

**Noah's Ark
Or
Memory As Cultural Heritage**

Sidonia NEDEIANU GRAMA

PhD Student

"Babeş-Bolyai" University, Cluj-Napoca

In Anglo-Saxon culture, the sharp eye of Prof. David Lowenthal, author of the book *The Past is a Foreign Country*, the title of which became an aphorism, saw the growing interest in heritage as a modern crusade, or as a growing industry of establishing one's pedigree. He wrote on the ubiquity of heritage in *Possessed by the Past. The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*: "All at once heritage is everywhere – in the news, in the movies, in market place – in everything from galaxies to genes. It is the chief focus of patriotism and a prime lure of tourism".¹

Even if he managed to find plausible explanations for these practices, identifying certain tendencies of contemporary society which predisposed for a nostalgic and anxious state of mind – in which everything different from the present is seen with a *chronic affection* – the English professor wanted to draw attention to the possible abuses provoked by this *zeal* of guarding more and more traces of the past and using them for different purposes in the present. He warned, "The growing worth of heritage aggravates conflicts over whose it is, what it means, and how to use it".²

On the other hand, the compulsive tendency to save and guard an indefinite number of traces of the past – since lately everything seems to deserve being memorable and kept from the spirit of destruction – may bring to uselessness and suffocation.

The ideas in the *Possessed by the Past*, yet in a different way, meet with similar concerns in French culture. The prestigious work of Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire*³, appears in the bibliography of Lowenthal's book, thus engaging a dialogue with it.

I have cast an eye on the Anglo-Saxon world in order to shed light on the problem of heritage, of cultural transmittance and inheritance in its widest sense. The theoretical echoes in the field of social sciences

¹ David Lowenthal, [*Possessed by the Past*]: *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, XIII.

² Idem, 248.

³ Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire*, Vol. 1-7, Paris: Gallimard, 1984-1992.

and humanities were aroused by international debates about cultural practices implied by this phenomenon.

The echo of these debates in the French academic world can be found in the journal that I chose as an illustration of the topic discussed. It is *EspacesTemps. Les Cahiers. Réfléchir les sciences sociales*, Revue trimestrielle de l'Association EspacesTemps, avec le concours du Centre National des Lettres, 4^{ème} trimestre, 2000, with the thematic issue *Transmettre aujourd'hui. Retour vers le futur*.

The journal contains articles by sociologists, historians, philosophers, philologists, artists.

The editorial is entitled *L'utopie d'une fidélité sans faille*; the chapter *Figures et paradoxes* comprises the articles: Jean Davallon, *Le patrimoine, "une filiation inversée?"*; Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *La lignée croyante en question*; Philippe Dujardin, *Des modernes et de leurs possibles traditions*; Christian Ruby, *Nul n'est héritier s'il n'est capable d'être initiateur*; David Desbons, *Platon et Homère réconciliés*.

The second heading is *Symptômes et enjeux*, containing the articles: André Micoud, *Patrimonialiser le vivant*; Bénédicte Goussaut, *Le PACS et les représentations de la famille*; Michel Peroni and Jacques Roux, *Un espace entre deux temps*; Yveline Lévy-Piarroux, *Infléchissement*; Philippe Lejeune, *L'autobiographie comme patrimoine*; Patrick Garcia, *Les lieux de mémoire, une poétique de la mémoire?*

The third heading is *Considérations faussement inactuelles*, with Reinhart Kosselleck's article, *Les ressorts du passé*.

One notices that this issue, dedicated to transmission as a dual phenomenon of returning to the future, is structured around important subjects: the politics of memory, the gesture of commemoration, memory, forgetting, relations between tradition and modernity, heritage, temporality, historicity.

As any outstanding journal, the *EspaceTemps* is built upon prestigious works considered guiding lines for the subjects mentioned, and thus opens into a forum for debates. We mention again, among these works of reference, the *Les lieux de la mémoire*, edited by Pierre Nora, and the book of David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past*. In the arguments of certain articles one may also find the spirit of other important books, such as the one by Reinhart Kosselleck, historian of philosophy, *Le Futur passé. Contribution à la sémantique du temps historique*; of Paul Ricoeur's *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*; of Maurice Halbwachs' *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*; or of François Furet, Jean François Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, etc.

