# Work of Memory

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## Abstract

*Film is the 'art of time', and film and memory's generative affiliation is founded in this relationship. This paper will examine how this mnemonic facility is invoked through practice and how this in turn creates memories.*

*The tension between narrative interests and memory's imperatives can form an axis of experimentation and exploration. All films reference memory, one way or another, however not all are works of memory. Some films would evoke the idea of memory but do not risk structural and psychological instability whereas others consciously suggest memory's presence through offering more than one temporal plain and other related signifiers.*

*The latter categorisation includes the films suchas Muriel ou le temps d'un retour (Resnais, 1963), Tren de sombras (Guerín, 1997) and Appearances (Meter, 2000). In this work the correspondence of history and form, narrative and memory relates and develops subjective and cultural recollection.*

*These films relate a form of filmic hybridity that emphasizes conceptual potentiality and will be the focus of this study. This examination will consider how these films' account of memory's evolving resonances is an act of writing and re-writing, and how these works produce new ways of seeing and thinking.*

## Introduction: Film's Mnemonic Facility

Film is experienced and remembered like no other medium. Through its technological imperative - in which one image, shot, sequentially follows another until its durational limit is reached – it becomes the 'art of time'. (Cubitt 2004, 365) But these actions also induce something *else*, something that adheres to the screen-bound images. Considering this associative creation James Monaco suggests, 'There is the image that exists for itself, the picture, and the image "made in seeing"',[1] the conception, which does not imitate so much as analyse or comment upon.' (1978, 12) Film and memory's generative affiliation is founded in this relationship.

This mnemonic interaction is a complimentary and complex invocation, which can be viewed in different ways, for instance Ben Brewster contends, 'film has functioned as a machine to produce and reproduce what is outside the cinema as a set of memory images', (1977, 48) whereas Belinda Morrissey suggests, that 'while memory is the bedrock of cinematic representation, allowing us to "see" that

which we could never and have never seen; it remains a most unsatisfactory foundation for any sort of understanding', (2011, 97) whilst John Mullarkey states film should be seen 'as a series of relational processes and hybrid contexts comprising the artists' and audience's psychologies, the cinematic "raw data", the physical media of the film.' (2009, 6) Part of film's appeal is that it exists seemingly for us, but also apart from us, 'awaken[ing] as much as it enfolds', becoming 'strand over strand with memories' of' life. (Cavell 1979, 19; xviii) These diverse reckonings suggest something of the contemporary contemplation of memory and its mutable and promiscuous workings. Further to this, Maya Deren observed, 'As we watch a film, the continuous act of recognition in which we are involved is like a strip of memory unrolling beneath the images of the film itself, to form the invisible under layer of an implicit double exposure.' (1985, 56) This suggests cinema is 'a medium of interactive narrative that requires spectators to engage in a process of mental editing - to make associative links between images and sounds and conceptual leaps that historicize their meaning.' (Kinder 2003, 22) This sense of instinctive ownership suggests the influence of extraneous social and cultural imperatives, the effect of experience and contextual connotations, an overlapping of art and life.

Film's referencing of memory is made known through a lexicon of tropes, which can be broadly understood as form and content related.[2] Also, it should be noted that 'when it comes to technique, fiction and nonfiction filmmakers can and do imitate each other', (Carroll 1996, 287) and how these aesthetic techniques are deployed determines their intentionality, for instance Maureen Turim writes, 'flashbacks in film often merge the two levels of remembering the past, giving large-scale social and political history the subjective mode of a single, fictional individual's remembered experience.' (1989, 2) This 'subjective memory' places dramatic exposition, the explanation of history within the individuated realm (whether actual or dramatized). These tropes are to be found in dramas, documentaries and experimental works alike, in which their transformative deployment is used to indicate something of the past in relation to the present.

