

STARRING EFFECT

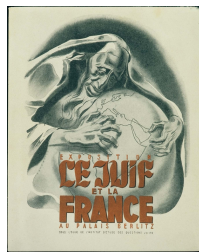
MAPPING PARIS DURING THE GERMAN OCCUPATION

My name is Mélanie Péron. I come from a tiny village barely visible on a map. I am not Jewish. None of my relatives was a victim of the Holocaust. My grandparents were not in the Resistance. They did not save any one from the Holocaust.

Yet, I created a course on Paris during the German Occupation, applied and received the Lori Rutman Teaching Fellowship. With the support of the USC Shoah Foundation and the Penn Price Lab for Digital Humanities, I then developed a multimedia map of Paris during WWII.

BLANK A – Why? Why would I explore a time from a past I did not experience?

PERRON-PÉRON-PERÓN-PÈRON



René Péron

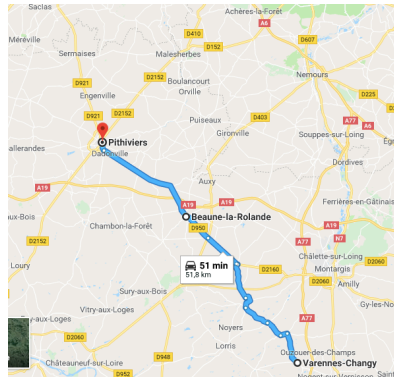


Juan Perón



To answer this question, I turned to my primary signifier. Could my name lead me to the liminal moment when it all started or should I say the threshold, as my name actually means in French if you add an extra [r]? A quick Google search conjures up a frightening web connecting my name to ...anti-Semitism. René Péron, the illustrator known for the poster he drew for the movie *And God created woman*, was the author of the infamous poster *The Jew and France*. Perón, with a displaced accent on the [o], takes us to the Argentinian leader who financed the escape of key architects of the Holocaust. Pèron, with an inverted accent on the [e], means pillory in old French. *Au Pilori* was the most virulent anti-Semitic weekly paper during the Occupation.

PITHIVIERS – BEAUNE LA ROLANDE



My place of birth only reinforces the rooting of my origins into the wrong side of history. I was born 30 kms away from Beaune-la-Rolande, 50 kms away from Pithiviers. Both towns became known for their internment camps where thousands of Jews – a lot of whom were children-transited before being deported to Auschwitz. Growing up, for the longest time, I only knew that a Pithiviers was a cake, specialty of the town bearing the same name.

Maybe this is where it all started.

BLANK B – My grandmother's apron



My grandmother was a peasant. One about whom books do not talk much. She worked like a man, ran the farm and raised 2 young daughters while her husband was a war prisoner in Czechoslovakia for 5 years. A woman of few words, she always remembered to make everyone's favorite dish when they came visit, to plant all of her grandchildren's favorite fruits in the garden, to take us on

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long bike rides finding the best tree under which to take a nap. She got up hours before everyone else, put on her meticulously ironed apron and silently got everything ready. She lived backstage, in her charismatic husband's shadow. She never talked about her past. She never talked about her feelings. She never talked about her dreams. No one asked her about them anyway. She was just *there* for us, her "little ones" (*mes petits*) as she called us.

Sometimes, she would go to my grandfather's office and close the door. Once I hid and saw her take a key from under a book and open the cabinet. She pulled out a folder, sat and cried repeating "these poor little ones". After she left, I took the key, opened the cabinet and looked at the papers. They were newspaper clippings about the camps in Pithiviers and Beaune-la-Rolande. I never said anything to her about it.

My grandmother eventually had Alzheimer's. My name and my face were the only ones she remembered. Her body was broken and took the shape of an inverted L. When she walked, her gaze could only stare at the floor. She filled the pocket of her apron with all sorts of little rocks she would find on the ground and inspect them before going to sleep. As she would painfully try to put her finger on what was inevitably ending on the tip of her tongue, I decided to appease her ordeal and stopped using words to talk to her. We communicated with gestures and looks. I had so many questions for her but she had no words for me. What she had for me though, apart from the little rocks she would leave on my bed, was this bright complicit light in her eyes when she looked at me. My relatives only talk about her blank stare. We evidently did not live in the same story.

BLANK C - Louise.