The editorial which starts this issue intends to establish the common basis of the articles written from diverse and unexpected perspectives around the topic of transmission, in the widest sense of the term. The articles seek to describe and understand the specificity of the present configuration, in the gestures and objects of transmission today. If we admit to the idea stated at the beginning about the omnipresence of the practice of transmitting a cultural inheritance (that is, everything that has an attributed meaning), the heterogeneity of the approaches to the field will not seem exasperating. Thus, we may follow the idea of heritage and its ways of transmission in the *EspaceTemps* in various perspectives: in the new field of historiography as a reflexive approach to historical writing; in the evolution of family representations; in the avatars of the concept of nation; in the new forms of religiousness; in the playful, ephemeral, and interrogative approach of contemporary art; in the systematic archiving of the autobiographies of ordinary people; or even in the current requirements, not necessarily innocent, of conserving everything that is alive.

The texts for the most part outline an almost paradoxical formula of an increased individualization of reference to the past and to tradition. It is a sort of privatization-personalization of the relations to the past – of memory, heritage, religion – as opposed to the “great nations”, the end of which has long been trumpeted by the postmodern philosophers of the West.

These tendencies are part of the specificities of a society individualizing even to atomization, overthrown in the past 50 years by rapid mutations. The lines of forces that configure society, at least of the West, if not the whole world, are analyzed or at least mentioned in these articles. Whichever way, the concern for heritage is always inscribed in this context.

It can be stated that the individualization to which we assist presumes a free choice about the past, often distanced or playful. In some cases tradition becomes disputed as an object of *bricolage* (tinkering) and *braconage* (poaching), as Michel de Certeau said. This happens because current modalities of transmission presume “a multiplicity of re-reading, re-using, re-interpretation, de-placement; the game between growing privatization and the search for universality”. This process of individualization of references is in continuous tension with the growing will to protect and produce everything that is common.

From the 12 consistent articles in this issue of the *EspaceTemps* we have chosen to present in detail the ones that render problematic the

relations that heritage installs between the past and the present as historicity.

It is well known that the work edited by Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire*, has configured some major guidelines in this field, which cannot be overlooked. Therefore, the articles that treat this topic inevitably enter the field described in the *Realms of Memory*, and thus initiating critical dialogues.

The most significant of all in this respect is Patrick Garcia's approach in his article *Les lieux de mémoire, une poétique de la mémoire?*¹, presented below. I will also refer to the ambitious project initiated by Philippe Lejeune in the *Association for Autobiography*.

On the other hand, I will draw attention to certain original treatments of the subject of transmission, that I found under the heading *Symptômes et enjeux*: one that identifies worrisome states generated by the underground ideology of scientific research (especially genetics) to preserve life, and the other which, from the perspective of contemporary art, suggests an attitude less tense compared to the serious, austere countenance with which we usually regard the act of heritage-making.

We begin therefore by presenting Patrick Garcia's critical analysis of the famous *Realms of memory*. Thus, the monumental work edited by Pierre Nora will become more familiar, and also more susceptible of reticence and questions.

Patrick Garcia: *Les lieux de mémoire, une poétique de la mémoire?*

The author is a historian, Associate Professor at the IUFM in Versailles, member of the editorial staff of the *EspaceTemps*, author of the book *Exercices de mémoire. Pratique sociale d'une commémoration. Le bicentenaire de la Revolution française* (1989), published at the CNRS, in January 2000.

The article presents itself as *intellectual archeology*, which reconstructs the itinerary of Pierre Nora and his work. Patrick Garcia re-walks the way that led Nora to undertake the enterprise of the *Realms of memory*, and critically questions the programmatic aspect of this work, first of all the social role of history and the historian.

¹ Patrick Garcia, "Les lieux de mémoire: une poétique de la mémoire?", in *EspaceTemps Les Cahiers. Reflechir les Sciences Sociales*, 2000/4.

Les lieux de mémoire is considered a major work of contemporary French historiography. Patrick Garcia identifies the following innovating directions of the work:

- it outlined the question of collective heritage and its transmission;
- it moved historiography from a traditionally peripheral position to a central position of historical knowledge (in the line of François Furet or Philippe Joutard), also giving it a heuristic value;
- *Les lieux...* contributed to the legitimization of certain new objects of study for historians, like *collective memory*, *heritage*, *commemorations*.
- by the importance given to the inexhaustible world of symbols, especially political ones, it showed that such approaches may enrich the study of political anthropology.

