

ART, COMMERCE, AND THE PRODUCTION OF MEMORY IN FRANCE AFTER WORLD WAR I

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The recent scholarly interest in collective memory, spurred by such ambitious publishing projects as Pierre Nora's *Les lieux de mémoire*, has brought new attention to those proverbially overlooked artifacts of public art, local war memorials. Owing perhaps to their profusion and their striking conjunction of variety and sameness, French monuments to the World War I dead have garnered a considerable share of this attention. Yet in the absence of a coherent theoretical framework, studies of such monuments too often present anecdotes, taxonomies, or metaphysical speculations as ends in themselves rather than as starting points for sustained historical analysis. Such a theoretical framework must, it seems to me, begin with a conception of collective memory not as something inherent to a group or group, reflected unproblematically in objects like monuments, but as a socially constructed discourse. In this view, as culturally specific beliefs about a historical event merge with individual memories and take on visible and legible form, collective memory emerges as a construct of the political, social, and economic structures that condition, if they do not determine, the production of those forms. Similarly, what we conventionally call "commemoration" I take to be the *practice* of representation that enacts and gives social substance to the discourse of collective memory.

The construction of both discourse and practice involves either the production or the reconfiguration, in terms specific to

their purpose, of certain cultural forms: monuments, of course, but also literature, film, and popular visual imagery in such media as post cards, cartoons, and posters. In most of these productions formal traditions and received assumptions have considerable autonomy from larger social structures and processes such as capitalism, technology, and ideological formulations like the national-local dichotomy. The role of these larger structures might best be understood as a kind of mediation: by mapping the terrain in which commemoration operates, moulding what Raymond Williams calls the "conditions of a practice," they mediate both the experience and the representation of memory.¹ In this essay, I seek to illuminate the workings of these mediations both separately and in terms of their interaction. My purpose is to reconstruct the space of monuments' construction as the conjunction of a variety of discourses and practices: local and national, commercial and artistic, high and low, and, ultimately perhaps, history and memory.

Although societies since antiquity have erected monuments to their military exploits, historians trace the origins of a new, democratic style of commemoration to the period of the Napoleonic wars, when large citizen armies began to replace mercenary troops. Whereas Roman monuments took the form of arches of triumph, with bas-reliefs celebrating the achievements of rulers or generals, the

modern nation-state has felt the need to pay tribute to the ordinary soldiers, whether volunteers or conscripts, who sacrifice their lives in its defense.² Although various groups and regimes proposed monuments to citizen soldiers from the late eighteenth century on, Maurice Agulhon and June Hargrove have argued that such monuments emerged in France only after the Franco-Prussian War finally removed the sovereign as a potential focus for commemoration. Besides their democratic spirit, monuments to the *mobiles*, the volunteer armies of 1870, broke with past traditions in two other ways that would prove durable: their location in soldiers' home towns and their frequent recourse to the reproduction of standard models.³

No one would deny, of course, that memorials to the World War I dead have an omnipresence in France that distinguishes them even from monuments with which they have much in common: the number of local monuments must approach the total number of French *communes* or townships in the 1920s, 36,000. The sheer extent of French losses in the war provides the most obvious, and the most common, explanation for the unprecedented scale of post-war commemoration.⁴ One estimate puts French military deaths at some 1,327,000, proportionally higher than any other major combatant.⁵ Yet it is not self-evident that even widespread grief should so rapidly--within only a few years of the war's end--find monumental expression. The proliferation of monuments to the dead of the Great War did not simply result from a spontaneous outpouring of emotion, however real this was, but involved the fusion of a collective need to mourn with pre-existing practices of commemoration. After all, as both Agulhon and William Cohen remind us, the nineteenth century, not the twentieth, gave birth to the expression *statuomanie*, literally a mania for putting up statues.⁶

In the Third Republic the objects of monumental commemoration ranged widely, from signal events to great figures

of the past, from Joan of Arc to Garibaldi. Agulhon's and Cohen's accounts together suggest some of the limits to this commemorative urge. Large-scale figural monuments, on the one hand, most of them original works of art, claimed resources available only to major cities and towns. On the other hand, cheaper images of the Republic, many mass-produced, generally reflected a depth of political commitment unique to certain regions, notably the Mediterranean coast.⁷ These limits suggest that monument building in the late nineteenth century took place chiefly in areas (in both the discursive and the geographical senses) of political contestation, as virtually all major cities were and as most of the areas Agulhon discusses had been as recently as 1851. The 1870-71 war became an object of commemoration particularly in areas that had suffered directly from the Prussian invasion, but elsewhere it was quickly eclipsed by the more contentious issues of the nature of the polity and its relation to the church. Significantly, a new wave of commemoration of 1870 coincided with the emergence of an aggressive (the French called it *revanchist*) nationalism in the late 1880s and 1890s. Many of these new monuments and plaques, still located predominantly in eastern France, were the work of an organization called the Souvenir français, founded shortly after the war and dedicated to the preservation of French war graves and memorials -- particularly in the "lost" province of Alsace.⁸

To observe that World War I gave rise to a vast number of monuments suggests, then, that it created a new discursive field, a new space of contestation that insistently called out for monumental resolution. This assertion may at first seem to fly in the face of the register in which monuments operate. What Americans call war memorials the French call "monuments aux morts," monuments to the dead, and with inscriptions dedicating them *to* the dead of a particular town, they evoke a community unified in mourning and in tribute.⁹ Yet besides the vigorous

controversies that occasionally developed over the site, design, and financing of monuments, debates that went to their very purpose,¹⁰ the decision to construct a monument implicated a community in several kinds of latent contestation. One might be characterized as a secular/religious question: in the face of precocious moves to place memorial plaques inside parish churches, the building of a monument stakes a claim for a specifically civic commemoration, one that may or may not be in conflict with the claims of the church.¹¹