All I have is her first name. Louise. My grandfather's name was Maurice. Louise and Maurice met in 1945 on the road. He was heading back home from Czechoslovakia where he was a war prisoner. She was a survivor from a concentration camp. She had nothing on. Her feet were swollen and bloody. My grandfather gave her a jacket and made her shoes with leaves and tree bark. He had never met a Jew and she surely did not look like what he had in mind Jews looked like. I can't help wonder: had my grandfather not been taken prisoner in 1940, would he have supported the Vichy anti-Semitic laws? He used to say Louise was the best thing that ever happened to him during that war. We all knew Louise who religiously called once a year – probably on the anniversary of the day they met. Yet, nobody in my family, but my grandfather, ever saw her or spoke to her. After he died, I looked for her name in his address book. She was listed simply as Louise. There was no address. Only a phone number. Soon after, somebody discarded the old book and Louise vanished with it.

RENÉE PÉRON

For /e/

Pour /e/ [ə]

Pour eux [ø]

For them

My grandmother's name was Renée Péron. That extra [e] which sets her apart from the illustrator of *The Jew and France* might be one key to the story. I could in fact dedicate the project to the letter [e] as Georges Perec did. For [e], Pour [e], For them, Pour eux. For those little ones my grandmother did not save, for the children she could have hidden in her farm and given magical memories to, for my grandmother and the person she wished she could have been for them, for the stories she could not tell as her memory was being erased, for my grandfather and the man he became thanks to Louise, for Louise who is forever part of the family narrative.

[INTERSTITIAL WHITES - Simon Hantaï]

The painter Simon Hantaï developed a particular method he called *pliage* (*folding*). The word *method* versus the word *technique* entails that the painter did not claim full control over the means he employed and did not aim at a definite outcome. His method consisted in folding, creasing, knotting (*ficelage*) a large canvas.



He then proceeded to lay the canvas on the floor and painted the visible convex spaces. Being on his knees and bent over his work, Hantaï intentionally denied himself full sight and therefore could not envisage the final result.



Once the paint was dry, he proceeded to unknot and unfold the cloth.

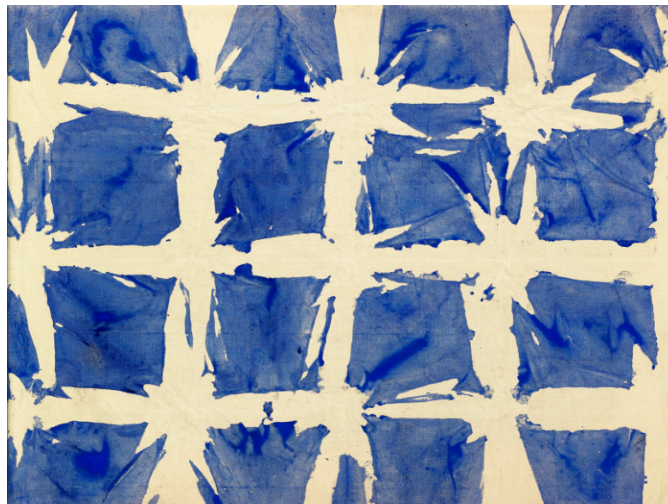


In the catalogue of a 1976 retrospective, Hantaï shared a picture pointing at the potential origin of his method. The picture shows his mother wearing a meticulously ironed apron. The symmetrical creases visible on the shiny cloth turns the maternal apron prefigured the tabulas painted by the son. Folding-as-method then helps bringing back memories to the surface.

THE APRON - A TABULA



Unfolding the canvas was always a revelation. Hantaï talked about chance as a key agent in his work for conjuring up what *he* could not even imagine or think of at the beginning. In this *Tabula*, the blue grid is counterbalanced by the white at the intersections created by the knots. Georges Didi-Huberman poetically called it *étoilement*, starring effect. The poet Dominique Fourcade explains that the starring effect generates “a sort of lifting, suspension, a prolongation of a time that is not supposed to last.”



In Hantai's series *Blancs*, the white activates the painted. The painted is brought into the visible by the empty. We see how the folds connect *and* separate whites and colors, pieces and the whole, inside and outside. The effect recalls the incessant back and forth binary movement of breathing in and out. When the canvas is stretched and finds the verticality it was denied while in the making, one can hear and see its heart beat.

BLANCS SERIES



PALIMPSEST A

MAPPING-AS-METHOD

In 2016, I was granted the Rutman Teaching Fellowship to conduct research for my course entitled *Paris during the German Occupation and its places of Non-Memory*. I knew I wanted to create a digital map to help my students – some of whom had never been to Paris – envision as best as possible the Paris of the time. Beyond locating the key places of the Nazi machinery and the collaborationist monster, I also wanted the map to become the space where the stories of individuals who vanished recovered their voices. What I did not know was how to answer the simple question: So what are the expected outcomes of this project? I would just say: “I’m not sure where it will take me. We’ll see.”