Films that would work with memory are not however all works of memory. Some films may refer to remembrance, but they do not risk its true exposure, because these films, like *Dunkirk* (Nolan, 2017), would delineate history, prioritise narrative assurance and psychological closure. Whilst other works risked narrative flow and propose non-linear structures that emulate the fragmentary nature of remembrance. This formulation encompasses experimental and

reflective works, such as *Night and Fog* (Resnais, 1955), *L'opéra-mouffe* (Varda, 1958) and *La Jetée* (Marker, 1962), which re-worked and re-defined genre and filmic possibility. These makers were part of the first generation to be 'imbued with the history' of cinema, (Monaco 1977, 5) and their 'inter-disciplinary' investigation 'marked a qualitative change in movie language and agenda.' (Durgnat 1987, 131-2) This development created an accessible modernism was founded in an innovative spirit, the need to comprehend the senselessness of human conflict, the possible purpose of being, and the desire to represent the fragmentation of individuated and collective space and time.

For this study three filmmakers will be considered, who use film as an investigative form to examine place and temporal exposure, film's permanence and passing. Firstly, the foundational example of *Muriel ou le temps d'un retour* (*Muriel, or The Time of Return*, Resnais, 1963) - a drama that created fictional authenticity - will contextualise the subject's development. This approach will then be traced through *Appearances* (Meter, 2000) - a personal experimental examination of the photographic archive - and *Tren de sombras* (*Train of Shadows*, Guerín, 1997) – a coming together of experimental materialism and reflective documentary. These works offer a hybrid reading of media and form, which privileges a visual searching of material history. This study will consider whether this evolving method of enquiry can produce memorious reciprocity, which relates memory and, in turn, influences remembrance and our understanding of it.

## 1: The Past Is Present

Memory is contextual, changeable, created determined by a myriad of social, historical, individual factors. Remembrance implies some form of personal relations with what has been and as time draws an event away, and its direct actuality decreases, memory evolves and alters with each recollective context, and this process of reiteration contributes to the rationalisation and narrativizing of experience. Eric Kandel, the Nobel Prize winning biologist, observes that remembering 'frees us from the constraints of time and space and allows us to move freely along completely different dimensions.' (2006, 3) This understanding was first elucidated by Proust and Freud, as Kandel writes, 'the idea that different aspects of visual perception might be handled in separate areas of the brain was predicted by Freud at the end of the nineteenth century', (Ibid, 303) and earlier Adorno, considering Proust, had written, that his work 'is a single effort to express necessary and compelling perceptions about men and their social relations which science can simply not match.' (1984, 156) Proust and Freud prized unconscious memories, perceiving them to hold revelatory importance, and the contemporary efforts to map memory's composition has iterated the pertinence of their profound instinctive realisation.

Prior to this acceptance of subjective reckoning, in which memory is created in time and takes on different meanings at different junctures, 'Whether in the form of "organic memory" or national history, […] was commonly imagined as collective, handed down from one generation to the next.' (Landsberg 2004, 7) The development of another, seemingly more contemporary understanding of history, one imbued with interpretation and preference, (Carr 1987, 12) arose out of the nineteenth century's 'memory crisis' in which 'the perceived discontinuities between the past and the future were questioned.' (Radstone 2000, 7) Therefore, there was the desire to formulate a new understanding, which could usher in a different 'consciousness of time.' (McQuire 1998, 119) This was to be a conscious, even antagonistic, demarcation, one that was expressed in the observational and intuitive models of memory and time being proposed by Proust, Freud and Bergson.

This was also a time of rapidly developing technology. The development of the film camera, by Louis Le Prince in 1888, enabled durational experience to be captured and reviewed for the first time. Walter Benjamin believed such development occurred out of necessity, writing that 'technology has subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training. There came a day when a new and urgent need for stimuli was met by the film.' (2007, 175) Russell Kilbourn connects this innovation with memory's intuitive orientation, writing that 'the collapsing of History into personal, subjective memory, via the photographic image – an image that prompts the memory of another image, in an endless vista of *petite madeleines*.' (2012, 28) His allusion to Proust's transformative encounter suggests the interjection of external stimuli, its unconscious passage, and the connectedness of memory's trajectory.

