 2017.

688 'Rus' (in the era of the Kievan Rus) referred to the Rus' itself (the lands of Kyiv and Chernihiv). 'All Rus' referred to the lands governed by the Princes of Kyiv whose power was relatively real. See also: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/05/myths-and-misconceptions-debate-russia/myth-11-peoples-ukraine-belarus-and-russia-are-one>

to Putin, a religious space. He writes: ‘and – after the baptism of Rus – the Orthodox faith. The spiritual choice made by St. Vladimir, who was both Prince of Novgorod and Grand Prince of Kiev, still largely determines our affinity today.’ That is why 28 July has been a national holiday in Russia since 2009. It celebrates the ‘baptism of Russia’ which, it is claimed, took place on 28 July 988. The problem is that the principality of Kiev was not Russia which did not yet exist at that time, or only in an undetermined form.<sup>689</sup> According to Putin, it is the West who ‘in recent years’, supposedly built a ‘wall’ between the two countries which, he purports, formed ‘the same historical and spiritual space’. For Putin, this wall is ‘a great common misfortune and tragedy’ because, as he puts it, the axiom that ‘Ukraine is not Russia’ is a Western invention, a manipulation, a negation of history. It is this axiom that he seeks to deconstruct. His purpose is therefore both historical and messianic: he seeks to recreate the unity of two peoples certified by history... by declaring war on Ukraine.

It should be noted that Vladimir Putin did not invent this ‘myth’. According to the researchers (mostly Ukrainians) who attended the Poltava conference in 1997, it became set in stone during the Soviet era: ‘Canonical Soviet textbooks brazenly falsified history – consider for example [...] the entirely false “theory” of the earlier existence of a united nation composed of Russians, Ukrainians and Belorussians.’<sup>690</sup>

Ukrainians have taken action against such a historical annexation. In 2021, Ukraine celebrated the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its independence and President Volodymyr Zelensky decreed that 28 July would be a public holiday known as ‘the Day of Ukrainian Statehood.’<sup>691</sup> It was marked for the first time on 28 July 2022, i.e., five months after the Russian invasion. In

689 Vladimir Berelowitch, « Les origines de la Russie dans l’historiographie russe au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle », *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, vol. 58, No. 1, 2003, p. 63–84. The city of Kyiv’s culture sparkled while Moscow was in limbo. In the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, it was a small village on the banks of the Moskva. What became Russia was under Mongol rule. Prince Alexander Nevsky only managed to make Moscow an independent principality in 1263. It would quickly go on to compete with its neighbours.

690 And the quotation continues thus: ‘... and the total omission of the famine from 1932 to 1933, as well as the falsification of the history of the Second World War (not a word on the rebel Ukrainian army or the millions of Ukrainians held in captivity.’ Leonid Finberg, ‘Rapports entre Ukrainiens et Juifs : comment la mythologie remplace la réalité’, *Ukraine, renaissance d’un mythe national, op.cit.*, p. 148.

691 <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/den-ukrayinskoyi-derzhavnosti-28-lipnya-utverdzhuvati-76645>

June 2023, the Ukrainian Parliament voted to move the Day of Ukrainian Statehood from 28 July to 15 July, not only to avoid clashing with the date chosen by the Russians but also in an abandonment of the Julian calendar in favour of the Gregorian one. On 28 July 2024, Zelensky issued a decree that moved the Christmas public holiday to 25 December (instead of 7 January) in an attempt to end Christmas' alignment with the liturgical calendar of the Russian Orthodox Church, i.e., 7 January. It is evident that Ukraine's symbolic and historical heritage is far from set in stone and very much a political issue.

Ukraine's desire to reclaim its memory of the principality of Kiev (where Ukrainian culture originated) was evident in France back in 2005. Viktor Yushchenko, then President of Ukraine, visited Senlis to inaugurate a statue erected in memory of Anne of Kyiv, Queen of France, who was suddenly thrust into the media spotlight. In 1051, Anne of Kyiv, daughter of Yaroslav the Wise (978–1054), Grand Prince of Kiev, Prince of Novgorod and Prince of Rostov, and his second wife Ingegerd of Sweden, married Henry I, King of France. Henry I (1008–1060) was the third of the Capetian line. A Kievan woman was therefore indeed Queen of France.<sup>692</sup> This demonstrates the importance of the Kievan Rus, its influence and its place at the heart of Europe in the Middle Ages.<sup>693</sup> That is why the Ukrainian authorities today present Yaroslav the Wise as a European pioneer and the 'greatest Ukrainian of all time', while feeding 'the myth of the constant ambition of reunification.'<sup>694</sup>

In Putin's supposedly historical article, the 'triune' myth enables him to diminish (even deny) Ukraine's Polish past ('the Republic of Two Nations'), as well as its Austrian past, despite Galicia being the home of Ukraine's cultural and political nationalism.<sup>695</sup> With a sweep of his hand, he dismisses

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692 Régine Desforges reimagines his fate in the form of an historic novel: *Sous le ciel de Novgorod*, Paris, Fayard, 1990.

693 Yaroslav the Wise ordered the construction of the Cathedral of Saint Sophia in Kyiv. The first code of justice, a source of medieval law, was produced during his reign: *Rousskaïa Pravda*.

694 Natalia Iakovenko, 'Modifications du mythe national ukrainien dans l'historiographie', in *Ukraine, renaissance d'un mythe national*, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

695 Isabel Röskau-Rydel, « La société multiculturelle et multinationale de Galicie de 1772 à 1918 : Allemands, Polonais, Ukrainiens et Juifs », *Annuaire de l'École pratique des hautes études (EPHE), Section des sciences historiques et philologiques* [Online], 139 | 2008, placed online on 26 November 2008, consulted on 20 November 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ashp/469>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ashp.469>

'the old groundwork of the Polish-Austrian ideologists to create an "anti-Moscow Russia"'. Is Ukraine's Austrian history really an 'invention'? It is this denial of history which leads him to annex Ukraine's cultural heritage. I will consider two examples Putin refers to in his article.

*A divisive 'common literary and cultural heritage'*

One writer in particular has been caught up in a diplomatic paternity dispute: Nikolay Gogol (1809–1852), author of *Taras Boulba*, a famous novella. Gogol came from an old Cossack family (in the Poltava region) but left for St Petersburg to pursue his literary career. He always wrote in Russian – at that time, how could a writer succeed outside Russia's rapidly developing literary circles? Russia was a dominant and recognised power, including culturally. So, for some people Gogol is Russian; for others he is Ukrainian. Vladimir Putin is happy to use him in his article to advance his argument: 'The books of Nikolay Gogol, a Russian patriot and native of Poltavshchyna, are written in Russian, bristling with Malorussian folk sayings and motifs.<sup>696</sup> How can this heritage be divided between Russia and Ukraine? And why do it?'

This paternity dispute came to light on the day marking the bicentenary of Gogol's birth in 2009, i.e. before the occupation of Crimea and the war. Some of Gogol's work had been republished in Ukrainian and Russia (a Russian state television channel) accused Kyiv of trying to 'Ukrainianise' the anniversary. Russian Gogol specialists criticised the fact that the adjective 'Russian' had been systematically replaced with 'Ukrainian' or 'Cossack'. In point of fact, the Western half of the country stopped studying Russian in 1991 so Gogol was no longer read. The new edition in Ukrainian sought to resolve that problem. However, in such a highly sensitive atmosphere translations can become controversial and political. Should it not be considered that Gogol represented a powerful weapon for those who sought to denigrate Ukraine's autonomous existence?<sup>697</sup>

In seeking to reclaim its history and its culture, Ukraine has showcased a figure from Ukraine's cultural renaissance: Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861),

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696 *Malorussia* refers to Ukrainian 'little Russians'.

697 Iryna Dmytrychyn, « Voyage dans l'Ukraine de Gogol », *Revue de littérature comparée*, 2009/3 (No. 331), p. 283–294. DOI: 10.3917/rlc.331.0283. URL: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-de-litterature-comparee-2009-3-page-283.htm>



a painter and poet but also a Ukrainian hero and martyr. He sought to codify Ukrainian grammar and establish modern Ukrainian literature. As a result, he was sent to prison and subsequently lived in exile in St Petersburg where he died.<sup>698</sup> For the Russian authorities, literary activities and young intellectuals posed a threat. A report from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century included the following wonderful homage to the power of culture and ideas:

‘In Ukraine, Slavophiles have become Ukrainophiles. The members of this brotherhood wanted to separate Ukraine from Russia. Of all its members, Shevchenko is the most dangerous because, as a poet, he can speak directly to the popular masses.’<sup>699</sup>

Shevchenko criticised the Russian Empire’s policy of subjugation and became a symbol of cultural resistance in Ukraine. Two years after his death, a memorandum from the Russian Government decreed that ‘there has never been, there is not and there cannot be any specific “little Russian” language.’ And yet, specialists have confirmed that ‘although all the Slavic languages are very similar, Ukrainian is closer to Polish than Russian in some respects.’ Ukrainian cannot be reduced to simply a dialect of Russian.<sup>700</sup> The Ems Ukaz was a perfect example of this repressive policy. The decree accused Ukrainians of wanting to live in a free Ukraine ‘in the form of a republic led by a hetman.’ Alexandre II (1818–1881) outlawed the printing of books in Ukrainian, the importing of Ukrainian books into the Russian Empire, the creation of original works in Ukrainian, and the translation of foreign language texts into Ukrainian. The prohibition would remain in force until the 1905 Revolution.<sup>701</sup>

Putin refers to Shevchenko in his article but only to state that, although his poems were mostly written in Ukrainian, he wrote ‘prose mainly in Russian’, making him part of ‘our common literary and cultural heritage.’ Thus does he deny Shevchenko’s symbolic place in Ukraine’s popular ima-

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698 Christianity was introduced into Kievan Rus’ by the monk Cyril who translated Byzantine religious documents into the Slavonic language and introduced the Cyrillic alphabet.

699 Roger Portal, *Russes et Ukrainiens*, Paris, Flammarion, 1970, p. 45.

700 Iaroslav Lebedynsky, « La Russie a entretenu le mythe de l’inexistence de l’Ukraine », *Science et Vie*, 24 February 2023. <https://www.science-et-vie.com/article-magazine/la-russie-a-entretenu-le-mythe-de-linexistence-de-lukraine>

701 After the first Russian Revolution in 1905, Nicolas II published a manifesto promising to respect nationalities.

gination and, above all, bolster the myth of the triune. Ukrainians would go on to revolt against such a Tsarist assimilationist policy and fight for their culture to be respected. However, Putin sweeps this to one side for two reasons: firstly, he believes that all national demands stem from nationalism and therefore from 'Nazism'; and secondly, anything that does not follow the myth of fusional unity between the two countries is rejected out of hand. It is his belief that this policy should be interpreted in light of the 'historical context' which he alleges demonstrates that Ukraine's national claims are purely a result of geopolitical manipulation by Russia's enemies, a 'tool of rivalry between European states.' In the past, this destabilisation operation had been led by the 'Polish national movement' and the 'Austro-Hungarian authorities.'

In his article, Putin completely ignores great national literary figures from western Ukraine with a connection to the University of Lviv such as Mykhaylo Petrovitch Drahomanov, Taras Shevchenko and Ivan Franko. He forgets Yakiv Holovatsky and Markiian Chachkevych who is recognised for adopting the civic Cyrillic alphabet to transcribe the Ukrainian vernacular into an accessible written language.

The only intellectual he does cite is Mykhaylo Hrushevsky (1866<sup>702</sup>-1934), one of the Galician exiles. This Ukrainian historian (and politician<sup>703</sup>) is often referred to as the 'father of Ukrainian historiography.'<sup>704</sup> He helped crystallise the 'return to the paradigm of the standard national myth' (Natalia Iakovenko<sup>705</sup>). Independent Ukraine's ambition to reclaim its historical heritage has also been constructed around him. Consider for example the extravagant festivities that were held in independent Ukraine in 1996 to mark the 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death. Hrushevsky chaired the Shevchenko Scientific Society<sup>706</sup> (named after the man who invented the Ukrainian language), the organisation at the heart of an international

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702 He was born in Chelm, Poland.

703 Hrushevsky was a politically engaged intellectual. A member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, he became president of the central Rada (parliament) at the time of the 1917 revolution and, in 1918, president of the ephemeral Ukrainian People's Republic, after which he had to seek exile in Vienna. He returned to Kyiv as an academician and was arrested in 1931.