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First, I bought a 1940 map for a modest 5 euros on ebay. It was unfolded and scanned with the creases time had left in its fabric visible. The digital image of the map was then layered onto a digital map of current Paris and the paper map was refolded.



From then on, I followed the same method rooted in unpredictability as Hantäi: bent over the canvas my floor, strewn with books, loose sheets and notes, had become, I adopted the floating vision of the painter.



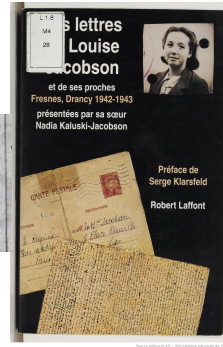
Then, Kyra and I knotted texts, images, voices together. Instead of brushing paint over this montage, we transposed it onto the map. Despite the frontal position we suddenly had, facing the screen, we still proceeded blindly. Mechanically pinning, stitching onto the fabric of the map never

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knowing what was going to appear *in the end*. When we would zoom out, empty spaces punctuated the map. Yet, surprisingly, there were not obscure blanks, signs of an inevitable erasure. Instead they were dynamic lights, semaphores that led us to keep on looking. They were the complicit lights I saw in my grandmother's stare.



assises de la Seine.
■ ON RECHERCHE une jeune fille,
Dora Bruder, 15 ans, 1 m. 55, visage
ovale, yeux gris marron, manteau
sport gris, pull-over bordeaux, jupe
et chapeau bleu marine, chaussu-
res sport marron. Adresser toutes
indications à M. et Mme Bruder,
41, boulevard Ornano, Paris.



The background of the course is woven with the stories of three young women: Hélène Berr, Dora Bruder and Louise Jacobson. Hélène left a diary started in 1942 and interrupted in 1944 when she was arrested. Louise left letters written during her captivity in the Drancy camp. Dora left an ad in the newspaper posted by her parents asking for anyone who had seen their runaway daughter to contact them. They all died in a concentration camp. Patrick Modiano tried to follow Dora's steps in his eponymous novel. We used the Visual History Archive. We cross-referenced and cross-stitched the stories of these three young women with the stories of young women who, unlike them, were able to tell their stories, after the war was over.



The Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive counts 52,000 testimonies from Holocaust witnesses. 1,858 are in French. 24, 626 are in English. In order to find my way amidst this ocean of stories, I searched the database using the keywords Paris, H  l  ne, Dora, Louise and each girl's date of birth as cross-reference criteria.

This is how I met Claude Bloch. I had initially selected her file because the Parisian was born the same year as Dora Bruder. As I was listening to the elegant 80 year-old lady Claude was fortunate to have become, I realized she grew up in the same milieu and neighborhood as H  l  ne Berr. And then magic or what Hanta   held dear, chance, happened: Claude talked about her mother's fragile state after her father, Jean Bloch, was arrested. It reminded me of a passage where H  l  ne Berr cryptically wrote about a family friend whose state of mind after her husband's arrest worried her. I flipped through the pages of the journal and found the passage. The lady in question was named ... Mme Bloch. I kept on flipping the pages and came across the entry where H  l  ne wrote "Jean Bloch was deported yesterday". The *knotting together of H  l  ne Berr's journal and Claude Bloch's visual testimony* triggered a starring effect further linking both young women: they both mention the Senator Pierre Masse who linked them to Paul L  on, James Joyce's friend, who tied them to Sylvia Beach, the owner of the famous bookstore Shakespeare and Company. During the same time, I had also started to read the book written by Georges Wellers, in 1946, about his captivity in the Drancy camp.

