

Archives of Memory

Key terms: memory, archive, Henri Bergson, transcultural memory, destruction of memories, mnemotechnics, prosthetic memory.

Matter and Memory & Memory in Matter

“The chronicler who narrates events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accord with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost to history” (Benjamin 1940, 390).

Bergson’s *Matter and Memory* (1896) was written in reaction to the book *The Maladies of Memory* (1881) by Théodule Ribot who claimed that memories were localized in the brain and hence of a material nature. Bergson was opposed to what he saw as an attempt to reduce spirit (the realm proper to memories) to matter. His project was to prove the ontological existence of the past over and above the merely psychological one. The past, for him, really exists, with each and every detail carefully catalogued away. However, Bergson consigned this ontological past to the realm of the spiritual or to that of Platonic “psyche”. This is rooted in Cartesian dualism between matter (body and brain) and mind (psyche or soul) which goes all the way back to Plato. Simply put, Bergson associates matter (brain and body) with objective rational thinking and the kind of memory he calls “habit” while the psyche or the spiritual becomes the domain of the ontological past with its ‘true memory’ – a source of intuition and creative duration for which matter becomes the site of materialization. Creative duration is to be understood as the synthesis of past and present with a view to the future. Memory thus becomes associated with creative intuition as against what it was previously understood to be as a faculty for repetition and reproduction. Explaining the link between ‘habit’ and ‘true memory’ Bergson writes:

“The bodily memory, made up of the sum of the sensory-motor systems, organized by habit, is then a quasi-instantaneous memory to which the true memory of the past serves as base... So, on the one hand, the memory of the past offers to the sensory-motor mechanisms all the recollections capable of guiding them in their task and of giving to the motor reactions the direction suggested by the lessons of experience. It is in just this that the associations of

contiguity and likeness consist. But, on the other hand, the sensory-motor apparatus furnish to ineffective, that is unconscious, memories, the means of taking on a body, of materializing themselves, in short of becoming present. For, that a recollection should reappear in consciousness, it is necessary that it should descend from the heights of pure memory down to the precise point where action is taking place. In other words, it is from the present that the appeal to which memory responds comes, and it is from the sensory-motor elements of present action that a memory borrows the warmth which gives it life.”

In the above extract, consciousness seems to be consonant with thinking or information processing in the brain whereas pure memory belongs to the spiritual realm if not to the Platonic realm of ideas, from which it offers assistance to the brain according to its needs. It is similar to arguing that the past, like ideas, already exist in the ether around us but is only tapped in the brain in a sufficient form according to the requirements of the moment. Furthermore, nothing in Bergson explains what keeps the brain from accessing all the past that has ever been in general if it subsists together as a whole in the spiritual realm, though Bergson’s thesis implies that only the past individual to the brain whose perception it once was is available to it for recollection i.e., we only have access to our own memories and not to the memories of the others. The question as to ‘where are recollections preserved?’ according to Deleuze’s reading of Bergson, involves a badly analyzed composite. The simple answer to that question for him is that they are preserved in itself or in other words in the spiritual realm from which they can be reminisced. Deleuze identifies this duality in Bergson, between the brain which is ‘wholly on the line of objectivity’ and the recollection which is ‘part of the line of subjectivity’. The Brain is characterized by what he calls “movement” like the pure perception that it determines which is to be understood as ‘instantaneous section’ (Deleuze, *Bergsonism* 1988, 54). The corollary of this would be that the past is ontologically stable though our representational recollections of it are often coloured by our needs and agendas. Thus, there is a difference in kind between pure perception and pure recollection, between present and past, between matter and memory. One belongs to the realm of the actual, the other to the virtual realm.

In many ways Bergson’s project of locating the ontological archive of memories in the spiritual realm appears counterintuitive to me especially given the findings of the current neurological research¹. I believe that some aspects of Bergson’s thesis are still worth salvaging but only after aligning them to the

¹ I am making this claim based on my understanding of neuroscientist Rodrigo Quian Quiroga’s research recorded in his book entitled *Borges and Memory* (Quiroga 2012)

current neurological findings videlicet, by housing the ontological past in matter, to which task I'll turn my immediate attention. Bergsonian dualism that confines brain to the line of objectivity is ironically reductionist and there is no reason for believing why brain should be incapable of subjectivity. Interpreting Bergson's claim that we place ourselves 'firstly into the past in general, then into a certain region of the past' Deleuze writes: "It is not a case of one region containing particular elements of the past, particular recollections, in opposition to another region which contains other recollections" (Deleuze, Bergsonism 1988, 61). In contradistinction to this, neurosurgeon Wilder Penfield performed experiments where he was able to make his patients recall memories by stimulating their temporal lobe (Penfield 1975). Based on these findings as well as others neuroscientist Rodrigo Quian Quiroga speculates a localization of different aspects of memories in corresponding areas of the brain responsible for the processing of that aspect:

"Does this mean that memories reside in the temporal lobe? Probably yes, especially for visual and auditory memories, because the temporal lobe processes those types of information. Similarly, one would expect that memories related to touch – say, the texture of wool or leather – would be located in the sensory cortex (where this type of information is processed), and memories of smell in the olfactory cortex" (Quiroga 2012, 99).

This indicates that not only do memories reside in the brain (even in their pure ontological form) but are also localized in different regions of it. Furthermore, complex memories can be distributed over several different locations according to the function in the brain they correspond to, yet which, for that reason are not isolated but come together to give a semblance of unity to recollections. Additionally, different memories interact with and complement each other and are often deployed in complex concatenations for the purpose of thought or problem solving. This is not altogether dissonant with an alternate interpretation of Bergson's duration marked by virtual coexistence of different levels of the past i.e., the inherence in each level of all of our past in a more or less contracted state. This is also coherent with what according to Deleuze, Bergson would call 'dynamic scheme' characterizing the movement of 'rotation', "where all the recollections in the process of actualization are in a relationship of reciprocal penetration" (Deleuze, Bergsonism 1988, 66). After all, each of our recollections, however specific, do tend to abstract the whole of our past which signify interaction between different regions of the brain and between different memories.

