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PhD French
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Proposal
Cultural Amnesia

<On ne guérit donc pas par simple mnésie, pas plus qu'on n'est malade par amnésie. (...) L'opération autrement théâtrale et dramatique par laquelle on guérit, et aussi par laquelle on ne guérit pas, a un nom, le transfert. Or le transfert est encore de la répétition, avant tout de la répétition. Si la répétition nous rend malades, c'est elle aussi qui nous guérit; (...) Toute la cure est un voyage au fond de la répétition.>¹

Cultural amnesia has been extensively examined in terms of the Holocaust, however this paper proposes to explore this notion in relation to the trauma and survivor guilt experienced under the French Occupation. Using a psychoanalytic and philosophical framework, the paper will focus on the implication that profoundly traumatic experience confounds comprehension and is necessarily incommunicable. Examining trauma and memory theory alongside readings of Freud's "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", I will propose that though impossible to render this loss, or gap in memory, fully in consciousness or in narration, the site of cultural amnesia has a location as "a gap" in memory, as transference. It is a shroud which bears witness to the implied loss beneath it. The loss disguises itself in amnesia as a thing that must be remembered to be forgotten. It takes on different guises but marks a spot in memory where the experience is transferred to loss. The site of that loss is not erased, just shrouded.

Moving from the theoretical to the specifics of textuality, I will trace a site of cultural amnesia through a close reading of Maurice Blanchot's text "L'instant de ma mort", a fictionalised account of Blanchot's own experience of facing a firing squad in Occupied France in 1944, and ask whether, or to what extent, "a journey to the bottom of repetition" in relating trauma through narrative can act as a "cure".

Word count: 305

¹ p.30 Deleuze, G *Différence et Répétition*, (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1968)