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Notes on the Art of Memory

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NOTES ON THE ART OF MEMORY

Memory believes before knowing remembers
Believes longer than recollects
Longer than knowing even wonders.
W. Faulkner, *Light in August*

Let us go then, you and I
when the evening is stretched out against the sky
like a patient etherized upon the table.
T.S.Elliot, *The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock*

A few years ago I was asked to write a piece for a memorial *Festschrift* for a friend and colleague who had just died. It occurred to me then that remembrance was a very special faculty of mind; this essay takes up the threads of that remembrance. The task of understanding memory is daunting: it is ubiquitous in every aspect of life and thought. I will try to distinguish important features of memory as it functions in our individual and collective lives, but my primary concern is with a particular aspect of remembrance that is a creative resource vital to the lives of individuals and to stories of those lives in the literature of culture.

I

Memory is an essential aspect of all thought and feeling. It is engaged and involved as a matter of course in each sentient moment of our lives. Studies in neurophysiology and the science of memory investigate bio-chemical processes that account for different functions of memory. Recently Barry Gordon (M.D., Ph.D., a professor of neurology and cognitive science at John Hopkins Medical School) in a coauthored book, *Intelligent Memory*, makes a distinction between 'ordinary' and 'intelligent' memory particularly in reference to the loss of memory that occurs with aging. What we might call the *ordinary labor* of memory is employed in the recording and storing of data, a routine accumulation that constitutes the body and resource of

mind that constructs a stable environment and supporting identity. Mostly automatic and a matter of repetition and patterning, this activity is located in a relatively small *hippocampus* section of the brain most vulnerable to the atrophy associated with aging. There is however, a different kind of memory that is a property of nerve cells located throughout the brain; this 'intelligent memory' funds an activity that corresponds more to *creative work* than the routine of labor. This aspect of memory represents a crucial resource of the mind as the residuals of routine memory fade, one that remains active as long as it is engaged in new activities of learning, a locus of memory vital to creative experience. The creative work of memory in the re-emergence of the past breaks the routine of conscious experience, and in this capacity opens a domain of remembrance to which the poet has recourse in the appeal: "Speak Memory." Our interest in this essay has to do not with the science of the brain, but with the art of the mind—in the creative work of memory as it expands consciousness and restores creative possibilities for transcendence.

The central issue of self-understanding in philosophy is also, of course, the understanding of life and world and other. The world is *my* world in the peculiar sense that I *am* my world—the world is the totality of my experience. But in an equally important and obvious sense it is not *only* my world—I am born into it, as I am born into a language and culture. In a no less puzzling sense, my existence is a presence, in a present that is a *kairic* moment in a continuous flow of experience in which all I have been leads up to and away from this moment. Time and life *is* this flow, the current of existence that I am.

The currency of memory in consciousness is widely discussed in the literature of phenomenology, but we will here be concerned less with the detailed structure of consciousness than in the special resource of remembrance that abides in the thoughtful individual and feeds the

poetic imagination. Whatever the complexity of its structure, memory is a generative force in the natural history of human beings from oral cultures through the development and codification of literate discourse. The theme of memory has been an essential feature of literature from its first emergence in myth and ritual and the mnemonic gathering into epic in the formation of cultural identity. In philosophical discourse, remembrance has been a central issue from its Hellenic beginnings to the recent renewal by Heidegger as essential to the authentic existence of human being as *aletheia*—un-forgetting. Whether or not Socrates was right that the unexamined life is not worth living, reflection—the playing back of experience to oneself—is the first movement in understanding what *is* worth living. The meaning of reflection requires the use of metaphor in both its process and description. In terms of movement, reflection begins a *journey*: to think back, to think again, to think about my thinking, to examine the horizon of my mind, to remember are all part of an adventure to search out the depth and detail of one's life. The larger process of humanistic self-understanding can be understood through metaphor as a concern for Being through remembrance.

The story of my life exists within the collective story of our lives; indeed, as many stories as can be imagined or remembered. Memory and imagination are the creative confluence of these stories. But in the metaphor of journey, where does one travel *to* in these cases of memory and imagination? Memory is a present journey into past times and places in which we seem to constitute a separate world from the ordinary of continuing consciousness (as if that itself were a clear concept)—a world apart from the ongoing current of our lives. We are continually doing this in an autonomic process, of course, constituting our lives reflectively with the invested meaning of past events and activities, people and places, hopes and regrets, procedures and projects. Our mutual lives and language embody the possibilities of our next encounter: we

constitute our lives in the things we do and do not do, within the framework of what we have done and left undone, in the relations we make and break, in the things we think, and choose, in the stories we invent about ourselves and each other, in what we remember and have forgotten.

In the phenomenology of my everyday existence there is a natural order of things and events, a causal nexus of sight, sound, and motion that I think of as the world. I am the focus of that causal order, as well as the center of an interpretive, rational order. I think of this double order of things, causal and rational, only on occasion as *my* world, when something is ajar or amiss when the continuing current of existence is somehow broken. I think the world as I live it, but also I can think about it, withdraw from it in thought, in reflection, in imagination, in memory. This withdrawal is not so much a leaving of the ongoing natural world as a reconstituting of it, or of a parallel construction of a temporary world of fiction, or on occasion fantasy that in turn modifies the natural world to which I return—a lateral activity that continually occurs, serving to set out myriad possibilities that run in parallel as I consider some task or person or event. The emotional importance of taking time out from the driving current of expectations and obligations that otherwise control our lives, of letting go ("and letting God" as it is sometimes expressed among both devoteds and debunkers) is a commonly acknowledged therapeutic benefit, the waking equivalent of a dream.