A second kind of tension inherent in the construction of monuments involved the negotiation of local and national claims to the memory of the dead. The scope of this conflict, of course, far exceeded the field of commemoration proper; perhaps its most visceral embodiment came in the prolonged debate over where the war dead should be buried, at the front or in their home towns. Ultimately, in the face of persistent entreaties from the families of victims, the government reluctantly agreed to pay for the return of soldiers' remains to their place of birth or their pre-war residence; it also offered a free annual trip to the former front to those relatives who agreed to leave their dead in a battlefield cemetery.¹² Yet neither the transfer of remains nor battlefield visits offered any consolation to the many relatives whose loved one's body had never been found. A 1922 article on the Verdun theatre estimated that, despite continuing efforts to recover and identify remains, no more than a quarter of the 400,000 killed there would ever be given individual graves.¹³

The plight of families who lacked the demarcated site of mourning that a tombstone offered, as well as the consolation of proximity to physical remains, had much to do with the rapid spread of monuments in the immediate post-war period. Many speeches at monument dedications referred to them as substitute tombs, and enjoined members of the community, especially children, to show them the same respect they would a

cemetery.¹⁴ This discourse of substitution gives much of its significance to the designation "monument aux morts," and helps to explain the one feature common to virtually all monuments, even the rare ones that feature allegories of victory: the prominent inscription of the names of the dead (fig. 1). These names were invariably read out at monument dedications and at subsequent Armistice Day ceremonies; in some towns they find an echo in faded enamel plaques with photographs of the dead and a brief encapsulation of their life histories (fig. 2). The purpose of this discourse was largely consolatory, but it was not simply a discourse of mourning. Although the proportions vary, fewer than a third of the communes in three very different departments -- the conservative Morbihan, in Brittany, the leftist Vaucluse, in Provence, and the centrist Loir-et-Cher -- decided to build their monuments in the cemetery, the space most suited to mourning. The rest chose to place them in more or less open spaces: in front of the church or town hall, in a public square or park, or at the entrance to the village.¹⁵ Such a public position served clearly to identify the community with its monument, and to claim for the locality a privileged place in the hierarchy of post-war commemorations.

Commemoration does not simply involve urges, however: it also requires means, and what made universal commemoration possible in France after the war was the existence of a commercial monument industry. Agulhon's study of Republican imagery from 1880 to 1914 makes clear the prior importance of the mass production of standard monumental forms, but after World War I it was to reach unparalleled heights.¹⁶ For if major towns had the resources to sponsor competitions for their monuments and to hire reasonably well-known architects and sculptors to execute them, the vast majority of France's *communes* did not. To meet their needs a number of major suppliers, from well-known foundries to commercial quarries, offered for sale both low-cost

monuments and standard designs that local stone-cutters could copy or finish. Their sales pitches ranged from brochures and fliers to newspapers and sales catalogues, and they pursued prospective clients aggressively. The state, its local representatives, and art critics disparaged both the producers and the product, calling it dated, unoriginal, pretentious, and quite simply not art. For localities, however, these mass-produced or standardized memorials represented not only all they could afford, but also a way of situating a sense of loss they shared with the whole nation in the particular context of their own community.

As soon as the war ended, the Fine Arts Ministry in Paris found itself flooded with requests from members of Parliament, prefects, and mayors for models of monuments or for competitions to create them. Some local officials also sought the names of artists who specialized in commemorative art. Their letters suggested that the state provide inexpensive but aesthetically acceptable designs that could be built by communes of varying resources: "bon marché, sans vulgarité," (cheap, but not vulgar) as the mayor of Chançay, in the Indre-et-Loire, put it. Provincials with ties to the capital seem to have had a real fear that purely local initiative would lead to considerable aesthetic embarrassment: a deputy from the Ain wrote, "we must not let our land become covered with horrors. Between a work of art and an abomination there is room for something suitable [*convenable*]." ¹⁷ But the state consistently refused to provide any such models, saying that to do so would both interfere with localities' right to make their own artistic choices and impede artists' exercise of their creative freedom. ¹⁸ From July of 1919 the Fine Arts Ministry replied to all such requests with the same formulaic statement: "the ministry has abstained from intervening in the choice of artists in order to leave towns and [monument] committees the greatest scope for

initiative." ¹⁹ In addition, the ministry refused to consider subventions for monuments in towns with populations of less than 5000, on the assumption that these could not be considered works of art. ²⁰

This cut-off point referred to a law of October 1919, which offered subsidies for monuments in towns of less than 5000 inhabitants. The law provided a formula for calculating the subsidy based on two scales, the percentage of the town's 1914 population killed in the war, and the value of local tax revenues. The total ranged from a minimum of four to a maximum of twenty-five percent of the cost of the monument borne by the commune; the product of subscriptions and other private contributions was not taken into account. The proffered grants, administered by the Public Commemoration Division of the Ministry of the Interior, amounted to too little to give the state an effective role in monument design. In theory all monuments required approval from the state, but in practice only communes wanting a subsidy had to submit documentation to Paris. Since the stakes were so small, many did not bother, or only did so late in the process. ²¹