The linking of memory and images is based in an empirical truth, that when we see an image, we instinctively understand it has discernible pastness, as it represents a time before our encounter. This connectedness was recognised by Freud who observed 'memories are mediated through representations.' (Landsberg 2004, 15) This reckoning was further emphasized by Benjamin, who wrote in 'Picturing Proust', 'Most of the memories we seek come to us as visual images.' (2008, 141) The past is never gone, and through an individual's existence memories are always being recast anew, but even with the best intentions memories alter with time and influence.

## 'The story of Muriel cannot be told'

Alain Resnais considered that 'modern life is fragmented' (Armes 1968, 120) and sought to find a filmic form to show this disposition. *Muriel ou le temps d'un retour* (*Muriel, or The Time of Return*, 1963) proposed temporal shifts, which are personal and national, and through this offered a vision of post war and colonial France. Through focusing on a familial

drama, which occurs in Boulogne, a provincial coastal town, the film considers the scars of conflict, which are visible on the town's architecture and in the characters actions and questions the surety of memory. The only visual divergence from the prime location is that of an 8 mm film, which the film's protagonist Bernard (Jean-Baptiste Thierrée) shot whilst on military service in Algeria.

The film's narrative is a matter of association, which resides in the interplay between place, time and its inhabitants, a personification of encounter that 'makes the oppression of imagined pasts human.' (Monaco 1978, 95) In her review of *Muriel* Susan Sontag contended, 'When Resnais decided to take as his subject, not "a memory", but "remembering", and to situate memories in characters within the film, a muted collusion between the aims of formalism and the ethic of engagement occurred.' (2009, 238) She desired a formalism that acknowledged the narrative film tradition and was not 'cluttered' and cited *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne* (Bresson, 1964) and *Vivre Sa Vie* (Godard, 1962) as examples of the formalist tradition that are 'emotionally exalting.' (Ibid) Her reckoning privileged individuated narrative fluency, whereas 'Resnais has often declared that it is not characters that interest him but the feelings that he could extract from them like their shadows.' (Deleuze 1989, 129) In this formulation, experience is seen as a form of repetition or reflection, like shadows, the film's writer Jean Cayrol commented that 'the film's characters are always between two memories, between two times, between two passions, unstable, badly put, not knowing the limits of their existence.' (Monaco 1978, 87) The film's characters may exist in a historical context, but they are not explanatory entities, and Cayrol treatment suggests that behaviour follows certain unavoidable patterns and that the pull of the past is always present, and it cannot easily be de-cluttered.

After France's World War II defeat and occupation Cayrol became a member of the French resistance. In 1943 he was betrayed and sent to the Gusen concentration camp. Following his imprisonment he suffered from bouts of amnesia, an experience that affected his memory, perceiving it to be an 'alternate reality, equal in value to present experience.' (Monaco 1978, 75) He first worked with Resnais on *Night and Fog* (1955), co-writing it with Marker, a film, which addressed the trauma of the Nazi's concentration camps, that 'respects history's demand to show "what really happened" while acknowledging the impossibility of ever really showing what happened.' (McQuire 1998, 155) In this conception the manifestation of all that 'happened' becomes apparent, not as a definitive statement, for nothing can produce that understanding, but as a partial reckoning that would unsettle history and provoke response.

Resnais' interest in personal histories and their 'authentic' siting is evident in his dramas and documentaries, their forms influencing one another,

Marguerite Duras, who wrote his first feature film *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), referred to it as a 'false documentary.' (Monaco 1978, 35) In *Muriel* the physical impact of World War II is apparent in the pockmarked buildings, still displaced inhabitants, the town's ongoing redevelopment. Cayrol recalled, 'I situated the story in Boulogne, despite Resnais's doubts, because Boulogne is also a town after a drama. There are two towns, the old one spared by the war and the reconstructed town, the topography of which the old inhabitants cannot recognise.' (Armes 1970, 128) Godard's first essayistic film Deux ou trois *choses que je sais d'elle* (*Two or Three Things I Know About Her*, 1967), also centred on urban renewal, in his case Paris, and proposed it to be 'a continuation of the movement begun by Resnais in *Muriel*: an attempt at a description of a phenomenon known in mathematics and sociology as a "complex" [the analysis of society through its social networks].' (Roud 1970, 118) Boulogne's new architecture, when seen in relation to the old town, appears unintegrated and unaltered. Commenting on the town's ongoing rebuild De Smoke, Bernard's mother's lover, recounts how an apartment block's foundations subsided before it was even occupied, concluding, 'we're waiting for it to fall down… It won't be a pretty ruin.' Time's affect, its unpredictable irrepressibility is always evident, and even when this is acknowledged its primal pull cannot be countermanded.