In *Matter and Memory* (1896) Bergson explains the process of actualization of the past into the present through his iconic metaphor of the inverted cone. The past becomes available to us in the present, or

perhaps it will be more accurate to say that the representational recollections of past events are made accessible to us which can shed light on a crisis in the present moment or simply yield a fresh perspective by affording a new vantage onto the present. Comparing the process of actualization of memories to the focusing of a camera², Bergson talks in terms of a ‘translation contraction’ of the entirety of the past to meet experience and a ‘rotation-orientation’ of its ‘useful facet’ to the present need. Now, how is this actualization of the past in the present useful and what are its implications?

Our bodily intelligence or ‘habit’³ as well as our day to day reasoning, recognition and sense making is performatively constituted, that is it is acquired through a series of repetitions and reenactments. A simple yet discernable example would be learning by rote by repeating something till it is committed to memory. The reason we’re able to recognize a familiar face or make sense of ourselves in time and space is by matching the present instance of perception against previous instances from recollection. Consequently, in as much as all these modes of intelligences rely on memory, the importance of recollection cannot be underestimated. It is vital for our subjectivity and identity as well as intellect⁴. However, Bergson’s claim for the actualization of the past in the present is not simply limited to availing the pool of knowledge of past experiences, memorized concepts, factual information and bodily inscriptions to the current sensory-motor stimulation by surrounding objects and situation. But it also seems to be imbued with a prophetic, almost spectral agency as denoted by phrases such as ‘burden of the past’ which seem to suggest both a spectral as well as material return of the past into the present. Experiences of the past dictate and influence our present actions, at times demanding a reincarnation or reenactment into the present and in this sense it exerts a spectral agency upon the present. In addition to this, and perhaps more interestingly, sometimes a future memory is captured into the present (which is not surprising given its constant anticipation) which can act as a self-fulfilling prophesy or be forgotten till the point of its material occurrence in time and (re)-experienced as a kind of Déjà Vu. We’ll return to this towards the end of the essay.

² “We become conscious of an act sui generis by which we detach ourselves from the present in order to replace ourselves, first in the past in general, then in a certain region of the past – a work of adjustment, something like the focusing of a camera. But our recollection still remains virtual; we simply prepare ourselves to receive it by adopting the appropriate attitude. Little by little it comes into view like a condensing cloud; from the virtual state it passes into the actual....” (as quoted from Deleuze 1988, 51)

³ “Habit” according to Bergson “acts our past experience but does not call up its image” (Bergson 2002/ 1896, 160) which would disqualify it from actualization of recollection which summons up an image. Here, however, we are using ‘actualization’ in a broader sense to mean re-activation of the past into the present which qualifies us to speak about ‘habit’ in relation to actualization as it continues to be informed by the past even though it has become too ensconced to summon an image.

⁴ See cases such as that of Clive Wearing who suffered from extreme amnesia and was rendered completely incapable of thinking as recounted in *Borges and Memory* (Quiroga 2012, 127-8).

Memories are stored in matter; when a person dies his memories die with him for all practical purposes and cannot be retrieved from the ontological archive that Bergson consigns to the spiritual realm. In Bergson's account each person is privy to his own spiritual archive, and for better or for worse, cannot access any more of the past from this ontology than properly belongs to him. However, the possibilities of the game change if one believes ontological memories to be housed in matter. First and foremost, the memories become subject to transference to other material forms and hence no longer remain as vulnerable to loss. A dying person can always commit his memory to the pages of a diary or make a friend privy to them thus ensuring their continuance after his death. The transferability of memory offers up new possibilities of an extensive prosthetic memory that can aid and deepen natural memory. 'Nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost to history' writes Benjamin, indicating the infinitude of the task he sets archaeology. The question then arises as to how much of this past can be actualized and secondly, how much of it can be accessed in its ontological purity?

It is common knowledge that memories are ephemeral and vulnerable to attenuation and garbling. Furthermore, their actualization involves some measure of abstraction and consequently the actualized recollection is usually not pure recollection. So the question facing us is whether we can we have access to pure recollections. Literature and history are full of examples that prove that pure recollections can indeed be actualized. Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges' short story entitled *Funes the Memorious* (1942) provides us with just such an instance in the character of its namesake Ireneo Funes who comes in possession of a prodigious memory after falling off a half-tamed horse. Borges writes:

"We, at one glance, can perceive three glasses on a table; Funes, all the leaves and tendrils and fruit that make up a grape vine. He knew by heart the forms of the southern clouds at dawn on 30 April 1882, and could compare them in his memory with the mottled streaks on a book in Spanish binding he had only seen once and with the outlines of the foam raised by an oar at Río Negro the night before the Quebracho uprising. These memories were not simple ones; each visual image was linked to muscular sensations, thermal sensations, etc. He could reconstruct all his dreams, all his half-dreams. Two or three times he had reconstructed a whole day; he never hesitated, but each reconstruction had required a whole day" and further "In fact, Funes remembered not only every leaf of every tree of every wood, but also every one of the times he had perceived or imagined it" (Borges 2000, 91-3).

The fact that these memories were never lost but were suddenly made accessible again attests to the ontological nature of memories. However, this ability to summon pure memories in their precise detail

did not come without a cost, i.e., Funes was almost incapable of conceptual ideas as conceptualization is premised on some capacity to abstract:

“Not only was it difficult for him to comprehend that the generic symbol dog embraces so many unlike individuals of diverse size and form; it bothered him that the dog at three fourteen (seen from the side) should have the same name as the dog, at three fifteen (seen from the front). His own face in the mirror, his own hands, surprised him every time he saw them” (Borges 2000, 93-4).