But the Interior Ministry did want to assure some quality control, to avoid what it considered the worst excesses of mass-produced monuments, so in 1920 it called on prefects to create review commissions, including the departmental architect and others with competence in design matters, to evaluate local proposals for monuments. ²² The commissions paid little attention to the Fine Arts Ministry's rhetoric about local initiative. The Breton town of La Trinité-sur-Mer, in the Morbihan, wanted to erect a monument in the shape of a *menhir*, the neolithic stone formation typical of the region, but the departmental commission considered this "lacking in harmony." Furthermore, it declared, "it does not seem a good idea to put a megalith on a masonry base." (After the monument's designer, a Paris sculptor and long-time summer resident of La Trinité, vigorously defended the regional

particularity of his design, pointing out that the base was to be in native blue granite, the commission reversed itself and approved the project.)²³ Commissioners were far more concerned with issues of originality, which they contrasted absolutely with serial or mass production. The rapporteur for the Var commission criticized the proposed monuments in Artignosc and Les Salles, two steles with pyramidal tops, saying their designer should have taken inspiration from classical models. Yet the appearance of the monuments concerned him less than the fact that the same workshop had produced both of the monuments, and that, at least in basic form, they were identical.²⁴

Commissioners were also concerned with maladroit designs by amateurs, and they continually urged communes to have recourse to trained architects and sculptors like themselves. Commission members did in fact design monuments, generally for larger towns, and naturally, they responded to their colleagues' designs with great enthusiasm.²⁵ When the project of the departmental architect Barla for a relatively simple monument in Callas came before the Var panel, the curator of the Draguignan museum wrote in his report, "Of all the commemorative projects sent to us up to now, this is certainly the one that, through the simplicity of its lines, the sobriety of its ornamentation, and the harmony of the whole responds the best and the most artistically to the desired end."²⁶ The commissioners did, however, realize that most smaller communities could not afford their services. Discussing the proposed monument in Bargemon, in the Var (fig. 3), which he called "a post-war horror," Barla declared that "certain towns seem unaware of the prefect's considered warning . . . to avoid the pretention of statues that can only be beautiful if their execution is entrusted to artists worthy of the name, whose inspiration, drawn from the faith of their art, realizes moving works, which are generally too costly to be within reach of our smaller villages."²⁷

But their reliance on models and sketches, as well as the primacy attached to originality, could blind commissioners to the way monuments work within specific locales. Arguably, the site of the Bargemon monument, in the hills of Haute Provence, lends it a dignity and power that go beyond its formal qualities. On the other hand, the Var commission lavished praise on the design for a monument in Cotignac, finding in it "the rare merit of being original, simple, and imposing at the same time. The *poilu*, the principal element of the work, becomes the soul of the stone, becomes an integral part of it as he became an integral part of the earth of the trenches."²⁸ But in the actual monument (fig. 4), the soldier looks as though he is peeping over the top of the stone out of which he is carved, and the effect, particularly from the back, is more comical than imposing.

In contrast to their praise for professionally produced unique memorials, commissions objected with particular vehemence to monuments ordered from catalogues, which they criticized for "a false luxury of details scattered without any ordering principle, and for the pretentious mannerism of statues that pretend to be allegorical."²⁹ Their comments reproduce a discourse widespread among critics of the "high art" arena, one that attributed the generally perceived low aesthetic quality of small-town monuments to the intervention of commerce and entrepreneurship. Wrote one critic in the spring of 1922, "the weather has already dilapidated the cheap enamel, the flashy gilding, the patinas of fake bronze that clever manufacturers used to disguise [maquiller] their commercial junk." Another critic, referring to "factories where commemorative war memorials are fabricated serially according to the principles of Taylorism," asked rhetorically, "is it not sad to think that so many pretty French villages have thus been disfigured by the manufacturers of patriotic sculpture?"³⁰

But the manufacturers, whatever their aesthetic deficiencies, proved skillful

at appropriating this discourse for their own purposes. Like the commissioner who reported on the Bargemon memorial, they realized that small towns lacked the resources to commission original art; indeed, this was the commercial producers' whole *raison d'être*. Yet rather than emphasizing the economy they offered, the firms' sales pitches to prospective clients sought to associate them and their product with the prestige of high art. They thus adopted a similar distinction between what they offered and a construct they labelled "serial" or "commercial." The Paris architectural firm of Clermont put out a flyer that began, "Your commune wants to build a monument that is not serially produced"; the accompanying letter said that "to avoid, following the wishes of the Minister of Fine Arts, marring our sites and public squares with monuments without cachet and in dubious taste . . . it is indispensable to provide oneself with all desirable guarantees." Specifically, the firm trumpeted the qualifications of its lead architect, "graduate of the state art school [diplômé du gouvernement] and a prize winner at the Paris Salon and in various competitions."³¹

A much larger firm, the Rombaux-Roland company in the Nord, claimed that "our designs are always approved without difficulty" by prefectural review boards. Yet the price list and the numbered designs that accompany this flyer, which could be recombined in a kind of mix-and-match fashion (figs. 5-6), leave no doubt of the commercial nature of the Rombaux-Roland enterprise.³² You could, for example, have the monument in plate 357E with or without a "victorious *poilu*," on it, in marble, bronze, or bronzed cast iron (the marble costing no more than the cast iron but executed, following the "same interpretation," by a different artist). The monuments in plate 363^{ter}, all based on the same stele form, came in a variety of sizes; on some, the decorations could be either sculpted in relief or cast in "patinated bronze"; the Gallic cock in no. 1029G could be ordered in either marble or granite; and

prices ranged from 1450 francs to 4450.