The morphology of a work (Morphologie d'une œuvre)

This subchapter describes the formal structure of Nora's work. He is the architect of the seven volumes of the *Realms of memory*, the person who coordinated the work of the 103 collaborators of this enterprise.

The work is considered the greatest editorial achievement in France. The publication started in 1984 and lasted until 1992. Although so many collaborators inevitably lead to a great diversity of opinion and style, the studies are articulated in fact around some strategic, programmatic lines, built by Pierre Nora, and expressed in the relatively small number of articles that he wrote for this book. The nucleus of the work also concentrates around the articles of other prestigious writers who impose strategic lines, like Mona Ozouf, François Furet, or Marcel Gauchet.

Outline of an archeology (Esquisse d'une archéologie)

Here Patrick Garcia remakes Pierre Nora's intellectual voyage. The project was built around two main directions. A first, epistemological-historiographic direction evolves around the understanding and explicit utterance of the several ways of thinking and writing about history today, and the new directions of its objects of study. This interest manifests itself in the Foucaultian editorial line created by P. Nora at the Gallimard publishing house in 1971, entitled *Les bibliothèques des histoires*, and also in another publication signed

together with Jacques Le Goff, the *Faire de l'histoire*, Paris, Gallimard, 1974. This work begins with the article of Michel de Certeau, *L'opération historique*, which marks the recent historiographic field by taking a stand against the naïve vision on history writing, as did March Bloch or Lucien Febvre as well.

The second direction is the attempt to polarize the field of history around new central concepts, just like modern history through the *Annales* school centered around the concept of *mentalities*. For this purpose Pierre Nora proposed the notion of *événement monstre*, the “monster event”, which propagates echoes, readings, and multiple representations, because the hyper-mediated contemporary society has a great “appetite for events”.

Another central concept for contemporary history is the concept of *collective memory*, which the French historian took over from the work of the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925), and which is repeatedly cited in the *EspaceTemps*. I must underline the fact that P. Nora's concerns are convergent with those of oral history as a separate discipline or practice, the research subject of which is exactly the oral testimonies that permanently construct collective memory. Oral history was institutionalized in the United States after the second World War, and French culture became receptive for it at the beginning of the '80s, French historiography thus being enriched with new approaches.¹

Patrick Garcia decrypts for the interest of the historian of collective memory the influences of certain psychoanalytic categories – that I consider of a Jungian nature – which legitimate the study of a problem that philosophers or psychologists previously considered an individual process. Thus, Pierre Nora was able to clearly define and subtly differentiate collective/social memory from historical memory, memory from history. These distinctions were necessary in order to break the confusion and circularity of the two terms, which allowed for the supremacy of the great teleological discourses of 19th century history, where all kinds of “*ideologisms*” found their legitimacy. The rethinking of the relations between history and memory and the transformation of the latter one into an object of study is inscribed into the historiographic mutation by which history accedes to self-awareness, by distancing itself from its own constructions; this is what stimulates the passage from

¹ See Philippe Joutard, *Ces Voix qui nous viennent du passé*, Paris: Hachette, 1983.

l'histoire-récit (narrative history) to *l'histoire-problème* (problem-oriented history)¹, noted by François Furet.

Here are some of the determiners of memory as opposed to those of history, as they appear in *Les lieux....* (Collective) memory is: “alive, and carried by groups in permanent evolution; it is subjected to a dialectics of remembrance and forgetting; it has a rhythm of its own latencies and revitalizations; unaware of its deformations, susceptible to be used and manipulated; vitally connected to the eternal present; affective and magical, nourished by fluid, telescopic, global, or floating memories, particular or symbolic; projects memory into the sacred; is peculiar to the individual or group to which it belongs; it is absolute, exalted.” History in its turn is or should be: “an always problematic and incomplete reconstruction of what exists no more; a representation of the past; an intellectual and secular operation, a critical analysis and discourse; it has the vocation of the universal, it is a relativist, critical, prosaic, desacralized approach.”²

Still, the borderlines between them are not tight, as a historian eager to produce a scientific, positivist piece of knowledge would have desired. Pierre Nora noted the long sustained circularity of history, memory, and nation. The historian was the one to hold real memory, in his appearance as a or “half priest, half prophet”. Therefore, the distancing from the “national novel” by a history of history cannot be an innocent action, but one that undermines memory-history by critical history.

