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Memory in the Twenty-First Century

**New Critical Perspectives from the Arts,
Humanities, and Sciences**

Edited by

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DAVID
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was created in early 2015 as an immersive theatre show in London's docks, where the audience are part of a group of agents in 2050 guiding humanity through the most pressing issues of the twenty-first century.¹⁵ The production was small and ran for only one week, but the ethos behind it fits more closely with the idea of us all as agents of change. Even if *New Atlantis* and *United Micro Kingdoms* did not result in immediate action, they introduce plural, mutable futures that can be shaped and modified. Such imaginations are an antidote for our often stubbornly singular visions of the future.

Notes

1. Martin Rees, *Our Final Century: The 50/50 Threat to Humanity's Survival: Will the Human Race Survive the Twenty-First Century?* (London: Arrow, 2004), 110.
2. Stephen Emmott, *10 Billion* (London: Penguin, 2013), 196.
3. Nesta, *Don't Stop Thinking about Tomorrow: A Modest Defence of Futurology* (London: Nesta, 2013).
4. Angela Wilkinson and Roland Kupers, 'Living in the Future', *Harvard Business Review* May Issue (2013).
5. Caroline Bassett, Ed Steinmueller and George Voss, *Better Made Up: The Mutual Influence of Science Fiction and Innovation* (London: Nesta, 2013), 38.
6. Arthur C. Clarke, 'Extra-Terrestrial Relays', *Wireless World* October Issue (1945), 305–308.
7. Douglas Adams, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (London: Pan Books, 1979).
8. Bassett, Steinmueller and Voss, *Better Made Up*, A11.
9. David A. Lane and Robert R. Maxfield, 'Ontological Uncertainty and Innovation', *Journal of Evolutionary Economics* 15 (2005), 26.
10. Endel Tulving, 'Episodic and Semantic Memory', in *Organization of Memory*, ed. Endel Tulving and Wayne Donaldson (London: Academic Press, 1972), 381–403.
11. Daniel L. Greenber and Mieke Verfaelle, 'Interdependence of Episodic and Semantic Memory: Evidence from Neuropsychology', *Journal of the International Neuropsychological Society* 16(5) (2010), 748–753.
12. Mark A. Wheeler, Donald T. Stuss and Endel Tulving, 'Toward a Theory of Episodic Memory: The Frontal Lobes and Autonoetic Consciousness', *Psychology Bulletin* 121(3) (1997), 331.
13. Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming* (London: MIT, 2013).
14. <http://www.unitedmicrokingdoms.org/>
15. <http://www.enlightenmentcafe.co.uk/>

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Memory Is No Longer What It Used to Be

Patricia Pisters

In *Difference and Repetition*, Gilles Deleuze develops a philosophy of time that allows three different conceptualizations of memory: memory conceived from the present, memory from the past and memory from the future.¹ According to Deleuze, in any human being there is always an interplay between these different ways of conceiving memory and time more generally. On a more collective cultural level, however, I propose that we have moved into new dominant way of understanding memory: In the twenty-first century we increasingly conceive memory from the point of view of possible futures. In contemporary cinema, as well as elsewhere in culture, memory is no longer what it used to be.

Deleuze departs from the idea of a passive (unconscious) synthesis of time. On the basis of what we perceive repeatedly in the living present, we recall, anticipate, or adapt our expectations in a synthesis of time, which Deleuze calls in Bergsonian terms 'durée' ('duration').² This synthesis is a passive synthesis, since 'it is not carried out by the mind, but occurs in the mind'.³ The active (conscious) synthesis of understanding and recollection are based upon this passive synthesis that occurs on an unconscious level. Deleuze distinguishes different types of passive syntheses of time that have to be seen in relation to one another and in combination with active syntheses.

