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Kate Elkins

Kenyon College, elkinsk@kenyon.edu

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Middling Memories and Dreams of Oblivion: Configurations of a Non-Archival Memory in Baudelaire and Proust

Katherine Elkins

Part One: Science versus Art: From the Modern to the Classical

If I ask you to remember a particular event from your childhood, do you remember mere fragments—certain colors, smells, or sounds? Or do you remember entire scenes that appear whole and intact—a certain summer day, or a winter evening? Perhaps, you would argue, it depends on the memory. Sometimes you remember a complete image; at other times you remember only isolated fragments. If you think this, you would have the support of many philosophers. Aristotle, for example, insists on the difference. A remembrance stores the past event entirely intact. A reminiscence preserves only a fragment. Proust's famous distinction between voluntary memory and involuntary memory revolves around this same difference. For the most part, Proust's narrator remembers only with the assistance of a feeble voluntary memory. This memory fails to truly restore the past, substituting only a lifeless remnant. Whole regions of the past remain immersed in the shadows of oblivion. But there are moments when the past miraculously returns whole and unfragmented, preserved with its entire atmosphere as though even the surrounding air had been captured in a bottle.

Up until recently, the debate has tended to revolve around this opposition: remembrance versus reminiscence, whole versus fragmentary. The stronger of the pair, remembrance, is important for grounding classical notions of the subject. The self's sense of continuity, one could argue, depends on an act of remembering that links past selves to the present. The present self is intimately tied to past selves in a continuous and unbroken line of development.

Recently, however, scientists like Edmund Bolles and Daniel Schacter have developed a very different model of memory.¹ This model calls into question the existence of a pure form of remembrance that would bring back the past completely. All memories, many scientists now suspect, fall into the category of isolated, partial, reminiscences. These memories allow us to remember past selves only in a fragmentary and discontinuous way. According to this new model, the self is experienced as connected to a past only through chance, momentary recollections that are always fragmentary. Interspersed with these fragmentary recollections are forgotten segments of our past that we leave behind as we move forward in time. Surrounding momentary recollections, then, are the shadowy stretches of oblivion. We are defined as much by what we forget as what we remember.

Remembrance or strong memory relies on an understanding of memory that is largely archival: we store the entire past, perfectly preserved, as in an archive. This new model, however, is distinctly non-archival. We do not store the entire past, and what we do store is dispersed in multiple regions of the brain. Remembering is always an act of recollecting fragments scattered across these different regions. We must reassemble these fragments into a coherent, seamless memory. Often, of course, key elements are missing. In these instances, the gaps are filled in through a process of invention and subtle revision. The memories created to fill these gaps are continually revised through a process of evaluation based on recognition. We might think we are comparing our "memory" with some "original" stored away in a central archive. But we are really evaluating the invented memory retrospectively. If we "recognize" it, we accept it as "true." If we do not, we revise the memory slightly and reevaluate once more.

What I have just described is a model for memory that scientists have termed non-computational. The implications are tremendous, for this model contradicts the possibility that we store all of the past, just as a computer stores data on a hard drive. Not only does memory fail to store the entire past, it is even highly probable that we store less than we think. While some memories are dispersed in the brain in fragmentary form, a multitude of experiences leave nothing behind. Or better put, these experiences change us—

sometimes profoundly—without leaving records of the events that have brought about the change. The self, in other words, continually adapts and changes in response to environmental stimuli without storing records of all these stimuli. This model of memory privileges continual change and adaptation, and depends on recognition over pure remembrance. We remember a past event or image not by locating it within our mind, stored in our memorial archive. Rather, we piece together a memory that is recollected only after encountering a fragment that reminds us of it in the external world.

One of the difficulties of talking about memory is that the mind has little awareness of how it works. This is especially true when memory seems to function well. If I ask you to remember something and you have no difficulty in doing so, you will probably be unable to tell me how you remembered. Did you search your archive of memories and alight on the proper one? Or did you rely on my question as a trigger for recollecting a largely unarchived event that you then partially recreated? Imagine, however, cases in which memory does not function so seamlessly. Imagine, for example, that I taste a cookie and immediately recognize the taste as familiar. As I search my memory, however, I am unable to find a fragment of a past experience that would explain its familiarity. In this case, the inability to locate the memory provides the glimpse of the possibility that my archive is empty. In trying to remember, I am not aware of searching a hard drive or archive for all the instances of past cookies. I do not, as far as I can tell, remember all the various cookies I have eaten and their attendant circumstances. Rather, I experience the search as one that leaves me unable to say why or how I recognize the cookie as familiar.