At the same time, it should be made conscious that between the historian-the-writer and the object/subject he studies there is a personal, intimate relationship, which has to be brought to light and understood. In the age when history can no longer be naïve, the researcher’s subjectivity must not be covered, but made conscious and assumed. These are the premises also of the *Essays of ego-history*, coordinated by Pierre Nora as well.

The newly opened directions in historiography are also echoes of certain tensions that accompany the transformation of contemporary (Western) society.

The subchapter *Circumstance analysis* (p. 128) collects Pierre Nora’s analyses and intuitions regarding the social and political circumstances of his work.

¹ François Furet, *L'Atelier de l'histoire*, Paris : Flammarion, 1982, 73-90.

² Based on Pierre Nora, *Les lieux....*, XIX-XX.

He perceives contemporary society in the spirit of the postmodern condition described by Jean François Lyotard, and emphasizes the implications of an individual's unconditioned pertinence to a group, brought by the end of holism. The breaking of these types of relations will rebound on the way of transmission of common values, the relations with the past, and the status of history. In P. Nora's view, the contemporary scene is haunted by irrecoverable *losses, mutilations, uprooting, shattered memories, deritualization*. "The Lyotardian end of great nations" means for Pierre Nora the end of *ideology-memories*, like socialism, nationalism, the Republic, and this brings about the exhaustion of conflicting political situations, as François Furet announced in 1988 that it was only then to say: "*La Révolution Française est terminée*."¹

For Nora, contemporary society is a world paradoxically *stable*, marked by *accelerated* rhythms, by *mediatization, globalization*, and the *ephemeral*. All these change the perception of the present and time as historicity: "... The present has become for us the category of self-comprehension. But it is a dilated present, in which the change has become continuous, and which can only be perceived beside a past endowed with new charm and mystery, a protecting past, meant more than ever to guard the secrets of what is not only our history, but our identity too."²

The subject of identity is assiduously followed throughout the whole work as an attempt to define a contemporary collective identity, within a society extremely individualist, even to the extent of atomization. It is a problem of affiliation and inheritance in a world in which we all are *the sons of nobody and of the whole world*.

Pierre Nora's voice, contrary to that of other analysts (and especially non-historians) who scrutinize postmodernism, has tones of anxiety and nostalgia, even with a touch of Proust. To think over contemporary mobility for Pierre Nora becomes a mourning ritual. Hence may derive the frequent use of the personal pronoun *we* and the possessive *our*, noticed by Patrick Garcia.

The rush for heritage (La ruée vers le patrimoine)

In the framework of the changes that occurred in contemporary French society, a new kind of relationship is installed between memory and the past. The sensation of the de-articulation of time, the dissolution

¹ See François Furet, *Reflecții asupra revoluției franceze* (Reflections on the French Revolution), Bucharest: Humanitas, 1992.

² Based on Pierre Nora, *Les lieux...*, 27.

of a global meaning is attenuated by the obsessive, compulsive gesture of conservation, which takes to the indefinite extension of the concept of heritage, also commented in this journal. An example of this tendency is the gigantic enterprise of the Social Security archives, extrapolated by Pierre Nora in the syntagm with ironic tones, often cited as a motto: "Archivez, archivez, il en restera toujours quelque-chose!"

Over and above possible excesses, the configuration of our age in which unifying ideological memories end would allow each one of us to choose whatever he/she might want to preserve from the past. Thus a certain – as the author of the article calls it – *memorial ecumenism* is installed. For Pierre Nora the (historical) past "lost its organic, peremptory, and constraining character".¹

However, this process does not throw the relations with the past into derision, or into the register of playing, characteristic to postmodernism, but it continues to present, in Nora's opinion, an existential importance. This makes the role of the historian in this *pluralist and pacified space* (re)become central (somewhat overdimensioned, as Patrick Garcia critically remarks), as the intermediary and interpreter of atomized private-personal memories, but also the maintainer of social cohesion. Here it is what Pierre Nora stated about the atomization of society and memory, and about individual responsibility: "The atomization of a general memory into private memory invests the law of memory with an intense power of inner coercion. It turns everybody's obligation of remembering and the recuperation of his pertinence-group into the principle and secret of identity. The more memory fails to be lived collectively, the more it requires particular people who turn themselves into memory-men."²

There is yet another important fact that Pierre Nora proposes in *Les lieux...*: a different type of history, a symbolic history, *of the second degree*.