Fifty years later, neuroscientist Rodrigo Q. Quiroga was amazed to discover a fantastically precise interpretation of his research findings in this story. Quiroga recounts cases of savants such as Solomon Shereshevskii, Kim Peek (after whom the character of Raymond Babbit played by Dustin Hoffman in Barry Levinson’s *Rain Man* (1988) is based), Daniel Tammet among others, who had memories comparable to Funes with similar difficulty for abstraction⁵.

Memories are etched in matter and we are surrounded with it. It then follows that we are surrounded by an ontological archive of memories. We ourselves house our own personal archives. In his characteristic poetic style, Heidegger writes: “The spring stays on in the water of the gift. In the spring the rock dwells, and in the rock dwells the dark slumber of the earth, which receives the rain and dew of the sky” (Heidegger 1975). This denotes the graphological traces that time leaves on matter, in other words the memory of time resides in the matter. What are sciences like archaeology, paleontology, geology, dendrochronology etc., if not for a systematic reading of these graphological traces, an actualization of memories housed in them? Of course, the ontological memories writ upon these artefacts are beyond access, but perhaps this represents a false problem, perhaps pure past is not to be accessed but only to be intuited if that. It certainly has its limitations as pointed out already. It would render the world nonsensical in its luminosity of detail, in as much as sense is a function of generalization. However, such an ontological archive has to exist in principle (however inaccessible) if any of its actualizations (however impure) are to materialize. This becomes the basis for an external archive (which we are more familiar with) where these materialized actualizations are stored as

⁵ Especially see chapters 3 *The Man Who Could Not Forget* and 7 *Prodigious Minds* (Quiroga 2012).

knowledge. The archive has to exist in its physicality if knowledge emanating from it is to have validity and legitimacy⁶.

Archival Selection

Previously, we charted a course from ontological archive to its external analogue which embodies recollections transformed into accessible, external modules of knowledge. As expected, the many junctures of translation that characterize this conduit from the ontological archives of memory to the external archives of knowledge are not free of leaks and even deliberate abuse. Archiving is not without its politics of selective representation and hegemony as summed up by Derrida : “There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory” (Derrida 1996, 4). The memories that are committed to the ontological archive and the knowledge that is housed in its externalized version are filtered at both points of their entry and recall. Firstly, when the past is being constituted alongside its corresponding present it does not escape the perceptions that colour the latter. To a large extent we select what to archive and what to jettison away based on a variety of considerations. The organization of the archive and the agenda determining it structures the archivable content as well as the interpretations drawn from it: “No, the technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event” (Derrida 1996, 17). Derrida adds a further caveat to it as he suggests that a change in archiving technology will effect a change in the way it is encountered and experienced: “[A]rchival technology no longer determines, will never have determined, merely the moment of the conservational recording, but rather the very institution of the archivable event... To put it more trivially: *what is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way*. Archivable meaning is also and in advance codetermined by the structure that archives” (Derrida 1996, 18) (emphasis added).

Secondly, when representational recollections are actualized they are subjective interpretations of the original (true) recollection occasioned by the present motivation. Moreover, our memories are ephemeral and vulnerable to loss over time which blurs the recollection of the original event. In a similar way, the interpretations we draw from the external archive, the knowledge that it generates, cater to the agendas of the interpreter. Here, the incisive study by Edward Said titled *Orientalism* (2014/ 1978) can be illuminating. Building upon Michel Foucault’s power-knowledge complex, Said demonstrates how

⁶ Jacques Derrida makes this link between the physicality of the archive and authority it houses in his *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Derrida 1996).

the colonization of the East by the West was premised upon certain self-validating notions of its moral and cultural superiority to the East, whence its entitlement to rule it. The ideology which soon manifested itself as rampant racism fed upon its own momentum as it became increasingly invested in the lopsided notions such as ‘oriental despotism’ and ‘white man’s burden’, expressing itself through Orientalist art and literature. Far from being a novel phenomenon it was the age-old demonization of the rival to justify its colonization within the moral economy, which justification if successful would be internalized by the colonized and assimilated rival.

It is this abuse of the archive that Benjamin has in mind when he writes: “Articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing it ‘the way it really was.’ It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger” (Benjamin 1940, 391). And further, in his comparison of the angel of history with Paul Klee’s *Angelus Novus* (1920) in the context of his famous critique of progressive history championed by material historicism, puncturing its claims to scientific objectivity, in what is revealed to be a fraud⁷:

“There is a picture by Klee called *Angelus Novus*. It shows an angel who seems about to move away from something he stares at. His eyes are wide, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how the angel of history must look. His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before *us*, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. The storm drives him irresistibly into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is *this* storm.” (Benjamin 1940, 392)

While for Benjamin nothing should be regarded as lost to history, for Deleuze loss and forgetting are “not determinations which must be overcome; rather, they refer to the objective nature of that which we recover, as lost, at the heart of forgetting” (Deleuze 1994, 102). Similarly, C. Nadia Seremetakis highlights the polarity between the sensational and the mundane, between the sensational and the sensory, where the former is set in relief against the latter allowing its (the former’s) narrativity. In this way, the historical narration plays out against the background of ahistorical, sensory time (what Braudel

⁷ Benjamin compares historical materialism to the fraudulent chess playing automaton, known as the *Turk*, which was actually operated by a dwarf (who happened to be a master at chess) hidden away inside it (Benjamin 1940, 389).

terms as the ‘longue durée’ consigned to the historical unconscious), such that “the cultural construction of the ‘public’ and the sayable in turn creates zones of privatized, inadmissible memory and experience that operate as spaces of social amnesia and anaesthesia” (Seremetakis 1994, 19-21).