Sylvia Beach has a very short chapter on the Occupation at the end of her memoirs. As could be expected, she talks about the exuberant Hemingway and, surprisingly, mentions a young Jewish friend who volunteered at the bookstore. Her name was Fran  oise Bernheim. The ricochet effect happened again: Fran  oise Bernheim is a recurring name in H  l  ne's journal. The two young women had met at the Jewish organization where they both volunteered. In the first part of her

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journal, H  l  ne constantly talks about her congenial colleague. In the second part of her journal, she writes about the void Fran  oise left behind after her arrest. Because the ricochet effect could not stop here, I ran into a whole chapter entitled *Fran  oise Bernheim* at the end of Georges Wellers's book. Georges Wellers described a young woman whose joie de vivre and selflessness touched many. In the last scene of the chapter, we see her heading towards the bus taking her to her final destination. She pulls the hood of her grey raincoat over her head and waves at Wellers goodbye with a smile echoing H  l  ne's description. Wellers and H  l  ne had to be referring to the same person. As chance wanted, Kyra found the report Fran  oise's niece filled at Yad Vashem. Her name is Fran  oise Findlay. She lives in London. Google provided me with a strange email address for a Fran  oise Findlay. I sent a message. Fran  oise and her sister Deanna kindly responded.

In the course of the detailed portrait they made of their aunt, they mentioned a farm they own in Pithiviers, 50 kms from my childhood village, and a book their cousin wrote about the war and which they highly recommended Kyra and I read. The name of the cousin? Claude Bloch. Claude Bloch married Fran  oise's cousin at the end of the war. She probably never met Fran  oise. Deanna and Fran  oise sent us a picture of their aunt taken during the war. We could finally pin the smile we had read about and ... pronounce her name correctly /bernem/

Using the same knotting method, we are currently connecting the VHA testimony of Nadia Kaluski to Louise Jacobson's story. Nadia's maiden name is Jacobson. She is in fact Louise's older sister. The testimony of Arlette Reiman seems to mirror parts of Dora Bruder's story. Claude, Nadia and Arlette offer versions of what the lives of H  l  ne, Louise and Dora could have been.

THREE STARS...



Beside its informational nature, the mapping project provides a surface for the passing through of witnesses to turn into an inscription, a trace. It enables the drafts, the victims' lives were condemned to be, to unfold into a variation of texts they could have become. The starring effect of M  lanie P  ron
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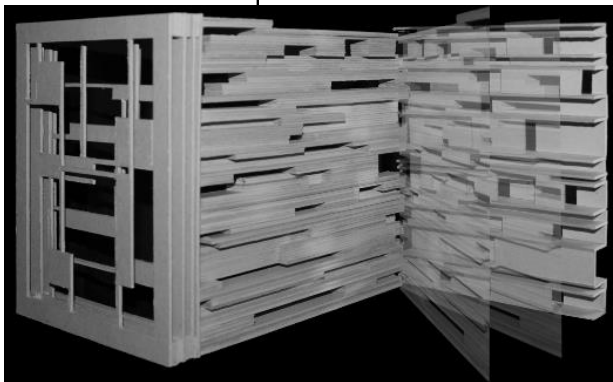
Hantai's paintings happens on the map and, as Fourcade says about the artist's work, it "lifts, suspends, prolongates a time that was not supposed to last."

On the map, three little stars identify the stories of witnesses. Three little stars are conventionally used to mask somebody's identity. In the unfolded map, it is a reminder of the breathing constellation that connects the visible and the vanished, here and there, now and then, us and them.

PALIMPSEST B

IMAGINING-AS-METHOD

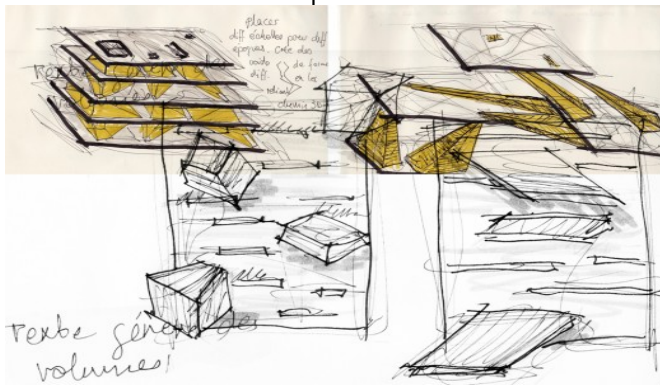
1. ANCHORING



During the first half of the semester, you will create and write the memoirs of a character who lived in Occupied Paris.

1. **A**NCRAGE

“In order to know, we must *imagine* for ourselves” Georges Didi-Huberman says in his essay *Images in Spite of All. Four photographs of Auschwitz*. At the beginning of the semester, I ask my students to invent a character whose memoirs they’ll write every week for the first 6 weeks. They are encouraged to **fold**, in the stories of their fictional character, fragments extracted from the montage of testimonies and historical information provided to them. The knotted montage provides the words and images necessary to express the ineffable and to participate in giving shape to the voids and silences left. This first part of the project is a conventional narrative anchored in a seemingly accurate historical context whose outcome is unknown to even the authors themselves. The students embark on a blind journey.