The printed circular of a Paris company, "La Pensée" (its letterhead shows the flower of that name, in English the pansy, which because of its association with memory was often planted around war memorials), assured the generic mayor to whom it was addressed that its "monuments are not produced serially, which is to say that when one is executed it is not reproduced a second time." Yet the enclosed questionnaire, beginning, "Do you desire a commemorative monument?" and including such questions as "What approximate sum do you wish to spend on it?" and "Do you want the letters painted, a) in black, b) in red, c) or gilded?" together with the promise of a free sketch and estimate within two to three weeks, suggests a file of standard designs with only minor modifications for each client.³³ Other companies, such as the Marbreries Générales in Paris, or a smaller Nice firm, insisted that they were specialists, that they could modify standard designs to suit particular sites and programs, and that their designs had "great artistic cachet."³⁴

The appropriation of artistic discourse to commercial ends reached something of an apex in a monthly (occasionally semi-monthly) newspaper called *L'art funéraire et commémoratif*. In four tabloid-size pages, each issue of *L'art funéraire* juxtaposed critical articles such as those quoted above, historical pieces on past masters of French commemorative sculpture like Mercié and Dalou, and articles, photographs, and advertisements promoting the monuments of the sculptor Charles-Henri Pourquet, a serious artist of modest talent whom the newspaper vaunted as the master of Great War commemoration.³⁵ Praise in these terms reinforced *L'art funéraire's* constant insistence, in editorials and in brief slogans interspersed throughout the text, that only trained artists and architects could produce monuments of a suitable aesthetic character.³⁶ But the newspaper did not limit itself to urgings of a purely artistic kind. Another of its slogans ran, "There is

a truth that those who undertake commemorative monuments too often do not know: in art, the beautiful is no more costly than the ugly."³⁷ On the last page of almost every issue, *L'art funéraire* advertised its availability to towns "proposing to build commemorative monuments of the Great War that will leave behind the current banality," and offered, at no charge, models, sketches, at low prices, even cost." These were undoubtedly the works of Pourquet; under the photograph of perhaps his best-known, *La Résistance*, the newspaper wrote that it could provide information "on the reproduction of this beautiful work in any material at all."³⁸

In the absence of entrepreneurial archives, it is difficult to know how successful this rhetorical strategy proved in attracting clients. A price list issued by Rombaux-Roland a few months after the one discussed earlier offered new variations on certain models and price reductions of up to fifteen percent on some of the more expensive ones. But this may simply indicate a routine market adjustment, as most prices, and all of the cheapest ones, remained the same.³⁹ More significantly, the monument business could tap a set of local attitudes that lent itself to precisely the kind of product, both discursive and physical, it was offering. The responses of local officials to the criticisms of prefectural review boards show a surprising confidence in their own ability to determine the type of monument appropriate to their community. The mayor of Les Salles, in the Var, considered the similarity of its monument to others, which the commission criticized as a sign it lacked originality, as proof of the contractor's ability. "The entrepreneur is not very good at drawing," the mayor explained, as though this explained the commissioner's reservations, "but he handles a chisel very skillfully; that's well known."⁴⁰

Recognizing the photograph on the Pourcieux plan as a commercial product, the rapporteur on the Var commission

wrote that the statue "cannot be considered an original work. It will doubtless be seen in several communes and will create more of a commercial than an artistic impression."⁴¹ The "original" realistic paint job applied by the town, in fact a fairly common practice, would hardly have changed his mind, but like most of his colleagues in similar cases he acquiesced, reasoning that small towns could hardly be expected either to produce or to appreciate original works of art.⁴² In some cases review boards were able to secure minor changes in the dimensions of a monument, in order say to harmonize a statue with a pedestal, but when presented with what the prefect called a *fait accompli*, a monument completed prior to their examination, they could not even do that.⁴³

Yet though the dichotomy between art and commerce, or between high and popular art, clearly constituted one of the basic divisions between the state and localities, it was not the only one. The town of Nans-les-Pins, also in the Var, prompted criticism from the commission because of its plan to use an old fountain as the base for its monument; the commissioner also suggested, not very helpfully, that the monument should be "more artistic."⁴⁴ In a polite but obviously deeply felt reply, the mayor observed that "the value of an object does not depend on its cost, but on the memory attached to it; our modest monument will perpetuate the memory of our dear departed just as well as one costing ten times as much." The town, the mayor wrote later, already had a monument in the cemetery, but the "population insists on having its *poilu* in a public square."⁴⁵ This apparently simple assertion actually contains two references that need to be considered separately: to the *poilu* and to the public square with its fountain.

For its *poilu* Nans chose a variation on the most popular, the product of the Jacomet company in the Vaucluse (fig. 9). Jacomet boasted in its literature, usually accompanied by a photograph (figs. 7-8) that "LE POILU is the only subject that fully

represents the idea that has been developed [qu'on se fait] of a Monument to the Dead of the Great War."⁴⁶ In fact, statistical surveys in a number of departments make clear that the most common monument was the cheapest, the simple stele (fig. 10).⁴⁷ Yet Jacomet's carefully worded advertisement makes a conceptual claim, not a statistical one, and certainly the *poilu*, who could be represented in busts, plaques, or full-length figures in a variety of poses, constitutes probably the most common motif of a national order on French World War I memorials. In the Morbihan, out of 154 monuments surveyed, seventy-nine, or just over half, lack any figural motif; in the Loir-et-Cher the percentage is greater, seventy-four out of 113.⁴⁸ But in both cases, of the monuments with figures, the overwhelming majority -- twenty-five out of thirty in the Loir-et-Cher; fifty-four out of sixty-two in the Morbihan -- include the *poilu*, either alone or grouped with other figures.