If I do manage to recognize the cookie—for it is just like one that I ate at my Aunt's house—this does not mean that the scene I then recreate is entirely accurate. According to Edmund Bolles, this memory will undergo numerous modifications and reevaluations depending on how comfortable I feel with all of the details that I *do not* recognize. While remembering, there is a continual looping process—modification followed by re-evaluation—that continues until I “recognize” the recollection. An artistically inclined person, he speculates, would continue the looping process for quite a while, leading to a sense of “timelessness” while remembering temporarily suspends the intake of any new perceptions.² My artistically inclined reader will, by this time, have recognized *my* story as that of Proust's *petite madeleine* from *A la recherche du temps perdu*. While the sense of timelessness produced by the experience of the *petite madeleine* has long been read as proof of the narrator's archived self, I am suggesting that it might actually be the intimation of another, non-archival

conception of memory. Perhaps this experience should be reconsidered as the recollection of memories scattered across various sites. Perhaps, as recent scholarly work has suggested, it is composed of memorial fragments, among them texts the author read in *lycée*.³ For the moment, what is important is that even the descriptions of memory that Proust fictionalizes as the most personal are actually memories of others, disguised as the narrator's own. Recollection thus actually blurs the distinction between what belongs to the self and what belongs to others. Indeed, the *petite madeleine* begs the question: what is the difference between what one has read and what one has personally experienced? When Proust's narrator reassembles a memory from diverse scattered fragments, many are fictitious not just because they are invented, but because they derive from other fictions. If the *petite madeleine* gives the narrator a sense of temporal depth, I would argue, it is because the fragments re-collected date back to a multitude of pasts, both fictional and real.

The writers I will be discussing—Baudelaire and Proust—cannot be said to develop a new model of memory in any purely scientific fashion. Nonetheless, viewing them through the prism of a non-computational model reveals the co-existence of multiple, almost contradictory conceptions of how memory works in their texts. Both Baudelaire and Proust assert the possibility of an archived past, and most of the key studies on these writers focus on evidence of this older, archival model of memory. To the extent that writers like Baudelaire and Proust have been read for a conception of memory, they have been read primarily as confirmation of an archived past. This model would confirm that we all store the past archived with us, if only we could find the magic key, our own Proustian *petite madeleine*, to unlock the archive. Forgetting, according to this conception, is relegated to problems of retrieval. With the right fragrance, taste or smell, the archive is unlocked, and the past floods back in all its detail.

I read these authors for a very different conception of memory evident in their more pessimistic moments. In contrast to Proust's more optimistic assertions about memory are the many moments when the narrator realizes he has adapted and changed without remembering all of the experiences that have brought about this change. The story of this other, forgetful side of human nature suggests the self to be as defined by forgetting as by remembering. Just as a plant bends towards the light, Proust's characters adapt to their environment without necessarily preserving records of all the experiences that have changed them. This adaptation, moreover, relies on the remarkable powers of a forgetfulness that permits them to change without constantly forcing them into an awareness of their dissimilarity to past selves

This artful forgetting, or as Umberto Eco calls it, an *ars oblivionalis*, holds increasing allure for the writers I investigate precisely because the failures of memory, not its successes, reveal the emptiness of the archive model. As I just mentioned, archival memory relegates forgetfulness to failures of retrieval. Given the right key, we might unlock an archived memory and return to some lost, enchanted past. There is the growing sense, however, that memory may not archive the entire past. If this is the case, forgetfulness serves as a reminder that the archive is empty. Today's self may disappear without leaving any kind of permanent record. Non-archival memory, in other words, brings with it the knowledge of the force of an oblivion that shapes us at least as profoundly, if not more so, than memory. This pessimism, however, does not lead to a dead end, to a "crisis of memory" as others have termed it. Rather, the writers I examine develop new conceptions of how memory might function if it does not in fact archive the past entirely.

Part Two: The Crisis of Memory and a New Art

Nineteenth-century France, it has been argued, experiences what has been termed a "memory crisis." This crisis is often portrayed as an increasing awareness that memory no longer provides the key to understanding the present. Among the more compelling explanations are two that seem especially relevant. First, nineteenth-century citizens of France live in the shadow of a French Revolution that shows past and present to be radically different.⁴ Second, inhabitants of mid-century Paris live in a world that has undergone a profound shift towards an increasingly industrialized, capitalist society. Walter Benjamin thus suggests that an internal change has occurred. In essays like *The Storyteller* and *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, he outlines a crisis in perception and memory brought about by profound changes in the way we experience the world. The disappearance of an earlier way of life—a life in which the storyteller played a central role—is replaced by an isolated individual whose mode of experience, and thus remembering, is less profound. Following this same kind of reasoning, Pierre Nora argues for a profound shift in the way people remember in nineteenth-century France. A memory place, usually a monument, becomes a site where memory is archived or stored precisely because the culture as a whole has become increasingly forgetful.

These accounts, however, fail to examine this crisis within the larger context of scientific discourse in the nineteenth century. Ian Hacking, for example, argues that over the course of the century,

examinations into the nature of the soul are gradually replaced by scientific investigations of memory. Daniel Schacter notes, moreover, that by the close of the nineteenth century, scientists have actually graphed curves of forgetting. Memorial retention has come under analysis, and memory has not performed well. It is not that forgetfulness is increasing, in other words, but that people are becoming ever more aware of its force.