Regarding memory, Resnais said, 'I've always refused the word "memory" a propos my work, I'd use the word "imagination".' [3] (Monaco 1978, 11) This would seem to emphasise a Bergsonian understanding of film, in that the present, and the promise of the future, are founded in imagination, whilst everything that follows the moment of registration quickly passes into memory. Emphasising this John Ward observes that, 'The framework within which the act of synthesis is made possible is the philosophy of Henri Bergson, augmented by an almost Proustian obsession with associationism.' (1968, 7) Bergson reasoned that unknown time, that which follows now, can only be disclosed within an understanding that connects it to all that has been, writing, 'It may be said that we have no grasp of the future without an equal and corresponding outlook over the past, that the onrush of our activity makes a void behind it into which memories flow.' (2004, 69-70) Resnais's treatment shows the trace of individual memory and its relation to history and others in which 'there is *a present of the future, a present of the present and a present of the past*.' (Deleuze 1989, 97) It is the depiction of space (in time) that orientates the film, and it is the observable accumulation of evidence that offers some orientation and reason in a way that the film's protagonists cannot.

*Muriel, or the Time of a Return* (1963)

In a key scene, Bernard, in his studio, projects an 8mm color film. This 'tin of rushes' has evidently been repeatedly viewed. It shows his time as a soldier in Algeria. Charles De Gaulle had become president again in 1958 and it was presumed, due to his military background, political record, explicit ethnonationalist sentiment, that he would maintain the status quo, therefore when he granted Algeria its independence in 1962 many 'pied-noir' (French Algerians) felt betrayed, as it had been a French 'possession' since 1830. Bernard films as any sightseer might, his images appear 'casual' and unedited. The film's true significance only becomes apparent through his confessional narration - he implicates himself in France's tortuous colonial misadventure. Later, Bernard tells his mother, Hélène (Delphine Seyrig), that 'the story of Muriel cannot be told.' Muriel was a young Algerian and to tell her story would be to admit involvement in her death. Also, the 'telling of the memory, of course betrays it… in the sense that to tell it is to misrepresent', for it will alter with communication and time. (Burgin 2004, 16) However, the 8mm film images have the power to transcend time, and Muriel's unjust death haunts Bernard. His sense of guilt, all he saw, precludes a return to the 'innocence' of civilian life. He will never be a non-combatant again.

Out of the need to recall that which cannot be forgotten, Resnais offers reclaimed fragments of life that require remembrance. One day Hélène decides to visit Bernard at his studio. He is absent. Curiosity compels her to turn on his 8mm projector. The image of a busy souk is illuminated. However, the film soon catches fire and burns in the projector's gate. When we see the heat radiate across the frame more than just an image is being destroyed, time itself is being effaced, but our ability to view what has been reiterates time's continuing affect. It is rare, particularly in feature films, to see the mechanised nature of film, its material inscription and *delicacy*, temporal passage, so exposed. The insertion of the 8mm film provides another textual and temporal surface, as do Bernard's photographs, journal, hand-written notes, all of which

indicate incidental authenticity. These elements personify and frame time, and facilitate, like memory, travel through time and space.