The selective representation that characterizes archives and histories can be gleaned from Sara



Figure 1: *Side by Side* (Digital Print) from the project *Ken. To be Destroyed* (S. Davidmann 2013)

Davidmann’s *Ken. To be Destroyed* (2013), an intervention by the artist into her family archives to salvage the truth of her Uncle Ken’s (K’s) identity as a transgender. The title of the work comes from the writing on an envelope found in her mother’s possession alongside letters and documents about K spanning a period of fifty years (1953-2003) and intended to be effaced from the family memoirs so as to wipe-out the embarrassment of his extreme identity. The family albums present Ken as a happily married ‘man’ revealing the constructed nature of such idealized histories which present a highly fictionalized version of reality, recording only what appears positive like weddings, birthdays etc. while carefully omitting rough-patches. The wedding photograph of Ken and Hazel reveals no traces of the

impending domestic strife so articulately documented in the family memorabilia of letters and papers as the couple tried to re-negotiate their relationship so as to inscribe Ken's identity as a transgender. With an ironic pun on the word 'Ken' which also connotes knowledge, what was at stake here was not just the memory of Ken's own identity but also the historical knowledge of an entire set of people whose histories are not allowed to exist and for whose histories Ken's documents become a synecdochal representative. Salvaging these documents from impending destruction, Davidmann intervenes by bringing the private memorabilia to the public realm of the archive, radically editing some of the photographs through digital manipulation and correction fluid, queering the version of truth told by them, and letting the remainder emerge from the gaps. According to Agamben, it is the ability to look beyond the darkness of the present, the ability to cite history in unforeseen ways which do not align themselves with specific agendas but rather responds to a compelling exigency, that marks out a contemporary: "To perceive, in the darkness of the present, this light that strives to reach us but cannot – this is what it means to be contemporary" (Agamben 2008, 46).

Paradoxically enough, the act of archiving is also an act of setting aside, and hence an act of forgetting as borne out by the forgotten envelope containing the memories of Ken's true identity. Derrida writes: "There would indeed be no archive desire without the radical finitude, without the possibility of a forgetfulness which does not limit itself to repression... there is no archive fever without the threat of this death drive, this aggression and destruction drive" (Derrida 1996, 19). In the case of Ken's memorabilia *carefully* archived by Davidmann's mother, the intention to destroy it existed alongside the drive to preserve it. It can be argued that the act of archiving in this case was itself a symbolic act of forgetting Ken even as it coexisted with the subconscious desire for the trace to be re-membered and saved. Thus, one cannot be separated from the other. It is no mean feat to obliterate memories.

Archaeological Therapy

“Finally, she appealed to the Goddess, my body distracts me, desire returns over and over again, my cunt howls, my breasts ache. I would like a year off from desire in order to complete works in my mind.”

– Carolee Schneemann, *ABC–We Print Anything–In The Cards*

In her work *ABC–We Print Anything–In The Cards* (1976), Carolee Schneemann excavates her memorial



Figure 2: (Schneemann, *ABC–We Print Anything–In The Cards* 1976). Photograph taken at Hales Gallery, London by Adwait Singh, 2015.

archive with the view to analyzing her personal relationships especially the one with her former partner, Anthony McCall. She reconstructs her memories, curating them piece by piece, using the formal trope of “diary”, compiling an archive of 315 numbered cards, transcribing the repertoire of remembered quotes, dreams, excerpts and private photographs. The cards are colour-coded – pink, blue and yellow – where each colour denotes quotes from friends, quotes from A., B., and C., (where A. stands for Anthony McCall, B. for Bruce McPherson and C. for Carolee herself) and fragments from dreams and diaries respectively. The artwork was complemented by a performance organized at De Appel, Amsterdam, in 1977 and filmed by Miguel-Ángel Cárdenas which was described by Schneemann as a ‘lecture with images’. Against a backdrop of projected images of cards containing text and photographs, Schneemann reads out from the cards shuffled at random (thus resigning narration and historicism to chance) in a detached drone, objectifying subjective content, nearly rendering it incredulous to the

audience in the process. The artwork can be described as a leap back into the past in order to process her floundering relationship with the artist Anthony McCall and the emerging new one with the publisher Bruce McPherson by externalizing her memories and perusing them from a safe objective distance.

In his essay *What is the Contemporary?* Giorgio Agamben proposes that the key to unlocking the present lies in the archaic and primordial past:

“It is in this sense that one can say that the entry point to the present necessarily takes the form of archaeology; an archaeology that does not, however, regress to a historical past, but returns to that part within the present that we are absolutely incapable of living. What remains un-lived therefore is incessantly sucked back toward the origin, without ever being able to reach it. The present is nothing other than this un-lived element in everything that is lived. That which impedes access to the present is precisely the mass of what for some reason (its traumatic character, its excessive nearness) we have not managed to live” (Agamben 2008, 51).

After highlighting the etymology of ‘archaic’ as that which is close to ‘arkhe’ or the origin, Agamben remarks that origin is not to be situated in a chronological past but is characterized by a historical contemporaneity and continuous agency. There are two different meanings of ‘present’ operational in the above extract – first, the untrammelled present and second, a specific part of that present which is experienced as unlivable or traumatic and which needs to be resolved before the passageway to the first is sufficiently cleared. It is the second that seeks constant retreat in the ‘immemorial’ and ‘prehistoric’ origin that continues nonetheless to be active ‘just as the embryo continues to be active in the tissues of the mature organism, and the child in the psychic life of the adult’ (Agamben 2008, 50). Attending to this “un-lived” pile is the task that Agamben assigns to the contemporary.

It is not surprising then, that Schneemann falls back on this same archaeology to resolve the crisis facing her, to disentangle the knot of un-lived fantasies and unfulfilled desires impeding her transition to a clear present. In composing the archive of externalized memories she is attempting to organize the welter of thoughts and emotions, and to impose a semblance of order on chaos by maintaining a safe distance from the whirlpool of affects which would otherwise carry her down. The repetition that characterizes the archive (according to Jacques Derrida⁸) and memory (according to Henry Bergson⁹) becomes a

⁸ See (Derrida 1996).