I am therefore suggesting a very different explanation from those offered above: the “memory crisis” occurs precisely at the juncture when writers like Baudelaire perceive the old, archival model of memory to be unequal to their own experience. At the same time, a new conception of how memory might function has not yet emerged. It is not that Baudelaire actually remembers differently. Instead, he understands the *act* of remembering differently. Walter Benjamin is right that the small village storyteller is representative of a life in which an individual’s past is continually reinforced by familiar people, places, and perhaps even a communal storyteller. I would not limit storytelling to a central figure, however, but expand it to the process whereby an individual’s experiences are dispersed and distributed within a larger community, whether via gossip at the local market or around the family hearth after dinner. Baudelaire’s poet, by contrast, is a solitary figure. He encounters a Paris undergoing such rapid and constant change that Heraclitus’ famous saying—one can never step into the same river twice—would seem to apply equally well to his walk through the city. Charles Baudelaire, as Kevin Newmark so aptly argues, writes a poetry that reflects the shocks of everyday life on the streets of this new, radically different, nineteenth-century Paris. External triggers that would remind him of the past are replaced by the shock of the radically new.

The crisis of memory, then, emerges first in large urban areas where the rapid disappearance of the present provokes fears that memory may be unequal to the task of preserving what has disappeared. Gone are the community and the constant, relatively unchanging atmosphere of people and places that normally serve as memory-triggers. As a consequence, inhabitants of mid-nineteenth-century Paris like Baudelaire are increasingly aware of how much they have forgotten. This crisis of memory is brought on by historical circumstances that make increasingly obvious the inadequacy of an earlier archival conception of memory. The burden of memory—formerly distributed amongst a community—becomes a solitary burden. Individual memory, moreover, shows itself inadequate to the task. Absent those triggers—those people, places, and stories that help create a sense of continuity with past selves—the crisis of memory is perhaps nothing more than the anxiety atten-

dant on an increasing awareness of a series of worlds and selves that are lost forever.

This crisis, as I suggested earlier, leads to a reformulation of the relationship between art and memory. While this “art of memory” is new, the idea of memory as an art dates back to antiquity when the term art of memory, or *ars memorativa* first appeared.⁵ Most scholars see its origins in Aristotle’s metaphor of memory as an architectural space. An art of memory was thought to replicate the natural memory process by purposefully placing things to be remembered in specific places. Quintillian describes the process thus: “when we return to a place after a considerable absence, we not merely recognise the place itself, but remember things that we did there, and recall the persons whom we met and even the unuttered thoughts which passed through our minds when we were there before.” Places serve as place holders for memories. An art of memory makes use of specific sites in the same fashion in order to locate, and therefore fix, certain memories. In order to make use of an art of memory, Quintillian writes, “we require therefore places, either real or imaginary, and images or simulacra which must be invented.” Here is a description of how it works:

Places are chosen, and marked with the utmost possible variety, as a spacious house divided into a number of rooms. Everything of note therein is diligently imprinted in the mind, in order that thought may be able to run through all the parts without let or hindrance. The first task is to resecure that there shall be no difficulty in running through these, for that memory must be most firmly fixed which helps another memory. Then what has been written down, or thought of, is noted by a sign to remind of it. This sign may be drawn from a whole “thing”, as navigation or warfare, or from some “word”; for what is slipping from memory is the recovered by the admonition of a single word. However, let us suppose that the sign is drawn from navigation, as, for instance an anchor; or from warfare, as, for example, a weapon. These signs are arranged as follows. The first notion is placed, as it were, in the forecourt; the second, let us say, in the atrium; the remainder are placed in order all round the impluvium, and committed not only to bedrooms and parlours, but even to states and the like. This done, when it is required to revive the memory, one begins from the first place to run through all, demanding what has been entrusted to them, of which one will be reminded by the image. Thus, however numerous are the particulars which it is required to remember, all are linked to one another as in a chorus nor can what follows wander from what has gone before to which it is joined, only the preliminary labour of learning being required. (22)

While the memories are linked in a certain order, an art of spatial placement actually enables one to move about amongst memories in any particular order. The architectural space in classical times was most often a house, as Quintillian notes above, although it “can

also be done in public buildings, or on a long journey, or in going through a city, or with pictures.” In the Middle Ages the architectural space was most often a cathedral.

Echoes of a classical art of memory appear in Proust’s famous metaphor of his work of art as a cathedral, a grand architectural space that houses the narrator’s memories. Less optimistically, Baudelaire laments a quickly-changing Paris in his poem “Le Cygne” (97). Quintillian’s model depends on assigning fleeting, unstable memories to architectural places that do not change over time. In Baudelaire’s rapidly changing urban landscape, the disappearance of spatial sites echoes the fleeting nature of memories that appear and then fade just as quickly. In nineteenth-century Paris, in other words, Quintillian’s city as memory-site no longer remains stable enough to serve as a memorial place holder.

