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Mnemonic and Intertextual Aspects of Literature

RENATE LACHMANN

1.

When literature is considered in the light of memory, it appears as the mnemonic art par excellence. Literature is culture's memory, not as a simple recording device but as a body of commemorative actions that include the knowledge stored by a culture, and virtually all texts a culture has produced and by which a culture is constituted. Writing is both an act of memory and a new interpretation, by which every new text is etched into memory space. Involvement with the extant texts of a culture, which every new text reflects (whether as convergence or divergence, assimilation or repulsion), stands in a reciprocal relation to the conception of memory that this culture implies. The authors of texts draw on other texts, both ancient and recent, belonging to their own or another culture and refer to them in various ways. They allude to them, they quote and paraphrase them, they incorporate them. "Intertextuality" is the term conceived in literary scholarship to capture this interchange and contact, formal and semantic, between texts—literary and non-literary. Intertextuality demonstrates the process by which a culture, where "culture" is a book culture, continually rewrites and retranscribes itself, constantly redefining itself through its signs. Every concrete text, as a sketched-out memory space, connotes the macrospace of memory that either represents a culture or appears as that culture.)

2.

Literature, culture's prominent (yet not only) representative of recording has affinities to other mnemonic paradigms, constitutive for a given culture. The most significant in this respect is the art of memory originating in the ancient discipline of mnemotechnics, which gave rise to a prolific tradition of representing and transmitting knowledge. Writing in its mnemonic dimension has some affinities to this art, concerning the concept of memory and the role that images play in procedures of recollection and remembering.

Mnemotechnics has a legendary source. The story of its invention by the Greek poet Simonides Melicus, passed down by Cicero and Quintilian as a prescription for acts of recollection, conceals an ancient myth narrat-

ing the development of the art of memory, at the threshold between an ancient epoch of ancestor cults and a later time when the deceased were mourned but not worshipped (Goldmann; see also Boer, this volume). The legend tells of an earthquake which caused a building in which the feasters at a banquet were seated in a certain order to collapse. It tells of the mutilation of their faces, so that it was impossible to recognize them and to remember their names. Simonides, the poet—the only one to survive the catastrophe—acts as a witness to the old, abandoned order that has been rendered unrecognizable by an epochal break. He restores this order through an “inner writing” and reading, using images that function in the same way as letters. Forgetting is the catastrophe; a given semiotic order is obliterated. It can only be restored by instituting a discipline that reestablishes semiotic “generation” and interpretation. At the beginning of memoria as art stands the effort to transform the work of mourning into a technique. The finding of images heals what has been destroyed: The art of memoria restores shape to the mutilated victims and makes them recognizable by establishing their place in life. Preserving cultural memory involves something like an apparatus for remembering by duplication, by the representation of the absent through the image (phantasma or simulacrum), by the objectification of memory (as power and ability, as a space of consciousness, or as thesaurus), and by the prevention of forgetting through the retrieval of images (the constant recuperation of lost meaning).

Several key concepts which helped to shape various styles of memoria could be seen as originating in this mythical tale: forgetting and remembering (as mechanisms that establish a culture); the storing of knowledge (as a tradition's strategy for survival); the need for cultural experience to be preserved by a bearer (of memory) as witness or as text. The myth anticipates the competition in mnemotechnics between writing and image, and the copresence of the working of memory and death.

The significance of the legend, or mythical narrative, emerges in the retellings by Cicero and Quintilian. With somewhat different accents, they both define mnemonics as imagination, as a combination of the experience of order and the invention of images. Images as representatives of things, *res*, and names, *verba*, to be remembered are registered in preordained spatial arrangements and deposited in imaginary spaces such as temples, public places, spacious rooms. When the mind traverses such depositories of mnemonic images, the images are recollected, arranged in a series and then made to revert into the elements for which they substituted. The technique recommended by Cicero refers specifically to the memorization of texts.

