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# Pierre Nora's Concept of Contrasting Memory and History

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**To cite this article:**

Hanna Nosova. Pierre Nora's concept of contrasting memory and history *International Journal of Philosophy*.

Vol. 9, No. 4, 2021, pp. 216-220. doi: 10.11648/j.ijp.20210904.16

**Received:** October 10, 2021; **Accepted:** November 4, 2021; **Published:** November 23, 2021

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**Abstract:** The article is based on an analysis of the works of the French historian Pierre Nora, who, trying to find a "true" history, comes to the opposition of history and memory. Outright political agitation and national imperatives are dominated in History; therefore history cannot be correct and objective. Instead of history, the philosopher believes, we should focus on the right memory. But when memory itself has been torn apart, it can only exist on the basis of "memory places" - mnemonic places. The power of memory is preserved now in the places of memory that accumulate and preserve history. Places of memory have lost their physical or geographical meanings. Meaning and sense are made places of memory, important place for history. Due to the nature of the memory places, the multiplicities of their interpretations are the normal. And the past, therefore, became a poly semantic space, focused on the co-presence of many different versions of the interpretation of the same memorial structures (monuments, historical facts and events, texts of the past). Contrasting memory and history, P. Nora concludes about "the tyranny of memory (it is reminiscent of Reeker's statement). In his opinion, at any moment the memory is ready to lift history under itself, to "memorize" it, it deeply and dangerously distorts the meaning of words. Precisely because there is no collective memory, the places of memory appear that designed to compensate for its absence. When the space of memory disappears, mnemonic places appear. It is through mnemonic places (places of memory) as spaces that provide access to traditions, Nora moves from the present to the past. But the noble goal of finding the truth, of recreating traditions, has turned into honoring memory for political purposes, where the past has become the rhetorical construct of the present. Hence, the perception of truth is changing. Now, the truth is not in the "factuality" of the data, but in their "relevance". In the end, Nora makes a rather devastating conclusion for history- that the past has lost its meaning, the present historical consciousness gives meaning to all possible and valid versions of the past, and that official memory (politics of memory) is associated with practices of selective forgetting or memory.

**Keywords:** Places of Memory, Collective Memory, True Memory, Politics of Memory, Objective History

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## 1. Introduction

Emile Durkheim and Maurice Halbwachs are the first researchers who contrast the history to memory [1, 2]. Halbwachs, who interprets collective memory as a set of representations of group members, justifies the differences between history and memory in the following way. Collective memory and history in his opinion do not coincide because history is static, complete and unique, while collective memory is constantly evolving. Collective memory is multiple, there are many of them. Therefore, for Halbwachs, collective memory and history are incomparable things [1], while for P. Nora; their comparison is the goal of

research. Nora explores the "relationship" between history and memory. What conclusion does he come to in the process of this exploration; it is the purpose of this study.

## 2. Pierre Nora About Opposition Between History and Memory

Is it possible to say, that the French philosopher and historian Pierre Nora works in the paradigm of scientific, "objective" history? No, as our contemporary he lives and thinks in a post-modern paradigm, which is why his historical memory cannot avoid post-modern transformation. Nora is honestly looking for a "real" story. But in this search, as a

conscientious researcher, he is forced to abandon objective history and focus on memory. First an author tries to overcome a break between historical science and socially oriented historiography, descriptive history. A break consists in what? According to Nora, if memory is, in fact, a search for objective truth, a recollection of "how it really was," then history will be ideological and manipulative. The memory of how it was in actual fact ends when history, distorted by both the "subjectivity" of the historian, and the area of history as "socially constructed reality" begins.

The opposition between memory and history can be found in all Nora's works, such as "The Present. Nation. Memory" [3], "Between memory and history. Problems of memory places." [4], "World celebration of memory" [5], History as protection from politics [6] and in Nora's most famous work "Places of Memory" [7].

Why does Nora's memory triumph over history? First, P. Nora tries to recreate the real story. To recreate history for him means to clear it from "necessary facts." Necessary facts are an attribute of any history, when it comes to the past or the future. Such a history becomes politics, and only memory can return history to true history, return history to its true essence.

History as such is formed in the era of nationalist movements and the formation of national identities. National identities need to be substantiated in national ideology in the form of a certain history. Therefore, historians, according to Nora, were forced to "turn the past into a continuous process of creating the present, in which is dominated by if not outright political agitation, then at least national imperatives" [6].