Empirical studies in neurophysiology and psychiatry have set out the mechanics and dynamics of brain and mind in the operation of ordinary remembrance, including clinical studies of pathology of Freud and others about traumatic remembrances of childhood. Our concern, however, is not with causal processes or the how of memory, but with a preliminary analysis of the experience of remembrance independent of causal process or clinical remediation: the simple question of what do we remember, and why? Very likely one kind of remembrance is simply the

memorable—not the traumas that scar the soul, but the good and bad together, the important junctures in our lives—turns in the road and roads not taken, roadside attractions, places we have stayed, places we have built or left, things we are proud of or regret—the mundane *vitae* of our ordinary but on reflection remarkable lives.

There are common categories of description as well as peculiar or singular occurrences that a given individual will claim in thinking back on her life. For example, both athletes and scholars, when invited, would likely begin by remembering early periods of life as a growing sense of competence and achievement, marking occasions of laurels and recognition. For those who have been to war, images of death and destruction, of comrades and chaos may be the stuff of remembrance and shared stories—or else be buried in repressive or dismissive alternatives. Those who are blissfully or tearfully married may remember a defining event in their lives—of commitment and optimism about an open future met together with another that fulfilled or failed in its promise. Those who have children will remember births, birthdays, broken hearts and bruised bones, the many faces of joy and disappointment as their children grew into themselves. Our remembered lives are all a patchwork; yet all of it somehow is the nurturing ground of our identity and continuance.

A common occasion and resource in the building of memory is the process and product of repetition: how much of our lives is taken up in the correlative activities that lead up to or follow from some event? Psychologists study the familiar procedures that make up and take up so much of our conscious life in the correlative activities of *rehearsing* and *debriefing*. We seem to routinely enact elaborate rituals preparing to greet the faces that we meet—cognitively and emotionally, as well as cosmetically and sartorially—solitary run-throughs of what the day is likely to bring. We get ready, practice, go-over, plan, preview, study, imagine, plot and project.

Later, after the fact, we similarly engage in a fictional debriefing; depending on how the interview, meeting, or engagement went, we tend in memory to think over, think through, repeat, re-hash, re-construct, reconsider, and otherwise correct and repair the episode in consciousness. In the process of such recollection, we can and do misremember, reinvent, change, and otherwise rearrange what happened to make ourselves in our own minds better, sharper, more intelligent, responsive, confident, successful…than perhaps we were in fact.

Both facts and fictions thus constitute the ongoing process of our development as persons. The fiction of memory may be one of self-reassurance, or more radically, re-constitution. The character of a person is developed through what she decides and does. That is, actions have residuals not just in the world but in ourselves: actions become habit become character—they make up what we become. But this becoming is also a matter of what we think about what we have done, what we reflectively index as part of a projected character. How much of character, so constituted, is invention—the product of imagination and projections of fantasy—fictions of belief and remembrance? We constitute ourselves and each other through what we do, chose, think, remember, imagine, through that to which we aspire, but also through that which we regret. Guilt and shame are indelible and enduring marks of memory, for which a given place or person, unawares, may be the prompting. Dostoevsky's Fyodor Karamazov remarks that he once did a man a terrible injustice and that he has never forgiven the man for it. Memory can shift responsibility in perverse ways, but still exact its pound of flesh.

II

So far, we have been speaking of the process of memory, and of recollection as a journey. We can also inquire into the *world* of memory, and the same question occurs again: where is this

world and of what sort of world is it? Where do I go *to*, remembering my childhood? I can review, and in some acute cases, re-live events of my life. And in such instances, we may be surprised at which ones present themselves at any given time—parts and pieces we somehow have indexed in our self-life-stories; as it were, footnotes in the annotated biography of our lives. Reflecting on this process, it seems very much a return in time to places once lived and now revisited. What is the language in which we can make sense of this? At such times it seems as if the mind is its own place, and of itself, can generate moments and images of what is past, of what had been forgotten, and provide a way to reach past places and times. We recover the past in stories retold: of old times, and former places—markings and remarkings along the way.

Here is a particular thought experiment; the detail of this remembrance is my own, but yours will not be so different: remember the house in which you were born and grew up. The detail of the place—the door to the cellar, the smell of the kitchen, the dust of the coal bin, the lint of the laundry room, the grain on the wood doors in the hallway, the window looking out into the garden. Remember the porch in summer, the neighbors gathered, talking in the darkening night air, fireflies blinking, mosquitoes biting; recall the feel of leaving for school on a Spring morning, the driveway with your father's car on the weekend; the leafless trees in winter, the sidewalk shoveled free of snow, the shouts of children on the playground in summer. It is as if we move though a world still there, knowing full well it is not. What is the nature of this experience, its meaning, and its possible effect on our continuing lives in remembrance? We are likely less interested in the veracity of the experience, than in its emotional substance and effect. Remembrance seems to be a psychic resource of some worth in the simple fact of its continuance and availability.