Baudelaire’s lament suggests an awareness that the classical art of memory no longer seems entirely appropriate to the modern age. Places no longer remain stable enough to function as memorial archives. But there are other differences as well. For Baudelaire, memories like those in “Le Cygne” pile up in a confused jumble rather than remaining in separate and distinct spaces. This is no classical art of memory that would enable the speaker to move back and forth amongst memories at will. Instead, the speaker of the poem is borne along, almost against his will, on a stream of memories. This modern art of memory, in other words, replaces a spatial metaphor with one that is acutely temporal. The classical metaphor is of a timeless, archival space in which images are secured for retrieval at any future date. This archival, spatial model is replaced by one that is acutely temporal in nature. Memories depend on chance encounters in time rather than eternal, spatial placement. They are linked together not by spatial contiguity, moreover, but by a temporal chain of succession. While the classical art of memory relies on a spatial configuration, allowing one to move backwards and forwards from any particular starting space, this temporal art of memory is profoundly linear. As these memories succeed each other, they obscure the earlier ones. Each new memory that arises partially obscures the vision of the previous one that it succeeds.

Concomitant with the emergence of a non-archival memory is the growing awareness, as I mentioned earlier, of what I term an *ars oblivionalis*.⁶ The art of memory is an artful, perhaps even artificial bridge that gives the illusion of a continuous self extending from the past into the present. Isolated, different selves are actually punctuated by gaps of forgetfulness, gaps that it is memory’s purpose to bridge. Between an initial impression of an event and its subsequent recollection lies a stretch of forgetfulness. Remembering casts a

bridge between these two moments, giving the impression that the memory has been there all along, continuously archived. Thus we might believe the self to be composed precisely in those elements remembered. The emergence of an art of forgetting, however, affords glimpses of a vast non-archived self comprised of past selves that have faded, at least for a time, into oblivion.

The final difference between a modern art of memory and a classical one appears in the reformulation of the self. The old, classical art of memory unifies or centers the self, enclosing the past in an internal space within the subject. This new art of memory decenters the self, drawing the person who remembers towards memories of others in the outside world. In Baudelaire's "Le Cygne," the poetic self is fragmented in an endless list of memories of other people, places, and things. These memories lead the lyric self farther and farther away from any center. Perhaps for the first time in poetry, the lyric self no longer depends on the creation of its own forceful, memorial projection. Instead, the poetic self is visible only in the structuring act of remembering, an act that seems to exceed the conscious will and desire of the speaker. Memories of others provide a memorial image of the speaker, but this image is apparent only in the uniqueness of the chain—the invisible, specifically temporal way in which one person's sequence of memories differs from another's.

Baudelaire's speaker and Proust's narrator remember themselves only indirectly, by remembering others. The archive does not lie within the self, but is dispersed in a space without specific boundaries. This space is now an entire city, or even country, that includes a multitude of people, places and objects. But there is a problem: when the mind fails to contain one's entire past, external triggers are crucial to the memorial process. And when a city or country changes rapidly—as it does in nineteenth-century France—these triggers often disappear. The past has escaped from its enclosure. But before we can investigate this further, we must turn to the metaphor of memory as aviary.

Part Three: Early Models of Memory: The Impression and the Aviary

In the previous section, I outlined the continuation of a classical art of memory that shifts from an archival to a non-archival understanding of memory. Baudelaire and Proust do more than translate this classical art into a modern one, however. They also rewrite two of the most famous models of memory inherited from the ancients. Both occur in Plato's *Theaetetus*, and the most famous is his theory

of the impression. His model is a wax tablet. A *typos*—Greek for furrow, stamp or imprint—produces an impression on the waxy substance of the mind. Here is the description, as Socrates explains it to Theaetetus:

Socrates: So, for the sake of argument, imagine that our mind contains a wax block, which may vary in size, cleanliness and consistency in different individuals, but in some people is just right.

Theaetetus: I can imagine that.

Socrates: And let us say that it is a gift of Memory, the mother of the Muses, and that whenever we want to remember something we've seen or heard or conceived on our own, we subject the block to the perception or the idea and stamp the impression into it, as if we were making marks with signet-rings. We remember and know anything imprinted, as long as the impression remains in the block; but we forget and do not know anything which is erased or cannot be imprinted. (99–100)

This typographical model of memory, a model that equates storing memories with an act of stamping or imprinting a physical substance, has influenced thinkers up through present.⁷ Albeit too complex to allow for a full description here, the controversy has centered on whether these impressions are pictorial images or linguistic traces. If we are to believe Aristotle, the impressions are icons-pictorial copies of what we once experienced. Freud's innovation, at least according to philosophers like Jacques Derrida, is to suggest that memorial impressions are actually grammatological. We read these marks, or what are commonly called "engrams," grammatologically, like a form of writing.⁸

Derrida's trace, however, is arguably still indebted to a typographical model. He does away with the wax slab, but continues to equate memory with writing, emphasizing the act of inscription or movement over any particular content impressed or preserved.⁹ It is true that his notion of the trace does incorporate the characteristics of disappearance and forgetfulness. But his focus on Freud's Mystic Writing Pad as a model ("Freud and the Scene of Writing") continues to emphasize a perceiving self that is written by unconscious traces.¹⁰ Derrida's questioning of the archive in *Archive Fever*, moreover, remains bound to this same Freudian model. While Derrida's archive incorporates forgetfulness and even suggests an exteriority at work in the seemingly "interior" archival process, it nonetheless continues to rely on a "graphic mark" (20) and an impression that is "scriptural or typographic" (26).