On the example of France, Nora shows that during the Third Republic, France, or rather its historians had the task of reconciling old and new France. In this way, they wanted to consolidate the experience of the revolution. Historians also solved the main "national" task - "to determine the identity of France itself, as opposed to the definition of the French nation in the German version." [6].

This was demanded by a new generation of young people who needed history precisely in order to clarify, confirm and justify their political views and aspirations. Therefore, according to P. Nora, "Such liberal historians as Augustin Thierry, Gizo, and Jules Michelet created a national history immediately after the Revolution and the Empire, in the era of Romanticism in 1820-1840". [4]

The main vocation of such a story was to choose from the past the facts that explain the development of the "nation". Thus, history has become a continuous story about the existence of a collective personality - the nation.

But attachment to national history makes the historian "national" and hinders the study of "world history," real history, Nora notes. Therefore, the author concludes, when history becomes politics, its opposite becomes memory. "Of course,- Nora notes, -a historian cannot abstract from his conventions, sever ties with his own country, class, religion, family, homeland, and even corporation." But it is necessary to strive for this: "observance of borders and analysis of restrictions in history, as everywhere, should become the

main condition of activity and freedom" [6]

Thus, according to Nora, there was a destruction of true history, that is, memory under the aggressive pressure of the of politics history. Henceforth, the efforts of the historian should be aimed precisely at protecting and reproducing the "correct" memory in the 19th century. To tell a story means to leave the correct memory of it.

### 3. "Places of Memory" as a Basis of Nora's Doctrine

How can we preserve the right memory, the right history in the conditions of "accelerating history" [4]. In another way, how can we preserve the right memory in the conditions, of time acceleration, which destroys traditions, the collective memory itself, when the memory itself becomes "broken". Under such conditions, when the traditions themselves are destroyed and all innovations become obsolete the next day, all appeal to collective memory loses its meaning. In such conditions correct memory can exist only based on "memory places" - mnemonic places, which together form a memory space.

That is why "places of memory" become the basis of Nora's doctrine. As editor-in-chief and compiler in 1971 Nora began work on a fundamental encyclopedia of "places of memory" in the "Library of Stories" series, which included 128 articles and essays. P. Nora interprets the concept of "places of memory" (*lieu de memoire*) in the preface to the English translation of his work as follows: "It is any significant phenomenon, materialized or intangible in nature, which by human will or under the influence of time has acquired the meaning of a symbol in the memorial heritage of a community. [8]

Collective memory exists due to places of memory. The latter are manifested in material, functional and symbolic forms. Material forms include monuments, monuments to the dead, memorials, functional forms include images on banknotes, awarding by the names of historical figures or notable events the streets, enterprises, establishments. Broken memory needs external support, which is found in the places of memory. Thus, symbolic forms enshrined the significance of the most prominent images of the nation, such as the Bastille in France. [8] The power of memory is in its material remains, which form the space where history and memory accumulate.

Nora opposes history to memory and in this way develops the ideas of Maurice Halbwachs, his thesis that history begins where memory ends. According to Halbwachs, memory is always collective; there are as many memories as there are collective groups. Group memory is actualized by individuals through the use of group memories. [2] Memory creates the identity of the individual, it contains both personal and non-personal memories, shared by the group. So, individual memory relies on collective memory and vice versa. In memories, we reconstruct the past by locating specific images in places of memory. [8] Collective memory forms a

"map" of the past, plotting objects of memorization with the help of spatial landmarks. That is, on the one hand, places of memory reflexively return history to itself, and on the other hand, mark the end of a certain tradition of memory, because it is the product of the absence of spontaneous collective / historical memory.

Many researchers note the complexity, ambiguity of understanding "places of memory". [9-12] For example, the concept of "places of memory" correlates with "cultural landscapes" in geography. A. Asman, writes that it is not clear what Nora means by the notion of "place of memory" - the memory about a place, or the memory that is localized in a certain place. [13] Unlike historical objects, places of memory have no reference in reality.

What makes places the "places of memory"? It is meanings that carry "places of memory". Due to the meanings the places of memory form a certain space of history. Thanks to meaning Nora's "place of memory" no longer means "physical place", it has lost its connection with place and has become a certain equivalent of Jean Baudrillard symbols – signs. "Places of memory" by Nora's has not the references, they disappear and the multiplicity of interpretations meaning of places become the norm. "Places of memory do not exist outside their metamorphoses, beyond the endless accumulation and unpredictable intertwining of their meanings." A place of memory is "a surplus place, closed in on itself, locked in its identity and gathered in its name, but constantly opens to the expansion of its meanings." [3].