That the common soldier should emerge as the most pervasive image of the war memorial in France may not seem surprising, but its significance deserves closer examination. The *poilu*, to be sure, comes out of a stylistic tradition particular to war memorials, one extant in France since the Franco-Prussian War and with examples from the United States (in Civil War memorials of both the Union and the Confederacy) to New Zealand.⁴⁹ But this form itself represents a radical break with the prevailing tradition of monumental representation, the female allegory. This tradition had hardly seemed moribund in France, for in the three decades prior to the war it had found an embodiment in Marianne, the personification of the newly re-established Republic. Nor can this new preference for the male body be attributed simply to commercial availability; the letter from the mayor of Nans-les-Pins suggests that in this case suppliers were largely responding to demand. Lower-end monument concerns such as Rombaux-Roland did not show female allegories in their publicity materials, and probably did not

sell them. But suppliers aiming for the middle and upper ranges of the market like the Marbreries Générales and the well-known Val d'Osne foundry did offer such designs, usually winged victories, and a few towns did select them, either with or without a *poilu* (figs. 11 and 12 show two Morbihan monuments purchased from the Marbreries Générales, in Plumelin and St. Dolay).⁵⁰

Why, then, did *so* few towns choose female allegories; why did so many, like Nans-les-Pins, want an unadorned *poilu* in the public square? Simple explanations largely unrelated to the nature of monuments are not lacking: the higher cost of elaborate sculptures, the pressure of veterans' groups for realistic representations of their dead comrades, or more generally the inappropriateness of a heroic idiom to the mood of post-war France.⁵¹ All of these explanations have some merit, but we also need to consider factors proper to the order of representation itself. Marina Warner has observed that monuments in the form of the female body have historically represented abstractions, signified by particular devices: Marianne's cap, Victory's wings, Justice's blindfold and scales. Logically, then, "female figures representing an ideal or an abstraction hardly ever intersect with real individual women."⁵² Though a specially commissioned monument could transcend this abstraction, for example by clothing women in regional costume or widow's weeds, a mass-produced standard figure could do so only with great difficulty.⁵³

The soldier in uniform, in contrast, was, even in the exaggeratedly heroic pose favored by Pourquet and others, immediately recognizable as a realistic type, an important attribute for grieving relatives. This is true in a general as well as a particular sense: Warner notes that male representations of the nation, such as John Bull or Uncle Sam, have particular characters in ways that Britannia or the Statue of Liberty do not.⁵⁴ France before the war lacked such a common male representation; the *poilu* supplied one. Yet

the special appeal of the *poilu* lay in his ability to conjoin national with local resonances. Not only a standard figure, he was also a local one; given local roots by the names at his feet, he stood not only for the nation but for the individuals a particular community had given up in its name.

Returning to Nans-les-Pins, we remember that the community did not *only* want a *poilu*, it wanted a *poilu* on an existing fountain base (fig. 13). Such a combination did not lack precedents: Agulhon has found a number of Third Republic Mariannes with what he calls "hydraulic supports." A Marianne so placed clearly associated social progress -- the easy availability of water in the center of the viillage, rather than in some distant well -- with a particular political commitment.⁵⁵ In one of his letters to the prefect the mayor gave a capsule history of the fountain, built in 1887 "for a great deal of money" and clearly the pride of the town.⁵⁶ The fusion of the fountain, a symbol of the community's civic identity, with the *poilu*, which embodied the link between the community and the nation that the monument itself sought to enact, thus signified not a solution of convenience but a profoundly meaningful commemorative act.

Towns wanted *poilus*, or steles with standard decorations, or defused shells to form balustrades, because these forms signified commemoration. Their resemblance to other forms, far from disqualifying them as art, provided a link to an order of signification that towns lacking experience with high cultural discourse construed as artistic, and thus the worthiest signifier of their own highest emotions.

Nor could the repetition of forms compromise the distinctiveness of individual monuments. Having inscribed monuments with the names of their own dead, having placed them in churchyards or in town squares newly renamed Place du Maréchal Foch, or Place Verdun, or, as in St. Maurice-sous-les-Côtes, Place du Poilu (see fig. 14), towns saw in them more than mass-produced compendiums of artistic

clichés.⁵⁷ For these monuments, recognizable as such by their association with standard types yet distinctive in their locations and in the names they inscribed, presented towns with an image of their community in terms both of what they shared with others and of what remained distinctly their own.

This is not to say that the meaning monuments conveyed was either clear or fixed. As objects, monuments from the moment of their conception offered themselves up to a variety of interpretations. Indeed, even at their dedication or on subsequent Armistice Days, ceremonial occasions when monuments most ostentatiously signified unity, a practiced rhetorician could appropriate them to his own political purposes. Where a leftist deputy might find in a monument, whatever its form, an exhortation to avoid senseless slaughter in the future, one of his conservative colleagues could, at the same ceremony, extract from it support for a strong defense and an uncompromising foreign policy.⁵⁸ Whatever the views of the commentator, the monument could be interpreted to suit them. As Warner has written, "it is in the intrinsic nature of public art that it seems to adapt, to collaborate. It could be said that it has no coat to turn."⁵⁹