This continued emphasis on memory and writing, I would

argue, is partially responsible for the lack of attention given to a non-archival¹¹ understanding of memory. When glimpses of a non-archival understanding do appear in the writers I discuss, they emerge in metaphors that are distinctly non-typographical. In concrete terms, descriptions of a memorial impression often have little to do with a writing-based concept of memory. Before discussing this further, however, I will turn to Plato's aviary, a memory model that arises as a supplement to typography. In spite of its enormous importance throughout the Middle Ages and beyond, this model has received little attention from contemporary thinkers.¹² And yet, Plato's typography only explains the process of recording memories as impressions; retrieval, or how we access those impressions at a later date, remains mysterious. To explain the retrieval process, Socrates invents the aviary:

Socrates: Think of the analogy of someone who has tracked down some wild birds (pigeons or whatever) and keeps them at home in a pigeonry he's constructed. Surely we would say that in a sense he always has them because he possesses them, wouldn't we?

Theaetetus: Yes

Socrates: But in another sense he has none of them, except potentially. Because they are under his control in his own enclosure, he has given himself the ability to track down, get hold of and have any one of them he wants, and to let it go again; the occasion is up to him, and he can do this as often as he likes.

Theaetetus: True.

Socrates: Here we go again, then. Earlier we constructed a kind of block of wax in our minds; now let's equip each mind with an aviary for all sorts of birds, some in exclusive flocks, some in small groups, and some flying alone, here, there, and everywhere among all the rest. . . . Suppose someone is tracking a piece of knowledge among those that are flitting about, and gets hold of the wrong one by mistake: that is when he thinks that eleven is twelve, because he gets hold of the knowledge of eleven instead of the knowledge of twelve, as one might grab hold of a wood-pigeon instead of a regular pigeon. (112)

What is interesting about the impression and the aviary is that they propose almost competing theories of storage and retrieval.¹³ Whereas the typographical model we saw earlier proposed the mind as a material substance gradually carved out by impressions, the aviary model proposes the opposite: the mind is an empty space gradually filled in with material bodies that we recollect at a later date.

The aviary model is particularly interesting because it accounts for forgetfulness in a way the impression cannot. The wax model explains irreversible forgetfulness, for this might be due to a poor wax slab that fails to record the impression properly:

When a person's mental wax is deep, plentiful, smooth and worked to the right consistency, whatever enters by means of the sense and makes marks on the 'heart' . . . people whose wax is like that get marks imprinted which are clean and of sufficient depth to last a long time . . . when it is dirty, with impurities in the wax, or when it is too moist or too hard—well, moist wax makes for good learning ability, but forgetfulness, hard wax for the opposite. Those in whom it is unkempt and rough, a gritty sort of thing, contaminated and clogged with earth and dirt, get unclear impressions. (104–105, 194c-195a)

But what about instances, like those in Proust, when the past has been completely forgotten, only to be resuscitated later in full? Where was that impression throughout the period of forgetfulness? For this kind of remembering, as I suggested earlier, we need a theory of the archive, or aviary. The aviary would explain why memories are often difficult to capture: though we possess memories enclosed in an aviary, they are winged creatures.

The aviary thus explains retrieval as the search for a material body in an archive-like space. Mistakes are made because these material memories have wings and are difficult to capture. Remembering the wrong thing, moreover, is explained by grabbing hold of the wrong bird, “as one might grab hold of a wood-pigeon instead of a regular pigeon.” Nonetheless, the aviary is a comforting model. Forgotten bits of knowledge are always stored away in our internal aviary; the difficulty is to recollect them again.

A curious thing happens to the aviary in the Middle Ages. The art of memory, I would argue, is grafted onto Plato's aviary. Here is Mary Carruthers' explanation of a medieval conception of memory: “there is a long-standing chain or perhaps the better word, a texture of metaphor that likens the placement of memory-images in a trained memory to the keeping of birds” (36). She continues:

The pigeons stand for bits of knowledge, some in flocks, some in small groups, some solitary. When we are infants our coops are empty, and as we acquire pieces of information, we shut them up in our enclosure — this is called “knowing.”

Plato's metaphors for them are “pigeon-holes,” or *peristereon*, but during the Middle Ages these were often called *cellae*, referring to nesting places for birds. There is even an ancient association between nesting birds and nesting scrolls. A cell is sometimes called

a “nidus” or nest, and these cells are commonly linked, in both Greek and Latin, to a kind of bookcase with pigeon-holes where rolls of a work are stored. These nests, scrolls, birds and bookshelves reappear in Proust. For now, I will turn to an exploration of the ways in which typography and the aviary reappear, transformed in Baudelaire and Proust.