The realms: a symbolic history (Les lieux: une histoire symbolique)

The author considers that the metaphorically understood history proposed by Nora in *Les lieux...* as the crystallization of the national feeling privileges as objects of study all the commentaries and representations describing the arabesques made by the successive forgetting and revitalization of guiding marks, figures, and fundamental works which configured the *French national narrative*.

¹ Pierre Nora, *Les lieux...*, 988.

² Idem, XXX.

Nora believes that at this level of self-referential symbols having a life of their own the project of the *Annales* school which has been dreaming of a *total history* may come true.

Where the history of demography and economy failed, Nora outlines an ambitious program of writing the history of material objects like the *realms of memory*, the function of which is “to stop the time, to halt the deeds of forgetting, to fix the state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial in order to enclose the maximum of meaning into the minimum of signs”.¹

The critical analysis of P. Garcia also draws attention to the danger of the expansion of symbolism to the point of *de-realization, de-substantiation of history*: “Throwing into the abyss may lead to a de-realization of history which would be no more than a game of mirrors where representations are reflected forever”.²

Without underestimating the central role that the *Les lieux...* fulfils in current historical writing, the author launches an invitation to the debate of the neuralgic points of Nora’s enterprise. The most sensible spot that Garcia identifies is Nora’s nostalgic attachment to the unifying, constitutive, and essentialist French nationalism of collective identity. In the context of contemporary France, national consciousness, this time projected into another mental disposition – “amoureuse” (loving), and not aggressive as it has been from the 19th century onwards –, remains in Nora’s view also an imperative for historians. By studying memory, they should understand in fact national consciousness. Historians – though only as interpreters and intermediaries – will remain irreplaceable. Therefore their civic importance remains, though lightly overestimated.

This national belief persists in the work coordinated by Nora beside reflexive, relativist, and innovating tendencies, in a somewhat contradictory manner. Beyond all this, a vague uneasiness and the perception of a past overshadowed by threats seem to permeate the articulations of Pierre Nora’s discourse in the *Les lieux de mémoire*.

Jean Davallon: *Le patrimoine: une filiation inversée?*

Another article of the journal which is centered around the *Realms of memory* discusses the relations between heritage transmission and the past from a changed perspective.

¹ Pierre Nora, *Entre mémoire et histoire*, in P. Nora, *Les lieux...*, 42-43.

² Patrick Garcia, *op.cit.* 139-141.

The author is professor at the Jean Monnet University in Saint-Etienne, where he is the Head of the Exhibitions and Museums Study and Research Center. In his article he questions heritage not from the perspective of the past, as a museographic approach usually does, but from that of the present. "What happens if we look at heritage from the present? What if we leave behind the scheme of linear transmission going from the creators towards us, the heirs? What if we simply ask what kind of relation heritage installs between the past and the present?"¹

The past is understood here as a different world, an "otherness". This consideration brings history closer to ethnology, by which it is inspired. The most important function of heritage is the fact that it stimulates the reconstruction of a relation with a world disappeared, starting from a found object. The recognized value of this object makes us indebted to those who produced it, so, far from being a memorial continuity, heritage opens a reverse affiliation, which is cultural, and not social or biological.

Using the dichotomy made by ethnology between oral societies, characterized by a *creativity of a cyclical type*, and literate societies, characterized by a *creativity of a rupture type*, Davallon voices the functions of heritage in our complex society, which mixes the two types of creativity in different amounts.

Heritage is part of the procedures which contribute to the establishment of the "good version" of the tradition on which a society or a social group was built, marking, inventorying, studying, recording, and preserving it." Heritage imposes a difference between a *we* and a spatial and/or temporal *elsewhere*, to which we are related as modalities of thinking and acting. It contains therefore a double dimension: of what there is, in relation to what there was. This difference, once brought to the surface, presupposes a rupture, a crevice (through which the past can be viewed from a distance), and also a *partial continuity* (installed exactly by this view thrown from the present to the past).