It seems clear, however, on the basis of some suggestive empirical evidence, that for most communities their monument embodied, more than anything else, a sense of loss. The stele alone, a form derived from funerary architecture, accounts for at least half the monuments in most departments, and often adjoins the figure of the *poilu*. Another five or ten percent of monuments in surveyed regions take the form of tombs, either with or without mourning figures, altars, or in Brittany even calvaries. Among figural monuments, few convey an attitude of triumph, either allegorically or in the pose or expression of the *poilu*. One finds as many dying soldiers as victorious ones, and the most common is at rest, solemn, pensive. A *poilu* in Normandy, not from a standard

model, even seems to be mourning a German helmet at his feet, a sign of the reconciliation that many veterans' groups advocated as a matter of policy in the post-war period.⁶⁰

But meaning is not a matter of proportions, frequencies, statistics; like memory it is profoundly unstable. The monument, in its tendency to blend into the landscape, embodies this instability in a particularly ironic way. Warner cites Robert Musil on this phenomenon:

The most striking feature of monuments is that you do not notice them. There is nothing in the world as invisible as monuments. Doubtless they have been erected to be seen -- even to attract attention; yet at the same time something has impregnated them against attention. Like a drop of water on an oilskin, attention runs down them without stopping for a moment.⁶¹

The builders of World War I monuments in France were conscious of the tendency of memory to fade, and their inaugural speeches often testify to a certain pessimism about the efficacy of the means, monuments, they had chosen to combat it: "In these parts," the mayor of a small Breton town declared bluntly, "forgetting comes quickly."⁶²

This inevitable dialectic between memory and forgetting affords a context at once poignant and revealing for the single most consistent feature of these monuments, their inscription of names. However odd or simply ugly we may find the ensemble of which they form a vital part, even today those long, heartbreaking lists, strangely echoed by the silence that usually surrounds them, cannot fail to move us. The names more than anything else constitute the monument as a place of mourning, inscribing it with the particularity of a locality that the denomination of its inhabitants embodies. More than this, by virtue of their inscription the names constitute themselves as part of a signifying process that seeks to transcend memory and its limitations by assigning it, in its

constructed "collective" form, a historical role. In a manner both poignant and troubling, names as the irreducible synecdoche for monuments stake a community's claim to a place in history, representing its loss as its most essential link to the nation.

Notes

Les lieux de mémoire currently numbers four volumes, with three more in the offing. For the scope of the project and its theoretical presuppositions, see Pierre Nora, "Présentation," pp. vii-xiii, and "Entre mémoire et histoire: La problématique des lieux," pp. xvii-xliii, in Nora, ed., *Les lieux de mémoire*, 3 vols., 1: *La République*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1984); the latter essay is translated (by Marc Roudebush) as "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations*, no. 26 (Spring 1989), pp. 7-25. On attitudes towards the study of war memorials see Jean-Pierre Marby, "Les monuments ardennais aux morts de la grande guerre," *Revue historique ardennaise* 22 (1987), pp. 137-146, who begins by observing, "Il s'avère que l'étude d'un tel sujet n'allait pas sans déclencher l'étonnement, voir le rire."

¹R. Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," in his *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 1980), p. 48. On the conception of relative autonomy in cultural theory, see Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art* (Houndmills: Macmillan Education, 1981), pp. 71-94. Her remarks on Bourdieu and cultural production, pp. 137-139, are also helpful.

²George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 9-10.

³M. Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir: L'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1880 à 1914* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989), pp. 128-136; J. Hargrove, "Souviens-toi," *Monuments historiques* no. 124 (December 1982-January 1983), pp. 59-60.

⁴See, among others, Mosse, pp. 3-4; Antoine Prost, "Les monuments aux morts: Culte républicain? Culte civique? Culte patriotique?," in Nora, ed., *Les lieux de mémoire*, 1: *La République*, p. 196; Monique Luirard, *La France et ses morts: les monuments commémoratifs dans la Loire* (St. Etienne: Université de St. Etienne, Centre Interdisciplinaire d'Etudes et de Recherches sur les Structures Régionales, 1977), pp. 15-17.

⁵Out of 1000 inhabitants in 1914, 168 were mobilized and 34 killed, as opposed to 154 and 30 in Germany. See Jean-Jacques Becker, *Les*

français dans la grande guerre, Les hommes et l'histoire (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1980), pp. 11-12.

⁶Agulhon, "La 'statuomanie' et l'histoire," *Ethnologie française*, n.s. 8 (1978), pp. 145-172; W. Cohen, "Symbols of Power: Statues in Nineteenth-Century Provincial France," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31 (1989): 491-513.

⁷Cohen, *passim*; Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir*, pp. 210-220.

⁸Prost, p. 196; Agulhon, *Marianne*, p. 132; on the rarity of monuments outside of the invaded area, Luirard, p. 14 (she cites a handful built under the aegis of the Souvenir français) and Remi Roques, "Monuments aux morts du sud-est de la France," *Provence historique* 31 (1981), pp. 247-8.

⁹On the significance of inscriptions, see Yves Hélias, "Pour une sémiologie politique des monuments aux morts," *Revue française de science politique* 29 (1979), pp. 742-4.

¹⁰I have discussed some of these controversies in "The Nation: In What Community? The Politics of Commemoration in Interwar France," in Linda Miller and Michael B. Smith, eds., *Ideas and Ideals: Essays on Politics in Honor of Stanley Hoffmann* (Boulder: Westview Press, forthcoming).

¹¹On this issue see Luirard, pp. 17-22.