In his interpretation of the Simonides legend, Cicero offers a new insight into the relation between image and script. He equates the fundamental factors of mnemotechnics, *loci* and *imagines*, with the wax tablet, *tabula*, and the letter, *littera*. These equations—wax tablet-mnemonic place, letter-image—are essential in his argument. In the second book of *De oratore* the work of memory requires the sketching of an inner image. This inner image must designate the object that is to be remembered, an object that is invisible, no longer present. The image becomes the visible sign for that object etching itself in the memory place. The images are registered in the mnemonic space—just as letters are scratched into a writing tablet.

By inserting itself into the mnemonic space between texts, a text inevitably creates a transformed mnemonic space, a textual depository whose syntax and semantics could be described in the language of the Simonidean mnemotechnics as *loci* and *imagines*. In the same way that the wax tablet is replaced by the architecture of memory, the architecture of memory is replaced by the textual space of literature. The text traverses memory spaces and settles into them. At the same time, every added text enriches the mnemonic space which new texts will traverse.

3.

The bond between mnemotechnics and literature is grounded in the double meaning of *imago* as an image of memory and as the product of imagination, the creative stimulus of literature. The image-producing activity of memory incorporates poetic imagination. The crucial problem here is to define the ways in which mnemonic imagination and poetic imagination interact. They seem to mirror each other and comment upon one another. It is also plausible to assume that literary imagery necessarily appears in mnemonic imagery, that the image bank of literature is the same as the image bank of memory.

(It is certainly the case that there are striking parallels between imagination (fantasy) and memory.) They both represent absent objects with images. For both the image is ambiguous, both true and false. However, the alternatives may not be as clear cut; they may not radically exclude one another. In philosophical and aesthetic treatises in antiquity as well as in the works of thinkers of later periods both the parallels between fantasy and memory and their interaction in the form of a coalition between the two are pointed out. To give two instances (representing different intelligences of ideas): In his essay “Pleasures of the Imagination” (1712), the English empiricist Joseph Addison defines primary pleasures as derived from sight, which he calls “the most perfect and most delightful of all our

senses," and secondary pleasures as pleasures of imagination, "which flow from the ideas of visible objects, when the objects are not actually before the eye, but are called up into our memories, or formed into agreeable visions of things that are either absent or fictitious." (Things absent are either due to past impressions or experiences or they are products of fantasy, fictitious.) In Giambattista Vico's treatise "Scienza Nuova" (1744), a third factor enters the coalition between *phantasia* and *memoria*, namely *ingenium*. Vico defines *phantasia*, *memoria*, and *ingenium* as human capacities that are indivisible from each other. (Whereas fantasy transforms what memory offers, *ingenium* is the capacity which orders and registers what has been remembered. Recollection and imagination are intertwined) (Trabant).

4.

Yet there are still other parallels between the art of memory and writing as a mnemonic act when taking a closer look at intertextual procedures. When a given text enters the domain of other texts, the reference can be to entire texts, to a textual paradigm, to a genre, to certain elements of a given text, to a stylistic device, to narrative techniques, to motifs, etc. The link between the given text and the "other" text (the referent text) is the referent signal or intertext. The intertext is the very element of another text which has been incorporated, absorbed, quoted, distorted, reversed, resemanticized, etc.

The memory of the text is formed by the intertextuality of its references. (Intertextuality arises in the act of writing inasmuch as each new act of writing is a traversal of the space between existing texts.) The codes to which the elements intertwined in intertextual discourse belong preserve their referential character in relation to a semantic potential and to cultural experience. Cultural memory remains the source of an intertextual play that cannot be deceived; any interaction with it, including that which is skeptical about memory, becomes a product that repeatedly attests to a cultural space.

I should like to suggest three models of intertextuality, whose construction attempts to take into account the above-mentioned interrelation between mnemonics and culture (participation, troping, and transformation). In these models, writing as continuation, writing as repetition, writing as rejoinder, and rewriting are concealed.)