Paul Ricoeur interprets "places of memory" as follows: the "places of memory come forward, first, as strong points of remembrances, their setting - to fight from forgetting and, in case of forgetting - to replace the lost memory". [14] But, at the same time, later, delving into the problem of memory places, Reeker notes the disappearance of meanings that carry memory places in material objects, resulting in the problem of displacement by artificial models of real, unpredictable and capricious memory.

One such artificial model is what Reeker considers the cult of heritage, when a place of memory is identified with a "topographic place" and a cult of memory is identified with a cult of remembrance. The cult of remembrance is, according to P. Reeker, a kind of absolutization of the idea of heritage, forms of remembrance from memorial ceremonies to rituals of remembrance. [14] Thus, the concept of "place of memory" as a symbolic instrument loses its purpose, the past no longer serves the future, but is distorted for the present time.

As for me, close to understanding Nora's "places of memory" concept" memory nodes "by Merab Mamardashvili. [15] These are places of "memory" and «knots of memory» are forming a common plane for two such different thinkers - Nora and Mamardashvili. Memory is the mechanism by which the eternal is repeated, maintained, is part of this ontology in Mamardashvili. And places and things in memory are "nodes" that revitalize memory. While for Nora places of "memory is a headstone on it all historical paradigm is actually building. Nora's place of memory is the

finishing chord of history. Thanks to the places of memory, "it is possible to mobilize a rare, intangible, elusive connection that lives in a person due to his attachment to symbols, sometimes already faded." [4].

Common to the places of Nora's memory and understanding of Mamardashvili memory is their productive role. They make you remember, remember what you wouldn't remember without them. The cultural, symbolic world, the world of going beyond the material, the ultimate, the transcendent, constitutes an understanding of the concept of "place of memory" in Nora, as well as the knots of memory in Mamardashvili.

The main meaning of Nora's places of memory is their symbolism, multiplicity of interpretations. Therefore, the past appears as a poly semantic space focused on the co-presence of many versions of the interpretation of the same memorial structures (monuments, historical facts and events, texts of the past).

The variety of interpretations, according to Pierre Nora, is also the result of conflicts of memory, which are inevitable for living, collective memory. Each group constructs social memory in accordance with the needs of its historical self-identification, which leads to conflicting interpretations of the past, when the same historical facts can be assessed from different positions by representatives of different groups and communities. The same historical facts can be assessed from different positions by representatives of different groups and communities, its lead to conflicting interpretations of the past. Thus, the heterogeneity of social memory gives rise to its fundamental conflict. Conflicts and even "wars of memory" can unfold in both horizontal and vertical planes. It is implied that the interpretation of history in one geographical or social space concerning common memorial structures (monuments, geographical names, etc.) comes into conflict, and in the vertical plane there is a conflict of interpretations at different generations.

#### 4. Past Has Lost Its Meaning

So, according to P. Nora, the places of memory preserve memory. The contradiction between history and memory does not disappear, and memory is no longer real, "about memory is spoken only because that it is no longer exists," the researcher said. [3] Alive memory disappears, and true "history-memory" is replaced by "history of history", "historiographical consciousness", which is no longer true history, because any historical text is not objective in modern mediocratic culture. "Alive" memory is getting smaller, there is a growing need to preserve the remnants and evidence of history, the need for people who will be study these remnants, and from here it arises up an obsession by archives [5].

P. Nora has a negative attitude towards archives because the archive is an "organized concealment of lost memory." Archived memory, according to Nora, is dead. Everything turns into a kind of archive. The materialization of memory becomes too widespread and decentralized. The creation of the archive has become a symbol of epoch, according to

Nora, in which the archive stops to be the relict of the outlived memory and becomes a conscious and organized allocation of lost memory. [6] The archive seems to double the experience and becomes a memory prosthesis in the current situation.

P. Nora, in contrast to memory and history, comes to a conclusion that echoes Reeker's statement about the "tyranny of memory" [14] in the end. In his opinion, at any moment memory is ready to lift history under itself, to "memorize".