It is a familiar experience to go as an adult back to a childhood home or place and remark how small it is; how large it had become in memory. Some of the remembered places and people are long gone or no more—destroyed, overgrown, dead—and still they come to life in memory. It is not untrue to remark that all the places of remembrance are dead and gone. The photograph as "*l'image du morte*" as pictures of those no longer—of my father, in a photograph once as a boy, that I look upon now that I am an old man, or in a similar sense, pictures of myself as a child. There is a sense of the uncanny in looking at such photographs—looking at what we were, looking onto the hopeful eyes of the dead.

This process of remembrance is not unlike reading a novel: deliberately initiated or not, we are drawn into a fictive world in which we live for awhile—which may indeed intrude upon, or detract from the "real" or natural world of our continuing lives. People can be lost both in and lost to memory. We say of such people that they "live in the past." Faulkner's characters come to mind here; the old woman recluse rumored to have been jilted by her lover as a girl, in "A Rose for Emily", and more generally the whole fixation of cultural remembrance in Faulkner's stories of a dying Southern aristocracy.

The familiar literature of clinical psychology often fixes the paradigm of remembrance in terms of pathology such that in extreme cases the line between what is real and imagined completely dissolves so that one is unable to clearly distinguish between past and present. It is not surprising, perhaps, that in a less virulent form this also is a regular feature of literature, both in writing and reading—for example in the autonomic or willing suspension of disbelief, or the related process of a willing appropriation of fictive belief. In literature, however, there is no special problem of reconnecting to the shared and public world of an ongoing present. Plato was inclined to credit the poet with a singular faculty and access to the irrational that he called divine

madness; however in ordinary cases of madness that do not achieve divinity the line between what is real and what not is less acute and therefore less re-presentable as art. For the pedestrian mad, if there is such a thing, the present and what has passed is simply blurred. The point here is not that madness is a risk of intrusive remembrance, but the appeal of the past and the lapse into memory may share something with such cases. If madness begins in a release from the solid insistence of a continuing time and place, sanity becomes, in the normal course of events, the constant recovery from continual excursions of imagination and memory. However, some kind of fantasy life no less than the deep sleep of dreaming is apparently critical to the health of human life and mind. Freud's theoretical structure of the person and personality in terms of three developmental stages are framed within three correlative principles: of pleasure, reality, and ideality. As a moralist, Freud was concerned to advocate the health of a secure reality orientation, a development of ego-strength to govern the conflicting demands of id and super-ego— the moderation and control of immediate gratification on the one hand and an anchor from the remove of abstraction on the other. His intuition is that the self can be equally devoured in the immediacy of sense, or in the distractions of the ideal. Even so, the health of the organism, no less than the person, seems to depend on such excursions—psychic breaks into the immediacy of sense, but also into the mediacies of fiction.

Our shared language constitutes a network of common sense and sensibility; a web of belief that supports both public and personal perceptions and relationships. Memory connects with belief in the crucial sense that *to believe that* something is the case is to hold it in memory, and to hold to memory as a foundation and operational resource. To *believe in* something or someone, is to hold in another way to a conviction, a trust stored in memory. The current of consciousness exists on a grid of memory and belief that constitutes the self, world, and others.

The creative act of imaginative remembrance makes use of this grid to break with the present, with the ongoing continuance of what is before me, to disengage from the pressing insistence of world and time.

Philosophical interest in "the given" in traditional epistemology and ontology—as the root datum of experience, and as the primal ground of being—can be usefully extended to the context of memory in the continuance of person, community, and culture. In addition to what is given in perception there are resources of the given in memory, dreams, and imagination that have special access to the unconscious, which inform and transform consciousness in the contexts of culture.

III

To fully understand the working of memory in the identity and continuity of a given life and culture is obviously a complex task that requires the perspectives of many disciplines, but the phenomenon of remembrance is also a simple experience common to every person, which provides a key to its significance. In the simple matter of remembering myself, what is it that I do, and what is it that I bring to mind? The times and places and people, issues of the day, the hopes and regrets that were building then until now—all come to presence once again, in retrospect. In such cases of deliberation, one begins always *in medias res,* and the time may be chosen arbitrarily. Say, twenty years ago this summer: that would make it 1984. I was at Oxford, the children were in school at Radley college; we had a house from the college on the grange overlooking the upper reaches of the Themes river... What I now select to remember is not only a function of who I am now, but what I am doing now in selecting—thinking about the process of remembering, remembering in order to examine the process and profit of remembrance.

If I give into the tug of recollection of 20 years ago, there are glimpses, for the most part, of a place—The Vicarage in Radley, a face of the Welsh Vicar, his ruddy cheeks, his kind uncertainty and gentle eyes, the concern in his voice as he begins the daily office of his late calling to the Anglican priesthood….but the image of my son at Radley college at that time intervenes in my recollection of the Vicar, and a mix of scholar gown and playing fields, the still acute horror of learning of his brain aneurism, the hospital visit, and Gaudy celebrated later on the pitch, cars gathered about with picnic baskets and blankets spread to watch the Cricket game, High table at Christ Church, Evensong in the Cathedral, an invitation to publish a journal piece recollecting my time with the philosopher O.K. Bouwsma.