⁹ See Henry Bergson’s *Matter and Memory* (1896).

cathartic act of sorts when undertaken through a careful filing and organizing of personal recollections. In addition to its therapeutic aspect, the ritualistic repetition also comprises an exercise in the hermeneutics of the self, an introspection that reassembles the harried self piece by piece through a projection and reabsorption of memories. Imagine waking up tabula rasa every morning, only to grow back, gradually, into yourself as the day wears on by having to artificially reconstruct your memories through an archival diary, as is indeed borne out by the testimony¹⁰ of emerging London based artist Katarina Rankovic.

In his 1959 essay *The Meaning of Working Through the Past* Theodor W. Adorno posits failure to take full cognizance of the events of the National Socialist era and of the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime as a willful forgetting or a 'destruction of memory'. Adorno enumerates several strategies by which this forgetting as a 'not so unconscious defensiveness against guilt' is effected – analytical subterfuge defusing the 'guilt complex', euphemism, feigned ignorance of events, alleged compensations that cancel the debt, and shifting responsibility (O'Connor 2010, 137). This lack of consciousness of the fact of suffering, a rational irrationality devised by modernity, constitutes what Adorno calls 'reified consciousness' which defers a real reconciliation with the object by disavowing the contradictions of its existence. A true reconciliation with the object requires 'affinity' and any knowledge of the object produced without it would remain biased: 'Without affinity there is no truth'. In deferring full accountability of the traumatic events 'reified consciousness' precludes acknowledgement of the object complete with its contradictions and the emergence of real rationality by imposing a false account of events on the collective consciousness.

Against 'reified consciousness,' Adorno contends negative dialectics or critical consciousness which offers 'autonomous subjectivity' as the appropriate way of 'working through the past'. Negative dialectics salvages marginal memory by letting contradictions to surface therein affording full reconciliation with the past: "Through the experience of contradiction we might come to abandon glib or causal conceptualizations of that suffering and of events irreducible to concepts by placing them against the enormity of the events themselves" (O'Connor 2010, 137). Here the use of the term 'experience'¹¹ has to be noted. Experiencing the contradictions and suffering of the times constitutes a

¹⁰ This was confided to me in a private conference in 2014. Her works can be accessed at <http://katarina-rankovic.com/>

¹¹ One of the German words for memory 'erinnerung' has the connotation of the systematized internalization of the experienced time span and hence the importance of experience to memory. Moreover, for Deleuze, whenever

qualitatively different type of knowledge, one that is inscribed onto memory as opposed to intellect. Only a fidelity to the former can attempt a corrective to the latter and the problem of ‘effacement of memory’ is very much a problem of destruction/ abortion of experience. Only when society offers itself to true experience and lets ‘affinity’ emerge can the false consciousness be countered, as Adorno writes: “[The] postulate of a capacity to experience the object – and discrimination is the experience of the object turned into a form of subjective reaction – provides a haven for the mimetic element of knowledge, for the element of elective affinity between the knower and the known”¹². Further, highlighting the role of experience in problematizing oversimplified constructions and conceptualizations Adorno writes: “Experience forbids the resolution in the unity of consciousness of whatever appears contradictory... Contradiction cannot be brought under any unity without manipulation, without the insertion of some wretched cover concepts that will make the crucial differences vanish”¹³. Similar arguments¹⁴ in defence of ‘opacity’ and the ‘untranslatability’ of the other are made by Édouard Glissant (For Opacity 1990/1997) and Sarat Maharaj (‘Perfidious Fidelity’ The Untranslatability of the Other 1994) respectively. False consciousness can lead to false memory and the first step to the resolution of trauma as posited by psychoanalysis is the liberation of repressed memories and consciousness. This liberation often involves coming to terms with the traumatic events by confronting them. The ritual of mourning, the experience of it is what constitutes the therapy itself. Here, one can recognize links to the aforementioned notion of ritualistic ‘repetition’ and how it performatively constitutes memory and knowledge itself through iterative embodiments.

Adorno posits certain artworks as ‘objectively the counterimage of enchained forces’ (by which he understands reified consciousness), engagement with which can engender “affinity” with the other and afford possibilities of reconciliation. These ‘authentic works’ are non-conformist, revisional, and encouraging of independent reflexivity, in short “rationality that criticizes rationality without withdrawing from it”¹⁵. However, curiously enough, these artworks must proceed by blotting out ‘every trace of reconciliation in memory’ for, as Peter Uwe Hohendal explains, “[re]conciliation is denied

we think we’re producing memories, we’re engaged in ‘becomings’ which indicates how recollection is subservient to praxis (Ansell-Pearson 2010, 161). This demarcates the cycle between experience, memory and becoming.

¹² As quoted from (O’Connor 2010, 138)

¹³ Ibid., 139.

¹⁴ Deleuze makes similar arguments championing a denaturation of language and advocating the replacement of the paternal function by a fraternal ‘community of celibates’ signaling possibilities of infinite becoming and charting a zone of indiscernability (Deleuze, Bartleby; or the Formula 1998).

¹⁵ As quoted from (O’Connor 2010, 146)

because any harmonious ending would be tantamount to untruth”¹⁶. Herbert Marcuse asserts that art contains the memory of freedom and opens up possibilities of unrepressed experience by preserving “the ‘memory’ of the subhistorical past when the life of the individual was the life of the genus, the image of the immediate unity between the universal and the particular under the role of the pleasure principle”¹⁷. Furthermore, this salubrious space which fosters reconciliation appears only in fantasy, art or memory. This sets in resonance Agamben’s notion of ‘unlived present’ constantly gravitating towards an archaic ‘origin’ and Proust’s fidelity to childhood as the place of undamaged memories¹⁸. The power of authentic artwork lies precisely in its ability to raise the viewer to these alternate possibilities and experiences and produce new modes of consciousness that are not positivist but admitting of contradictions. I am aware at this point of the two different senses of reconciliation in operation here: one that seeks redressal of present circumstances through a full acknowledgement of the past wrongs and the other more moderate, that is of the nature of coping mechanism; more specifically the two senses in which they are deployed in Adorno’s thesis and that of Marcel Proust – a reconciliation with the past versus reconciliation with the loss – respectively. While Adorno is concerned with addressing the post war situation where contemporary society refuses to acknowledge and come to terms with the monstrous enormity of destruction wreaked by the Nazi regime, Proust’s thesis envisions coping strategies to deal with loss and death drive. The two are perhaps contradictory but no less valid for it and address different problems. Very often a happy recovery would strive for a balance between the two i.e., it will prescribe encountering reality but in a safe way. This is what authentic art administers – safe dosage of critical consciousness tintured with fantastical primordial base. It combines a return to the origin with negative dialectics, a return in order to regain sensibility to contradiction and suffering, a pilgrimage that renews faith and bestows upon the pilgrim the means to unblock the present.