The first synthesis Deleuze distinguishes is that of habit, which he describes as the true foundation of time, occupied by the living present.⁴ In the first synthesis of time based in the present, the future is an automatic habitual anticipation, and the past is a passive sensory-motor recollection, also known as 'procedural memory': we do not need actively to recall how to move our body to walk up the stairs, to bring food to our mouth, to run for a bus, and so on. So memory conceived from the first synthesis of time (which has the present as firm foundation of the body) is automatic recollection in a stretch of duration, a stretch of the living present. In cinema terms one can think of the classical action hero, John Wayne or Humphrey Bogart, who knows how to overcome obstacles he finds on his path. Stylistically the images follow a logical cause-effect narration in a cinematographic style that follows the continuity editing rules of classical Hollywood, giving us the impression of a seamlessly told story: from one

moment to the next, we always know where we are in relation to the present. The flashback is always a recollection that is called for by a moment in the present, and is clearly distinct from that present (cinematographically this is often marked by a dissolve or fade out to another moment back in time). In general, memory in the first synthesis is a habitual form of recollection in a present that continuously passes.

But this first synthesis of the passing present is grounded in a second synthesis of memory as such, or 'pure past' in general, as Bergson would have it: 'Memory is the fundamental synthesis of time which constitutes the being of the past (that which causes the present to pass)'.⁵ In the second way of passively synthesizing time, the past as pure past (as the co-existence of layers of the past) is the dominant temporal form. In this second form of temporal order, the past appears unannounced and forcefully, as in Proust's involuntary memory caused by the madeleine. Or as in modern cinema after the Second World War, where characters seem unable to act in a habitual way, trapped by the traumas of the past that keep on returning. Through her encounter with a Japanese man in Hiroshima, the French woman of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (Alain Resnais 1959), for instance, relives her love affair with a German soldier, while at the same time the collective memories of the war are repeatedly recalled. So in this second form of temporal synthesis the past is not automatically embodied, but appears as the effect of a sudden or traumatic encounter, a trigger in the present that opens up (several) layers of the individual (episodic) and collective past. Different layers of the past move to the present where their virtuality merges with the actuality of the present. The logical order and style of classic cinema has now given way to an irrational logic where past and present form crystals of time.

The future in this temporal order is based on the expectations from the past, the expectation of a cyclic return of the past. In *Hiroshima Mon Amour* the future is a dimension of the past, and the trauma of forgetting. In several instances, it is said that the war and other disasters will be repeated in the future, which is based on the idea that we will forget, and everything will start all over again based on the forgotten model of the past: '2,000 dead bodies, 80,000 wounded, within nine seconds. The numbers are official. It will happen again', the woman says in voice-over over images of a reconstructed Hiroshima.⁶ Also, in the love story, the future is raised as a function of memory and forgetting, as the man says, 'In a few years when I have forgotten you, I will remember you as the symbol of love's forgetfulness. I will think of you as the horror of forgetting'.⁷ The woman, too, when she recalls her first love, trembles at the fact that the intensity of such shattering love can be forgotten, and a new love can be encountered again. In particular, after the Second World War the past in general becomes a cultural obsession, and the typical form of post-War cinema translates this in a form of cinema where the past has an irrational force.

Memory from the future in the database logic

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, and even more intensely after the attack on the Twin Towers, a new world order has also changed our relationship to time: in

politics and culture, polling, profiling, pre-emption, prediction and prevention are symptomatic of our obsession with the future. This can be understood by considering the third way of repeating and differing, of synthesizing time: 'The third repetition, this time by excess, [is] the repetition of the future as eternal return'.⁸ In this third synthesis, the foundation of habit in the present and the ground of the past are 'superseded by a groundlessness, a universal ungrounding which turns upon itself and causes only the yet-to-come to return'.⁹ In this third synthesis, the present and the past are dimensions of the future. Because the future is always speculative, there is never the foundation and ground of the past or the present, but always multiple options. The third synthesis is the time of (endless) serial variations and remixes of pasts and presents, remixed from a future perspective. As Deleuze suggests at the end 'The Brain is the Screen', cinema is only at the beginning of its exploration of audio-visual relations, which are relations of time.¹⁰ This suggests the possibilities for new dimensions of time in the image. Contemporary cinema is predominantly based in the third synthesis of time, marked by serializations of possible scenarios.