(Participation is the dialogical sharing in the texts of a culture that occurs in writing. I understand troping in the sense of Harold Bloom's concept of the trope, as a turning away from the precursor text, a tragic strug-

gle against those other texts that necessarily write themselves into the author's own text, and an attempt to surpass, defend against, and eradicate traces of a precursor's text. In contrast, I take transformation to involve the appropriation of other texts through a process of distancing them, through a sovereign and indeed usurpatory exertion of control over them. This appropriation conceals the other texts, veils them, plays with them, renders them unrecognizable, irreverently overturns their opposition, mixes a plethora of texts together, and demonstrates a tendency toward the esoteric and the cryptic on the one hand, and the ludic, the syncretistic, and the carnivalesque on the other.)

(All texts participate, repeat, and constitute acts of memory; all are products of their distancing and surpassing of precursor texts.) In addition to manifest traces of other texts and obvious forms of transformation, all contain cryptic elements. All texts are stamped by the doubling of manifest and latent, whether consciously or unconsciously. All texts make use of mnemotechnic procedures, in sketching out spaces, *images*, and *images agentes*. (As a collection of intertexts, the text itself is a memory place; as a texture, it is memory architecture, and so forth.) All texts, furthermore, are indebted to transformatory procedures that they employ either covertly or ludically and demonstratively.

In order to describe intertextual reference to elements of other texts, a metonymic type would have to be distinguished from a metaphorical one, with the help of rhetorical categories. The appropriation of texts occurs differently according to whether they are in a relation of contiguity or a relation of similarity. Here it seems evident that a tendency toward the metonymic should be ascribed to the model of participation. In quotations, anagrams, and syllepses, the borders between the previous text and the new text are shifted; the texts, in a sense, enter into one another. Metaphoric reference allows the preceding text to appear as an *imago* within the new one; similarity evokes the original but at the same time veils and distorts it.

Troping, participation, and transformation, with their respective emphases on metonymic and metaphoric procedures, cannot be clearly distinguished with regard to the constitution of meaning in a text: They occupy a position between positive and negative semantics, between the production of semantic surplus value and semantic evacuation. Intertexts based on similarity (figures causing semantic shifts and reversals of polarity) dissolve the meaning of the text as it existed beforehand, whereas intertexts based on metonymy (participational figures) seem to preserve the pre-text. The above-mentioned models cannot be exclusively identified with metaphoric or metonymic intertextuality. One can, however, note a metonymic tendency in authors such as Pushkin, Akhmatova, and

Mandelstam, primarily in their use of anagrams, syllepses, quotations, hidden allusions, rejoinders, and repetitions, and in their surpassing of other texts as well as their attempt to identify or to merge the time of their pre-texts with the time of their own texts. In authors such as Dostoevsky, Bely, Nabokov, one also finds metonymic intertextuality; however, its repeating, preserving gesture is subverted by the syncretism of the assembled intertexts. In these authors, without a doubt, metaphoric intertextuality is more strongly developed. Semantic repolarization, achieved through the figurative or "improper" text (in the rhetorical sense of *improvisé*), shifts the already present meaning of the text while simultaneously proffering another meaning. The simulacral character of metaphoric intertextuality lies in the double status of the intertextual text, being itself and another at once. Through the play of restructuring and dissimulating, it denies the presence of other texts that it nevertheless indicates at the same time. This also applies to metonymic texts, insofar as their manifest structure is subverted by a subtexual one. At the same time, the approach to another text is also a distancing of it: The other textual model—especially in Dostoevsky—is followed and simultaneously crossed out.

5.