And in the process just now I remember that my father had just died. Suddenly the years seem all to run together in ways that disrupt the intention of examining a particular time. There are in memory times within times, a collusion of thoughts, images, feelings that have a life of their own, an insistence that I give into in reverie, or not. Unwanted and intrusive feelings arise here—an illness that I have inherited, and passed on, my sense of loss, my wanting to remember my father earlier in his life, young and vital, decades younger than I am at the time of writing this. To what end memory? At the very least, something in me remains alive and returns to life in this process that is the gift of remembrance.

In looking at one's own children as adults, now older than my first memories of my father when I think of him, memory is intimate and integral to this perception—one sees the knicks and scars of their adventures, sees through their present looks and lives to everything they have been. These images and feelings granted by memory are an essential part of my continuing and changing perception of them.

The sense of one's life—what I do, what I am, with whom I am, both with others in the community and in the world to which I belong—is tangled in a web of memory To remember my parents, who are now dead. To remember the birth of my children, now with children of their own. To remember the first day of school, my first date, first kiss, first car, first job….first everything: the memorable, what signals a formative event, made so by the decision to mark it as a defining moment or chapter in the building story of my life. These are all *kairic* moments in the flux of time such that we date our consciousness of ourselves in the events. Not everything goes into memory, into the available resources of consciousness to be called on in times of self-doubt, or occasions of reaffirmation. Moments of sudden recollection in the sound of a song, the smell of a flower bring, undirected to conscious attention that moment in my life: lilacs in spring and the filling of May baskets for childhood friends in the old neighborhood; or at another time hearing the sound of the blues, I see and feel the wet night streets outside a club the name of which I no longer remember in Manhattan fifty years ago.

There are common and shared historical moments in memory that serve to index both a time and cultural identity. For a certain age of people, the question: "Where were you when you heard that Kennedy had been assassinated on the streets of Dallas?" is a significant way of connecting not only with an event in the past, but to a relationship with the asker in the continuing narrative of the present.

Man is a storytelling animal, and the natural emergence of narrative in memory sometimes comes of its own—a sound, a smell, and I am back among things of childhood. Sometimes it comes with effort: I want to remember when it was that I last met with a colleague who has just retired. Or, as with the assassination of a president, it may become an automatic point of reference that when asked where I was when the planes hit the twin towers on 9/11, I

can say without thinking "I was preparing for class in my office at the university, the department secretary, eyes wide in shock of disbelief came in to announce what was happening in New York City as if to confirm the reality of a world in which she no longer felt secure—and once again, in this process of remembrance, the mind leads away into a domain of details and images some real some second order electronic from the television of that moment and the ensuing day. The point in citing such remembrance is that when I recall some remembered time with only a few details or images the mind is so structured that it weaves them into a story, as much for myself as the questioner, of who and what and where, and when of the day and incident of "9-11".

What is it I "intend" in remembering the school, the hallways and classrooms of my first school experience? Not each day, or a particular day; nor the exact shape of the building; rather there is a sense of the place, on a rainy day, of a soccer game played out on the sandlot in the spring, a game of tag years earlier in the snow at recess, of a boy who chewed his pencil into fragments, of a girl who insisted that I confess to grinding up an eraser in the pencil sharpener so that the class could be released from being kept after school until someone confessed (I had not done the deed, but she seemed so genuinely angry and so sure in her accusation that it still makes me wonder)…and now I think of that little girl—Patricia Westcott, which I recall because the brand name on the school ruler at that time was Westscott) whether I had ever talked with her before or after that accusation during those years in school—I don't think so—but here is the name and the child's face more than sixty years later. I am quite sure this is not an invention of imagination—we were there, next to the water-fountain, standing on the soft cork of the hallway floors, on a sunny afternoon. Someone finally must have confessed, or else the teacher wearied of it all and sent us all home with a reprimand about character, the wages of sin, and what will become of such evil doing. There was no trauma in this, no repressed childhood memory that

needs exorcizing. No special reason to remember any of it; but there it is, long dead and half buried, but the gentle winds of memory strip away the years and all the things piled on…and now other memories come of those times, the "victory garden" in a field just up the way from the school, raising our own vegetables to help the war effort, I thought—and so I collected newspapers, aluminum foil, the flag with the service stars in my grandmother's window for her four sons somewhere in the military in a world at war, the evenings gathered among the women, my great aunt at the piano playing some of the songs from an earlier war, soft lights and soft conversations, hearing somehow in the whispering of women the sounds of war—I see the uncertain child I was, feeling once again the fear, the longing, the hope, the absence…

And so it goes, a collage of sights and sounds, random pieces of a puzzle I may have no need to sort out or fit together, but there is a story and a life there, roots and remnants—habitations of the heart and mind in the soft tissue of personal history.

IV

I awakened this morning in Prato, Italy. I am here to present a paper at an international conference on the future—seemingly dismal at times—of the Humanities. It is a good question that seems not to be addressed, whether the future of humanity is somehow allied with the future of the Humanities: living beings enscripted with values which their disciplines more or less independently study and seek to shape. The Humanities constitute the collected memory of a sometimes comparative and conflicted cultural tradition in terms of which nations and peoples, independently or mutually, seek identification and continuance.