2. INKING

For the second panel of the project, you will write under predefined constraints. As a guide, we will draw inspiration from the works by post-memory writers, in particular Georges Perec and Patrick Modiano. The objective of this experimental writing is to account for and to give shape to the voids, the silences left by History.

For these texts, you will adopt a different typography from the one used in the memoirs. Tense of your choice.

2. ENCAGE

In the second part of the semester, students are prompted to write under predefined constraints inspired by Georges Perec’s experimental works. For example, write a text where one letter of the alphabet does not appear. These experimental texts are then interspersed in the character’s memoirs. Interweaving the different structures aims at representing the very nature of the course topic: mending holes by connecting fragments and fleeting traces.

This new page will act as **the cylindrical mirrors** in anamorphic constructions. Thanks to it, the diverse fragments, which until then ,were scattered and disparate, will find a shape | a sense (or not). You have carte blanche on what this page will look like.

This exercise makes the students aware of “the resurgence of the ground underneath” their writing. Placed at the intersection of all the pages of their story, this final canvas recalls the unfolding and the starring-effect in Hantai’s paintings. Here too the emergence of the plenitude of the work is delayed. By writing, these young authors conjured up stories which were either forgotten, interrupted or never happened. In any case, they prolonged a time that was not supposed to last.

MNEMOSYNE

LEFT-OVERS



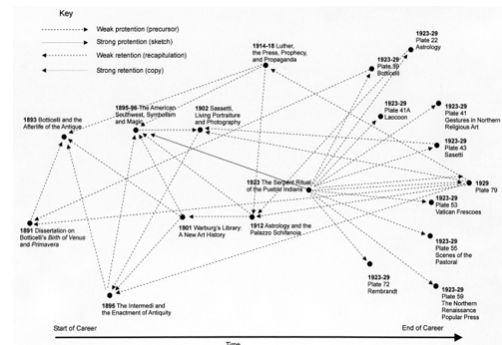
At the end of his life, Hantaï cut out individual canvases out of his latest monumental works. He called them *laissées*, left-overs. Even though each fragment was reframed and cut to stand on its own, they all kept a trace of the whole they were once part of.

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ATLAS MNÉMOSYNE

As a final project, you will create a digital panel entitled “Ghost” meant to echo Warburg’s Atlas.



As a final project, the students virtually visit the panels of Aby Warburg’s Mnemosyne Atlas and Georges Didi-Huberman’s 2014 exhibit “New ghost stories”. They then create a multimedia montage entitled *Ghosts*. Warburg’s project was never finished and is in essence permanently unfinished. By adding their own panel to the fragmentary atlas, the students must look back to the journey they made and become aware of the underlying constellation of affinities and correspondences which led each of their steps along the way.

CONCLUSION

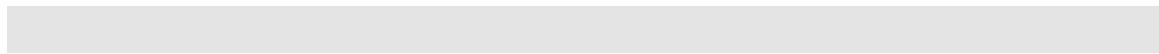
This back and forth movement, between fragments and whole, past and present, historical narratives and individual testimonies, national and personal, encourages students to not only *consider* the time period but also to be *considerate* towards those who lived it, towards those who live around them. To be considerate is to take into consideration the humanity of others with everything it entails: their daily routine, their dreams, their feelings, their favorite pastry etc. It is to recognize ourselves in others, others in ourselves.

In a wonderful little yellow book which fits in your hand, Marielle Macé reminds the reader that, etymologically, the verb *to consider* comes from the Latin *sidus*, *sideris* which means *star*. To consider is to look attentively at the stars...

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Imagination is a key component in the writing project. Imagination is a form of consideration. The historian Patrick Boucheron, in his inaugural speech at the Collège de France, compares imagination to a form of hospitality. In fact, imagination enables us to welcome, to open our door to others from other places, from other times and to close the gap that separates *us* from *them*, *here* from *there*, *now* from *then*.

Hantaï started his folding method when he moved his family from Paris to Meun. A tiny village barely visible on a map. It is located 30 kms from Pithiviers and 30 kms from Beaune-la-Rolande - both known for their internment camps where thousands of Jew – among whom many children- transited before being deported to Auschwitz. His series *Blancs* was started the year I was born. Maybe this is when it all started for me.



Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you

T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

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