Part Four: A Swan Escaped from its Cage

I will return to the aviary and the impression in a moment. My argument actually begins elsewhere, with another classical subject: Horace’s swan. Horace’s swan from Ode 2.20 reappears, disguised as a remembrance from the speaker’s own past, in Baudelaire’s “Le Cygne” (97).¹⁴ In Horace, the metaphor of the poet as swan ensures the poet’s continued memorial presence. Half-bird, half-man, the poet will fly through the air, forever present to future generations. The swan materializes in Baudelaire, but this time separated from the speaker. This swan, like the poet, cannot soar. Instead, both are oppressed by thoughts of a present that differs greatly from the past. Horace’s flight of memory is here translated into a fleeting chain of memories that tend increasingly to impersonality. For these memories, unlike Horace’s, are not memories of the self. Instead, the speaker serves as the site for the fleeting remembrance, in time, of memories of others. These memories are no longer memories of immortality, moreover, but of loss. Memories of people, places and things unfold in time, and then gradually disappear beneath those that replace them.

In Proust, his novel of a search for lost time begins with shadowy images of a past mostly forgotten. In the beginning, this past returns to the narrator only briefly, and only in dreams. Most critics, as I mentioned earlier, read the *petite madeleine* as the key that unlocks the archive. The novel that follows is a past that returns in all its fullness, splendor, and clarity. But another memory appears in the opening section of the novel. This memory, significantly, is framed by the initial memories of dreams and the *petite madeleine*, the dream of the perfect memory. This other memory is of the character Charles Swann. Does Charles Baudelaire’s swan reappear, disguised as the narrator’s very own Charles Swann?

If so, the narrator’s remembrance of his own past begins, as it does in Baudelaire’s poem, with the memory of another. The swan functions, moreover, as the memorial indicator of a world that both precedes and exceeds the remembering subject. The narrator cannot return to a lost past, only read it as a memorial “cygne/swan”

that is very much a memorial “signe/sign” embodied in the present. To read Charles Swann in this way is to see the search for lost time as a search for birds. One might even rewrite Deleuze’s observation—that the novel is a search for “signes”—with the modification that it is a search for “cygnes.” Each figure, beginning with Swann, captivates the narrator with a bird-like fragment, a plume or a beak, that first appears in an earlier figure. The narrator recollects this image from the past only when it appears later, grafted onto someone new in the present. Proust calls these figures his “ornithological deities.” Echoing Horace, they are half-animal, half-deity, but they unfold, like Baudelaire’s chain of memories, in a distinctly temporal fashion. Once again they are not memories of the self, but memories of others. Instances of self-remembering like the *petite madeleine* are perhaps nothing but fictional memorial beginnings. The narrator’s story actually starts before this dream of perfect self-remembrance. We may think his memories of others rely for their believability on the truth of the *petite madeleine*, the narrator’s ability to remember himself. But perhaps the narrative actually functions in reverse. We believe the narrator’s memory of himself because we believe his memory of Swann. From this perspective, reading *A la recherche du temps perdu* as the most personal and intimate of memoirs seems inadequate. The narrator’s search for swans suggests that the search for a self always leads to another’s story. One’s own most intimate past always resides elsewhere, in a cup of tea, or a feather.

Non-archival memory, then, requires an entirely new conception of literary influence. Horatian immortality depends on memorial will for a continued presence in future generations. But for Baudelaire, the only kind of immortality possible is of a dispersed and fragmented nature. In *Le temps retrouvé*, Proust’s narrator mentions that for most of his life he longed to place himself, following Baudelaire, in a long line of literary immortals. He abandons this desire as an impossible dream, however, and ends by concluding something quite different: his survival will only become visible belatedly, in fragments of his text that reappear in another’s. This is the same memorial survival that allows a fragment of Horace’s material, his swan, to reappear in Baudelaire, and then in Proust. Memorial immortality through continued presence is rewritten as the continued survival of material fragments in later incarnations of a long chain of memories.

The swans I have just discussed bring us back to the commonplace trope of memory: the aviary. The aviary also reappears in Baudelaire, albeit less overtly than Horace’s swan. Critics have puzzled over the fact that Baudelaire’s swan is “escaped from its cage.”

This detail, I would argue, is evidence of a clear rewriting of the traditional metaphor of memories as “caged birds.” The aviary as cage or enclosure no longer functions as an adequate metaphor for memory. In Baudelaire, the cage fails to contain the memorial swan. It has escaped and is now exiled, unarchived, in the external world. In Proust, the search for birds in an outside world is a response, perhaps, to the narrator’s fear that the internal aviary is for the most part empty. The aviary, in other words, is now enlarged to include a world almost without limit. Retrieving memories is all the more difficult, for the narrator must look for memories that appear as material “cygnes” in the vast world around him. This means that the search involves a very temporal dimension, for it takes time, and perhaps even luck, to track down these winged memories.

Part Five: The Impression: Visual or Acoustic?