Coming to consciousness from an exhausted sleep, jet-lagged, my first effort is to remember where I am and what I am doing: I have awakened to memory. This room becomes

familiar from last night, I remember the hallway, the elevator, the lobby, the clerk, the bellman, the elaborate Persian carpets in the lobby, and now a sense that the staff were all middle-eastern, and that the hotel is likely owned not by Italians but Arabs. I remember the front of the hotel in the dark of night as the cab passed it by to make a u-turn to deposit me. I now remember that my baggage did not arrive with me, and that I will have to call the airport to see if they have yet arrived. I remember the difficulty of registering at the airport with lost and found, the incredibly understaffed and inefficient process, standing in a queue of 25 people, all of whom arrived without luggage, all having intended to disperse into the outreaches of Northern Italy. I recall the expression of anger and anxiety in the confusion and fusion of many languages as we endured the slow and individual remediation of our mutual inconvenience. My own anxiety now, in what I will have to do or buy to get by until the luggage arrives. I am aware of regretting, as I often have in the past as I now remember foresworn against, that I am traveling in a country whose language I barely manage. And so on it goes, memory mixed into a cognitive reorientation to a place and time, a presence from which to meet the day.

Memory even in this common sense as a ready and ongoing source of appeal is not so far distanced from literature as a mediating resource of cultural identity and community. Nabokov's autobiography is entitled "Speak Memory", as if the faculty has its own energy and voice. It is through the invitation to have memory speak that literature discovers the mediated reach and embodied domain of heart and mind. The citation from Faulkner's *Light in August* at the outset of this essay suggests the existence of a more remote source of sight and insight in the appeal of remembrance, a pale light, not the fire of passion, but not the dead light of winter. Remembrance *is* a kind of light in August, an infusion of light and life from a season distanced from the spring of its origin. Faulkner's poetic remembrance is both collective and systematic

and of a studied and opaque character; indeed the body of Faulkner's literature is an imaginative journey into a remembered but dying Southern culture, of a people caught in the remembrance of a glory that was, in fact, an illusion in its own lifetime. This literature strives to capture the echoes of memory that has become belief. Another familiar metaphor in literature speaks of the *mirror* of memory that allows us to see ourselves as we were through the prism of what we have or have not become. Even though selective or distorted, the insight of remembrance may be genuine. Honesty with oneself is no easy matter, however—no more in remembrance than any other human activity of self knowledge.

V

While our interest is in memory and mind, it is important to acknowledge that there is memory in the body as well. Quite apart from the miracle of the billions of neurons going about the extraordinary if routine tasks of monitoring thought, the body remembers to breathe; it remembers the motions which coordinate its movement. In healing a wound to its surface, it remembers how and when to stop the process of the repair of skin to make itself whole. The mind of memory, and the memory of mind are extensions into the assimilation of consciousness in terms of the logic of a natural process, whatever theory otherwise accounts for its operations. Memories come as they will, are internalized on their own logic. There is more than a fine difference between memory and memorizing: the latter is a matter of repetition until the recall of some face or figure or sound is imprinted. Remembrance, on the other hand, is not in this way contrived but natural. Numberless kinds of occasions and causes imprint on memory—excitement, desire, fear, awe, and the many kinds of trauma that haunt human beings beyond the moment of the experience

Apart from the current of existence that is the backdrop of our lives individually and collectively, a special occurrence of remembrance sometimes comes to us as a gift. It is as if something deep in us, in our past, a residual unrealized in our conscious and continuing life comes to presence in us and presents us with an uncanny insight that we have either forgotten, repressed, or did not consciously notice at its first occurrence. Memory in this instance comes to disrupt the routine course of perception in our affairs and re-minds us of a possibility that has escaped us: This is you: this is something you have been, or done, or felt… It has the function of restoring to us a possibility of becoming something other than what we are tending to become. Something appears that has been missing. Remembrance in this special addition is very much like dreams. There is a need demanded on some level for the well being of the complex organism of the self; the function of the dream is in part to knit up the raveled sleeve of care, or in memory renew a resource that has fallen away. The restoration of possibility in what was lost may or may not come to conscious awareness, but the heart has reasons that are realized in the resource of dreams and memory.

This aspect of memory is celebrated in the ritual of commemoration; in the practice of birthdays, the observance of holidays. Christian scripture expresses the healing of memory in the sacrament of the Eucharist: "…Do this in remembrance of me." There is a promise in such remembrance, not unlike the celebration of a birthday: a reminder of the promise of a birth, of new life, a re-calling of the gift of life itself, which requires a waking and renewal from the routine wearing down of time and care. Elegy and expressions *in memoriam* are parts of the process of grief and mourning, which like remorse, draw on memory to repair a tear in the fabric of consciousness, to bring the remembrance of a person or event to consciousness in order to align the pain of loss with the continuing energy of life.