704 The following spelling is also used, including in Putin's article: Mikhaïl Grouchevski.

705 Or 'Yakovenko'.

706 [https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Gazetteer/Places/Europe/Ukraine/\\_Topics/history/\\_Texts/DORSUH/22\\*.html](https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Gazetteer/Places/Europe/Ukraine/_Topics/history/_Texts/DORSUH/22*.html)

network promoting the idea of Ukraine's own culture. In 1894, Mykhaylo Hrushevsky was appointed the new Chair of Eastern European History in Lviv, Galicia. He used his freedom and academic unctio[n] to deconstruct the official Russian narrative based on the 'uninterrupted continuity' of the Russian state since the Middle Ages. He brought about an intellectual revolution by postulating that the Rus of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries were historically and culturally indigenous and that the Kievan Rus had its own specific and authentic history, independent of that of Russia. He wrote an 11-volume *History of Rus-Ukraine*, a monumental enterprise. The first volume was published in 1898. He was one of the first to attempt to present a historical foundation for the Ukrainian nation to provide some perspective with regard to what he called the aspiration for 'a shared national life.' Mykhaylo Hrushevsky was therefore someone who represented a total refutation of Russia's anti-Ukrainian counternarrative. As Timothy Snyder underlined, he offered Ukraine 'a base for its political rejection of Russian pretensions.'<sup>707</sup> That is why Putin symbolically sets about to destroy him, presenting him as a traitor to his cause. Putin lets it be understood that this emblematic figure of Ukrainian nationalism actually abandoned his political battle and returned to Russia at the end of his life in an act of disloyalty to his cause:

'In the 1920's-1930's, the Bolsheviks actively promoted the "localization policy", which took the form of Ukrainization in the Ukrainian SSR.<sup>708</sup> Symbolically, as part of this policy and with consent of the Soviet authorities, Mikhail Grushevskiy, former chairman of Central Rada, one of the ideologists of Ukrainian nationalism, who at a certain period of time had been supported by Austria-Hungary, was returned to the USSR and was elected member of the Academy of Sciences.'

In Ukraine, the de-Sovietisation of its heritage became a de-Russification operation. Monuments dedicated to Alexander Pushkin were demolished (such as in the city of Uzhhorod in April 2002) and the Government sought to 'purify' public libraries.

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707 Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations...*, *op.cit.*, p. 197–198.

708 Soviet Socialist Republic.

Putin: 'de-Nazifier' of Ukraine's memory

Ukraine has showcased a number of heroes in its attempts to rebuild its memory and its heritage. Patriotic heritage has always been shaped by figures it is hoped are iconic. In Ukraine, this tradition is still evolving following the wave of demolitions. It seems that the myth of the hero has had its time – which in itself is no bad thing. However, the 'heroes' Ukraine has dusted off and brought out of its pantheon are not glorious and have triggered significant dissent. Consider, for example, one 'independence hero': Symon Petlyura. Accused of covering up unspeakable antisemitic pogroms in 1917 and 1918, he was killed by a Russian Jewish anarchist in Paris in 1926.<sup>709</sup> President Viktor Yushchenko's visit to his grave at Montparnasse Cemetery in Paris in May 2006 caused a scandal, not least in France itself.

Another 'hero' (this time from the Second World War) is the focus of Putin's criticism. It must be said that it is a complicated and unsavoury case. It mainly serves to enable Putin to justify his campaign of presenting his war as an operation to 'denazify' Ukraine. At the heart of his anti-Nazi argument is the figure of Stepan Bandera, considered a leading Ukrainian Nazi sympathiser. This is what Putin writes: 'Bandera, who collaborated with the Nazis, ... [is] ranked as ... [a] national [hero].'<sup>710</sup> Everything is being done to erase from the memory of young generations the names of genuine patriots and victors, who have always been the pride of Ukraine.'

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709 Léon Poliakov, 'Petlioura : la dignité d'un mythe', *Information juive*, October 1986. Léon Poliakov did not support the theory that Petlyura was anti-Jewish. It was his view that media coverage of the Petlyura trial (in 1927) first and foremost reflected Comintern propaganda which saw it as a way to discredit Ukrainian nationalists and justify the domination of Ukraine. See also: Henry Abramson, *A Prayer for the Government: Ukrainians and Jews in Revolutionary Times, 1917–1920*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999; Lidia Miliakov ed., *Le livre des pogroms. Antichambre d'un génocide. Ukraine, Russie, Biélorussie, 1917–1922*, French edition produced by Nicolas Werth, *Mémorial de la Shoah-Calmann-Lévy*, 2010; David Engel, *The Assassination of Symon Petliura and the Trial of Scholem Schwarzbard 1926–1927. A Selection of Documents*, Bristol (USA), Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016.

710 In fact, 'on 2 April 2010, a month after former prime minister Viktor Yanukovich was elected head of the State of Ukraine, the Administrative Court of Donetsk overturned and rescinded former president Viktor Yushchenko's decree making Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych Heroes of Ukraine. It argued that even posthumously this title could only be bestowed on citizens of the State of Ukraine which had only existed since 1991. The ruling was immediately confirmed upon appeal on 21 April 2010.' <https://timenote.info/fr/Roman-Choukhevych-30.07.1907>

The decision taken by the city of Kyiv in 2016, two years after the annexation of Crimea, to rename Moscow Avenue ‘Stepan Bandera Avenue’ immediately after the Decommunisation Laws adopted in 2015 has come under much scrutiny.

The way in which western Ukrainians welcomed the German army as liberators in 1941, co-ran the occupation and participated in the slaughter of the Jews is problematic, as is the underwhelming attention given to Holocaust memorialisation.<sup>711</sup> Stepan Bandera (1909–1959) led the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). He was born on 1 January 1909 in Kalush, Galicia, a province in the east of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Like others, he sought to collaborate with the Germans against the Soviet Union to lead Ukraine towards independence. The anti-Judaism of the Nazis was not entirely displeasing to him. Ukrainian nationalists quickly realised that the Germans (who funded their movement) had no intention of helping an independent Ukraine to emerge. Bandera was imprisoned at a German concentration camp from 1941 to 1944 after attempting to establish an independent Ukrainian government. It should be noted that he was poisoned by a KGB agent in 1959 in Munich.

Putin brandishes the effigy of Bandera to suggest that modern Ukraine has learnt nothing from history and is falling victim to its old nationalist demons once again. This position was the reason for the Russian Government’s manipulation of the UN on 16 November 2017 to hold a vote on its draft resolution against ‘the glorification of Nazism.’

Nonetheless, Ukraine should have avoided leaving itself wide open to the often-justified criticism that it has been ‘laundering’<sup>712</sup> the darkest episodes in its history and rehabilitating ‘questionable’, or even shameful, figures. Consider, for example, a man like Roman Shukhevych, leader of the Nazi ‘Nachtigall’ battalion (created in Krakow in March 1941). His virulent

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711 John-Paul Himka, ‘Obstacles to the Integration of the Holocaust into Post-Communist East European Historical Narratives’, *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 50 (3–4), 2008, p. 359–72. See: Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*, New York, Basic Books Perseus Books Group, 2012; Marc Sagnol, « Lieux oubliés de l’Holocauste en Ukraine. Berezovka, Domaniekva, Bogdanovka », *Mémoires en jeu. Revue critique interdisciplinaire et multiculturelle sur les enjeux de mémoire*, 29.04.2021. <https://www.memoires-en-jeu.com/sites-lieux/lieux-oublies-de-lholocauste-en-ukraine-berezovka-domaniekva-bogdanovka/>

712 Delphine Bechtel, « Mensonges et légitimation dans la construction nationale en Ukraine (2005–2010) », *Écrire l’histoire* [online], 10 | 2012, placed online on 18 December 2015, consulted on 10 December 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/elh/199>.

anti-Polish perspective was only equalled by his treatment of Jews in Galicia where he committed mass murder.<sup>713</sup> He was made a 'hero of Ukraine' on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth in 2007.<sup>714</sup> Ukrainians themselves were bitterly divided over this issue. In 2017, for example, it even led to scuffles in the street.<sup>715</sup>

However, the rehabilitation process had begun. In 2019, the Ukrainian city of Kalush unveiled a monument in honour of Shukhevych, provoking a joint reaction from the Ambassadors of Israel and Poland. In March 2021, the city of Ternopil in Ukraine renamed its football stadium after that symbol of Nazi collaborationism. The Simon Wiesenthal Center had no choice but to react and requested that FIFA condemn the decision. And yet, in July 2021 Yulia Laputina, the Veterans Affairs Minister, did not hesitate to pose for pictures with a member of Pravy Sektor<sup>716</sup> in front of a portrait of Roman Shukhevych.

The Holocaust is now well-documented in Ukraine. However, a heavy-weight study by the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum) in 2013 was disturbed by Ukraine's revisionist approach to 'the invention new heroes and martyrs.'<sup>717</sup> For example, the scenography of Lviv's Historical Museum was altered in 2006 to tone down suggestions of collaboration. The Nazi 'Nachtigall' battalion became the 'Division of Ukrainian Nationalists'; the SS 'Galizien' Division became the 'Ukrainian Division Halychyna.'<sup>718</sup> Ukraine should have foregone a non-discrimination policy in its attempts to restore its national heritage

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713 In August 1943, Shukhevych was appointed Supreme Commander of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). In some biographies, he is presented as having been an 'Abwehr agent from 1937'.

714 He was awarded this title by President Yushchenko on 14 October 2007 during commemorations marking 65 years of the UPA. The decision would later be rescinded by the courts.

715 According to a 2009 opinion poll conducted by Ivan Katchanovski, a Ukrainian researcher teaching at Ottawa University, 'only 13 % of people questioned had a positive impression of the UPA; approximately 45 % of Ukrainians had a negative impression of the insurgent army.' <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/rci/fr/nouvelle/2013410/choukhevytch-honore-canada-heros-national-ukrainien-ou-criminel-nazi>

716 A small far-right party founded in 2014.

717 Delphine Bechtel, "The 1941 pogroms as represented in Western Ukrainian historiography and memorial culture", in "The Holocaust in Ukraine. New Sources and Perspectives", Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum), 2013, p.7. <https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20130500-holocaust-in-ukraine.pdf>.

718 Halychyna is Ukrainian for Galicia.

and history. Doing so would have avoided providing Putin with one of the most aggressive themes of his propaganda. Condemning the Putin regime's falsification of history does not exonerate Ukraine from providing clarity about its own history.

Putin's denazification argument is fuelled by the policy of Ukrainian governments to de-Sovietise the country's heritage. When Petro Poroshenko enacted laws 'prohibiting Soviet symbols and condemning the Soviet regime' in 2015 (resulting in the toppling of several statues of Lenin), Moscow made its hostility clear – as if the memory of the Soviets' heroic struggle against Nazi Germany should mean that Ukrainians could not pass a critical eye over the Sovietisation policy they had had to endure. That is why, for example, Putin rejects the idea that Holodomor was a 'genocide'.<sup>719</sup> However, the fundamental question is whether Russians believe that Ukraine, as an independent country, should have the freedom to manage the public symbols of its own heritage and the right to propose its own historical narrative.

### *Conclusion*

Russia's centuries-long policy of culturally colonising Ukraine clearly casts a long shadow over this report with its focus on heritage. According to Putin, Ukraine's claim that its culture and heritage are autonomous is equivalent to negating its own past:

'Ukraine's ruling circles decided to justify their country's independence through the denial of its past, however, except for border issues. They began to mythologize and rewrite history, edit out everything that united us, and refer to the period when Ukraine was part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union as an occupation.'

The Russia-Ukraine war is also a symbolic war launched on the basis of a political exploitation of history, the other principal victim of this tragedy. It is therefore Ukraine that is supposedly betraying the shared history of two peoples – as if there were no history for Ukrainians outside the great Russian narrative; as if Ukraine had never existed without Russia. Russians

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719 In 2006, President Viktor Yushchenko enacted a law to remember the victims of the famine and punish anyone who contested its genocidal nature. The National Museum of the Holodomor-Genocide was opened in Kyiv in 2008 on the right bank of the Dnieper River.

are using history and heritage as a weapon to make Ukraine culpable and to negate its history. Such is the anachronistic reflection of its longstanding cultural and political colonisation. The observation that Ukraine's history may contain some aberrations does not give Russia the right to consider the creation of Ukraine's own popular imagination and its own national story illegitimate.

Vladimir Putin opposes a national rereading of Ukrainian history because it calls into question the narrative in which he very possibly believes, where Soviet Russia is Ukraine's benefactor. Moreover, Ukraine's policy of asserting its identity (despite the many ambiguities therein) has put it on a collision course with the meta-historical myth of 'Great Russia'<sup>720</sup> which Putin is somehow attempting to bring back to life with limited means. The historian Timothy Garton Ash recalls visiting St Petersburg at the beginning of 1994 and meeting Vladimir Putin who only held a municipal role at that point. Putin explained to him that the Russian Federation had to reassert its presence in 'lands which, historically, had always belonged to Russia', such as Crimea, and reestablish its authority over Russians living beyond its borders. It was his view that the world would have to learn to view 'the Russian people as a great nation' once more.<sup>721</sup>

Ukraine's ambition to join the European Union will also have to be assessed on the basis of its ability to accept a critical analysis of its own history. It will need to understand that 'humanism is linked to the development of critical (even self-critical) rationality'<sup>722</sup> because, as Denis de Rougemont put it, European culture is naturally 'pluralist, secular, critical and personalist, and encourages invention, innovation and originality, even when it is subversive.'<sup>723</sup>

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720 Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Nationalism. Imaginaries, Doctrines, and Political Battlefields*, Routledge, 2018.

721 'Putin's post-imperial yearnings were already clear when I met him in 1994, well before the first eastward enlargement of NATO in 1999.' Timothy Garton Ash, *Homelands: A Personal History of Europe*, New York, Vintage, 2023.

722 Edgar Morin, *Culture et barbarie européennes*, Paris, éditions de l'Aube, 2012, p. 37.

723 Denis de Rougemont, « Originalité de la culture européenne comparée aux autres cultures », conference of 17 November 1959. Source: CEC archives, Geneva. CEC 119. Box II-I-45.