¹²Articles on this issue can be found in newspapers published by veterans' associations throughout the early 1920s; see especially *La Voix du Combattant*, 1 August 1920 and 11 December 1921. Some of the state's deliberations on war grave policy are in Archives Nationales (AN), F² 2125.

¹³*Echo de l'Ossuaire de Douaumont*, no. 3 (January-February 1922), pp. 93-4. The traumatic effects of this search for bodies has recently received widespread attention in France thanks to Bertrand Tavernier's 1989 film *La vie et rien d'autre* and Jean Rouaud's novel *Les champs d'honneur* (Paris: Minuit, 1990) winner of the 1990 Prix Goncourt.

¹⁴See, for example, remarks about respect and observance at the inaugurations of two war memorials in the Loir-et-Cher: Coulanges, 11 November 1921 (*La République de Loir-et-Cher*,

12 December 1921) and Theillay, 28 May 1922 (*Echo de la Sologne*, 4 June 1922).

¹⁵On the Vaucluse, see Jean Giroud, Raymond Michel, and Maryse Michel, *Les monuments aux morts de la guerre 1914-1918 dans le Vaucluse* (L'Isle sur la Sorgue: Scriba, 1991), p. 104. In the Vaucluse 38.2% of monuments are in cemeteries; figures for the Morbihan and the Loir-et-Cher, based on my own preliminary research and subject to revision, are 28.4% and 29.6% respectively. If one adds to the Loir-et-Cher monuments located *outside* cemetery gates, the percentage rises to 38.4%, but there are good reasons to put such sites in the category of open rather than of enclosed spaces.

¹⁶Agulhon, *Marianne*, pp. 229-239.

¹⁷AN, F²¹ 4770, Dossier 2i: Mayor Chançay to Ministre de l'Instruction Publique et des Beaux-Arts; A. Laguerre, Deputy to Ministre des Pensions, 22 July 1919.

¹⁸See AN, F²¹ 4770: one suggestion of a competition came in the form of a parliamentary question from the deputy Simonet (*Journal Officiel*, hereafter *JO*, 19 April 1919); the reply said that the Conseil Supérieur des Beaux-Arts "s'est prononcé à l'unanimité contre l'organisation d'un concours de cette nature, qui serait une attente à la liberté des communes et ne pourrait que nuire aux intérêts de l'art et des artistes."

¹⁹AN, F²¹ 4770, Dossier 2i, copy of Ministre to Maire Périers (Manche), 31 July 1919.

²⁰This assumption can be found in AN, F²¹ 4770, Dossier 2i, the draft of a letter from the Ministre de l'Instruction Publique et des Beaux-Arts to the Ministre de l'Intérieur, 16 July 1919.

²¹On the basic provision for state subsidies, contained in a law of 25 October 1919, see AN, F²¹ 4770, Dossier 2i; the actual scales delineating state support as a percentage of the monument's cost are in *JO*, 1 August 1920, p. 10940. Prefects then transmitted these scales to mayors, along with a list of the supporting material the state required to be submitted with a subsidy request; see, e.g., Archives Départementales de la Meuse (hereafter ADMe), E Dépôt 353/1 M 7, a circular of the Préfet de la Meuse, dated 4 September 1920. The subsidy program expired at the end of 1924; see, for example, Archives Départementales

du Morbihan (hereafter ADM), O 93, circular dated 25 October 1924.

²²AN, F²¹ 4770, Dossier 2i, Ministre de l'Intérieur to Ministre de l'Instruction Publique et des Beaux-Arts, 18 May 1920, enclosing a copy of the circular to prefects of 5 May 1920.

²³ADM, O 94, minutes of meeting of 9 June 1921 and 16 December 1921; for the defense of the artist, André Rivaud, see ADM, O 2125, his letters to the mayor of 30 August 1921 and to the prefect of 5 November 1921.

²⁴Archives Départementales du Var (hereafter ADV), 9T4-4, report of Roustan for the commission meeting of 25 October 1920.

²⁵In one instance, an architect on the Var review board had to excuse himself from evaluating a monument he himself had designed: ADV, 9T4-4, Roustan to Préfet, 19 June 1922, regarding the monument in Brignoles.

²⁶ADV, 9T4-4, report of 13 May 1921 (Callas).

²⁷ADV, 9T4-4, report of Barla, 23 July 1921.

²⁸ADV, 9T4-4, report of Jules Roustan, 19 January 1921.

²⁹ADV, 9T4-4, report of Roustan for the commission meeting of 25 October 1920; the comments concern the proposed monument in Carcès.

³⁰Lucien Marie, "Une Renaissance monumentale," *L'Art funéraire et commémoratif* (hereafter *AFC*), no. 36, April 1922, p. 1; "Un article sensationnel de M. Clément Vautel," *AFC*, no. 53, November 1924, p. 2 (quoting from *Le Journal*).

³¹ADV, deposited Archives Communales de Montferrat, Series M (hereafter ACM), undated circular.

³²All materials from ADV/ACM.

³³ADM, 79 Es 41 (deposited communal archives of Guillac), brochure dated 1920.

³⁴ADM, O 93, circular of Marbreries Générales, undated but with attachments from fall 1920; ADV/ACM, letter from Lesage, Biagetti, et Bottala, dated 21 July 1919.

³⁵In one two-page feature about his recent work, the newspaper's lead critic wrote, "No one more than this excellent artist has struggled more successfully against the vulgarity and banality of certain funeral monuments, and no one will have honored the memory of the war with more feeling, of a sound instinct, of sincerity and constancy . . ." See L. Marie, "Les oeuvres commémoratives du sculpteur Pourquet," *AFC*, June 1922. On Pourquet, see Annette Becker, *Les monuments au morts: Patrimoine et mémoire de la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Errance, [1988]), pp. 29-32.

