

Keep it Longer

Advancing through a dark room, you walk towards the flickering light reflected by two screens, facing each other. You squeeze past one of the screens and move towards the centre of the space. A black carpet covers the floor and you sit down, arranging your legs underneath your body. One of the screens lights up with a close-up of a woman, her hair partly covered in confetti. She smiles brightly at the camera. On the other screen, a man starts dancing in his bedroom. He keeps looking at you and the corner of his mouth twists upward. You smile back involuntarily. A haunting pop tune floods the space and your eyelids feel heavier and heavier. Upstairs, the warm glow of a lamp nudges you to move your crumpled legs. On the mezzanine, leftovers from a chance meeting between two characters are strewn on a table. A recorded dialogue contorts into a choir of altered voices. You may ask yourself how fiction permeates these blurred fragments and collected sounds. You may ask yourself what specters these memories invoke.

Instead of answers, another question emerges: how can we, in fact, keep it longer? How can we stop the continuous spillage of information? Memory seems to be insufficiently “porous” to retain everything we perceive. No matter how hard we try, memory is not a lossless format. But perhaps in that limited porosity, in that faulty compression is where memory becomes productive. That’s where it starts filling in the gaps by constructing and reconfiguring the past. Loosely related instances become a logical thread of events. The logic, of course, is fictional. Memory plays a double role and the phenomenon of déjà vu illustrates its duplicate function. In its non-pathological form, déjà vu is a mere anomaly of an otherwise well-functioning memory, a false recognition that whatever is being experienced now has happened before. For Paolo Virno, “it means the untrammelled extension of memory’s jurisdiction, of its dominion. Rather than limit itself to preserving traces of times past, memory also applies itself to actuality, to the evanescent now. The instantaneous present takes the form of memory, and is re-evoked even as it is taking place.”¹ The current moment thus becomes past. In other words, the present mutates into an imagined, yet potential past, a past whose potentiality is mistaken for actuality, just for a few moments. The categories of actual, virtual or potential become indistinct. In the meantime,

recollections keep overflowing and the contours of the present are eroded with each flash of memory. You slip further along the wormhole.

Then maybe the problem does not lie in keeping it longer, but allowing the past to resurface again. In Virno’s words: “Are we not, perhaps, more used to projecting the potential, that which does not yet exist, into the future? More used to considering it the object of expectation and prediction, and never as some chest of reminiscences?”² If the past is the site of unrealised potentialities, then how can we invoke those once-imaginable futures? As a nostalgic tune engulfs the space, you sink deeper, in loophole outside time. The song seems vaguely familiar, yet distorted beyond recognition. You grasp for clues, but the ghostly voice escapes your memory. Within the endless flow of images, your eyes keep searching for a familiar silhouette. Perhaps that figure by the window or that slight movement of a hand. Suddenly, you stop and smile. You recognize that face.

In Ken McMullen’s 1983 film, *Ghost Dance*, Jacques Derrida has a brief, but haunting cameo: a close-up of his face, framed by his coiffed hair and sharp suit. When questioned if he believes in ghosts, he replies: “Cinema is the art of ghosts, a battle of phantoms. That’s what I think cinema is about, when it’s not boring. It’s the art of allowing ghosts to come back. That’s what we’re doing now.” Cinema becomes the technique of making the past present, of granting ghosts the power to permeate reality. Derrida clutches his pipe, fully aware that his cinematic double is already illustrating his point. “Here, the ghost is me,” he says, and calls to be invoked in the future.

More or less scripted, somebody else’s memories still drift before your eyes. It’s a space where memory becomes productive again, where characters encounter one another and time becomes an additional, spectral figure. The past becomes present again or was it the other way round?

Simina Neagu

The text has been written in conjunction with “Keep it Longer”, an exhibition by Philomène Hoël at Gallery S O, 21-30 April 2017. Curated by Valentina Bin and Simina Neagu.

¹ Paolo Virno, *Déjà Vu and the End of History* (London: Verso Books, 2015), p. 7

² *Ibid.*, p. 15