The ambivalence of the nature of heritage must be considered differently than the usual approaches to the problem have done so far, which always saw only one side of the coin. Because if we understood heritage only under the sign of difference, of the rupture between *us* and those producers or guardians of the objects that we generically call *them* (in order to name the social world of the past), then we would cast the object of our retrospective view into isolation, uselessness, into that what

¹ Jean Davallon, "Le patrimoine: une filiation inversée?", in *EspaceTemps Les Cahiers. Reflechir les Sciences Sociales*, 2000/4, 7.

is transcended, parasite, synonymous with an exaggerated turning to the past, regression, and, finally, death. But the understanding of the opposite, which only sees the continuity which it installs between *us* and *them*, can be abused by a social group's construction of identity, legitimating, uncritical, undistanced.

The author pleads for a general view over the constitution of heritage and proposes the notion of *partial continuity* in order to adequately understand its relations with the past, as the central idea of this article is that heritage mediates between two worlds.

We may say that the rupture marked by the persistence of heritage opens up the possibility (falsely flattering) of choosing our ancestors and looking at our history from a distance. This is the process of *reverse affiliation* that Davallon speaks about. Cultural affiliation, which substitutes strictly biological or social affiliation, will not be possible unless *we* think of ourselves in a way as *their* inheritors (who are our ancestors). Henceforward the problem of heritage leaves the domain of history (as a truthful representation of past events) and enters that of a cultural construct.

Philippe Lejeune: L'autobiographie comme patrimoine

Another facet of the problem of transmission is also worth being presented, that of a cultural practice pertaining to everyday life. It is the vast collection of autobiographies, initiated by the well-known philologist Philippe Lejeune, which is inscribed in the line of the current preoccupations of social sciences for *ego-documents*, and which tend to become objects first for archives, and then for study.

Beside the article of Philippe Lejeune, Professor of Literature at the University of Paris-Nord and member of the Institut Universitaire Français, suggestively entitled *Autobiography as heritage*, the journal contains another text by Yveline Lévy-Piaroux, professor of literature in Paris. It is an introductory presentation of Lejeune's enterprise, referring to his first efforts for the research and preservation of biographies treated as diaries, and it launches questions about the meaning of the premises and tenacity with which the French scholar undertook his research.

Lévy-Piaroux's article places Lejeune's work under the beneficial, yet potentially negative sign of the frenzy ironically expressed by Pierre Nora: "Archivez, archivez, il en restera toujours quelque chose".

Philippe Lejeune is known as the animator of the group *Récits de vie*, and the author of the works *L'autobiographie en France*; *Le pacte*

autobiographique; Je est un autre. His works contributed to the interest in autobiographies in schools and universities, not in the previous intuitive and psychological manner, but by understanding the relational games and their stake, woven in the autobiographical text, between the narrator, the referent of the writing, and the potential reader.

In the *Le pacte autobiographique* Lejeune defines autobiography as: “a retrospective story in prose that a real person tells about his/her own existence, stressing his/her individual life, particularly the history of his/her personality.” It is a clear definition by which the genre of autobiography can be differentiated from the first-person novel by its referential, non-fictional character, and also from biography, on account of the permutations peculiar to each genre between the author, the narrator, the character, and the model.

Autobiography was a fashionable genre in the ‘90s, as it was associated with wider social phenomena, with anxiety and reflection about the individual. The interest in autobiography is found in literature, and it is also absorbed by social sciences which tend to valorize the resources offered by life-stories, like sociology, psychology, cultural anthropology, and especially oral history.

Pierre Nora, who is always referred to, as we can see, in the topic discussed by the journal, says that “the production of archives is imperative for this age; the fear of losing information, traces, testimonies urges us to preserve everything”. However, Yveline Lévi-Piaroux is reticent about this quantitative approach which raises difficulties even in the age of computerized information. On the one hand, scanty sources favor wrong interpretations, on the other hand, she says, abundance might suffocate us. This truly is a daunting dilemma that Philippe Lejeune also tried to avoid.

In his article, *Autobiography as heritage*, Philippe Lejeune presents his own itinerary and the boundaries that he encountered in the valorization of the autobiographies.

The creation of the Association for Autobiography in 1992 happened, as the initiator himself admits, in the general context of the *collective frenzy of commemorations, searching for roots, of memory and the fear of forgetting, in a time when the number of recording tools is growing exponentially*. He declares that the project of the Association is meant to save “by all means the autobiographical archives sleeping in the attics of families, and which in succession will find their end in a garbage bin”, even if this desire at its extremes would arouse an older fear, felt mainly by archivists, of being invaded by a *black tide of documents*.