³⁶"You want, do you not" one of these slogans read, "to erect a commemorative monument that is a work of art? The first condition is to apply to an artist." *AFC*, February-March 1922, July 1922, and other issues.

³⁷*AFC*, January 1924 and other issues.

³⁸*AFC*, May 1922.

³⁹ADV/ACM, price list dated February 1921. For an indication of the sales of a rival concern, see n. 47 below.

⁴⁰ADV, 9T4-4, Maire to Préfet, 1 December 1920. The mayor actually used the word "aiguille," or needle; since "aiguille" can refer to an engraving needle, he may have been confusing it with another term, "burin," that can mean either an engraving needle or a chisel.

⁴¹ADV, 9T4-4, report of 28 July 1921.

⁴²ADV, 9T4-4: such attitudes are expressed in reports on Sillans-la-Cascade (report of 8 November 1921) and Tanneron (report of 17 July 1921).

⁴³ADV, 9T4-4: cases involving changes in proportions include Figanières (report of 15 November 1921) and Mazauges (report of 25 November 1921); cases of *faits accomplis* include Comps-sur-Artuby (Préfet to Ministre de l'Intérieur, 3 January 1921) and Ginasservis (Préfet to Ministre, 22 December 1920).

⁴⁴ADV, 9T4-4, report of Barla, 15 September 1924.

⁴⁵ADV, 9T4-4, Maire to Préfet, 10 October and 14 November 1924.

⁴⁶ADV/ACM, undated photograph and flyer. The photograph was quite common; I have also found it in Archives Départementales de la Meuse (hereafter ADMe), E Dépôt 289/1 M 2, the communal archives of Neuville-sur-Ornain (which in the end did not incorporate a *poilu* in its monument) and in Archives Municipales de Vannes (hereafter AM Vannes), 1 M 199, which also contain a brochure published by Jacomet entitled the *Livre d'Or du 'Poilu'*. Unfortunately undated (it does not include all the communes in which I have located Jacomet designs), it lists 274 communes in metropolitan France and six in Algeria that had adopted the Jacomet *poilu*, as well as the names of the firm's local agents.

⁴⁷On the stele as the typical war memorial, see Prost, *Les anciens combattants et la société française, 1914-1939*; 3 vols., 3: *Mentalités et idéologies* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1977), p. 42; Giroud et al., p. 98. In the Morbihan steles amount to nearly half of the monuments I surveyed, 73 out of 154; in the Loir-et-Cher they are a clear majority, 76 out of 113.

⁴⁸Based on both archival research in ADM and the Archives Départementales du Loir-et-Cher and on research in the field; the figures are not identical to the ones in n. 48 above because they include, among monuments with figural motifs, steles decorated with small medallions depicting *poilus* in bust or in profile. The Morbihan group is a representative sample of the 263 communes in the department; the Loir-et-Cher sample (out of 285 communes) is skewed in favor of monuments costing more than 5000 francs, and so if anything probably over-represents sculptural monuments.

⁴⁹On the United States, see Kirk Savage, "Race, Memory, and Identity: The National Monuments of the Union and the Confederacy," in this volume; on New Zealand, Chris Maclean and Jock Phillips, *The Sorrow and the Pride: New Zealand War Memorials* (Wellington: Historical Branch/GP Books, 1990), especially chapters 3-4.

⁵⁰Brochures and photographs in AM Vannes, 1 M 199. The Val d'Osne "Winged Victory" was one of its more expensive monuments, costing from 8800 to 18,000 francs depending on the material, but it also offered a Richefeu *poilu* costing somewhat more (10,750 to 22,000 francs for the equivalent size) and a Pourquet *poilu* for rather less (5300 to 11,000). The Marbreries Générales offered a wide range of prices, and for similar

kinds of monuments *poilus* and female allegories went for similar prices.

⁵¹On veterans' group pressure, see my "The Nation? In What Community," in *Ideas and Ideals*, forthcoming.

⁵²M. Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), pp. xix-xxi, 28.

⁵³On some female allegories in World War I memorials, see A. Becker, pp. 59-64, 73-75; Christiane Massonnet, "Patrimoine méconnu: la figure féminine dans les monuments aux morts de la guerre de 1914-18 dans les Bouches-du-Rhône," *Provence historique* 31 (1981), pp. 263-170.

⁵⁴Warner, p. 12.

⁵⁵Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir*, pp. 260-263.

⁵⁶ADV, 9T4-4, Maire to Préfet, 14 November 1924.

⁵⁷The name "Place du Poilu" is from a post card, dated 1927, in the author's collection.

⁵⁸I have considered this issue in "Discours parallèles: Les inaugurations et la politique," in the catalogue of the exhibition *Monuments de Mémoire: Monuments aux Morts de 1914-1918* (Paris: Secrétariat d'Etat aux Anciens Combattants, 1991); see also Luirard, pp. 21-22, 39-74.

⁵⁹Warner, p. 32.

⁶⁰The monument is in Bacqueville (Seine-Maritime).

⁶¹Robert Musil, "Denkmale," in *Nachlass su Lebzeiten* (Zurich, 1936), pp. 87-93, translated and cited in Warner, p. 21.

⁶²*Ouest-Républicain*, 8 June 1922 (on the inauguration of the monument in Cléguer).