The aviary, as we have just seen, is expanded to include the outside world. As part of a rethinking of memory, what were once thought to be internal, caged memories are now understood to be semi-legible, bodily swans that appear in the external world. These material *cygnes* (“swans”) differ remarkably from signs stored as visual impressions on a wax tablet. What happens, then, to Plato’s theory of the impression? How does this new understanding of *retrieval*—the search for swans in the outside world—imply a very different understanding of *storage*—the mark or inscription of an impression? This final section will examine the impression for the manner in which it, too, appears changed in the writers I discuss.

Near the end of his life Baudelaire had a passionate encounter with music. In a letter to Wagner, he describes listening to Wagner’s music as the impression of listening to his own creation. What is interesting about this description is that the impression echoes the same blurring between self and other we saw in the search for swans. Storage and retrieval, to the extent that they can be distinguished, seem mirror opposites. The musical impression gives Baudelaire the sense his own material has been produced by another. The search for swans, by contrast, is the attempt to re-collect others’ material as one’s own.

More importantly, perhaps, the fascination with a musical impression is evidence of a more general shift from a visual to an acoustic understanding of how memories are stored. Proust echoes this shift, arguing at one point that the most accurate metaphor for his involuntary memory is the impression of listening to music. To listen for an impression is clearly very different from receiving

impressions as marks or inscriptions. What, after all, does the music leave behind in its place? In Proust's words, it is only the memory of an air or tune, the *souvenir d'un air*. The musical impression makes even more obvious what is already evident in the search for swans. An eternal collection that would be a complete capture or possession is impossible. To listen to a musical impression is to receive the present only as it unfolds in time. The musical impression, in other words, does not leave eternal, unchanging marks on the wax tablet. Rather, it gives the very impression of time as it unfolds.

The musical impression is thus at odds with the wax tablet model. Whereas the wax tablet suggests the self as a physical wax substance that changes through experience, the musical impression suggests that one's empty self resonates to another's sound as if it were one's own. In Proust, the self is described almost like a wind instrument. The subject resonates to external stimuli, producing a sound from its unique hollows. Here, we see the glimpse again of the importance of forgetting. Our individual response to the outside world depends as much on our emptiness—what we have forgotten—as whatever has been recorded on an internal wax tablet.

Like the other metaphors for memory I discussed earlier, the self as bodily, memorial instrument first appears much earlier, in Descartes' *Traité de l'homme*.¹⁵ The dilemma for Descartes was to separate the intellectual memory of spirit or mind from a mechanical, bodily memory that was far more threatening. According to Descartes, sensory impressions play upon us just as air produces sound in a church organ. Winds from outside blow through our pipes. The impression derives not from internal breath—a metaphor for the soul—but from the external air blowing through these pipes. Musical impressions, in other words, only give the illusion that a soul exists, like a homunculus seated at the keyboard. But it is only the illusion of spirit: there is no one home playing the tune. Instead, sensible objects in the external world function as the “organist's fingers.”

This musical impression, like the search for swans, decenters any sense of self at the heart of remembering. Memorial impressions are automatic responses to the environment rather than the indication of a soul at the center of the act of remembering. Descartes' organ reappears in Proust, this time as a mechanical *pianola* that mechanically replays the impression. The self, moreover, is like an out-of-tune barrel organ—always playing a tune other than the one that appears on the page. The dream of a unique, memorial self that always plays the same note is nothing but a dream. The body changes over time, and thus the tune changes. At worst, remembering is the impression of discord: the bodily memo-

rial instrument has changed over time and the remembering self clashes with the self remembered.

Musical impressions, like the search for swans, suggest that we re-evaluate the relationship between body and memory. Formerly a container for stored memories, the body is now often memorial precisely to the extent that it is hollow. One's exterior takes on increasing importance, for the past must now be read in its external material. The impression made by the present, moreover, cannot be reread at a later date, like a text on a page. Instead, impressions of the present can only be heard through a process of listening for echoes. Individual bodies resonate to external events differently through time, and Proust will search out these particular resonances.

The current emphasis on a writing-based conception of memory, by contrast, conceals this central role of the body. For it fails to account for the reliance of a remembering self on bodies—both on its own, and on those in the external world that serve as memorial triggers for recollection. If we are to look beyond the archive as a metaphor for memory, we must look for non-archival configurations of memory elsewhere than in writing—in musical impressions, for instance, or in the search for the aviary outside the self. Where will these non-archival configurations of memory lead us? Perhaps towards a way of reading bodies, both one's own and others, in a non-typographical way. Which brings us to the question Umberto Eco poses: Is an art of forgetting possible? I would answer his pessimism with an affirmative, for we can glimpse it as the counterpart to a memory that often fails to archive experiences as they occur the first time. Some impressions, precisely because they cannot be grasped as a written trace, afford a view of the memory process before recollection. They allow for an experience of the impression, in other words, as it unfolds in time. Failing this, memories must be retrieved out of the world as aviary—out of the material, memorial fragments that remain in the present.