The mnemonic capacities of literature include the representation and transmission of knowledge. Whereas the disciplines that substituted the ancient mnemotechnics tend to system formation and the creation of encyclopedic models in order to recover and accumulate knowledge (especially in the tradition initiated by Raimundus Lullus and taken up and refined by authors of the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries), literature responds to this in a less systematic way. In quoting and discussing philosophical, aesthetic, theological, historical, and scientific knowledge, literature stores and transmits knowledge, transforming it into an element of the artistic text (exemplified by versified and prosaic texts of different periods). Literature becomes the bearer of actual and the transmitter of historical knowledge and it construes intertextual bonds between literary and non-literary texts (Furthermore, literature recovers and revives knowledge in reincorporating some of its formerly rejected unofficial or arcane traditions.) The particular mode of writing which deals with such knowledge is the literature of the fantastic, especially in Romanticism. Here the fantastic operates as a mnemonic device that makes the forgotten or repressed reappear and compensates for what was lost as a result of cultural constraints. This mode of writing supported and nourished suppressed traditions of knowledge which ran as an undercurrent below the main-

stream of Enlightenment. The authors of fantastic texts were fascinated by the exclusive nature of the disciplines of arcane knowledge with their doctrines and practices, the secrets of alchemy, mesmerism, the symbolic language of the kabbala as well as by their ritualistic preservation and transmission, and by the hope of regaining through them long-forgotten insights into human nature and the lost order of the world. Scientifically not fully approved techniques, such as hypnosis and hypnosis, persisted along—or "under"—the enlightened disciplines and sciences proper. A forgotten past is encountered again in fantastic literature. The recounting of that past heals an occluded memory. In this mode of writing, authors (in the "classical" fantastic and the "neo-fantastic" traditions) draw—in a most obvious manner—on other texts, recollecting stylistic strategies, plots, motifs, the personnel, the anthropological or philosophical problems the preceding texts dealt with; they transmit the structure and semantics of the genre as such (cf. the tradition including the representatives of the Gothic novel, Mary Shelley, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Nikolaj Gogol, Edgar Allan Poe, H. G. Wells, and others).

6.

Authors of literary texts like to explicate their own memory concepts. Some develop intricate "mythopoetic" theories which betray the assimilation of philosophy or literary theory. The manifests of avant-gardist movements (e.g., Italian and Russian futurism) proclaim the death of the established artistic-literary tradition in order to begin anew on its ruins. The corresponding literary theory, formulated by Russian formalism, sees literary (cultural) evolution as an alternation of systems, advocating discontinuity and rupture as the moving force. The radical opposite to the programmatic dismissal of the past, advocated by the futurists, is to be found in the movement of the Acmeists, Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandelstam. Instead of defending the idea of a tabula rasa, the Acmeists "yearn for the world culture" (Mandelstam) as an imperishable *thesaurus*, which they want to incorporate and to repeat, transforming it into a text. Their poetry is a telling example of the participation model that appears to best represent the mnemonic function of intertextuality. Participation works as revoking past texts, as sharing and repetition. (Anna Akhmatova speaks of "the profound joy of recurrence." It includes a thematization of writing as a process of remembering, an equation described by Akhmatova thus: "When I write, I remember, when I remember, I write.") Mandelstam in "Literary Moscow" (1922) expresses it even more pointedly: "Invention and remembering go hand in hand in poetry; to remember

means the same thing as to find, and the man who remembers is the inventor. [...] Poetry inhales remembering and invention with its nose and mouth." Mandelstam proposed an elaborate theory of cultural memory which owes some of its constituent ideas to Henri Bergson's notions of time, duration, evolution, and memory. The past is grasped as becoming, as deferred meaning that neither was nor is but is always being projected into the future. By treating culture as a kind of macroconsciousness, Mandelstam transposes Bergsonian concepts, which originally related to human consciousness, to the realm of culture. Retrospection is an approach to history which is carried on by writing. It is an attempt to participate in the past of a culture as a whole.

Disordered pluralism, the disengagement from divisible, measurable time, the plurivocal answer of the poetic word to the earlier times, the experience of distinct temporal strata—all these aspects of Mandelstam's conceptual imagery are echoes of Bergsonian concepts. Pure duration is heterogeneous. Remembering is not the restitution of a unified, monadic complex but the recalling of heterogeneous, interrelated strata. For Mandelstam culture is a totality that encompasses the continuous accumulation of elements, which cannot be related to one another in terms of measurable time. In order to make time into an achronic synchrony, Mandelstam extricates it from the iron rule of sequentiality. Heterogeneity is stored in the text and in memory; it is itself a phenomenon of time, just as time is a phenomenon of the heterogeneous.