## 2: Aide Mémoire

'All history is the history of thought', so proposed the historian E. H. Carr (1961, 22), a notion that found conceptual purpose with Hollis Frampton who wrote, 'It often seems to us, as we think about thinking, that we think in words, it seems as often, when we are not thinking about thinking, that we think not merely in "pictures" but in photographs.' (2009, 53) An idea that Susan Sontag iterates, 'Each memory from one's childhood, or from any period that's not in the immediate past, is like a still photograph rather than a strip of film. And photography has objectified this way of seeing and remembering.' (Movius 1975) In this appreciation the photograph becomes personified, a means to encounter all that is experienced, but an image is never just an image as it is always framed by technological mediation, historical bearing and personal perception.

The development of the photograph, from Joseph Nicéphore Niépce's experiments in the 1820s onwards, was a profound expression of the desire to represent and behold reality. These images relate what has been, as a representation of a recorded past, and exist in a discursive context. The digital form may now be ubiquitous, but the idea that memory is composed of a series of images is still relatable, a notion that resonates with Bergson's observation that 'pure memory' is formed from only the most pressing 'snapshots.' (1911, 333) And when individuals express themselves, 'think' through this medium, consciously and unconsciously, it becomes part of their sensibility, a way in which the world is encountered. (Flusser 2000, 10) Furthermore, Roland Barthes writes, 'The Photograph does not call up the past (nothing Proustian in a photograph). The effect it produces upon me is not to restore what has been abolished (by time, by distance) but to attest that what I see has indeed existed.' (1982, 82) In this contention his relation to the photograph is restated, not his connection with what is past.

## 'This film is made from photographs'

Barbara Meter's *Appearances* (2000) begins with the introductory text: 'Independently of each other my father and mother fled from Germany in 1934. They met the same year in Amsterdam. This film is made from photographs they left me, all of which were taken before I was born.' The film's photographs were revealed to Meter only after her mother's death. The images were taken at the time of the Weimar Republic and show a large multi-generational bourgeois family. The analogue photographs, offer a direct indexical presence, the undeniable trace of time. Meter contrasts this archive with the contemporary filming of the German landscape.

The film's opening card offers a straightforward description of parental departure, which occurred a year after Hitler became Reich Chancellor, and five years after they 'fled' Meter was born. Annette Kuhn proposes, 'Memory work makes it possible to explore connections between "public" historical events, structures of feeling, family dramas, relations of class, national identity and gender, and "personal memory".' (Kuhan 1995, 4). Meter's short film (22 minutes) shows, rather than tells (it features no spoken explanation), and to see the film's images, framed as they are, at the century's end, is to imagine a familial narrative, a possible record of mortality, a national tragedy in microcosm.

The archive is filmed in stark black and white, her camera hovers over images of lost faces, never completely still, wanting to find some connection. When taking a photograph, the photographer is looking into the future and those who are being addressed by the camera look towards the past, as if photography is a 'way of certifying experience' by 'converting experience into an image.' (Sontag 1977, 9) Meter would reanimate the photographs, the re-framed enlarged grain oscillates, as if inscribed with reciprocal presence, if endeavouring to find some reason beyond symbolic association. Robert Rosenstone writes, 'History does not exist until it is created' (1995, 43) and it is continually being rewritten in this act of creation, and films reenvision the past in a way that is not possible in any other medium, and the work's form compounds this intention, because 'experimental films help to re-vision what we mean by history.' (Ibid, 64) This notion is evident in Meter's treatment of her familial past and how she reimagines it.

The use of the photograph in film, for Raymond Bellour, indicates awareness and perception, the evocation of things past, as he writes, 'the photograph enjoys a privilege over all other effects that make the spectator of cinema, this hurried spectator; a pensive one as well.'[4] (1987, 10) Additionally, Philippe Dubois contends, photographs 'speak' to us of ourselves' and are understandable as such, as 'autobiography sets in motion an essential reflection on the notion of mental image.' (1995, 154) This 'cinema of the self' is an accessible way to navigate complicated matters, being a personal form of communication within an often unknown and daunting realm. Meter's film's images form an authentic, if incomplete, familial record, which facilitate a project of reclamation, she writes, 'I wanted to recreate my own family […] I wanted to recreate them from the depths of death. Out of the darkness into the filmic light and then back into the darkness again.' (Meter, 2008) This is emphasised by Meter's freighted introspection - the recovered scenes are poured over, till they are relinquished and fade into darkness.