In the French professor's opinion autobiographies may have the quality of heritage because they assume the idea of transmission by the very intention of their writing, that is, to be read in the private environment of family and friends, or in public. (In this respect intimate diaries cannot become heritage unless in exceptional cases, and with the greatest precaution, empathy, and respect for an intimacy which was not meant to be made public).

At a closer look autobiographies also imply the idea of collective value and collective good, which Ph. Lejeune considers inherent to heritage. How does he argue for this apparently paradoxical assertion in a case when autobiography is considered an individual practice and an exclusive territory for contemplative subjectivity, close to narcissism?

The metaphor of Narcissus seems inadequate for Lejeune, because autobiography implies an exchange value. It is so because other people's life stories may help us to build our own identity. In order to make this exchange easier, Lejeune and his team intend to organize the reception of these texts, to encourage and guide their reading. Nevertheless, the dilemmas determined by this approach appeared soon, as was expected. During the entire enterprise Philippe Lejeune had to confront with questions like: "Is it necessary that so many stories be preserved, hard to explore, repetitive, and often lacking any literary value? Would it not lead to a chaotic mass? Shouldn't natural mechanisms of selection be left to do their work?"

He still remarks, not necessarily in order to avoid the questions, that the phantasm of the black tide of autobiographies has always accompanied this genre. The example of Rousseau's *Confessions* is conclusive; a contemporary critic launched the alarm as the *Confessions* was published: "to what shall we arrive if everybody arrogates his right to write and publish everything what is of his personal interest, and what he likes to remember?" (*L'année littéraire*, 1782.) Two centuries later Milan Kundera in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* has the premonition of a world of deafness, where everybody writes down his own life and nobody reads those of other people. These fears touch editors and archivists today probably more than ever.

Lejeune's arguments are realistic and precautions: the aim of the Association for Autobiography is not to preserve everything, which would be absurd, but to alleviate the destructive impulse. Even more so, the idea of autobiographic heritage for him is connected to a sort of suspension of the power of exclusion practiced by the humanities.

But returning to the questions and dilemmas aroused by this enterprise (and which can be extrapolated to everything which is considered heritage today, at least in Western society), Ph. Lejeune confesses that he found possible answers in the writings of Sartre, Xavier Edouard, but also in universal thinking: "I discovered a Sartre who wrote like a person, but talked like anybody else. After I studied the genial structure of the *Words*, here I am dissecting the film-interview *Sartre through himself*, where I find a Sartre unarmed, trivial, sometimes even opaque about himself."

As a legitimization of his efforts of preserving so many anonymous biographies Lejeune recalls the last sentence of the *Words*: "Un homme, fait de tous les hommes, et qui les vaut tous et qui vaut n'import qui."

The project of the Association for Autobiography is grounded on four original principles:

- to collect without selection (they do not refuse any autobiographical text, unlike editors)
- to read (with sympathy) without analyzing (since they do not pose as researchers, but put forward an authentic material, not subject to interpretation, for the purpose of future research from several perspectives)
- to appreciate without evaluation
- to circulate without publication (trying to develop a micro-reading system in which all texts would have equal chances of being available to the readers).

Beyond doubts and inherent failures, Lejeune presents the results of this systematic enterprise with satisfaction: a live archive, very rich and visited, which means a valuable material for research started soon thereafter. As examples for subjects of study determined by these ego-documents in various fields of social sciences, the author mentions an anthropological research about the *rites of passage* in case of teenagers, or a sociological research which focuses on the topic of identity construction, analyzing 20 autobiographies.

According to the ethics of these professions, in each case of usage of such a document the agreement of its author is required. This practice extended to other cultural circles as well, preserving some specific differences, like Spain, Germany, or England, and at this moment an online network is being initiated between similar international institutions. In the long run, the texts thus interconnected are not only potential objects of study but above all the living voices of our

contemporaries, men and women. It is possible this way to engage into an indirect, polyphonic dialogue, and a new *form of sociability*.

I wish to mention another article of this journal, the study of the sociologist André Micoud, entitled *Patrimonialiser le vivant*, purposely included by the editors under the heading *Symptômes et enjeux*. I do this because the author, questioning the present worries for recording everything that is alive (as it can be implicitly found in the paradigms of “the preservation of nature”, “protection of the environment”, “saving of the natural and human heritage”, “maintaining bio-diversity”), launches an intriguing hypothesis.