## 12 Memory activism, resilience and reconciliation

Heritage is a collective act that is a memorial position on history: deciding today (in a particular context) what tomorrow will have to remember of the past, or what it will be able to forget (an event, object, building, figure, tradition, etc.). Thus, it is a story, a construct, a choice. However, every story evolves according to current issues, knowledge, and sensitivities in the name of this 'reversed filiation'<sup>724</sup>. Therefore, the heritage regime is therefore not a linear, downward, mechanical transmission: it is based on this freedom to preserve, destroy, and reconstitute. The heritage dynamic moves dialectically between commemoration, 'De-commemoration' and 'Re-commemoration'<sup>725</sup>. This is why, contrary to the widely-held notion, heritage is a social reality in a state of constant flux and is itself historical and archivable.

The most noteworthy contemporary fact, which has aroused the interest of researchers and social science experts, has been the steady rise of heritage as a social and identity issue, a factor in economic and territorial development, a point of geopolitical crystallisation or a demand for a critical rereading of history to bring out 'dominated' memories and promote values (anti-racism, inclusion, democracy, etc.). What we are now witnessing is a gradual expansion of heritage to include natural goods and intangible goods in addition to 'cultural' goods. At the same time, heritage has been accredited with a new function: that of 'resilience'.

Emerging at the same time as the development of the ethics of 'care' and the advent of the 'victim' in history in the 1970s, the notion of 'resilience' has gradually pervaded the human and social sciences. Recently, it has incorporated the discourse on heritage and its supposed virtues. Widely-held opinion and cultural institutions (such as UNESCO) willingly provide the heritage approach with potential for consolation, reconciliation, and 're-synchronisation'. Today, 'dominated' (or outlying) memories see it as a source of *reparation*, both in terms of memory and material terms. It inspires social and political actors in territories that have been the victims

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724 See Note 63 of this book.

725 Tracy Adams et Yinon Guttel-Klein, 'Make it Till you Break It: Toward a Typology of De-Commemoration', *Sociological Forum*, vol. 37, n° 2, June 2022, p. 603–625.

of brutal change. After a disruptive event, *heritage action* would make it possible to restore ties to heal and prevent the worst, ward off suffering or loss, and finally, resist the fatality of history in order to face the future with greater success. For example, on 23 May 2024, the United Nations established an International Day to Commemorate the Srebrenica Genocide (July 1995) to encourage ‘reconciliation, now and for the future’. This is what I might call the supposedly ‘conjuring effect’ of heritagisation.

Behind this consensus that is forming around the requirement of resilience as a new imperative is the promotion of protection as an ultimate, almost sacred, value. We have come to consider cultural protection a human right like Pope Francis, who, in his general address on November 30, 2016, welcomed the conference on endangered heritage (initiated by France and the United Arab Emirates) based on his belief that ‘the protection of cultural wealth constitutes an essential dimension of the defence of the human being’. With the growth in environmental awareness, the ‘rights’ of nature (landscapes, fauna, flora) play an ever more active role in this process of reconstitution and repair. Even the ‘rewilding’ of forests, for example, has been equated with a heritage ‘revolution’: ‘Where we thought only of destroying, we are beginning to rebuild.’<sup>726</sup> Reconstruction involves more than just building. We are witnessing the promotion of a secularised culture of the relic and of the sanctuary that must lead man to be reconciled with ‘nature’. It is this myth of resilience as a force for reconciliation and protection that we wish to examine.

### *‘Resilience’ as a marker of a change in the relationship to memory*

‘Resilience’ is a multi-referential notion that has its origins in mechanical science but which has gradually pervaded the humanities and social sciences.<sup>727</sup> Contemporaneous with the development of the ethics of ‘care’<sup>728</sup> and the advent of the ‘victim’ in history, the term has recently entered common usage. Recently, the concept of resilience has become part of the

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726 Gilbert Cochet, Béatrice Kremer-Cochet, *L’Europe réensauvagée. Vers un nouveau monde*, Actes Sud, Babel, 2020, p. 92.

727 Amélie Nillus, *Généalogie du concept de résilience*, École Normale Supérieure de Lyon – Département Sciences Humaines – M1 Histoire de la philosophie (report), September 2018.

728 Carol Ciligan, *In a different voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*, Harvard University Press, 1982.

discourse on heritage and its supposed virtues. Indeed, common opinion willingly endows the heritage approach an almost analgesic or thaumaturgical social power: social, psychological, territorial, geopolitical, economic resilience... UNESCO has adopted it, bringing about a change in the very philosophy of heritage distinction: it is no longer just a question of pointing out the prowess of human creativity or celebrating the beauty of nature, but also of taking into account the worst that man has done and protecting damaged ecosystems endangered by man.

There is the underlying idea that like psychoanalysis, heritage can reconcile, heal, neutralise conflict, and compensate for a lack of unity or overcome division, thanks to the restorative magic of remembrance. Everything happens as if the reactivation, recovery, and preservation of the past were a factor in palingenesis and a promise of the future and renewal. The most striking example of this today is the movement for the restitution of cultural property acquired via illegal means during the colonial period. This phenomenon is not new, and is part of the long history of 'trophy archives'. The recovery of items from the past would result in redemption and repair that would allow former colonies to reinvest their identity and achieve reconciliation with themselves and with their former colonisers. This news can be related to news of another event: the tragic death of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020. This event sparked a wave of indignation that manifested itself on monuments in public spaces that bore witness to the history of the domination of whites over blacks around the world. The 'heroes' of yesterday had to be toppled in favour of 'victims', who for too long had been deprived of a heritage and moral presence in public spaces. According to estimates, more than 100 statues of famous people were damaged or removed from public spaces by local authorities between May and October 2020.

This is indicative of the importance placed by public opinion on heritage (i.e. beyond monuments or memorials), the history of the victims, and their claim to their rightful place in history, with the idea that recourse to memory and heritage can manifest itself in action for the present day. The concept of resilience is generally called upon when there has been an upsetting, disruptive, or even traumatic event, whether during a historical (e.g. conflict, genocide), technological, or natural disaster, or as a result of a more or less gradual process that causes a radical change in the social, economic, or political environment (e.g. decolonisation, deindustrialisation).

I propose to question this received wisdom through a dual perspective. First, how can this oft-cited notion be considered less a concept and more a

‘marker’ of the evolution of the relationship of contemporary societies with the issue of memory, its purposes, and its points of materialisation? Second, how does the notion of ‘resilience’ (which arose in the English-speaking world in the early 1970s and was popularised in the early 2000s) serve to help analyse the supposedly redemptive effects of the revival of the heritage aspect of conflict, suffering, absence, and loss? The ultimate question is whether this is a social reality or a period doxa, an ‘instituent fiction’, or a myth.

One must first determine what the notion of resilience encompasses, as it falls under a number of disciplinary registers and is very polysemic and ductile, due to the fact that it does not (yet) have the stability afforded by veritable scientific status.<sup>729</sup> While little is known of its etymology, we do know that the word has been used in English-speaking cultures, that it arose at the start of the 1970s and became more commonplace in the 2000s. The notion has been referred to most in psychological and psychiatric research, which has served as the main vehicle for the dissemination of the concept.<sup>730</sup>

Here are the main disciplines where it has developed chronologically.

<b>Physics</b>	The ability of materials to absorb kinetic energy after a shock, without breaking (and therefore, without changing state).
<b>War medicine</b>	Post-traumatic stress disorder.
<b>Environment</b>	‘But there is another property, termed resilience, that is a measure of the persistence of systems and of their ability to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationships between populations or state variables’. <sup>731</sup>
<b>Psychoanalysis</b>	A ‘dynamic process that involves positive adaptation within the framework of significant adversity’. <sup>732</sup>
<b>Agriculture</b>	In agriculture, the expression ‘sustainable and resilient’ is used to refer to soil management that reduces the environmental footprint of agricultural activity.

729 Michel Manciaux, « La résilience. Un regard qui fait vivre », *Études*, Vol. Tome 395, no. 10, 2001, p. 321–330.

730 S.S. Luthar, D. Cicchetti, B. Becker, ‘The Construct of Resilience: A Critical Evaluation and Guidelines for Future Work’, *Child Development*, vol. 71, no. 3, 2000, p. 543–562.

731 Crawford Stanley Holling, ‘Resilience and Stability of Ecological Systems’, *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, Vol. 4 (1973), pp. 1–23

732 Marie Anaut, *La résilience. Surmonter les traumatismes*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2005–2008.

<b>IT</b>	The ability of a system to function despite malfunctions within its constituent elements.
<b>Sociology</b>	'The ability of a social system (e.g. an organisation, city, or society) to proactively adapt to and recover from disturbances within it that are perceived as extraordinary and unexpected.' <sup>733</sup>
<b>Town planning</b>	'Urban resilience', 'Urban sustainability'. <sup>734</sup>
<b>Geography</b>	'A system with a very well-developed ability to adapt in an unstable world'.
<b>Management</b>	Risk management <sup>735</sup> and 'dynamic capacity for resilience' or 'ability to cope with disruptive events in the macro environment'. <sup>736</sup>
<b>Heritage</b>	Valuing the past as a source of revitalisation (social, territorial, economic) and the reconciliation of identity.

It is difficult to come up with a single formula that can account for this diversity of uses of the notion of resilience. However, one definition can bring together a number of approaches and open up interesting heuristic perspectives: resilience as the 'capacity of a person or a group to develop well, to continue to project into the future despite destabilising events, difficult living conditions, or severe trauma'.<sup>737</sup> This definition, which comes from public health researchers, is taken from a book whose title is a whole program: *La résilience: Résister et se construire*. There are two other notions at play: 'resistance' (i.e. a force that opposes another force) and 'construction' (i.e. a positive action that confers stability and identity). These two concepts are part of a dialectic of overcoming antagonistic forces between the negative and the positive, and between what is experienced and what is built.

733 Louise K. Comfort, Arjen Boin, Chris C. Demchak, *Designing Resilience: Preparing for Extreme Events*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010.

734 Marie Toubin and al., « La Résilience urbaine : Un nouveau concept opérationnel vecteur de durabilité urbaine? », *Développement durable & territoires*, vol. 3, no. 1, May 2012.

735 André Dauphiné, Damienne Provitolo, « La résilience : Un concept pour la gestion des risques », *Annales de Géographie*, vol. 654, no. 2, 2007, p. 115–125.

736 Gulsun Altintas, « La capacité dynamique de résilience : l'aptitude à faire face aux événements perturbateurs du macro-environnement », *Management & Avenir*, vol. 115, no. 1, 2020, p. 113–133.

737 Michel Manciaux and al., *La résilience : Résister et se construire*, Geneva, Cahiers Médicaux Sociaux, 2001.

*The turn of the 1970s and the beginning of the 'era of the victim'*

At the heart of the notion is the relationship to violence. Why? It is in the field of psychiatry where the concept has been most cited and disseminated to the general public. It all started in the United States, where the term emerged in studies on children at the very beginning of the 1970s.<sup>738</sup> In France, Doctor Boris Cyrulnik was the main force behind the dissemination of this notion in the media. This is why resilience is almost always associated with emotional abuse. In schematic terms and for common opinion, resilience could be described as a process for overcoming an act of violence suffered. This definition brings in another concept: that of the 'victim', the victim of an act of violence. When asked why this concept was not studied earlier, neuropsychiatrist Boris Cyrulnik gave the following response: 'Because victims have long been neglected.'

At the heart of the resilient configuration is the victim-violence combination that results from a high-intensity event, which can lead to traumatic reactions. This event is generally associated with violence between individuals (such as violence against children<sup>739</sup>). The current importance of 'personal development' in Western societies has led to a proliferation of studies and books on how to 'decondition oneself from one's past'<sup>740</sup> and 'heal from one's traumas and wounds' (Boris Cyrulnik). The resilience process begins with the will to resist this diabolical confinement to neutralise the destabilising impact of violence, and to be able to access a sustainable state. The process of reappropriating/overcoming this painful past then makes it possible to trigger the resilience process. This process will open a virtuous and re-creative phase of consolation, healing, repair, reconciliation, protection, development, and dynamisation.

However, these can of course be long-lasting collective events or processes. One example would be the impact of the Industrial Revolution on nature, the ecological balance, and the climate, what is now commonly referred to as the 'anthropocene'. The book *L'Europe réenauvagée*, which deplores the destructive action of Promethean and predatory man on

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738 Emmy E. Werner, Jessie M. Bierman, Fern E. French, *The children of Kauai: A longitudinal study from the prenatal period to age ten*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1977.

739 Michel Manciaux, « Violence subie et résilience : Introduction et historique », in Claude de Tyche (ed), *Violence subie et résilience*. ERES, 2015, pp. 9–16.

740 Stéphanie Hahusseau, *Comment ne plus subir. Se déconditionner de son passé*, Paris, O. Jacob, 2018.

plant and animal heritage, begins as follows: 'Our Europe was one of the first continents to suffer as a result of human activity'.<sup>741</sup> According to its authors, to 'reintroduce' extinct animal heritage is to 'repair'. Take, for example (and conversely), the economic, social, and urban suffering of territories that have been the victims of deindustrialisation: how can we avoid the *tabula rasa* of the old productivist world and reinstate industrial heritage as a cultural value in the urban space and the collective representations?<sup>742</sup> Geographers and town planners have worked extensively on urban renewal processes, and have been propagators of the concept of 'resilience', applied in particular to territories and societies affected by deindustrialisation and peri-urbanisation since the 1970s. The problem unfolded around the question of soil pollution in (de)industrialised<sup>743</sup> territories, but also through the issue of the transformation of the building heritage of the industrial era: how can we 'regenerate' an area stricken with escheat in a creative place?<sup>744</sup>

How to marry modernity and memory? How to preserve this history<sup>745</sup> while at the same time fighting against social and spatial imbalances? This has been (and continues to be) the experience of the city of Saint-Étienne (Loire, France)<sup>746</sup>, as well as of other European cities (Turin, Newcastle, Hamburg, Dortmund, etc.). The earth has become man's greatest victim, and the relationship between man and nature needs to be rethought. The 'age of resilience' has arrived<sup>747</sup> at the same time as the 'planetary age'<sup>748</sup>.