In his reading of the Bergsonian concept of time as *évolution créatrice* and *durée irréversible*, Mandelstam takes into account Bergson's ideas of past, present, and future, as well as his theory of the role of memory. Bergson's notion of the accumulation of the past in the present led him to postulate a mechanism suppressing those things in memory that are unnecessary for grasping the present. Acmeist memory—deviating from Bergson at this point—is directed expressly against the forgetting of signs, against their utilitarian suppression. For them, *durée* is possible only as the storing of continually accruing layers of memory. The creative act of writing is immersed in duration. The act of writing prevents that which has been gathered in memory and in remembering from acquiring a definite identity. Mandelstam's formulaic statement in his essay "Pushkin and Skryabin" (1919): "Memory triumphs even at the price of death! To die is to remember, to remember is to die" expresses a transindividual concept of memory. Dying as remembering means that the cultural experience stored by an individual (a writer) outlives that same person. Memory enshrined in writing is directed against the destruction of cultural experience. The locus of this transindividual, noninheritable memory is the text.

7.

(In techniques such as the embedding of either other texts or foreign textual elements in the surface structure of a given text (quotations, allusions, reminiscences, and so on), or in procedures such as the mixing together and piling up of many different texts belonging to various poetic systems (cento, bricolage), or even the rewriting of, or a rejoinder to, a known text that appears in the form of a polemical response, travesty, parody, and so forth, the concern is neither with conjuring up an untouched world of literary tradition nor with demonstrating an inexhaustible erudition that is absorbed into the text as quotation. The issue concerns the semantic explosion that takes place in the collision or interfacing of texts, in the production of an aesthetic and semantic surplus. The mnemonic function of literature provokes intertextual procedures, or: the other way round, intertextuality produces and sustains literature's memory.)

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Cultural Memory and the Literary Canon

HERBERT GRABES

Every moment while I am writing this down, a myriad of details are dropping into the past. No wonder that my memory, when attempting to store them, cannot but be highly selective. If this already pertains to personal memory, selectivity must be much increased when it comes to the storage of what is shared by a group of any size. The result of such selective processes has been called a canon (see A. Assmann, this volume).

As there are good reasons to assume that the processes of selection are generally based on evaluation, canons are objectifications of values, either individual or shared. For this reason they possess a considerable amount of prestige within the larger framework of culture. The awareness that this is so is shared keenly by the group of (mostly American) critics who, over the last few decades of the twentieth century, fiercely attacked "the canon." What these attacks show is that when collective values change, this may affect considerably the validation of canons.

We know from personal experience and from history that changes in the hierarchy of values are not uncommon, and an objective indication of such changes are the canonical shifts that can be observed over time. It is therefore not surprising that the widest field in the domain of the study of the canon has been that of the history of the concept of "canon" (cf. Gorak) and the history of such literary canons as have actually been formed (cf. Weinbrot; Kramnick; Ross; Grabes and Sichert). In view of the likelihood of change and the appearance of competing canons in one and the same culture, it seems sensible to consider them as results of evaluations shared and promoted by groups within a culture over a certain span of time.

On the other hand, canons are construed in order to last, and the history of canon formation shows that, against all odds, they quite often possess an extraordinary degree of longevity. This has to do with their central importance for the shaping and sustenance of cultural memory, in his groundbreaking 1988 essay "Kollektives Gedächtnis und kulturelle Identität" ("Collective Memory and Cultural Identity") (Jan Assmann presented a definition of cultural memory as "the characteristic store of repeatedly used texts, images and rituals in the cultivation of which each society and epoch stabilizes and imports its self-image; a collectively shared knowledge of preferably (yet not exclusively) the past, on which a group bases its awareness of unity and character" (15).)