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FROM MARA GOYET**


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C is the kind of question you ask yourself one morning. When you're 5 years old, it's about

life deprived of the light of the fridge once the door was closed. That was another matter altogether. So I wondered whether the ancient Egyptians depicted their erotic scenes with individuals whose faces and feet were pro-wire and whose bodies were frontal. I had the idea that this wouldn't make things any easier and indulged in a few geometrically sulphurous speculations.

This term, coined by the German Egyptologist Emma Brunner-Traut, refers to the way in which certain civilizations "constructed" an image which, in a single instance and without repetition of the same motif, narrated successive events, thereby emphasizing the cyclical nature of what is.

I then found answers to my questions in *La Fabuleuse Histoire de la levrette* (La Musardine, 2022). Its author, Didier Dillen, shows that the practice can be found on several occasions in Egypt: in a tomb as well as in a long erotic papyrus. This document offers a set of twelve pornographic scenes that horrified the French Egyptologist Jean-François Champollion: "Monstrously obscene scraps of paint that give me a very peculiar idea of Egyptian gravity and wisdom."

Front and side view

Today, this papyrus is in lam-beaux, illegible. Fortunately, a reproduction made in the 19th century by the Italian researcher Ippolito Rosellini gives a clearer idea of how the sexual act were talking about was depicted. Wearing my magnifying glasses so as not to miss any significant details, I patiently observed the two adjacent scenes depicting coitus *more ferarum*. Clearly, the women, obeying the iconographic codes of the time, appear to be both frontal and in profile. This is admirable, given that they are drawn upside down, with their hands on the ground or holding the reins of a chariot. For a moment, I had the impression that the men, bald and simian, were conforming to the laws of perspective. But no, only the norms of anatomy have been shaken up here.

Yet there's something less fixed, more flexible, about these scenes, which suggests that the orgasmic explosion is free from the rules. Which leads us to wonder whether the acrobatic and the erotic are not guiding us towards the very reconciliation of representation and construction, of the aspect and the perspective. Do the *more cano* and the *more geometrico* not find common ground here? It's a dream come true. From one point of view from an iconographic point of view.

MARA Goyet

Mara Goyet is a writer and secondary school teacher.

Lost in a shopping mall

The explorers of psychology-6/6-In the 1990s, American Elizabeth Loftus, a specialist in cognitive psychology, worked on the concept of "false memory".

Ehe idea came to her on the road at the end of 1991, on her way back from a conference at the University of Georgia in the USA. At the time, Elizabeth Loftus was not encore the most influential female psychologist of the 20th century - this honor from the scientific journal of the *American Psychological Association* will come in 2002 - but she is already recognized for her work on eyewitness testimony, which brought the science of memory into the courts. Her laboratory has shown that the memory of an event is corruptible: under the effect of subsequent suggestions, a white car can turn green or a moustache appear on a hairless face. The psychologist believes that the human memory is so malleable that her obsession is to induce a memory that has been fabricated from scratch in an experimental situation. "A vivid memory," she tells the colleague who drives her to the airport, "but not so traumatic as to be deemed unethical." "Like getting lost in a crowd as a child?" the friend suggests. As they pass a shopping mall on the road, Elizabeth Loftus thinks aloud, "Lost in a mall."

Back at the University of Washington, where she was teaching cognitive psychology at the time, the researcher suggested that her students take advantage of the Thanksgiving break to try to implant this memory in someone close to them. Two weeks later, she listened in amazement to a recording of an interview one of them had conducted with his 14-year-old brother, who had "fallen for it magnificently". After reminding him of four events from his early childhood, including the false one, the elder brother encouraged him to write down everything he could remember about them. As the days went by, the guinea pig produced visual details such as the baldness, glasses and flannel shirt of the old man who had found him, in tears, and escorted him back to his family. By the time the deception was revealed, the memory was so ingrained that the teenager couldn't guess which of the quatre anecdotes was fabricated.