¹⁶ Ibid., 146

¹⁷ Ibid., 149

¹⁸ According to Adorno’s reading of Proust, “undamaged experience is produced only in memory, far beyond immediacy, and through, memory aging and death seem to be overcome in the aesthetic image”. As quoted from (O’Connor 2010, 147)



Figure 3: Heroic Symbol V, Oil on Canvas, 150 x 260.5 cm (Kiefer 1970)

German artist Anselm Kiefer's oeuvre provides several examples of authentic artworks in the sense propounded by Adorno. Especially relevant are his *Occupations* (1969) photographs and *Heroic Symbols* (1969-70) artworks and other works such as *Ice and Blood* (1971). A recurrent motif in all these works is Kiefer's self-portrait performing the 'Seig Heil' salute in his father's military uniform at different locations across Europe. The staging of the 'Seig Heil,' despite having caused a frenzy regarding the works' moral implications, was for Kiefer an important gesture of reconciliation with the past. As an artist hailing from a race which had been deemed guilty of homicide, in appropriating a gesture symbolizing all the past wrongs and the debt incumbent upon them, Kiefer broke the ice on what Adorno would regard as strategies adopted by contemporary society to dismiss responsibility and guilt. These 'actions' become cathartic and first steps toward cauterization of a lacerated psyche. They prepared the grounds for reconciliation by acknowledging the fact that not all was right and normal and were hailed as 'good actions' by supporters such as Joseph Beuys who saw action as art and performance as homeopathic and even exorcistic (Weikop, 33-34). The *Occupations* photographs that stage the 'Seig Heil' salute in front of different monuments in the dramatic cinematographic technique developed by Leni Riefenstahl serve to criticize the Nazi propaganda and monumentality. Often these photographs are strategically framed by arboreal elements especially the branches of the so called 'Hitler tree' in a subversive reenactment of the National Socialist appropriation of forests for their own

to the exclusion of the nomadic other as epitomized by an anti-Semitic sign displayed outside a forest that read “Jews are not welcome in our forest”¹⁹.

Not only do these works fire a critical consciousness by exposing the scarred landscape and the atrocities committed in the forests such as Buchenwald and Hinzert but they also connote forests as spaces where life is recycled and renewed as symbolized by the other most dominant iconography in his works, that of sunflowers springing from the buried body. The notion of recycle and return to the origin is nowhere as strongly expressed as it is in his book *The Sorrow of the Nibelungen* (1976) which refers to the final opera of Wagner’s Ring cycle, *Die Götterdämmerung* (Twilight of the Gods) (1876). It relates the tale of the quest for the ring of power from Norse legends leading to the destruction of Gods and their halls *Valhalla* in the apocalyptic flood *Ragnarök* and the ring’s eventual return to its origin i.e. to the Rhine maidens after the possessor of the ring *Brünnhilde* rides into her lover, Siegfried’s funeral pyre built by the side of Rhine, causing the river to overflow and thereby allowing the maidens to retrieve the ring which was stolen from them in the first opera. The fire from Siegfried’s funeral pyre which ignited *Valhalla* in what Reinhold Heller described as a ‘purifying apocalyptic conflagration,’ is often a symbol employed by Kiefer to denote rejuvenation. Forests thus transpire as not only the space to which the hermit artist turns for solace but also as memorial sites²⁰ where past memories are invoked for the purpose of obeisance or reconciliation. They are primordial and generative as well as shrines of remembrance and markers of subjectivities and cultural identity. Kiefer’s multi-layered canvasses thus reveal insights into the German collective and cultural memory not only in their choice of subject matter but also in the choice of the material, especially local wood and repurposed lead. In this sense artworks are doubly memorial as they can crystallize memories around the subject matter and around the historical materiality of the artwork itself. Closely mirroring Agamben’s assigning of the task of archaeology to the contemporary, Christian Weikop identifies Kiefer as a dendrochronologist: “In many respects, Kiefer is like a dendrochronologist working back through the age-rings of time on tree sections, exploring the mythic place of the forest in the cultural ecologies of the past” (Weikop, 46).

¹⁹ Translated from the original “Juden sind in unsern deutschen Wäldern nicht erwünscht” as cited from (Weikop 27 September- 14 December 2014, 41) Weikop explains “The Nazis were obsessed with the idea of the rooted ‘forest dwelling’ German as distinct from what they saw as homeless ‘desert-roaming’ Jews” (Ibid.).

²⁰ Weikop writes: “The forest as memorial site is an important idea here and relates Kiefer not only to Friedrich and Kersting, but also to later paintings by Adolf Menzel and Max Liebermann (from 1868 and 1888 respectively) depicting memorial services in Kösen in the Thuringian Forest, a place rich in Romantic connotations” (Weikop 27 September- 14 December 2014, 41).