Just as we are restored to a forgotten resource in our lives in the past, so are we invited to transcend whatever it is we have become in its absence. The impulse of memory is not unlike a form of desire: this is what I was, and can be—the past comes to present in the promise of a future. The faculty of remembrance has a vital role in the process by which self-awareness, through reflection becomes self-understanding. Remembrance in this sense, becomes a mechanism for self-transformation where the past, experienced upon re-emergence, becomes a provocation—an instrument for cognitive change.

This use of remembrance figures centrally in the art of fiction, both in the life of writers, and in the lives of their characters. While self-awareness is in an immediate sense automatic, it is also cumulative: as we reflect upon and make growth a matter of concern, habits become dispositions that, reinforced, become the character of the person, or the personality of the character in fiction. But character becomes habituated to the presupposed and predictable, and in the routine of our lives we become locked into a self-image through the expectations of self and others. There are many ways in which this routine may be effectively altered—sometimes the course of our lives is shattered, sometimes merely adjusted in terms of some new erotically charged altercation. In the poetry of fiction we are released into a world of imaginative remembrance—a window not simply to the lost fragments of past life, but to a field of creative possibility. Remembrance serves in this way to restore possibility or otherwise reorient one to a continuing life in need of repair. Sometimes, to go forward in our lives, we must regress, not merely to see what it is we have come through, but what in the ordinary of the past was significant in deciding what we have become. We are enabled through remembrance to look along a line of development of past and future; at times deliberately taking stock, and judging

our judgments in retrospect we search in our past for some key to what we have become, to find some resource or insight that will make change possible.

Memory generally provides a residuum of affirmation through which poetry gives expression to transcendental possibility. In the individual case, the poet takes the kernel of remembrance and gives life to its potential in images such that the poem becomes for the reader a crystallized memory. I experience the poem as if it were memory speaking. "Recollected in tranquility" may be the particular watchword of Wordsworthian Romanticism, but there is a common appeal in poetry to the transcendental residuals of experience not used up in the ordinary affairs of life. Whether tranquil or fevered, recollected or renovated, the poet consciously draws on an unconscious cauldron of energy available from the untapped resources of what the organism of the self has retained from the past.

The cognitive occurrence of remembrance is a complex phenomenon employing a recollection and separate sense and investment in time and place, along with images drawn from that time and place. I recall a trip I made with my son to celebrate his 16th birthday, the hotel on the cliffs above Naples, sitting on the porch, Easter morning, he was still sleeping, and I remember his face in sleep, so like a infant or an angel, the spring morning alive with orange blossoms mixed with the smell of lemon trees, the bells begin to peal from the church far below… I can walk into and through this experience as though it were a stage set, or as if I were once again alive in that time and place.

We have seen that such a deliberate process, once initiated, may develop a life of its own. And so I now recall what led into the decision that the two of us would make the trip, the excitement and disappointments of being thrown together, my gradual realization of what a different person he had become, seeing myself in his anxieties… Once I have located a time and

place, however deliberately, memory has a creative and independent logic that has to do not simply with a given time and place; on this occasion of regression it gathers together both prior and continuing concerns that make up my relation to my son. The engaging of imagination in memory has limits such that I am drawn into the context of memory as an observer rather than participant, or rather, I suffer the memory, I do not command it. The point at which I speak rather than listen in a particular occurrence of memory suggests that invention threatens to displace memory, which, even as a derivative activity, draws its energy from spontaneous imagination.

VI

Memory, like perception, is always a *memory of* something, and so characterized by intentionality. Not some thing, necessarily—it may be a time, or place, or event, or feeling, or person. How is the content of remembrance different from that of perception or thought? Perception, of course is contextualized in present and continuing circumstances. While thought generally is limited only by sense, memory seems to have additional contextual boundaries. A significant counterpoint of relevance exists in the relational ideas of the intentionality that key the insights of Husserl, and the idea of contextuality as it is central to Wittgenstein's analysis of meaningful experience. Both play a crucial role in understanding memory. In its phenomenological appearance memory has both mixed content and a split or doubled context. Meaning is discovered and recovered in remembrance both in its intention and the simultaneous experiencing of the context of present and past. Patterns of association are further complicated by the feeling tones that accompany the experience. Whether wandering in memory, as in the familiar sentimental song about taking a "sentimental journey," or discovering a more intense

reminiscence in the Beetle's lyric of "Yesterdays," thought follows sentience into moods of understanding and disclosure.

In terms of intentional content, *what* I remember is…a place/ a person/ a feeling/ an event. In each case I focus on something distinct: in place, I can walk through it; in time, I can persist through it; in person, I can examine the features, character, face, shape of the body, grace of the carriage; in feeling, remembrance re-experiences specific emotions that bridge recent and remote times. The problem with this analytic procedure is that it seems to make of memory a process no different in kind from what takes place under the directions: "Think of…" or "Imagine that…" Examining the content or intent of remembering in an analytic frieze thus seems to lose an essential element that distinguishes it from thinking and imagining. To correct this, it may be useful again to return to the analogy with madness. Just as we may suffer the intrusion of remembrance in a way that breaks the consciousness of the moment, of the actual time and place of our continuing lives that we associated remotely but in kind with madness, so there an important comparison of the process of remembrance with the dream—in which one *has* a dream—the dream *presents itself* to consciousness on some level. The importance of this very human faculty of remembrance may finally be, in any particular case, as with dreaming, not the detail of *what* we remember, but the fact *that* we remember.