So, to find ourselves directly in the midst of anxiety, here it is the thesis of André Micoud, research manager of the CNRS: “More than just a concern for the future of life, we are talking about (in all our concerns about the preservation of *live* heritage) the symptom that accompanies the project of dominating the future”. Nothing new under the sun so far – one might say. For a start, one can only notice a subtle differentiation between the concept of *life* and *that what is alive*. For André Micoud this represents the signs of re-evaluations and re-definitions which ultimately legitimate the possibility of human intervention into what before the current impetus of genetics we all called life.

The sociologist analyzes everything that has currently happened in our society in connection with the fast conquests of genetics and the great endeavor to try to save as many life forms as possible, as in a monumental, technical, strangely contemporary *Ark of Noah*. Therefore he is entitled to believe that the (declared?) purpose of obsessive preservation of everything that is alive comes in fact from the need to isolate the factors by which life is perpetuated in order to make new, hybrid beings.

Ethnology (or, more precisely, ethnography) with its sometimes pathetic concerns for pure tradition, safe from the contaminations of modernity, also feeds on the idea of preserving everything that is threatened with extinction (physical or moral, as aging, or turning obsolete). Under the influence of a certain way of thinking about the past in the present, the (Western) disciplines of ethnology started to extend their efforts of preserving material objects in general, including even natural products from the countryside which are endangered by the industrialization of agriculture.

There is a vague similitude and a contrast in André Micoud’s article between such practices on the one hand, and the concern for

genetically modified organisms, on the other. In the end, the French sociologist concludes: *the constructed live beings* of today are abstract technical objects, because they cannot evolve, nor can they be transmitted; therefore they stop belonging to the history of life, but they belong to human society.

In order to change the register of worrying about the problem of transmission, which is present in several texts, I have to mention the article of the philosopher Christian Ruby, *Nul n'est héritier s'il n'est capable d'être initiateur*, where he proposes a voyage in the world of contemporary art, and especially its hidden convictions.

Compared to the recently outdated modernity which denied tradition in art, self-confidently basing itself on a ground considered *tabula rasa*, while socially fuddling itself with the *great emancipatory narratives*, contemporary postmodern art seems to be obsessed by the sensation of a *déjà vu*. If we look around (in the West, but also here) we can see how cultural production disappears, devoured by an *era of the ephemeral*, where mediatization maintains the generalized phenomenon of cultural “zapping”, of guarding cultural forms threatened by their fast alteration into clichés.

How does contemporary art relate to the phenomenon of heritage-transmission commented on in this journal? “Can we conceive of transmission otherwise than authority and continuity?” asks the author in his article.

The pluralist, heterogeneous, interrogative, experimental, hypothetical, and playful discourses of art are an alternative answer to the problem of heritage. In this respect the predilection for all art forms which are already conventionally called unconventional (*installations, happenings, performance*) may seem as a defiance of the ambition of eternity, or resistance in time with which the idea of cultural production has always been associated.

This frenzy of destruction, of deliberate perishing seems to get closer to the spirit of a generalized *potlatch* (as described by Marcel Mauss in *An Essay on the Gift*). Still, the French philosopher finds in the overtones a beneficial, relativist option, born from the awareness of the horrors that definitive truths produced in the 20th century. This is why contemporary art prefers – as Christian Ruby presents – questions rather than answers, the premeditated arousal of doubt, criticism, uncertainty, the experimenting with endless hypotheses that it can get close to, or distance itself from, unhampered.

It is possible that this open attitude that we find in contemporary art towards the heritage of the past and the heritage that we may leave to the future, and especially the ways that we build these bridges, might indeed be the right ones. We may succeed thus in balancing among all kinds of collective sensitivities.

Naturally, the world referred to in the *EspaceTemps* is the Western one, to which our culture has always been an *Other*. But the questions generated in the debate undertaken in the journal can be asked from here too.

What can be said about Romania from the perspective of transmission? What about this other half – paradoxically, always smaller – of Europe which has recently begun to slip back into its skin? How does all this happen here, in the city of Cluj? What else can we say about the entrails of this city, exhibited for some time in the center in order to insinuate to the by-passer a story that he has already known? How can this sort of ostentation of the distant past cope with the omnipresence of the spirit of destruction, or with the carelessness about the traces of the nearer past? How can we (re)consider our relations with the past as historicity, and first of all with the recent past, which, I dare say, was more or less confusing for each one of us?