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741 Gilbert Cochet, Béatrice Kremer-Cochet, *L'Europe réensauvagée*, *op.cit.*, p. 33.

742 Robert Belot, Pierre Lamard (dir.), *Image[s] de l'industrie, XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Paris, éd. ETAI, 2011.

743 Christelle Morel Journel, Georges Gay, Cécile Ferrieux, 'La résilience territoriale comme principe et comme volonté. Réflexions à partir de la question de la pollution des sols dans des territoires (dés)industrialisés', *VertigO – la revue électronique en sciences de l'environnement* [online], Special Issue 30 | May 2018.

744 Vincent Beal, *Sociologie de Saint-Étienne*, Paris, La Découverte, 2020.

745 Maurice Daumas, *L'Archéologie industrielle en France*, Paris, R. Laffont, 1980.

746 This is a theme that we have been working on with students from our Erasmus mundus DYCLAM+ master's programme and our partners. To this end, we organised a congress of the International Committee for the History of Technology: Robert Belot, Luc Rojas, « Saint-Étienne, lieu de mémoire de l'industrie française », *Industry & Innovation in Saint-Étienne* (France), Booklet of *The 45<sup>th</sup> ICOHTEC Symposium, July 2018*, Jean Monnet University, p 3–19.

747 Jeremy Rifkin, *The Age of Resilience. Reimagining Existence on Rewilding Earth*, London, Swift Press, 2022.

748 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of history in a planetary age*, Chicago, The University of Chicago, 2021.



Collective events that produce violence and a rupture are generally associated with conflicts and wars. How to survive the brutal experience of violence in individual and collective destinies?

The Great European War (1914–1918), the deadliest and most brutal war in human history, was at the origin of the advent of war medicine. In addition to the countless injured and amputees who had to be treated and rehabilitated, some survivors were affected by post-traumatic stress syndrome. Psychology had a new field to explore. Freud was challenged by this question, as demonstrated by his book *Reflections on War and Death*. Several hundred thousand French and Germans had been affected by mental disorders.<sup>749</sup> We had to deal with what we were beginning to call ‘war neuroses’.<sup>750</sup> The Vietnam War accelerated reflection on the psychological trauma of war. It was at this time that the concept of ‘post-traumatic stress disorder’ emerged. It is no coincidence that the concept of ‘resilience’ has taken hold in the United States.

Recent US studies have attempted to apply the metaphor of resilience to survivors of the Holocaust.<sup>751</sup> The 1970s were also a turning point for historical research, driven by trends in collective and affective memory. Research focused on the question of mass violence. It marked the start of the ‘era of the victim’<sup>752</sup> and of the ‘empire of trauma’.<sup>753</sup> In France, we see this evolution in the memory and historiography of World War II and of the German occupation: a primitive phase, developed around the glorification of the Resistance (the hero of the anti-Nazi struggle and a symbol of political renewal), overshadowing victims (the deportation of Jews, for example<sup>754</sup>), and civil resistance, gradually gave way to consideration of the harmfulness of the Vichy regime (in the deportation of Jews, in Franco-German collaboration) and of the ‘executioners’ (collaborators,

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749 Louis Crocq, *Les blessés psychiques de la Grande Guerre*, Paris, O. Jacob, 2014.

750 Julien Bogousslavsky, Laurent Tatu, *La folie au front. La grande bataille des névroses de guerre (1914–1918)*, Imago, 2012.

751 Roberta R. Greene et al., *Holocaust survivors: Three waves of resilience research. J Evid Based Soc Work*. 2012, 9(5), p.481-497.

752 Iannis Roder, *Sortir de l'ère victimaire. Pour une nouvelle approche de la Shoah et des crimes de guerre*, Paris, O. Jacob, 2019, p. 49.

753 Didier Fassin, Richard Rechtman, *L'Empire du traumatisme. Enquête sur la condition de victime*, Paris, Flammarion, 2011. These authors show how a ‘policy of reparation’ has developed.

754 Robert Belot, « Le sort des juifs dans les discours et les pratiques du mouvement Combat », *Les Cahiers de la Shoah* no. 8, Paris, éditions Liana Levi, 2005, p. 179–226.

traitors, auxiliaries of the German police).<sup>755</sup> Today, the national memory is centred on the question of the spoliation of the Jews and the enhancement of the Righteous, the women and men who saved Jews. It is no coincidence that in 2020, Chambon-sur-Lignon (Haute-Loire), the land of rescue for refugees and those persecuted by the Nazis, was classified under the new 'European Heritage' label after becoming the only village recognised as 'Righteous' by the Yad Vashem memorial in Jerusalem. At the dawn of the 1980s, the Holocaust has become a central element in the remembrance of World War II and in Western culture<sup>756</sup>.

World War I has not escaped this onerous trend: it has been reinterpreted through the prism of 'brutalisation'<sup>757</sup> and of the suffering of French soldiers. After a long memorial phase highlighting heroism and patriotism, historians are today interested in the intimate and daily experience of French soldiers<sup>758</sup> and in the 'European community of suffering' that has brought combatants from all sides together.<sup>759</sup> There is a dialectic and an interaction between memory and academic history, and the claims of the groups concerned.

Scholarly culture is in step with the emergence of two expectations in contemporary societies: compassion and emotion.<sup>760</sup> This compassionate dynamic allows other parts of the memory of suffering of humanity (colonisation, slavery, women, etc.) to re-emerge and to claim their right to become part of world heritage.

As I have already demonstrated<sup>761</sup>, the European project, which took shape within the struggles of the Resistance against Nazism during World

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755 Robert Belot, « Temps épistémologique, temps social et conscience historique : Les raisons du retard historiographique de l'occupation en France », *Corée-France: Regards croisés sur deux sociétés face à l'occupation étrangère*, dir. Robert Belot, Woo Bong Ha, Jung Sook Bae, Presses de l'UTBM, 2013, pp. 15–56.

756 Raoul Hildberg, *The Politics of Memory: The Journey of a Holocaust Historian*, Chicago, Ivan R. Dee, 2002.

757 George L. Mosse, *Fallen soldiers: Reshaping the memory of the world wars*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1990.

758 Rémy Cazals, André Loez, 14–18. *Vivre et mourir dans les tranchées*, Paris, éd. Tallandier, 2012.

759 Frédéric Rousseau, *La guerre censurée. Une histoire des combattants européens de 14–18*, Paris, Seuil, 1999–2003.

760 Lauren Berlant ed., *Compassion: The culture and politics of emotion*, New York/Londres, Routledge, 2004.

761 Robert Belot, *The rebirth of Europe after the war. Hopes, divisions and failure among the French Resistance*, Lausanne, Fondation Jean Monnet pour l'Europe, coll. 'Les Cahiers Rouges', 2022.

War II and would result in the creation of the European Union, was part of this desire to put an end to a cycle of violence that had begun in 1870. It is a manifestation of *geopolitical resilience*: consideration of the causes of conflict (nationalism and racism) to overcome suffering and division in order to bring about peace and reconciliation. In his *Reflections on War and Death*, Freud had indeed analysed this process of disintegration of the European bond caused by the Great War, which was bloodier and more murderous than any war in the past:

‘It hurls down in blind rage whatever bars its way, as though there were to be no future and no peace after it is over. It tears asunder all community bonds among the struggling peoples and threatens to leave a bitterness which will make impossible any reestablishment of these ties for a long time to come.’<sup>762</sup>

Resilience is precisely an attempt to restore this connection. This restoration is the basis of heritage action, which is a process of dynamic reappropriation of a past event with a view to overcoming it via creative means. In the case of Europe, this dynamic was implemented by the creation of institutions, with people continuing to play a modest role.

What has not yet been noticed is that there is a chronological concomitance between the emergence of the concept (or the notion) of resilience and the renewed interest in heritage. This also reflects the search for another temporality and other values after the cycle of the Glorious Thirties. This was also the time when environmentalism took off. Pierre Nora, the inventor of ‘lieux de mémoire’<sup>763</sup>, spoke of an explosion: ‘We are witnessing a brutal and chaotic inflation of all items of heritage. Whole swathes of new fields have become part of what is considered heritage’.<sup>764</sup> One example is the creation of the Ecomuseum of Creusot in 1974 (industrial heritage). At the end of the 1970s, there was also the research carried out by the historian Maurice Daumas within the framework of the CNAM (National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts) on the birth of ‘industrial archaeology’ as a field of research<sup>765</sup>, and the decision of the then President of the

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762 Sigmund Freud, *Reflections on war and death*, English translation by Brill and Kuttner, Moffat, Yard and Company, New York, 1918, p. 6.

763 The following translations are available: ‘places of memory’, ‘sites of memory’ or ‘realms of memory’.

764 Pierre Nora, *Présent, nation, mémoire*, Paris, Gallimard, 2011, p. 97.

765 Robert Belot, ‘The Advent of Europe’s Industrial Heritage as a Field of Research: The contribution of Maurice Daumas through the CNAM Survey’, *Ethnologies*,

French Republic, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, in 1977 to turn the Gare d'Orsay into a museum and declare 1980 Heritage Year. The warning signs of the post-industrial world were already plain to see. A whole model of development was to make way for a new modernity. We had to take an interest in what was going to die and what could be saved. At the time, we were witnessing a dilation and a 'metaphorical extension' (P. Nora) of the notion, which had hitherto been reserved for the monumental, the majestic, and the spectacular. According to Pierre Nora, at the source of this phenomenon of hypermnesia was 'the acceleration of history', which would have caused a 'sense of loss' in the face of the unpredictability of the future.<sup>766</sup> Globalisation has reinforced this feeling and has contributed to this need for a renewal of identity, and even community renewal. The dissemination of digital technology in our lives represents a revolution in our relationship to records and memories, but also the birth of a virtual heritage endowed with an infinite capacity for dissemination.

*Turning violence, injustice, and loss into heritage to ward off pain*

Recently, UNESCO touted 'resilience' as one of its ambitions, with resilience having become an attribute of heritage. When you stand in front of UNESCO's headquarters in Paris, you can read on a sign describing the missions of this UN agency: 'UNESCO World Heritage. A source of resilience, humanity and innovation'<sup>767</sup>.

However, the term very seldom appears in UN texts, and when it does it refers primarily to natural heritage. If we refer to the Basic Texts of the 1972 World Heritage Convention (UNESCO, 2019 edition), we find a text dated July 10, 2019 entitled: *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (an intergovernmental committee for the protection of world cultural and natural heritage). Two articles contain references to this concept. Article 15: 'Integrate the protection of this heritage into comprehensive planning programmes and in mechanisms for coordi-

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Laval Universitij (Canada), vol. 42, n°1–2, 2020, p. 47–88. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1074935ar>

766 P. Nora, *Présent, nation, mémoire, op.cit.*, p. 108.

767 UNESCO, in partnership with the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs (ACA), the Japanese National Institutes for Cultural Heritage (NICH), ICCROM and ICOSMOS, has organized a special session on 'Resilient Cultural Heritage' within the framework of the Third United Nations World Conference Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR), which has taken place between 14 and 18 March 2015 at Sendai, Japan.

nation, with particular emphasis on *the resilience of assets' socio-ecological systems*. Heritage appears as a potential victim, as we intend to 'combat the perils that threaten heritage'. The other article is Article 118 bis, which refers to the assessment of the environmental impact: 'This will ensure the long-term protection of outstanding universal value and *build up the resilience of heritage* to disasters and climate change.' The cruel paradox is that UNESCO has had to deal with another threat to the sites it has listed in order to protect them: anti-heritage terrorism, where heritage as such has become the target to be destroyed by culturicide movements.

Over the past ten years, current events have highlighted the geopolitical importance of heritage and cultural property.<sup>768</sup> Tragic events have made the symbolic power of cultural heritage clear to public opinion: from the protected mausoleums in Timbuktu, to the fire at the Notre-Dame de Paris and the destruction of the Monumental Arch of Palmyra. The international community has finally taken this issue into account. On September 27, 2016, the International Criminal Court issued a powerful signal when it handed down a historic judgment against the Malian jihadist who had admitted having destroyed part of the religious heritage of Timbuktu: crimes against heritage were thus recognised for the first time. While there is a need to repress such conduct, it is also necessary to repair and prevent it. For this reason, a new foundation (Aliph<sup>769</sup>) was created in Abu Dhabi in collaboration with UNESCO on March 20, 2017. The purpose of this foundation is 'the protection of endangered heritage'. However, threats are not always spectacular in dimension. The growth of trafficking in cultural property, particularly following the disorder that reigns in the Middle East, constitutes a major threat as it is a way of depriving peoples of their heritage. It was for this reason that the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution (February 12, 2015) to protect and defend cultural heritage against looting, trafficking, and destruction in all conflict zones.