Notes

¹ The best recent work in this field includes that by Edmund Bolles, Daniel Schacter (*Memory Distortion, Seven Sins*), and Robert Pollack. Schacter, for example, describes memory as a process of retaining only a few key elements around which one reconstructs a past (*Seven Sins*, 9). In a different vein, Robert Pollack's account of a missing moment that founds consciousness is quite astounding, for it implies a critique of presence quite different from that put forward by philosophers.

² Edmund Bolles outlines this looping process (153). Bolles makes an interesting claim for the continued importance of the imagination, especially in light of this new, non-archival model that relies greatly on invention. Perhaps one of his most

interesting points, however, is the link he makes between those who are most dissatisfied with their re-invented memories and an artistic temperament. Dissatisfaction leads to experiences of timelessness strikingly similar to those Proust's narrator terms involuntary memories. In this case, we must rethink the conventional interpretation that involuntary memories are perfect resuscitations of the past. Perhaps they rely precisely on the inability to remember well. Of course the extent to which Bolles himself is influenced by Proust's model remains open to speculation.

³ See, for example, Daria Galateria's excellent work comparing passages in Taine's *De l'intelligence* to Proust's passage on the *petite madeleine*.

⁴ Richard Terdiman makes this claim in "Deconstructing Memory: On Representing the Past and Theorizing Culture in France Since the Revolution." See also his account of the memory crisis in *Past Present*.

⁵ The most famous early texts describing this classical art of memory are the *Ad Herennium* (of uncertain authorship), Cicero's *De Oratore*, and Quintillian's *Institutio oratoria*. The origin of the art, according to these texts, dates back to the poet Simonides, who is commonly held to be its inventor. For a good overview, see Frances Yates' *The Art of Memory* (1–26).

⁶ For more on a theory of an *ars oblivionalis*, see Umberto Eco's "An *Ars Oblivionalis*? Forget it!" in the *PMLA*, May 1988, 103:3, 254–261. I take issue with his assertion that an art of forgetting is impossible. While it is true, as he suggests, that such an art could not manifest itself using the same semiotic sign-system of an art of memory, I argue that it appears, however indirectly reflected, in the writers I discuss.

⁷ For excellent overviews of the history of this model, see Krell's *Of Memory*, and Jean-Yves and Marc Tadié, *Le sens de la mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999). For those interested in Derrida's development of the notion of the trace and writing, see *Dissemination* and *Of Grammatology*. See also Krell's Chapters Four and Seven.

⁸ I find it interesting that Derrida chooses to focus on Plato's *Phaedrus* ("Plato's Pharmacy"), in which Plato privileges a living, spontaneous memory over writing as an inferior form of memory. This allows Derrida to overturn the binary opposition living memory/writing. In *Theaetetus*, however, Plato explicitly elaborates this same typographical model of memory that Derrida continues to espouse in modified form.

⁹ I agree with David Farrell Krell's excellent critique of Derrida's trace as a disembodied, idealized rewriting of memory. See *Of Memory*, 165–187. Krell also discusses Derrida's later work, which seems to diverge from the writing-based model by suggesting the metaphor of ashes or cinders (277–314). While this metaphor does distance us from the archival model, I do not find it terribly helpful for conceiving how memory actually works.

¹⁰ Consider, by contrast, Bolles' description of how neurons change and adapt to experiences without necessarily preserving records of those experiences (*Remembering and Forgetting*). This is very different way of conceiving of a non-archival memory. Many experiences do not leave unconscious traces or marks. Rather, they are evidenced only through an examination of the way our body changes and reacts differently over time.

¹¹ While Derrida's term "archive" does call into question the archive, I choose to use the term "non-archival" in order to focus on the revisionist retrieval of archival terms. In the process, I hope to shed light on how a non-archival memory might actually work.

¹² Unlike most contemporary thinkers writing about memory, Krell does discuss the aviary model briefly in *Of Memory*, 27–28. He reads the aviary, however, as an instance of iconography, a reading that I would argue fails to account for the model. The materiality of the birds shows them to be more than mere icons or images.

¹³ For the most interesting work by classical scholars on the relationship between typography and aviary see H.D.P. Lee, “The Aviary Simile in the *Theaetetus*,” *Classical Quarterly*; F.A. Lewis, “Foul Play in Plato’s Aviary: *Theaetetus* 195bff”; R. Hackforth, “The Aviary Theory in the *Theaetetus*”; G. Fine, “False Belief in the *Theaetetus*”; and J. Rist, “The Aviary Model in the *Theaetetus*.” On the relation between perception, memory and knowledge in *Theaetetus*, see William Bondeson, “Perception, True Opinion and Knowledge in Plato’s *Theaetetus*”; and C.J. Rowe, M. Welbourne, and C.J.F. Williams, “Knowledge, Perception and Memory: *Theaetetus* 166B.”

¹⁴ See my article “Stalled Flight: Horatian Remains in Baudelaire’s ‘Le Cygne’” for a more detailed description of this argument.

¹⁵ The comparison of bodily memory to a church organ occurs on pages 841–2 of the Bridoux edition (1953).

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