Expansion of the Cone

Borges's short story *Shakespeare's Memory* (1983) narrates the story of a self-proclaimed devotee of Shakespeare, Hermann Sörgel, who comes to receive Shakespeare's memory from a man named Daniel Thorpe at a Shakespeare conference. As this alien memory starts to grow on him, he starts whistling melodies he has never heard before, dreams faces he does not recognize. He gains new insights into Shakespeare's works and techniques but eventually the memory threatens to overwhelm his own as he realizes that he's unable to comprehend engines and cars from his own time. This scenario emphasizes the point sketched earlier about the importance of memories to the formation of our subjectivities. The interesting point to underline here is how an alien memory gets implanted and assimilated into the protagonist's memory. While obviously fabulist in its modality, the point is not without its truth. It is not uncommon for us to introject and internalize the memories of others in our everyday lives, some of which we even come to believe our own. Such confabulations, far from being pathological, are normal modes in which individual, collective and transcultural memory works. In the context of cinema Alison Landsberg mobilizes the concept of prosthetic memory to demonstrate how cinema can implant into the psyche of its spectators memories previously unknown to them. This is the exploration pursued in some detail by Susannah Radstone who draws upon arguments of cinema as an embodied experience capable through psychical processes of condensation and displacement of melding its images into memories of the spectators, as she writes: "This exploration of cinema/memory as 'cultural experience' illuminates the intimate and 'micro' processes through which subjectivity binds itself with culture, place, and nation, while noting also how these processes may be prompted or facilitated by films that share in the aesthetics, language, and textures of memory" (Radstone 2010, 338).

One can make similar arguments of transmission through contagion in the field of collective memory as indeed the concept of 'meme,' as the basic unit of transmission of cultural memory, does in the field of mimetics. All this argues for the inter-subjective sensitivity and malleability of memories²¹. Underlining the culturally mediated aspect of memory, C. Nadia Seremetakis visualizes it as 'both a meta-sensory capacity and as a sense organ in-it-self' activated by embodied acts²² and semantically dense objects (Seremetakis 1994, 9). Similarly, identifying 'movement' as the essential component of memories, Astrid Erll explains how memory is constituted through travel, undergoing hybridization, reinterpretation and

²¹ Gerald M. Edelman describes memory as "the melting and refreezing of a glacier" (M. Edelman and Tononi 2000, 108-9).

²² According to Antonio Damasio memory resides in the emotional experience of the affected body (Goodman and Parisi 2010, 351).

sometimes even distortion and perversion as it is refracted through different locations, giving rise to such complex phenomenon as ‘time-space compressions’ and ‘anachronies’:

“It involves knowledge, repertoires of stories and scripts, implicit memory, bodily aspects such as habitus, and – next to remembering – also that other basic operation of memory: forgetting. In the transcultural travels of memory, elements may get lost, become repressed, silenced, and censored, and remain unfulfilled. This is a consequence of the existence and variable permeability of borders. Movement across boundaries is always contingent on specific possibilities and restrictions, which can be of a medical, social, political, or semantic nature” (ErlI 2011).

She isolates media and migrations as the most obvious dimensions of global movement. Moreover, her concept of mnemonic forms as ‘imminently transportable’ ‘shorthands’ that succinctly convey complex occurrences in the past through ‘condensed Figures’ (such as ‘Holocaust’, ‘The fall of the Berlin Wall’, ‘Somme’ etc.) (ErlI 2011, 12-15) maps rather well onto Bergson’s theory of memory as he unpacks the concept of contraction and ‘rotation upon itself’, the motions which allow the crystallization of recollections around certain prominent events or “shining points around which the others form a vague nebulousness”²³.

As noted earlier in the case of archive a change in technology changes the way we experience memory. Philosopher Bernard Steigler has argued that mnemotechnics or externalization of memory through cinema and other mass media marks a transformation in the technology of memory itself (Roberts 2006, 59). In the light of this and Alison Landsberg’s *Prosthetic Memory* (2004) as well as the recent advances in the area of transcultural memory, one begins to envisage an expansion of the Bergsonian cone in scope. The cone expands laterally as more and more memories of our surrounding objects become available to us as inventions such as internet introduce more and more of the world into the range of our cognizance as well as on account of more memory storage capacity due to improvements in prosthetic memory. In simple words we know about more things (or the knowledge is just a click away) and we can remember more (albeit with appropriate technological aid). The cone also registers a vertical expansion as we’re able to dig deeper into our past with advancements in archaeology and archiving enabling us to remember beyond the limits of our own unsupported memories, as well as

²³ As quoted from (Ansell Pearson 2010, 68)

anticipate the future with greater precision²⁴. In their conception of a post-cybernetic memory, Goodman and Parisi flesh out the notion of anticipative memory hinting at the future-orientation of the past and the present: “Memories no longer purely relate to a trace of the past but, more importantly for us, hint at the activity of the future in the present” (Goodman and Parisi 2010, 358). Manuscripts, books, personal diaries, libraries, and archives (this itself represents a vast array from DNA to emotions) memory sticks, Facebook timelines, and the concern about archiving the archive (the archiving of outmoded internet pages, Facebook profiles of deceased users, certain sections of the British Museum etc.) all attest to our proclivity and commitment towards gaining access to more and more channels of memory. A simple truth elucidated by Foucault²⁵ and substantiated by numerous studies like the aforementioned Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (2014/ 1978) explains this tendency: *knowledge is power*. Steve Goodman and Luciana Parisi make similar arguments: “Bergson’s and Whitehead’s theories of virtuality and immediate time open the concept of memory to the notion of cosmology, the ontology of the non-living, beyond the extension of human memory into technical machines” (Goodman and Parisi 2010, 346).

²⁴ For a discussion of an archive of the future produced by cybernetic technologies and of anticipative memory in general see *Machines of Memory* (Goodman and Parisi 2010).

²⁵ Highlighting the role apparatuses such as books, cinema (especially certain films), television etc., in capturing the popular memory, Foucault writes disparagingly: “Today cheap books aren’t enough. There are much more effective means like television and cinema. And I believe that this was one way of reprogramming popular memory, which existed but had no way of expressing itself. So people are shown not what they were, but what they must remember having been” (Radstone 2010, 335).