Europe is fully committed to this policy: the 47 heritage ministers at the Council of Europe have launched an appeal in Namur (April 2015) for closer 'international solidarity'. The European Commission has made plans to strengthen intra-European cooperation and made a commitment (July 2017) to protecting 'World heritage'. The Commission made the decision to change the regulatory environment by proposing a crime specific to

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768 Robert Belot, 'Heritage abuse and geopolitical disorder at the dawn of the third millennium', *Ethnologies*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2018, p. 27–49.

769 Aliph: International Alliance for the protection of heritage in conflict areas.

offences involving cultural property (in connection with the fight against the financing of terrorism) and a European regulation making it possible to engage in a global effort against the illicit importation of cultural property into the EU, in conjunction with developing countries.

There is victim heritage to be protected, and there are the victims of history to be protected by making it heritage. The entries on the UNESCO World Heritage List are indicative of an evolution that echoes this trend towards victimisation and offer it new horizons. Majestic and spectacular heritage, which values the capacity of man to surpass himself, gives way to the heritage of desolation that is intended to be both a tribute to the victims and a message in favour of prevention. We can cite a few iconic examples of three types of historical violence that have received UN recognition: the island of Gorée (1978); Auschwitz (1979); and Genbaku Dome in Hiroshima (1996). An analysis of the list of cultural assets that have received the 'European Heritage' label (awarded by the European Union since 2005) reveals that six of these sites are places that symbolise the tragic heritage of Europe. The 2020 selection contains two entries (out of 10) that have a direct relationship with Europe at war (the Łambinowice Commemoration site (Poland) and the Place of Memory at Chambon-sur-Lignon (France) dedicated to the memory of the Righteous (those who helped Jews during the Nazi period), and one entry linked to the benevolence shown to the victims: the Colonies de Bienveillance (Belgium and the Netherlands). There is also the Sighet Memorial (Romania), listed in 2018, the first memorial dedicated (under this classification) to the memory of the victims of Communism. However, the philosophy of this classification aims to highlight the European dimension of cultural property, monuments, cultural sites, places of memory, etc., as witnesses of a shared history and a common culture to bring the European construct to fruition.

Turning the memory of the most tragic and violent events into heritage can be presented as a form of resilience: the recalling of a violent memory (resistance to oblivion) is a way of taking the victims and their suffering into account in a process to overcome this tragic story that ultimately serves two purposes: to repair and to prevent.<sup>770</sup> Thus, resilience does not merely mean 'consolation', withdrawal into an imaginary and nostalgic identity. It is about trying to come to terms with oneself, and with those

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770 Robert Belot, « La patrimonialisation *du pire* a-t-elle des vertus véritatives et préventives? Le Dôme d'Hiroshima comme lieu de *dé-mémoire* », *Ethnologues*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2017, p. 3–28.

who have committed violence or injustice. It is about trying to assume a loss (the loss of a person, a landscape, a tradition, an activity, etc.) in exchange for something else (well-being, etc.).<sup>771</sup> Resilience is at the heart of the difference between ‘the unconsolated’ (the person who admits loss or intolerable deprivation, but wants to turn their suffering into a claim or action) and ‘the inconsolable’ (the person who is powerless to bring about this change and recover from a loss or trauma).<sup>772</sup> Freud was clear that consolation should not be a refuge from distress in religion, withdrawal, or metaphysics, which would lead to an illusory cure.

The process of turning something into heritage is intrinsically connected to the idea that memorial distinction (a memory that assumes material form and is maintained and valued in the long-term) must serve to preserve a memory so that the future does not forget the past. This operation to ensure the survival of memory (the second attribute of turning something into heritage) is said to have a prophylactic virtue: memory must serve to forge a better future, since it would be able to protect and transform. Hence the (questionable) concept of the ‘duty of memory’.

A definition of resilience must take account of the dialectic of resistance and rebound. The word ‘resilience’ is said to derive from the Latin verb *salire*<sup>773</sup> (to jump, with the prefix ‘re’ indicating a backward movement<sup>774</sup>), while the word ‘resistance’ is said to come from the verb *stare* (to remain still, to stand, to ‘stand firm’). When applied to heritage this means to remember, to move forward, so that the worst ‘does not happen again’. Thus, heritage opens the door to the magnificent possibility of being able to heal from the worst and resist the fatality of history. The European Union could be seen as the most successful demonstration of the validity of this axiom. However, the memory of the Armenian genocide or the Holocaust, among other examples, has not prevented other contemporary genocides, such as that in Rwanda. But we can agree that at the heart of the definition of heritage there is the idea of movement, of dynamics. This is at odds with a very widespread view that heritage is synonymous with backward-looking conservative and onanistic contemplation.

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771 Michel Juffé, « La résilience : de quoi, à quoi et pour quoi? », *Annales des Mines – Responsabilité et environnement*, 2013/4 (no. 72), p. 7–11.

772 Mickaël Foessel, *Le Temps de la consolation*, Paris, Seuil, 2015.

773 “L’elasticità di *resilienza*”, *A cura di Simona Cresti, Redazione Consulenza Linguistica, Accademia della Crusca*. <https://accademiadellacrusca.it/it/consulenza/elasticita%3%A0-di-resilienza/928>

774 Serge Tisseron, *La résilience*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2009, p. 7.

*Ruins as heritage-relics and involuntary monument*

The asymmetrical wars that have followed the Cold War have renewed the arsenal of culturicide and refuelled hatred for heritage: the explosion of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001; the destruction of several mausoleums and the burning of manuscripts in Timbuktu (June-July 2012); the demolition and desecration of the mausoleum of Sage al-Shaab al-Dahmani in Tripoli, Libya (August 2012); the ransacking of the pre-Islamic heritage of the Mosul museum and burnings (February 2015); the attack on the Bardo Museum (March 18, 2015) in Tunisia; and the destruction of the Monumental Arch of Palmyra (October 5, 2015). This list is not exhaustive. The hatred of heritage has always existed. To destroy the heritage of another people is to destroy their history; it is the desire to annihilate it. On February 12, 2015, the United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution to protect and defend cultural heritage against looting, trafficking, and destruction in all conflict zones.

Europe experienced this phenomenon in the late 20th century, during the implosion of Yugoslavia.<sup>775</sup> Bosnian Serbs were not only responsible for ethnic cleansing: they committed 'monumental cleansing' through the physical elimination of Muslim symbols: during the course of the war, 614 Muslim places of worship were destroyed. In 1993, the 16th-century mosques in Banja Luka, which had been World Heritage listed, were destroyed. In Sarajevo, the Library was devastated. Traces of the multi-ethnic nature of the former Yugoslavia had to be erased. The paths to resilience have been rebuilt. In 2016, several thousand people gathered in Banja Luka, the capital of the Serbian Republic of Bosnia, one Saturday to attend the reopening of the Ferhat-Pasha mosque, a historic building destroyed during the war. Similarly, the National Library of Bosnia, which had also been destroyed, was rebuilt in its pseudo-Moorish style and inaugurated in 2014. Of the 12 million euros spent, 9 million came from the European Union. The ruined landscape has become an instrument of propaganda, a hypermediatised 'place of discourse'.<sup>776</sup>

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775 François Chaslin, *Une haine monumentale: Essai sur la destruction des villes en ex-Yugoslavie*, Paris, Descartes & Cie, 1997; Vincent Veschambre, *Traces et mémoires urbaines. Enjeux sociaux de la patrimonialisation et de la démolition*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2008.

776 Bénédicte Tratnjek, « Le paysage-spectacle dans la guerre : L'urbicide, une mise en scène de la haine dans la ville », *Secondes Journées Doctorales en Paysage*, Dec 2009, Blois, France. (halshs-00650729)



There is some good news: Courtesy of new image-processing technologies, destruction can no longer be what it used to be. Courtesy of the digital revolution, resurrection is now possible. We have seen this with the reconstruction of the Monumental Arch of Palmyra: using a 3D printer, life-size copies were made and installed in Trafalgar Square in London and in Times Square in New York in April 2016. A French company (ICONEM), a partner of parent company DYCLAM+, was created for this purpose. The United Nations, in conjunction with CERN<sup>777</sup>, has designed a technology-intensive program (UNOSAT). This program can provide imagery analysis and satellite solutions to organisations working in the fields of humanitarian activity, security, and endangered heritage.<sup>778</sup>

A choice can also be made not to rebuild or reconstitute in order to let a ruin speak, to protect the effect of desolation and amazement that only a ruin can provide. The emotional virtues of ruins were highlighted by the writer René-François de Chateaubriand (1768–1848): ‘All men have a secret attraction to ruins. This feeling is a function of the fragility of our nature, of a secret consistency between these monuments that have been destroyed and the fleeting nature of our existence.’<sup>779</sup> A ruin then becomes heritage through the choice to preserve it as a ruin. In addition to monuments that have been designed as such, one must also take into account those that have become monuments in spite of themselves, so to speak, such as industrial landscapes or equipment that have lost their value for use but could increase in cultural and memorial value through the process of heritage and social appropriation. There are the monuments that society values, glorifies, and even exploits, and there are those that it neglects, despises, and abandons. The recent *Urbex* phenomenon reflects a form of resistance to a certain inevitability of the oblivion and abandonment that may await memorials because of their status as testimony to a history that has been denied, despite the benevolent attention and resources dedicated to them.<sup>780</sup> Urban explorers, who often act illegally, are also against the current opinion

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777 CERN: the European Organization for Nuclear Research.

778 It can produce highly accurate geographical maps of areas of the world affected or threatened by natural disasters or conflict. See: ‘Empowering pacific resilience: UNOSAT’s technological and capacity building initiatives’, 28 May 2024, Geneva, Switzerland. <https://www.unitar.org/about/news-stories/news/empowering-pacific-resilience-unosats-technological-and-capacity-building-initiatives>

779 See Alain Schnapp, *Une histoire universelle des ruines. Des origines aux Lumières*, Paris, Seuil, 2020.

780 Nicolas Offenstadt, *Urbex. Le phénomène de l’exploration urbaine décryptée*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2022.

that demonises the factory as a symbol of the anthropocene: they have rediscovered the ‘poetry’ of industry celebrated by Achille Kaufmann in the *Revue de Paris* in 1853.

Yet paradoxically, these ‘involuntary’ memorials are the memorials to which society has the closest attachment. In her remarkable book – *L’Allégorie du patrimoine* – Françoise Choay stated that ‘the symbolic monument erected *ex nihilo* for the purpose of remembrance is practically no longer current in our developed societies’, and that the authentic monuments, vectors of emotion, were those that ‘do not say their name’ and ‘are concealed in unusual minimal and non-metaphorical forms’ that ‘recall a past whose weight, and, more often, horror, mean that they cannot be entrusted to historical memory alone’. A ruin is an open wound, not closed, not reintegrated into a process of normalisation or neutralisation. This is learning through affect:

‘The affective nature of the intended purpose is essential: the aim is not to make people observe or to deliver neutral information, but to use emotion to stir a living memory. (...) The specificity of the monument is therefore precisely due to its effect on memory. Monuments do not just work the memory and mobilise it through affectivity, in order to recall the past by giving it a sensitive presence.’<sup>781</sup>

This is the case of the Genbaku Dome, in Hiroshima, a ruin listed as a World Heritage Site in 1996 that symbolises one of the most tragic events of the 20th century. There are other examples that predate the Dome. One is the extermination camps invented by the Nazis, which are ‘better than abstract symbols or realistic images, better than photographs, because an integral part of the jointly-remembered drama is the concentration camps themselves, with their barracks and their gas chambers, which have become monuments.’<sup>782</sup> For France, we could cite the town of Oradour-sur-Glane, a victim of the atrocities of the Nazi occupiers, or the church of old Saint-Etienne in Caen (Normandy).

The concern for the preservation of testimony of devastation and violence was systematised during World War I. To this end, the Photographic Section of the Armies was created in 1915. One photographer, Paul Castelnau (1880–1944), specialised in photographing the destruction of the Great War. Postcards played a role in the ‘war of images’, and featured topograph-

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781 Françoise Choay, *L’Allégorie du patrimoine*, Paris, Seuil, 1992–1999, p. 14–15.

782 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

ic views of ruins. On both sides of the Western Front, the French and the Germans used these views of destruction as proof of the barbarism of the other, thus contributing to the mobilisation of the populations at war. The aim was to demonstrate the impact (human, heritage, environmental, landscape) of the war. In some cases, reconstruction proved impossible. The landscape and vegetation continued to bear the lasting scars of the war: the areas that became battlefields simply could not be returned to their original function as agricultural land (vineyards, meadows, orchards, etc.). The law of April 17, 1919 transferred ownership of these areas to the State and the Office National des Forêts was given the task of creating and developing the Verdun national forest inside red zones, on land that had been neither completely demined nor decontaminated.

In other cases, non-reconstruction is the product of a testimonial and pedagogical decision: these sites have been left in a state of ruin. In 1915, Sermaize-les-Bains (Marne) asked for the classification of its church, which had been burnt down during the Battle of the Marne between September 6 and 12, 1914, 'provided that the monument remain in ruins... so as to perpetuate the crime committed on our unfortunate country. The interior of the church would be transformed into an ossuary, and the transept into a museum of remembrance'.<sup>783</sup> As early as 1915, the Ministry of Public Instruction launched a process of reflection for the preservation of the memory of these events and their heroes: the creation of the *Commission des souvenirs et vestiges de guerre* (Commission for Memories and Traces of War). Its mission was to take regulatory account of places and monuments selected for conservation.