"Memory wars"

Elizabeth Loftus had a variante of this device approved by her institution's ethics committee, and then re-recruited twenty-four adult volunteers for a study presented as focusing on childhood memories. *The procedure was tedious, hence the small sample size,* says the psychologist, now a professor at the University of California, Irvine. *Each research subject had to choose an older relative who was willing to give us information. Then, we had to meet this person so that he or she could tell us the three true stories and help us develop a credible esquisse of the false event. All this takes time.* But the effort paid off. After three interviews conducted two weeks apart, six participants recall getting lost in a shopping mall at the age of 5. In her article, published in 1995 and since cited almost 1,800 times, the memory specialist interprets this result as "proof of existence" of the phenomenon of false memories.

The study emerges in the midst of Satanic Panic, a conspiracy-type collective psychosis that sees throngs of ordinary Americans prosecuted for horrific pedocriminal rites on the basis of testimony that will turn out to be induced by investigators. In shrink's offices, the unconscious is extracted from so many severely those supposedly repressed since

 Next article *Torrid forms*


STÉPHANE OIRY

work before the courts. The fraternity of academic psychologists is fractured: on one side, the proponents of recovered memories, mainly clinicians; on the other, those of false memories, mainly researchers in cognitive science. These *"memory wars"*, as the media will call them, end in disgrace for memory retrieval therapies, some of whose practitioners are ordered to pay millions of dollars in damages to their manipulated patients.

Since then, Elizabeth Loftus has never ceased to be invited to appear as an expert witness. The psychologist, who turns 80 in 2024, estimates that she has testified in over 300 trials in recent years, including those of sexual predators such as Harvey Weinstein and Ghislaine Maxwell. These depositions, which have earned her countless written and spoken insults since the 1990s - one prosecutor even called her a "whore" in the corridor of a courthouse - continue to outrage some trauma specialists. "I'm afraid I don't think it's very ethical to suggest to a jury that it's easy to induce false memories, and use them to cast doubt on the testimony of people talking about often terrible things they say have happened to them", says Chris Brewin, a professor of clinical psychology at University College, London. Without denying their existence, a critical review of the scientific literature on false sightings is a must.

venirs co-authored by him in 2017 concludes that they are not so easy to induce.

The "lost in the mall" technique created controversy and a field of research. "Our critics said, 'Getting lost is so commonplace, show us you can do it with something more disturbing, more bizarre,'" recounts the psychologist. "So colleagues took up the challenge with an animal attack, a hot-air balloon ride, a near-drowning, or having released the handbrake and crashed into something after being left alone in a car."

"Uncooked memories"

Other studies have shown that a false memory of a parental quarrel activates the nervous system just as much as a real one, and that a false memory of food poisoning can disgust you with strawberries. At Maastricht University (Netherlands), where Dutch psychologist Henry Otgaar conducts prolific research, the implantation method has been updated. *He now uses what's called false feedback,* explains Elizabeth Loftus. *You ask people about their childhood, and later, when you go back to them, you say, "Here are some stories you told us." And the false event is slipped in, as if it came from them. It's so elegant."*

In 2022, the first replication of his experiment put an end to the old attacks on the insufficiency of

its sample. Entitled "Lost in the mall again", this rigorous Irish study multiplies the number of participants by five, and its protocol takes account of the methodological criticisms levelled at the original. "Elizabeth Loftus' research tends to be judged a little unfairly, so we wanted to protect our work as best we could," says Gillian Murphy, the psychologist from University College, Cork, who led it. At the end of the experiment, two-thirds of the research subjects said they remembered the false event (14%) or believed it had happened (52%). Gillian Murphy was amazed: "No matter how much you continue to research and understand what's going on in people's brains, there's still something unbelievable about seeing false memories form before your very eyes."

Attentive to what happens to them, the young researcher wanted to know whether the induced memories disappear completely after the debriefing. "Can we go back? This is an essential question, and the answer is yes. Some people can still imagine the scene in their mind, but they know it didn't happen." The richer the false memories are in sensory impressions, the more "col-lant" they are, she points out. Psychologists refer to these as "non-believed memories", like the images of Santa Claus coming down the chimney that some adults can still see in their heads. The shopping mall Elizabeth Loftus would like us to visit than the

the law abolished the statute of limitations, sparking a wave of lawsuits. Obsessed with the phenomenon of miscarriages of justice from an early age, Elizabeth Loftus wasted no time in introducing her

other studies have shown that a false fear of food poisoning can make

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Santa Claus, but his neon lights
still shine in a small number of
inner worlds. p

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