Memory functions in all these many ways to constitute and make possible who we are individually and collectively. Insofar as we are human, i.e. persons with an identity, it makes possible *that* we are. In a deliberate act of remembrance—last night with my friends at the pub—I recall not just what happened, who was there, what was said, I recall the *meaning* of what happened, the situation, actions and reactions of my friends—the occasion and what was made or not made of it. Such focus is not only intentional, but interpretively so: I am searching and

sorting through what I can re-present, aware that there is something here to be understood, to be considered, to be assimilated toward a revision of my ongoing project of self and other, of life and world.

It is the same with the unwanted or gratuitous emergence of remembrance: I may or may not be surprised or troubled by this intrusion into consciousness of the past, this insistence of some sub-strata of mind that this particular thing of remembrance is important, but I can take an interest in it as a reminder, as a gift, as a warning, as a key to what is on the border of currency in my life. We can learn to listen to memory, and here as elsewhere, Santayana's familiar after-dinner reminder is worth a moment: should we fail to listen to memory, we miss an invited moment in which our lives might take another turn, albeit for better or worse. I am inclined to think "for better" in the sense that such emergence is not without meaning whether the organism itself requires this remembrance as a kind of updating or stabilizing of health (wholeness), or whether it is the soul that needs this resource for healing.

It is important, finally, to address the other side of all this, in the imperative of forgetting. Remembrance makes possible the identity of the person and of a people in the shifting occurrences of time and place, makes possible the continuing narrative of our life and lives, the self-life-writing of relational scripts for world and other. But *forgetting* is also a critical moment in this process, for example in the simple feature that allows a renewal or continuance of consciousness without the encumbrance of all we assimilate. A further essential aspect to forgetting discussed by Ricoeur argues the need for the oblivion of forgetfulness to free the mind generally from the binding residuals of the past, and by Arendt in the context of political life that requires forgiving that we may begin again in the freedom of action.

We are, in fact, worth more than our acts. We are what we have done, and thought, and said—the totality of experience, that is, of consciousness, of memory. But, as we have argued, memory exceeds consciousness at any given point. Memory resides in the body and culture as well as in individual consciousness; it is inclusive of the unconscious and what may be operative and manifest in the life energy of desire and culture whether or not we are aware of it. Individually and collectively, we exceed the sum total of experience in that we can forget and forgive—give over to oblivion what would otherwise be held in consciousness and character, tradition and history. It may be that residuals in some sense always remain, that although I can give up my resentment or hatred for what you did, a trace always remains. Aristotle claimed as a point of moral autonomy no less than law that one may be blamed only for what he does, not for what he thinks or feels. Whatever we retain in active memory is a resource we dispose ourselves toward in terms of choice. I may not choose the anger I feel at your betrayal, but I need not nurture it into resentment or hatred. Nietzsche's idea of master morality is in part recognition of the possibility that we are not simply subject to memory, not simply organ stops with respect to experience. We are not creatures condemned to *resentiment*. We can and do alter memory, as we filter experience, and this is our mastery which makes of morality something more than rationalization and habit.

VII

Within the *structure* of memory in Husserl's accounting and in addition to the autonomic feedback loops supportive of the ongoing current of existence, remembrance thus serves a creative resource of restoration and transformation. There is a mending feature to remembrance in the process of reconciliation for example, that is critical for both identity and growth. Remembrance, coupled with the reciprocal movement of forgetting, or in the further movement

of forgiving, makes possible a revaluation of the whole life project. This is a process of letting go in such a way that there is a deeper understanding and retention in memory, and a remediation through memory. If it is impossible to remove the residuals of the trace, it *is* possible to revalue and reinscribe the tenor of a life-script.

Shoah is a point of remembrance without resolution in oblivion or forgiveness—it is simply and insistently a bearing witness to pain in memory. The point however, is that there exists an option. In individual and collective terms the residuals of memory require both retention and removal; they may be constructive or destructive; be that with which we learn and grow, or that from which we wither and die. In the dynamic of memory, the reciprocity of retention and remediation must sometimes be attended by a deeper movement in which, e.g. remorse and guilt is transformed through forgiveness, so that one can begin again or be enabled to go on. The adage attributed to Santayana, that those who fail to remember their past are doomed to fulfill it, is an additional reminder that we must both remember the past and somehow work through it to be freed of the consequences of its determination. Both Freud and Derrida speak of the encumbrances of residuals in the trace of memory, and Ricoeur's analysis of the three modes of remembrance, history, and oblivion addresses at length the imperative of oblivion as a counter force against the chains of memory and history.

Anger may be a simple matter of the moment—felt, acted upon, and forgotten. But it may be retained and sour into hatred. Memory in this way becomes pathological: hatred is destructive of the subject, not its object. Forgetting is a critical therapeutic issue here. In the general course of individual and social development, remembering passes into history—natural, cultural, historical, individual—in ways that we are bound by it in habit and habituation, character and custom. It is essential to the freedom of mind and spirit that there is an enabling

power of disengagement from the bounds and bonds of memory and history, the examples of which are legion. Nietzsche analyzed the cultural foundation of traditional morality in terms of the negative trace of memory in *resentiment* and Shakespeare makes the more general point without cultural moralizing in Hamlet's remark: "Thus doth conscience make cowards of us all,"—both of which suggest the scope of this difficulty. The psychoanalytic focus on the negative aspects of memory in the forming of pathology through anxiety, guilt, resentment, remorse and shame indicate as well the need for a creative faculty that integrates the reciprocity of selective remembrance and forgetting.