The ruin establishes 'relic' heritage. The underlying idea is to build resilience through visual and physical confrontation with the concrete consequences of violence of destruction.

### *The analgesic virtues of heritage action*

Heritage is generally seen as a factor in resilience because of its potential for reconciliation, mending, and 'resynchronisation'. After a disruptive event, it restores ties to produce more harmony, wards off violence, eases suffering, and provides relief from loss. Which ties? The ties between past and

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783 *Première Guerre mondiale et monuments historiques*, Direction générale du Patrimoine, Ministère de la Culture (France), novembre 2014, p. 7.

present, between individuals, between communities, and between nations. History (in the sense of the discipline) is often presented as the cardinal operator of this reconciling metamorphosis: it makes it possible to reconcile with the past and time, with oneself, and with others.

Heritage action, which plays a role in the historical process as a vector and mediator, depends of course on the event at the origin of the rupture and the desire for heritage and resilience. While the events that cause shock, fear, or suffering can be very diverse, a distinction can be made between two broad categories of disruptive event: historical events (caused by man) and natural events (beyond the control of man). Each type of event can be short-term or long-term. A 'disruptive' (or brutal) event takes place in a short time and in a limited space, and with a certain suddenness: it can be a revolt, a war (whether civil or foreign), a health crisis (Covid 19), a violent confrontation between communities, or a disaster (climate, health, or technological). An 'evolutionary' (or lasting) event can be classified as 'low intensity' as it unfolds over an average time frame (colonisation, apartheid, deindustrialisation, modernity, globalisation) or over a long time (climate change, the male/female ratio). Here, we will confine ourselves to events of a historical nature.

Patrimonialisation and reconciliation require a specific protocol that must ensure knowledge and recognition of the conflict. The process of resilience requires an awareness among the two parties in conflict, and therefore a sharing of views. This process differs from the judicial option, which will lead to one party being declared guilty and a sentence being handed down. Patrimonialisation and reconciliation must be part of a broader awareness of (and search for) 'truth' according to methodological precautions and protocols of the history of historians.

The wholesale massacres of the 20th century allowed the development of analytical models on memory and the history of the worst events.<sup>784</sup>

While the Nuremberg trial had a proven legal dimension, at the same time (and even, above all) it served the interests of a heritage issue: witnesses had to be heard and the facts recorded to build up a knowledge of Nazism and its misdeeds, to preserve it in the collective memory in the future. The numerous volumes of the trial constitute a historical-memorial paper monument of sorts that testifies to the tragedy suffered by European

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784 Jacques Semelin, *Purifier et détruire : Usages politiques des massacres et génocides*, Paris, Seuil, 2005.

populations, and are presented as a warning. This trial brought Europeans together around the rejection of liberticidal and hegemonic ideologies, and enabled them to imagine a new horizon based on the superiority and desirability of 'Western' democracy.<sup>785</sup> Many lament the fact that the fall of the Soviet empire did not result in a 'Nuremberg of Communism', i.e. a symbolically powerful moment that opened the way to a collective catharsis from knowledge of the historical phenomenon and recognition of the suffering experienced.<sup>786</sup>

Other experiences closer to us have taken place, which have shown the benefits of heritage as a source of resilience and a source upon which to draw for the restoration of social and national ties. The clear-eyed reappropriation of the past (whether recent or distant) opens the door to reconciliation/repair of oneself, with oneself, and of oneself with others. This is the case of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa (1996–1998) that was established by the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act of July 19, 1995, shortly after Nelson Mandela came to power. The main mission was to identify human rights violations since 1960 to build up a heritage of discrimination. This was also the case with the *National Unity and Reconciliation Commission* established in Rwanda (1999) after the horrible genocide of Tutsis (1994), the last wholesale massacre of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>787</sup>

A *National Commission for the Fight against Genocide* has been entrusted with compiling the memory of the genocide. Many historians have been part of this approach, which starts a process of heritagisation. Their presence bears witness to the desire to put this event into perspective, in order to make it part of a heritage dynamic. A memorial has been built. It is through this dynamic that the work of memory and mourning can develop

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785 Kim Christian Priemel, *The Betrayal: The Nuremberg Trials and German Divergence*, Oxford University Press, 2016.

786 On 25 January 2006, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a resolution on the 'need for international condemnation of the crimes of totalitarian communist regimes'. <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-FR.asp?fileid=17403&lang=FR>

787 The official website states that: 'The NUR was created in March 1999 by a parliamentary law to promote Unity and Reconciliation among Rwandans in the aftermath of the devastating 1994 genocide against Tutsis to mark a major milestone in changing, fundamentally, effects of bad governance based on discrimination and exclusion. NURC has been a pivotal institution in the process of unity and reconciliation policy implementation, social trust and social cohesion towards the main goal achievement of building a united country.'

and avoid the rut of oblivion, revenge, 'emotional contagion',<sup>788</sup> and denial. This memory policy, which mobilises civil society, serves an ambition of rebuilding institutions, national reconciliation, and prevention through the promotion of fundamental human rights, the rehabilitation of survivors, and, of course, the 'eradication of divisionist and genocidal ideology'.<sup>789</sup> The case of Rwanda illustrates the validity of what I might call *heritage squaring*: memorialisation-reparation-reconciliation-prevention.

Quite similar methods were used following the attacks of November 13, 2015. A team of scientists and historians immediately launched a campaign to record testimonies (victims and relatives of victims, direct and indirect witnesses) and interdisciplinary studies to turn this tragic event into heritage, in order to get through the trauma.<sup>790</sup> On the first National Day of Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism on March 11, 2020, in which President Macron participated, the historian Denis Peschanski, one of the initiators of the project, declared that the aim of the studies carried out was to understand the mechanisms of resilience. 'Resilience must make it possible to put the past back in its place, i.e. in the past'.<sup>791</sup> One way to accomplish this delicate transmutation is through commemoration. Drawing a comparison with how Americans have turned September 11, 2001 into part of their heritage, he observed that 'the United States has built its collective resilience around the figure of the hero', while France has built its collective resilience around the figure of the victim.

Thus, it could be said that turning something into heritage-resilience is put in the presence of the past, but of the past as a past of which we have been made aware and is assumed. It is the dominated past, not the past, that dominates the subject through nostalgia, uncontrolled intrusion, avoidance, fear, and neurosis. This transmutation requires a narration (testimony, monument, book, museum, exhibition, etc.). 'All sources of sorrow

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788 Caroline Digeon, « Répétition, remémoration et commémoration au Rwanda », in Marie-Odile Godard and Philippe Spoljar, *Le Génocide des Tutsis au Rwanda: Études cliniques*, Sarrebruck, Éditions Universitaires Européennes, 2011, p. 31.

789 Célestin Kanimba Misago, « Commission nationale de lutte contre le génocide. Contexte et perspectives », *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah*, vol. 190, no. 1, 2009, p. 437-450.

790 Denis Peschanski, Francis Eustache, « 13-Novembre », un programme de recherche inédit sur les mémoires traumatiques », *Revue de neuropsychologie*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2016, p. 155-157.

791 *Télérama*, March 11, 2020.

are bearable if you make a story out of them’, which is not always the case for some (e.g. Primo Levi).<sup>792</sup>

By putting the event suffered at a distance, the story objectivises the act of heritage and opens the way to the completion of the mourning process favoured by the reappropriation of the past and the promise of an entry in the future and of well-being. The ‘narration framework’<sup>793</sup> can take a number of forms, in particular testimonials, museums (real or virtual), designation (European Heritage), special status (UNESCO, the ‘Righteous’), memorials, monuments (whether real or virtual, such as the monument to the Parisians who died in 1914–18), and street names.

### *How to escape alibi and placebo heritage?*

We believe that patrimonialisation (i.e. bringing the past into the present as the past for the future) can be a factor in developing resilience (revival and reconciliation) after a painful event.

Of course, it all depends on the event suffered and the type of suffering or fear it has generated, and the type of claim it can trigger.

Type of event	
An international conflict	e.g. Hiroshima, Auschwitz
A civil war	e.g. The former Yugoslavia
A political system	e.g. Communism
An economic system	e.g. Industrialisation / deindustrialisation
A discriminatory policy	e.g. Apartheid, colonisation
A technological disaster	e.g. Chernobyl – Fukushima
A health disaster	e.g. Ebola, AIDS, Covid-19
A natural disaster	e.g. Tsunami – climate change

In order to be effective at fostering resilience, a heritage distinction must meet certain conditions. There are five such conditions:

- The event must put into perspective through a contextualising and problematising ‘narrative framework’ (not just a collection of artefacts or testimonies)

792 Boris Cyrulnik, *Un merveilleux malheur*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 1999.

793 Lucien Crocq, *Les traumatismes psychologiques de guerre*, Paris, O. Jacob, 1999, p. 10.

- It must respect history and its complexity (academic history)
- It must adopt a rational and non-emotional approach (the act of memory must be, as Marc Bloch wrote, ‘with reference to reason’<sup>794</sup>)
- Accessibility ensured by an appropriate didactic strategy involving consideration of the social group concerned, by involving it in the process
- The political will to make decisions

The usual pitfall is alibi heritage, the heritage of ‘good conscience’ that only provides ‘illusory cures’ and placebo effects. Take the example of the patrimonialisation of pastor Martin Luther King and his fight against racism. Admittedly, he had long been memorialised in his neighbourhood in his hometown of Atlanta. However, a further step in its incorporation into the collective memory was taken when, despite opposition from President Reagan, January 15 (his birthday) was declared a federal holiday (Martin Luther King Day) on November 2, 1983. The ultimate stage of heritage recognition was the erection of a memorial in his memory in the consecrated space that is the National Mall in Washington DC in 2011.<sup>795</sup> Luther King is the first African-American to receive such a tribute from the Nation. But has this gesture helped mitigate ‘real’ discrimination against black people in the United States?<sup>796</sup> The death of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020 and the turmoil it caused underline the extent to which African-Americans still feel insufficiently part of the national community. This is borne out by the fact that in the state of Mississippi, for example, King Day is associated with the birthday of Robert E. Lee, a general symbol of the Confederate cause, slaveowner, and white supremacist. His statue was nearly torn down in Charlottesville in 2017, sparking protests and counter-protests that resulted in the death of a young woman. A number of statues were toppled and vandalised at this time, in the United States but also across the Western world.

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794 Marc Bloch, « Souvenirs de guerre 1914–1915 », *Cahiers des Annales*, no. 26, 1969, p.9, cited by Annette Becker, *Maurice Halbwachs, un intellectuel en guerres mondiales, 1914–1945*, Agnès Viénot éditeurs, 2003, p. 159.

795 Samuel Rufat, Françoise Bahoken, Sylvestre Duroudier, Olivier Milhaud, Christian Montès et Pascale Nédélec, « Des paroles et des pierres, Martin Luther King de Washington DC au global », *Mappemonde* [En ligne], 132 | 2021.

796 D.H. Alderman, J. Inwood, ‘Street naming and the politics of belonging: spatial injustices in the toponymic commemoration of Martin Luther King Jr’, *Social & Cultural Geography*, 2013, vol. 14, n° 2, p. 211–233.



We can see that heritagisation will not always fulfil the mission of pacification attributed to it if there is no dynamic of consensus, and if politics does not take up the struggle. According to Michael Lapsley, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission established when Mandela came to power did not keep all of its promises: 'In South Africa, the error was to believe that the Commission was an end in itself, when in reality it was just the beginning'.<sup>797</sup> One example of this is the Mostar bridge in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was destroyed in 1993 by the Croats to blockade the Bosnians. Despite its reconstruction (2004) and its UNESCO designation (on the UNESCO website it says 'Creating reconciliation: Mostar Bridge'), this bridge has not restored the link between the two parts of the city and the communities (Catholic and Muslim) separated by the river. On May 2024, the United Nations established an International Day to Commemorate the Srebrenica Genocide (July 1995) to encourage 'reconciliation, now and for the future'.<sup>798</sup> This is an example of the belief in the conjuring effect of patrimonialisation. The commemoration of the past would serve a useful purpose: it would guarantee that such a tragic event (the genocide, but also, it should be added, the failure of the UN to intervene against the Serbs) would not be repeated. Nothing could be more dubious. Instead of reconciliation, this UN resolution has created dissension. Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic came to New York to fight against this 'highly politicised' initiative, which he said would 'open old wounds and cause political havoc'.<sup>799</sup>

Patrimonialisation can unite as well as divide, and perpetuate conflicting memories. Patrimonialisation can even be a point that results in the materialisation of conflicts, as is still the case in Hebron, in Palestine. Memory can heal, but it can also divide and bruise. Heritage itself is no longer sanctuary: it is sometimes contested, mutilated, or destroyed. This is because the history it claims to embody and eternalise is itself subject to confrontation, to revision, and to conflicts in interpretation as a result of new sensitivities. To illustrate our point, let us briefly analyse two contemporary examples.

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797 Michael Lapsley, *Guérir du passé. Du combat pour la liberté au travail pour la paix*, éditions de l'Atelier, 2015.