In an earlier work titled *Aggression for Couples* (1972) Schneemann tries to preempt the future²⁶



Figure 4: (Schneemann, *Aggression for Couples* 1972). Photograph taken at Hales Gallery, London by Adwait Singh, 2015.

through a collage of hand painted silver gelatin prints containing staged photographs of the then couple Schneemann and McCall having a fight. If the present is pure becoming as Deleuze proposes, then it is as if Schneemann forays out from it in search for various possible futures, specifically one where the couple is headed for a split. The resulting artwork is a tableau of eight silver-gelatin prints of the couple expressing their aggression, with scribbled bits of paper collaged onto them, almost as a postscript. It's as if the destruction-drive that we mentioned earlier, proves too irresistible for her and by staging this (yet) un-lived reality she attempts to live vicariously in the present by enacting a scenario appropriated from a probable future, in the process uncovering the mysterious destruction-drive which usually keeps low. Goodman and Parisi offer the following insightful reading of Whitehead that is relevant here: "Memories, for Alfred North Whitehead, are always memories of the future, time anomalies where the future is immediate to the present's contraction of the past, as if the future were haunting its own emergence" (Goodman and Parisi 2010, 355).

²⁶ Ansell-Pearson writes: "Not only do we repeat our past loves, it is also the case that any present love repeats the moment of the dissolution and anticipates its own end" (Ansell-Pearson 2010, 168).

While the tone of the artwork is parodic, it is impossible to banish an element of irony from its reading altogether, especially in the view of the couple's estrangement five years later. The destruction-drive, which was staged and contained within an intimate-domestic frame five years ago, has finally materialized in real-time with all the force of a stark reality. It took that duration for the photographs to develop fully and for the work to commandeer a full-fleshed interpretation. Benjamin quotes André Monglond to a similar effect: "The future alone possesses developers strong enough to reveal the image in all its details" (Benjamin 1940, 404). It is then as if she must later return to this same work i.e. to a past reanimated by the shadow cast by the present thus enabling her to see through the darkness of the now (to borrow Agamben's terminology), appropriating its diaristic form, to excavate layer by layer the rubble of un-lived moments that is blocking and snagging her becoming. In both her ability to grasp the 'light that can never reach her destiny' by anticipating the future in her work *Agression for Couples* and to redress the crisis of the present moment by taking a dip in the past (as seen in her work *ABC- We print anything in the cards*) the artist thus emerges as a true contemporary, as the one who, "dividing and interpolating time, is capable of transforming it and putting it in relation with other times". (Agamben 2008, 54)

"When he came back to be with her, she wanted him to feel less guilty for having left her. She borrowed ten dollars, bought ten long stemmed red roses and placed them conspicuously. When he asked, she said they were from a new lover." – Carolee Schneemann, *ABC–We Print Anything–In The Cards*

Bibliography

Agamben, Giorgio. "What is the Contemporary." In *What is an Apparatus*, by Giorgio Agamben, 39-54. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.

Ansell Pearson, Kieth. "Bergson and Memory." In *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, edited by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, 61-76. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.

Ansell-Pearson, Kieth. "Deleuze and the Overcoming of Memory." In *Memories: Histories, Theories, Debates*, edited by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, 161-174. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.

Benjamin, Walter. *Paralipomena to "On the Concept of History"*. Vol. 4, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings (1938-1940)*, by Walter Benjamin, edited by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, translated

by Edmund Jephcott and Others. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1940.

Bergson, Henri. *Matter and Memory*. Edited by John Mullarkey and Kieth Ansell Pearson. London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2002/ 1896.

Borges, Jorge Luis. "Funes the Memorious." In *Labrynth*s, by Jorge Luis Borges, 87-95. London: Penguin Classics, 2000.

Davidmann, Sara. *Ken. To be Destroyed*.

Davidmann, Sarah. *Side by Side from Ken. To be Destroyed*.

Deleuze, Gilles. "Bartleby; or the Formula." In *Essays Clinical and Critical*, by Gilles Deleuze, translated by Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco, 68-90. Verso, 1998.

—. *Bergsonism*. Translated by H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam. New York: Zone Books, 1988.

—. *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by P. Patton. London: Continuum Press, 1994.

Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Translated by Eric Prenowitz. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Erll, Astrid. "Travelling Memory." *Parallax* (Routledge) 17, no. 4 (2011): 4-18.

Glissant, Édouard. "For Opacity." In *Poetics of Relation*, by Édouard Glissant. University of Michigan Press, 1990/1997.

Goodman, Steve, and Luciana Parisi. "Machines of Memory." In *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, edited by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, 343-359. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.

Heidegger, Martin. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. New York and London: Harper and Row, 1975.

Kiefer, Anselm. *Heroic Symbol V*. Collection Würth.

M. Edelman, Gerald, and Giulio Tononi. *Consciousness: How Matter Becomes Imagination*. London: Penguin Books, 2000.

Maharaj, Sarat. "'Perfidious Fidelity' The Untranslatability of the Other." In *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, edited by Jean Fisher, 28-35. London: Kala Press in association with the Institute of International Visual Arts, 1994.

O'Connor, Brian. "Adorno on the Destruction of Memory." In *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, edited by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, 136-149. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.

Penfield, Wilder. *The Mystery of the Mind: A Critical Study of Consciousness and the Human Brain*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975.

Quiroga, Rodrigo Quian. *Borges and Memory*. Translated by Juan Pablo Fernández. Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2012.

Radstone, Susannah. "Cinema and Memory." In *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, edited by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, 325-342. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.

Roberts, Ben. "Cinema as Mnemotechnics: Bernard Stiegler and the Industrialization of Memory." *Angelaki* (Angelaki) 11, no. 1 (April 2006): 55-63.

Said, Edward.W. *Orientalism*. Knopf Doubleday, 2014/ 1978.

Schneemann, Carolee. *ABC—We Print Anything—In The Cards*. Krannert Art Museum, Champaign, IL.

Schneemann, Carolee. *Agression for Couples*. Krannert Art Museum, Champaign IL.

Seremetakis, C. Nadia, ed. *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Weikop, Christian. "Forests of Myth, Forests of Memory." In *'Anselm Keife'r exhibition catalogue* , 30-47. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 27 September- 14 December 2014.