Focusing only on the temporal dimensions of these images, it becomes evident that the future plays an important role, expressing itself on many levels. In *Minority Report*, crime prevention is based on crimes that are about to happen, predicted by *savants* with the power of predicting the future. The main character in *Source Code* acts with increasing knowledge of the future, every time he relives a variation of the past. If we think of *Inception*, it is possible to argue that the whole story is actually told from a point of view of the future. At the beginning of the film the main characters meet when they are in old age. At the end of the story, we return to this point, indicating that actually everything was told from this future moment of old age and even the moment of their death. Here, the future structures the narration. *Melancholia* also starts with flash-forwards of scenes that we will see later in the film, and of course, the whole story is based on an apocalyptic vision of the future. Many other variations can be given to show that a different temporal order of repetition and difference, eternal return, and serialization with much more complexity, typical of the digital age, has definitively made its way onto the cinema screen. So memory no longer functions as a stable ground or source that allows us to extrapolate or extend a logical future (as the cyclical repetition in *Hiroshima Mon Amour* still suggests). This explodes conventional forms of causality and reason; the pathways which lead to the future are inherently unstable.

Contemporary digital culture is driven by databases, from which, time and again, new selections are made and new narratives can be constructed, in endless series. As Lev Manovich explains, this does not mean that the database is only of our time: the encyclopaedia and even Dutch still lifes of the seventeenth century follow a kind of database logic.¹¹ It is just that with the seemingly endless storage and retrieval possibilities of digital technology, databases seem to become a dominant form of organizing and shaping culture. And it allows very explicitly for endless series of new combinations, orderings, and remixes of its basic source materials, which on a temporal scale matches the characteristics of the third

synthesis of time, the serialization and remixing of the past and the present from a point of view of the future. With respect to cinema as a form of cultural memory itself, we can see there are endless variations of films that are remixed and mashed up in many different ways, recreating as such the past from a later moment of time (the future). *Cloud Atlas* (Tom Tykwer, Andy and Lana Wachowski 2012) is another case in point. In the film the characters in different layers of time are played by the same actors, implying that they are variations of the same persons. The framing story is told from a point of view of the future, when Tom Hanks and Halle Berry as Zachry and Meronym, on another planet, are telling all the previous stories to their (grand)children. But what is also particularly interesting is that each memory – each of the six stories in a deeper layer in time – is told from a point of view of the future, and is recalled by a character from the future through a particular mediating technology: letters, a book manuscript, or a film. Each previous layer of time unfolds in the next layer through these memory devices.

Of course there are still classic images that operate under the logic of the rational cut, continuity editing, and the integration of sequences into an organic, Aristotelian whole and are based in the first passive synthesis of time. And the post-war cinema form also find new directors whose work is grounded in the second synthesis of time reigned by the incommensurable or irrational cut of the coexisting layers of the pure past.¹² But, arguably, the heart of cinema has moved into a database logic connected to the third synthesis of time. It is an impure image regime, because it repeats and remixes all previous image regimes as well as its temporal orders, but ungrounds all these orders because of the dominance of the third synthesis. Memory is not (only) based in habitual recollection, nor does it speak for itself in unexpected ways. Memory is increasingly remixed and reordered from future points of view.

Notes

1. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: The Athlone Press, 1994), 70–91.
2. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 70.
3. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 71.
4. In his cinema books, Deleuze distinguished classical pre-war cinema as ‘movement images’ and modern post-war as ‘time-images’. See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: The Athlone Press, 1986) and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: The Athlone Press, 1989). I argue that the ‘brain-screen’ of cinema in the digital age can be distinguished as a third mode of cinema as ‘the neuro-image’. See Patricia Pisters, *The Neuro-Image: A Film-Philosophy of Digital Screen Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).
5. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 80.
6. See also the published scenario and dialogues written by Marguerite Duras, *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 25: ‘Deux cent mille morts. Quatre-vingt mille blessés. En neuf seconds. Ces chiffres sont officiels. Ca recommencera’.
7. See also Duras, *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, 83: ‘Dans quelques années, quand je t’aurais oubliée [. . .] je me souviendrai de toi comme de l’oubli de l’amour même. Je penserai à cette histoire comme à l’horreur de l’oubli’.

8. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 90.
9. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 91.
10. Gilles Deleuze, ‘The Brain Is the Screen’, in *The Brain Is the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema*, ed. Gregory Flaxman (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 372.
11. Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2001), 212–280.
12. Deleuze, *The Time-Image*, 277. The most clear example Deleuze gives of an irrational or incommensurable regime of time in post-war cinema is *Last Year in Marienbad* (Alain Resnais 1961). One can also think of Fellini’s *8½* (1962) and *Roma* (1972).