798 The resolution, prepared by Germany and Rwanda, two countries marked by other 20<sup>th</sup> century genocides, received 84 votes in favour, 19 against and 68 abstentions. <https://press.un.org/en/2024/gal2601.doc.htm>

799 <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/223954/serbia-in-un-defends-world-principles-of-international-law.php>; <https://www.rferl.org/a/un-srebrenica-resolution-bosnia-genocide/32960943.html>

Both are part of a medium-term event that is suddenly and unexpectedly resurfacing today: cultural decolonisation and demolition. The first relates to what is essentially a moral and political claim (even if it involves an object); the second concerns the way of re-examining the memorial narrative that occupies the public space in Western cities.

*The restitution of cultural property as reparation*

In recent years, heritage has become a geopolitical issue: a source of conflict (between communities, countries, and religions); the target of terrorist violence; an instrument for international cultural rebalancing; and a tool for identity reappropriation and historical reparations. The historian Pierre Nora foresaw the emergence of this kind of ‘circularity’ between heritage, memory, and identity that translates into an assertive ambition: ‘We have gone from an inherited heritage to a claimed and, if necessary, fabricated heritage’.<sup>800</sup> This intuition is illustrated by the hyper-publicised and globalised example of the restitution of cultural property acquired via dubious means during the colonial period.

This phenomenon is not new, and is part of the long history of ‘trophy archives’ to which the name of Napoleon I is attached<sup>801</sup>, but also, less well known, the French Revolution<sup>802</sup>. All countries have to a greater or lesser extent been a victim of or perpetrator in this type of spoliation and deprivation. Closer to home, we can point out the current diplomatic dispute between France and Russia relating to the theft of French archives by Nazi occupiers in 1940, then by the USSR in 1945. These archives constitute historical and memorial capital that has been stolen from France and whose return it had demanded, but are also the testimony of a tragic event (the defeat of 1940, the occupation, the draconian regime of Vichy), mingled with

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800 P. Nora, *Présent, nation, mémoire, op.cit.*, p. 112.

801 Bénédicte Savoy, *Le Patrimoine annexé. Les biens culturels saisis par la France en Allemagne autour de 1800*, Paris, Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, 2003, 2 volumes, préface de Pierre Rosenberg.

802 Fabienne Henryot, « Depuis les destructions jusqu’à l’ébauche d’une théorie patrimoniale. Les bibliothèques des départements belges pendant les guerres de la Révolution (1792–1795) », *Ethnologies*, vol. 39, 1, 2017, p. 63–83.

pain and shame, which ‘after years of secrecy, repression, and imperfect mourning’,<sup>803</sup> has entered the historisation and patrimonialisation phase.

Concerning the current movement to demand the restitution of ill-gotten cultural property, this property consists of items (objects of art, objects of worship, human bodies, etc.) that have been taken (using very diverse methods that are not always considered ‘looting’) in the past by Europe from peoples under its domination. We have noted a major change compared to *Les statues meurent aussi*, the famous short film made by Alain Resnais and Chris Marker in 1953, at the beginning of the period of de-colonisation. The aim of these filmmakers was to denounce the recovery of ‘Negro art’ by white colonisers: We had been commissioned to make a film on Negro art’, explained Resnais. ‘Chris Marker and I started with the following question: Why is Negro art in the Musée de l’Homme, but Greek and Egyptian art in the Louvre?’<sup>804</sup> This question is now outdated: We are not calling for the recognition of non-European art by European museums, but for this art to be removed and returned to the peoples who created it. What is at stake goes beyond the issue of physical restitution: the symbolic and restorative dimension prevails. Restitution is seen as a means of compensating for loss (material loss and loss in terms of identity), but also (and, above all) of coming to terms with the past in order to envisage a new future between former colonised peoples and former colonisers. Here, heritage action would perform its mission of recognition-resilience in full.

We are in the presence of a *global desire for heritage* that has gone hand-in-hand with the growth of tourism, the globalisation of behaviours, and claims to identity. Heritage can divide, but it can also be a symbolic element of rapprochement, reconciliation, and even moral reparation. In 2010, the French government returned 297 manuscripts seized in Korea by the French fleet in 1866 and Maori heads claimed by New Zealand. This resulted in protests from culture and heritage actors, who brandished the weapon of inalienability and expressed fears for the preservation of the entirety of the collections. The main threat was the proliferation of ‘political’ claims and restitutions. The restitution of heritage that has been ‘looted’ is an old demand fraught with moral, legal, historical, and diplomatic issues,

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803 Sophie Cœuré, *La mémoire spoliée. Les archives des Français, butin de guerre nazi puis soviétique*, Paris, Petite bibliothèque Payot, 2007–2013, p. 259.

804 René Vautier, Nicole Le Garrec, « *Les Statues meurent aussi* et les ciseaux d’Anastasia », *Téléciné*, vol. 175, no. 560, 1972, p. 33. Cited by: M. De Groof, « *Les Statues meurent aussi* (Chris Marker and Alain Resnais, 1953) – mais leur mort n’est pas le dernier mot », *Décadrages*, 40–42 | 2019, 72–93.

as borne out by cases (still ongoing) of theft of Jewish property by the Nazis.

However, the problem is growing today and poses a challenge to the international community, in particular Europe, which has drawn heavily on the heritage of colonised countries. In other words, apart from the heritage issue in the strict sense of the term, the restitution of works of art is fraught by the more complex and sensitive issue of repairing a past based on a balance of power. This is what Victor Hugo stated a long time ago when he challenged Europeans on the case of China, when, in 1860, the English and the French invaded the summer residence of the Emperor Xianfeng:

‘One day, two bandits entered the Summer Palace. One looted it, the other set it on fire. (...) We Europeans are the civilised people, and for us the Chinese are the barbarians. This is what civilisation has done to barbarism. In the face of history, one of the two bandits will be called France, the other England. (...) It is my hope that a day will come when France, delivered and cleansed, will return this treasure to a dispossessed China.’<sup>805</sup>

Restitution therefore often bears some similarity to *reparation*, or even compensation if there has been spoliation. It was on this basis that in the 1990s, France launched a vast operation of historical and memorial recovery that focused on the question of Jewish property looted during the Nazi occupation from 1940 to 1944. This dynamic was in line with a favourable editorial context: in 1995, two high-profile books shed new light on this issue<sup>806</sup> and encouraged movement. In 1997, the French government took the matter in hand and asked Jean Matteoli, a former member of the Resistance and the then President of the Economic and Social Council, to create a team to ‘study the mode of spoliation of Jewish property that had been seized by both the occupier and the Vichy authorities between 1940 and 1944, to assess the extent of these seizures, and to locate this property’. In 1999, a commission was set up to compensate victims of spoliations the result of anti-Semitic legislation in force during the Occupation. Despite the

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805 Victor Hugo, Letter to capitaine Butler, Hauteville House, 25 november 1861, in *Actes et Paroles. II. Pendant l'exil. 1852–1870*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1938, p. 162.

806 Lynn H. Nicholas, *The rape of Europa: the fate of Europe's treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World War*, New York, Knopf, 1994; Hector Feliciano, *Le Musée disparu. Enquête sur le pillage des œuvres d'art en France par les nazis*, Paris, Austral, 1995.

in-depth historical studies that have characterised this process of reclaiming a painful history long denied, the government is showing signs of a certain pro-active approach. In June 2017, for example, it published a *vade mecum* entitled *Le traitement des biens culturels spoliés (The treatment of looted cultural property)*.<sup>807</sup> In 2018, the French Minister of Culture set up a new mission for the restitution of spoliated Jewish property. An important report was published in the aftermath of this mission under the direction of David Zivie (an official at the Ministry of Culture): *Biens culturels spoliés pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale: Une ambition pour rechercher, retrouver, restituer et expliquer (Cultural property looted during the Second World War: An ambition to search, recover, return and explain)*.<sup>808</sup>

Thus, cultural heritage has become a historical, moral, legal, and material issue. But it also has a geopolitical dimension, sometimes giving rise to new claims and even new disputes, to which an appropriate response must be found. In his speech delivered at the University of Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso on Tuesday, November 28, 2017, the President of the French Republic revived this idea of culture as a 'remedy'. After stigmatising 'the crimes of European colonisation', the president committed himself to the 'restitution of African heritage', given that 'there is no valid, lasting, and unconditional justification' for the fact that for the most part African heritage is held in 'private collections and European museums'. We must be prepared for this prospect. The process is under way, with the restitution of 26 works taken from Benin by the Musée du Quai Branly. While the first line of reactions and claims is underpinned by the apparent simplicity of ethics and politics, a barrage of questions arises when one ventures beyond the discourse and postures.

The emergence of this claim sometimes suggests that the phenomenon is recent. One question, which is important but is as little addressed as it is known, is: what is the history of the protest movement among colonised peoples? Is this movement confined to Africa? Should heritage be returned? Permanently or temporarily? What can/must be returned? Do we know the history of objects, the processes by which they were extracted from their place of origin, and how they were acquired? How should heritage items be returned and to whom, in the knowledge that the tribal system is not nec-

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807 <https://www.conseildesventes.fr/flipbooks/2017/vademecum-biens-spolies/index.html#p=16>

808 [https://www.lootedart.com/web\\_images/pdf2019/Rapport biens spoliés D. Zivie – version définitive – juillet 2018.pdf](https://www.lootedart.com/web_images/pdf2019/Rapport_biens_spolies_D._Zivie_-_version_définitive_-_juillet_2018.pdf)

essarily aligned with the state-national structure of the claiming countries, which moreover has been inherited from the culture of former colonies? Can we envisage a new type of cultural and museum cooperation between Europe and former colonies that does not necessarily involve physical restitution? Can the use of digital technology enable virtual restitution through, for example, digital museums? What are the legal, diplomatic, and technical conditions of this movement for restitution? How can the cultural actors of the countries to which the works will be returned be trained to preserve the integrity of said works? Is there not a risk of de-universalisation<sup>809</sup> of cultural goods and the nationalisation of heritage for identity purposes?

The failure to adopt a truly historical approach in these re-patrimonialisation processes can lead to forms of guilt and moral reflection that aid the search for 'truth' and maintain memorial conflict. We have demonstrated this in the case of Hiroshima and for the return of cultural property with 'Champollion syndrome'.<sup>810</sup>

### *Demolition as 'deconditioning' of the public memorial space*

The demolition of statues and 'vandalism', a form of violent rewriting of history, is a recurring phenomenon in human history: it has accompanied wars, conflicts, and political and religious change. France has experienced such destruction of its heritage on a number of occasions, such as during the German occupation (1940–1945), when the Vichy regime or the Nazi occupier purged its statue heritage by destroying or melting down (when bronze) statues that were deemed politically harmful; thus disappeared statues of Garibaldi, Admiral Bruat, and Gambetta, the monument to the aeronauts of the siege of Paris and to the heroes of the post, telegraphs, railways, and many others. Moreover, it was to fight this political violence that France, at the time of the French Revolution and thanks to the action of Abbé Grégoire, invented the idea of the legal protection of heritage. What from an old order that the people reject should be removed? What should be retained? Under what conditions? The issue has arisen on a large scale in post-colonial societies and in post-communist Europe. The

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809 Chantal Delsol, *Le crépuscule de l'Universel. L'Occident postmoderne et ses adversaires, un conflit mondial des paradigmes*, Paris, Les éditions du Cerf, 2020; Amine Boukerche, *L'universalisme contesté*, Rennes, éditions Apogée, 2024.

810 See Note 663.

last gasp of this 'de-communisation' and 'de-canonisation'<sup>811</sup> movement was the decision of the Kyiv mayor's office on April 26, 2022 to demolish a Soviet-era historical monument celebrating the friendship between Ukraine and Russia, after the invasion of Ukraine launched by Moscow in February 2022. This 8-metre bronze statue ensemble, which was erected in 1982, featured a Russian worker and a Ukrainian worker holding a Soviet symbol bearing the inscription *Friendship between peoples*. Some 60 monuments, bas-reliefs, and signs associated with the USSR and Russia are being dismantled, while more than 460 streets have been renamed.

This destruction of heritage was particularly pronounced during the second decade of the 21st century, with the destructive actions of Daesh in the Middle East. It disproved the Austrian writer Robert Musil, who noted that no one was interested in public statues:

'Among other peculiarities that [they] can boast about, the most noteworthy is the fact that paradoxically, they are not noticed. There is nothing in the world more invisible than these statues. There can be no doubt, however, that they are not erected to be seen, but to attract attention; however, at the same time they are waterproofed, in a sense, and attention is showered on them like water on an impregnated garment, without dwelling on them for a single moment'.<sup>812</sup>

This phenomenon is consistent with the twofold movement of digital globalisation and the reclamation of dominated memories. The aim is to destroy material commemorative signs that occupy public spaces and constitute an urban historical narrative. However, this is what I would call 'creative destruction', unlike the nihilistic anti-heritage tendency of terrorist Islamism. Indeed, the challenge is to denounce a vision of history that gives prominence to iconic figures that have become unacceptable within the framework of an alternative narration of this history that calls on other values, other figures, and other events. On June 16, 2020, on the base of the statue of Joseph Gallieni, the Marshal of France, in Paris, there was graffiti

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811 Yuliya Yurchuk, « Dé-canonisation du passé soviétique : abject, kitsch et mémoire en Ukraine », in Sarah Gensburger & Jenny Wüstenberg, *Dé-commémoration. Quand le monde déboulonne des statues et renomme les rues*, Paris, Fayard, 2023, p.128 – 134.