That's why it is necessary to be well aware of it so as not to fall into the trap of its visibility... Memory has acquired such a broad and all-encompassing meaning that in some cases, which we still need to clarify, that it threatens to replace the word "history" and put the practice of history at the service of memory ". [6].

Memory tests "deformation" when substitutes the "real" reiteration of *ремоморациєю*. About memory in general begin to talk exactly because no longer has her. Memory undergoes "deformation" when it replaces "true" repetition with rememoration. People start talking about memory in general precisely because it no longer exists. Memory undergoes "deformation" when it replaces "true" repetition with rememoration. People start talking about memory in general precisely because it no longer exists. [4].

And precisely because there is no more collective memory, and there are places of memory designed to compensate for its absence. When the space of memory, alive memory disappears, mnemonic places appear. It is through mnemonic places (places of memory) as spaces that give access to traditions Nora, according to Patrick Hutton, moves from the present to the past. [16] But the noble goal of finding the truth, of recreating traditions, turned into honoring memory for political purposes, where the past became a rhetorical construct of the present, and "memory completely turned into its own careful reconstruction."

In order to somehow resolve the contradiction between true memory and "memorization", Nora alongside with places of memory introduces the concept of "place of history", in which, in his opinion, the reflection of symbolic life still twinkles. [4].

To somehow reconcile these concepts, Nora derives the notion "place of history" from "places of memory" as follows: "if there is an intention to remember, then places of memory become places of history". Places of memory are able to generate history, somewhat different, but history.

On the development of mnemonic places of memory was influenced not only acceleration of history but processes of "democratization" of history [5], which Nora connects with the processes of democratization of society in general.

Nora identifies three types of democratization of the past and the liberation of memory: the world democratization - the collapse of colonial empires; internal democratization inherent in Western societies, deal with the emancipation of various "minorities" (sexual, religious, regional, etc.). Ideological democratization concerns post-totalitarian social spaces, thanks to which peoples return to traditional memory.

Democratization of history, according to Nora, leads to the

disappearance of metanarratives of memory communities which set the direction from the past to the future through the present. The classical way of understanding history is defeated [4] due to the defeat of the traditional perception of time and the autonomy of the present.

As a result, Nora states that the idea of truth is changing. Now, truth is not the "factuality" of the data, but their actuality. Events continue to live in cultural memory, as they are actual [2]. And in this actuality the places of memory fit organically. You look for and analyze places of memory, a kind of "topos" - areas of social memory instead of searching for chronology.

Thus, Nora concludes that the past has lost its meaning; the historical consciousness is now endowed exclusively the present, which legitimizes and gives meaning all possible and valid versions of the past. Official memory (memory policy) is invariably associated with the practice of selective forgetting or memory.

The places of memory by Nora as a concept of historical knowledge of the postmodern era, usually included in the mythologized context, are the result of interpretation. Places of memory are facts, and therefore not the "objective reality" of the past, but the construction of the historian, which is, quite naturally, subjective. These contradictions, which are recorded by P. Nora, arise because of this subjectivity.

In the opinion of many modern researchers, the "places of memory" occupy a corresponding place in the field of mass consciousness, but not in the field of strict science. Therefore, if it is necessary to reconstruct places of memory within the science, researchers believe [11, 17, 18] but it to destroy their integrity in mass consciousness's level is hardly worth it.

## 5. Conclusions

The French historian P. Nora studies history and its components, first collective, social memory, trying to determine what real history. He concludes that history is opposed to memory. Where history begins, true, correct memory ends, - the researcher considers. A history changes the past into an agreement of someone's interests.

But in conditions when time and history accelerate, when the foundations of memory - traditions - are destroyed, memory becomes "broken". It can no longer be the basis for history. Under such conditions, according to the researcher, memory as well as history can exist only based on places of memory.

According to Nora, the "place of memory" is not a physical place; it has lost its direct connection with space. Places of memory include a variety of physical objects such as monuments, memorials, names of historical figures and symbolic - a variety of images and symbols.

When physical places are endowed with certain meanings and meanings, they become places of memory. Such places of memory give rise to many interpretations and memories. The past is a poly semantic space focused on the co-presence

of many versions of the interpretation of the same memorial structures. Due to this, the past can be interpreted in any way that is used in the modern world. The noble goal of finding the truth becomes the construction of the past by the present for political purposes.

Thus, P. Nora concludes that history becomes political history, memory - official memory, the main purpose of which is to select what to remember and what to forget, to construct the past based on the needs of the present.

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