The savage energies of war generate an intensity of feeling that often carries into indelible memory. In the violence of action, life becomes meaningful in ways hard to relinquish in its aftermath, so that its carnage for both perpetrator and victim remain long after the offense. Reconciliation with self and other, in and after war, requires more than forgetting. The political instrument of general amnesty as a kind of formal and public forgetting is exemplary: there is always a trace of remembrance written on the soul of a person and a people, such that more than a political act is required for reconciliation, for a healing of the self in relation to the other. If forgetting ensured oblivion, it would be ideal: the terrible sense of the other as alien, an object of fear and loathing simply deleted from living memory. But the deeper healing of reconciliation that makes community possible seems to require a middle ground that includes remembrance as well. A spiritual sense of wholeness and a democracy of cultural sensibility cannot be legislated by government.

It is at just this point that the world of literature, art, and music transcends times and cultures to become a mode of translation and transformation, of recognition and redemption. The most obvious example of this is found in tragic drama, which identifies suffering as

universal; it creates a space in which we can identify with and take on the suffering of the other. The Greek writing and viewing of *The Trojan Women* is one example that Martha Nussbaum has examined. The drama is far removed from the aftermath of a mythic war, of course, and written in Greek for Greeks, but the transforming point of reconciliation in the imaginative use of memory is still in force. Another familiar example of humanity in the remembrance of the other in literature is found in the memorable episode in the war-poem of the *Iliad,* in which man-slaying Hector, taking off his war helmet at the frightened cry of his child, comforts him in an unquestionable and intimate moment of humanity. Remarque's novel *All Quiet on The Western Front*, is another familiar example of an expression of humanity with which any side of a conflict can identify, and through this recognition of a common humanity, find reconciliation with the other.

It is not hard to envision what Man would be in the absence of the faculty of remembering or of an interest in the preservation of memory. There would be neither character nor culture, creatures living only from moment to moment with no thought of either past or future. It is in this way of course that the idea of future exists only in the conception of the past. The assimilative character of consciousness is rooted in the background connectedness of the moments of its lived-time, and the fact that the moment just past is still retained as part of the living structure of the present. Husserl's three modes of consciousness: primal *impression* (consciousness as such); *retention* (original consciousness of past that preserves and modifies the just lapsed phases of the object), and *protention* (immediate consciousness of the future phases of the object as possibility) together constitute perception, memories, and strivings, a phenomenology of time consciousness as a flow of continuous moments of past-present-future.

Both world and person exist in this continuous flow of duration: that we have a past, makes the conception of the future—of a different and better life.—possible. However difficult things are, we remember that times can be better and find therein the resources for making them so—thus springs hope and a strength of endurance.

Concluding Note

I had in mind to reference and analyze the importance of remembrance though various literary works, but that must await a further writing. In addition to Faulkner and Elliot cited at the outset, and aside from the obvious and usual inclusion of writers like Proust (*On the Remembrance of Things Past*), it would be instructive to contrast remembrance in writers such as Conrad (*Youth, Heart of Darkness),* Dostoevsky (*Letters from Underground*), Joyce (*Dubliners, Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*), Thomas Wolff (*Look Homeward Angel*), Nabokov (*Speak Memory*), and lighter pieces like Harold Pinter's *Old Times*, among many others that you might recall as well.

Aristotle cited the remembrance of great words and deeds as that which makes possible the history and identity of a people. Marx's analysis of man as a species-being whose identity is a product of his history—what he makes, what he does, what he incorporates into the memory of his constructive achievements—also speaks to the essential importance of cultural memory. But it is in the transcendental character of remembrance in art and literature that human beings become conscious of and reconciled to the essential strangeness as well as possibilities of a shared and common world.

The wonder of invitation in human life is to think, to dream, to remember, to imagine. We began with the metaphor of journey to describe the life of memory. The metaphor of journey

is also essential to an understanding of human life as such. T.S. Elliot expresses in poetry the argument of Plato about life and learning: that all human strivings may result in returning to the place where we began, and of recognizing it for the first time. Remembrance is an essential modality in the journey of recognition and realization that leads us to ourselves, which is the crucial point of Plato's reminder that philosophy is coming to understand what it is we already know.

Heidegger's lesson in the repair of humanity that envisions truth as *aletheia* as unforgetting— is also a remembrance that brings to presence that from which we have fallen away—most of all that we have fallen away from ourselves, from the being of the becoming which we are. But essential to the correction of forgetfulness is the reciprocal dynamic and existential dialectic that joins remembering and forgetting: both are essential in the mind's freedom and identity and to its outreach to world and other. The contribution of poetic literature to this constituting of self and world is the collective idea of humanity in which presence and absence exist each in the other so that the mind of memory is discovered already in the shared world of culture, in the living tradition that binds experience into the possibility of the moral life of human beings.

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