812 Cited by Daniel Fabre, « Introduction. Habiter les monuments », *Les monuments sont habités* [online]. Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2010 (generated May 28, 2022).

that read as follows: 'Let's debunk the official narrative'. Gallieni is a hero of World War I, but also a symbol of colonisation, in Madagascar in particular.

Since the mid-1970s, a movement has been developing in the West to redress the 'silences of history'<sup>813</sup> and give a voice to the 'invisible'. A new call for memory and recognition is developing around new categories of victims presumed to have been 'forgotten by history': slaves and colonised, 'first' or 'indigenous' peoples, women<sup>814</sup>. In Canada, to cite just this example, a re-reading of history is in progress following the rise of social interest in 'indigenous peoples', i.e. peoples who have been colonised by Europeans. Museums have been dedicated to these peoples. In August 2017, John A. Macdonald, the very first head of government of the Canadian federation 150 years ago, was called into question. The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario called for all schools in the province with 'John-A.-Macdonald' in their name to be renamed, recalling that he was 'the architect of the genocide perpetrated against the Aboriginal peoples'.<sup>815</sup> A national inquiry has been launched into 'Missing and murdered indigenous women and girls'.<sup>816</sup>

Another underlying issue, but which is rarely expressed as such, is the 'making of urban heritage' other than by resorting to 'hero' figures, heroes who are often soldiers (Lee, Faidherbe, Bugeaud, Gallieni, etc.) and referring to a warrior history that is over-represented in the statues on display. 'Personified monumentality'<sup>817</sup> is one method of evoking history that is now being called into question. In this sense, the wave of statue-toppling can have a beneficial effect. We should take inspiration from the sculptor Auguste Bartholdi, who, to represent the heroic defeat of Colonel Denfert-Rochereau and his men against the Prussians in 1870, imagined a lion in the 'quiet strength' mode.<sup>818</sup> The aim should be to 'de-heroise' and 'decondition' memory. It should also be to present history other than through, to quote

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813 Michelle Perrot, *Les femmes ou le silence de l'histoire*, Paris, Flammarion, 1998

814 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York, Routledge, 1990–2006; Éric Fassin, « Le genre aux États-Unis et en France », *Agora débats/jeunesses*, 41, 2006. Jeunes, genre et société, p. 12–21.

815 <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/here-is-what-sir-john-a-macdonald-did-to-indigenous-people>

816 [https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Final\\_Report\\_Vol\\_2\\_Quebec\\_Report-1.pdf](https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Final_Report_Vol_2_Quebec_Report-1.pdf)

817 Laure Murat, *Qui annule quoi?*, Paris, Seuil Libelle, 2022, p. 22.

818 See Chapter 1.



Fernand Braudel, ‘quintessential heroes’<sup>819</sup>. This is the case in particular given that every ‘hero’ has their dark side, including Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Victor Schœlcher, Churchill, and Gandhi. However, we must not forget that there are ‘heroes’ to whom monuments have been erected and who have expressed an ideology that is openly contrary to the values system on which democracies are based, creating a contradiction that protest movements bring to light. The intention of any personalised monument that presents a man as an example is to ‘edify’ history. It is precisely for this reason that in Belgium, statues of Leopold II are the subject of lively and recurring challenges from anti-colonialists, and that, referring to colonial policy, the figure of Jules Ferry in France is also increasingly pilloried. Jules Ferry is an iconic figure in French republican mythology for having, at the turn of the 1880s, eliminated the influence of the Church on schools and instituted fundamentally secular education. But since the early 2000s, it is the memory of the coloniser who did not believe in the equality of races that has dominated.<sup>820</sup> France has also been confronted with ‘statues of discord’ by a re-reading of the history of slavery and colonisation that has resulted in vandalism and destruction.<sup>821</sup> But the issues at stake in ‘cancel culture’ must be of concern to the social sciences: why should the debunkings indicate, not a desire to erase history, but a demand for a paradigm shift in our readings of history, which would be a return to the epistemological revolution proposed by Fernand Braudel<sup>822</sup>? The ‘cancel culture’ carries with it the crisis of the ‘great men’<sup>823</sup>.

In the United States, it is the dominated memory of African-Americans that claims its place in the symbolic public space. However, it is also the will to fight against a system that expresses a racist vision of history. There, moral reparation involves the suppression of heritage. This phenomenon gained traction with the ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement<sup>824</sup>, which was founded in 2013 following the acquittal of the police officer who killed

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819 Fernand Braudel, « Les responsabilités de l’Histoire », *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie*, vol. 10, 1951, p.3 – 18.

820 Carole Reynaud Paligot, *La République raciale, 1860–1930*, Paris, PUF, 2006.

821 Jacqueline Lalouette, *Les statues de la discorde*, Passés/Composés-Humensis, 2021.

822 Emmanuel Furiex, « Déboulonnages et dévoilements : l’histoire en morceaux? », *Écrire l’histoire*, 20–21 | 2021, 229–232.

823 Jacqueline Lalouette, *Un peuple de statues. La célébration sculptée des grands hommes (1804-2018)*, Paris, Mare et Martin, 2018.

824 Brianne McGonigle Leyh, ‘Imperatives of the Present: Black Lives Matter and the politics of memory and memorialization’, *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights*, 38(4), 239–245.

black teenager Trayvon Martin. In 2015, 20-year-old Dylann Roof killed nine black people at a church in Charleston, South Carolina, which sparked a movement to remove the Confederate flag from public buildings. This flag was created in 1861, when the 11 Southern states seceded from the Union. It has become the symbol of slavery. South Carolina then decided to remove the flag from public spaces. This decision led to demonstrations, in particular by the Ku Klux Klan. This emblem was worn by some of the individuals involved in the siege on the Capitol in Washington on January 6, 2021. In Charlottesville on August 12, 2017, white supremacist activists (Unite the Right Rally) gathered around the statue of General Lee, the General in Chief of the Armies of the Confederate States. The statue was erected in 1924. This prompted a counter-protest, at which a young woman, Heather Heyer, was killed. She, in turn, would become a heroine of the fight against racism. The fire was smouldering beneath the ashes.

In May 2017, Mitch Landrieu, the mayor of New Orleans, decided to enforce the municipal decision to remove Confederate statues (Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, P.G.T. Beauregard) from his city, including one erected in favour of a racist association, the White League. Controversy arose: By removing these statues from public spaces, wasn't the mayor of New Orleans denying history? He correctly countered that these statues were designed and erected as ideological messages and not as a testimony to history. On May 19, 2017, Landrieu made an impassioned speech about why he was removing these statues in his city:

'The statues were not honoring history, or heroes. They were created as political weapons, part of an effort to hide the truth, which is that the Confederacy was on the wrong side of not just of history, but of humanity. The monuments helped distort history, putting forth a myth of Southern chivalry, the gallant "Lost Cause", to distract from the terror tactics that deprived African Americans of fundamental rights from the Reconstruction years through Jim Crow until the civil rights movement and the federal court decisions, of the 1960s.'<sup>825</sup>

We have discovered that the Confederate memory has been the subject of a policy of systematic lobbying to build and develop a public heritage around Confederate values since the end of the 19th century. The spearhead of this movement was the Southern Women's Heritage Association, which was

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825 <https://www.milwaukeeindependent.com/featured/the-problem-with-white-america-as-enduring-love-affair-of-the-confederacy/>

created in Nashville in 1894 to officially commemorate Confederate soldiers and fund the erection of memorials. The ‘Daughters of the Confederacy’ donated a stained glass window to the Washington National Cathedral in 1953. This stained glass window represents General Lee. In September 2017, cathedral officials launched a debate in the parish community on whether the presence of this stained glass window was ‘appropriate’ in this ‘sacred’ place.

The finding is clear: the process of patrimonialisation is fraught with ideological issues, where history is instrumentalised. The Confederates lost the war, but did not recognise their defeat (they referred to the war as ‘the War of Northern Aggression’). This civil war led to the death of 620,000 soldiers: 360,000 Unionist soldiers and 260,000 Confederacy soldiers. Despite his surrender at Appomattox on April 9, 1865, General Lee became a hero. The Confederates did not renounce their ‘sacred cause’, i.e. the fight for racism. They may have lost the War of Secession,<sup>826</sup> but wanted to win the ideological war. This memorial battle of revenge involves a statuary narrative structuring the public space; in fact, it could be said that there has been a ‘victory of Southern memory at the national level’.<sup>827</sup> There are 1,500 monuments dedicated to the Confederates. Yet many of these monuments were erected well after the Civil War, in two waves: from the 1890s to the 1930s, and from the 1950s to the mid-1960s. As the historian Jane Dailey (University of Chicago) put it, in many cases the purpose of these monuments was not to celebrate the past, but rather to promote a ‘future white supremacy’<sup>828</sup>. At the end of the 19th century, ‘dominant whites crafted a cohesive narrative designed to entrench their superiority in the South’.<sup>829</sup> And it is this instrumentalisation of history that is denounced by the current proponents of the policy of toppling statues.

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826 Duncan Andrew Campbell, « La guerre de Sécession », *Revue d'histoire du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 35 | 2007, 141–159.

827 Marie-Jeanne Rossignol, « Les statues des confédérés dans l’espace public aux États-Unis : Pourra-t-on en finir avec une mauvaise cause? », *Transatlantica* [Online], 1 | 2017, Online since November 27, 2018.

828 Jane Dailey, ‘Baltimore’s Confederate monument was never about “history and culture”’, *The Huffington Post*, 17 August 2017.

829 Robert J. Cook, *Civil War Memories: Contesting the Past in the United States since 1865*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017.

Is 'hiding the offence' not unlike 'hiding the story'?<sup>830</sup> However, removing a heritage symbol is not akin to erasing history, since history has other places and other methods to express itself. Moreover, this wave of questioning public statues has been an opportunity for Americans to be confronted with their past (the reactivation of the memory of a civil war and a memorial conflict), with their present (the integration of African-Americans), and the philosophical foundations of their democracy. It has been found that the 1776 Declaration of Independence includes the following sentence: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creators with certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.' There has been a desynchronisation effect of American memory. The rise of the white supremacist movement and the wave of statue-toppling coincided with President Obama's inauguration of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., a decision made by G.W. Bush in 2003.

Black Live Matter' is perhaps less a moment than a long-term movement. It tells us something about the 'circularity' that links history, memory and heritage. In effect, this socio-political movement, specific to one country, has become a global phenomenon, formalising the demand for a different kind of memory and a different kind of world history, a more inclusive history<sup>831</sup>.

This example illustrates the ambivalence and the reversibility of heritage and of its uses: it can unite, but it can also maintain the 'clash of memories'<sup>832</sup> and even provoke violence. This violence can, in turn, carry a promise of reconciliation and reparation, and embody a call to make history differently. As Kristin Ross says, we need to 'unlearn what we think we know about the past', because 'the past is unpredictable'.<sup>833</sup>

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830 Anne Lafont, « Violences monumentales. Peut-on désarmer les symboles ? », *Esprit*, May 2022, no. 2022, p. 88.

831 Kathryn Speckart, *Black Lives Matter and the Push for Colonial-Era Cultural Heritage Restitution*, 72 *Cath. UL Rev.* 99, 2023. <https://scholarship.law.edu/lawreview/vol72/iss2/8>

832 William Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.

833 Kristin Ross, « Le passé est imprévisible », *Ballast*, 3 novembre 2020. <https://www.revue-ballast.fr/kristin-ross-le-passe-est-imprevisible/>

## Conclusion

Contrary to popular belief, it could be said that heritage in itself does not exist in the sense that it is not the inviolable, indisputable, and immutable refuge of the memory of societies: it is a reflection of a society at a given time. Recent events calling into question a dominant patrimonial heritage illustrate the thesis according to which heritage 'is caught in the historical process of continuous adjustment of the values that govern collective life'.<sup>834</sup> If heritage has a virtue of resilience, should one not ask what suffering it can bring to an end, and how it could do this? The suffering of what has disappeared or will disappear; the pain of death, loss, or destruction; the suffering of abandonment, indifference, and contempt. This suffering can concern people, nations, the environment (material and immaterial), and ways of life. It can be experienced individually or collectively. We can also evoke the suffering of the non-recognition of past suffering (discrimination, colonial domination, loss of territory or identity, the death of one's family, absence, etc.). Its main source is trauma that has been denied, not recognised as heritage, and not assumed.

The resilient strength of heritage action is precisely this ability to recognise what caused suffering in order to overcome it, to overcome the past, and to resynchronise the time before and the time after. Thus, heritage is also a process of remembering the suffering associated with disappearance, oblivion, contempt, and denial. There would thus be a relationship between resilience and 'reliance', i.e. this 'chronophanic' possibility of linking the past and the present for a future presented as better. Reconnecting with the past to unravel suffering, thwart loss, and reinvent the future by rebuilding, by 'repairing'.

For the appropriation of the collective memory of pain or loss as heritage to be able to have a 'resilience' effect, as described in this document, a set of conditions must be met so that the return to the past is not an alibi, a manipulation, or a placebo. At the same time, it is important not to overestimate the capacity to reconcile and repair heritage by attributing magical powers to it. Jacques Lacan's warning is still valid today: 'We do not remember because we are cured. We are cured because we remember.'<sup>835</sup>

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834 Anne Lafont, « Patrimoines contestés », *Esprit*, May 2022, no. 2022, p. 39.

835 Cited by Adam Philips, *On Flirtation*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1994, p. 67.