*Appearances* (2000)

Meter's German travelogue focuses all that is gone. It reiterates that place 'trigger[s] or produce[s] memories.' (Kuhn 2002, 16-7) It is inferred she is visiting the places the family once inhabited. The accompanying soundscape, a work of quiet everyday encounters and evocative musical extracts, further emphasises this is a journey through individuated and divided time and place. Carr observed that 'before he [or she, the historian,] begins to write history, he [or she] is the product of history', (1961, 40) a sentiment that could be applied to other adjudicators of the past. Svetlana Boym identifies two forms of nostalgia, restorative and reflective, contending that the latter 'reveals that longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another, as affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgement or critical reflection.' (2001, 49-50) This relates the search for identity, a notion that found particular expression in the twentieth century, a time when the potency and nature of home became uncertain. The film's end credits offer a dedication - 'To my parents, Leo Meter 1911-1943, Elisabeth Meter-Plaut 1906-1987' - which indicates her mother survived the war, and perhaps shared her experiences. Meter's temporal interaction is transcendent, it brings the past, all that she did not directly experience, and the present, all she undertook, together, and in doing so she compounds their interconnected complexity and her part in this narrative.

## 3: Complexity of Shadows

Last night I was in the Kingdom of Shadows.
If you only knew how strange it is to be there. […]
It is not life but its shadow. (Gorky, 1896)

Maxim Gorky's cinematic invocation was composed after attending a Lumière screening at the Nizhny-Novgorod All-Russian Exhibition, which was primarily a celebration of Russian industrial achievement. Reflecting on this experience he wrote, 'The extra-ordinary impression it creates is so unique and complex that I doubt my ability to describe it with all its nuances.' (1896) His encounter impressed upon him a 'train of shadows', sequential moving images that suggest 'strange imaginings' that can 'invade

your mind' and become part of your 'consciousness.' (1896). When films are offered in cinema conditions, there is an acceptance by the viewer that irredeemable time is given, and this emphasises that other forms of media encounter may offer ease of access but do not facilitate the same degree of situational resolution.

Any description of moving images is an act of deciphering and mediation, as Bellour asserts, when invoking a film, a conversion occurs that privileges 'written expression.' (1975, 19) Film may not be directly 'quotable', a point that Cavell also makes (1979, 12), so a process occurs that 'constantly mimics, evokes, describes.' (Bellour 1975, 19) Emphasising this necessity, Stan Brakhage comments, 'The capacity to remember *any* imagery from the flowing-river experience of motion pictures is exactly dependent upon one's capacity to *name* what one has seen.' (2002, 68) This suggests that there is a need to think beyond textual exploration and to seek other means of expression. Endeavouring to do so Cavell describes his memory of films being 'like dreams' and contends that the disparity between what is seen, remembered and then written suggests that 'movies have achieved the condition of music.' (Ibid) This also reiterates that there is often a need to share something of our filmic encounter, which emphasises our deductive and relational engagement, but also the importance of thinking in and through (and beyond) film to gain some experiential grasp.

Film may have the appearance of a language (Wollen 1972, 238), but it is more than a set of codes to be mastered, it is always a complex collection of effects, which are produced through specific aesthetics, techniques, histories and resonances, that generate relative meanings, as Wollen writes, 'any reading of a film has to be justified by an explanation of how the film itself works to make this reading possible. Nor is it the single reading, the one which gives us the true meaning of the film; it is simply a reading which produces more meaning.' (Ibid, 169) Therefore, writing about film is, in some ways, analogous to communicating a memory, in that both are present in the telling yet both reside in the experience.

When remembering, we select one reflection over another. In considering a film it becomes apparent that instances, rather than its actual narrative per se, come to be what we think of as the film. Christian Keathley describes these 'discarded' details as being 'cinephilic moments.' (2006, 7) This conception is reminiscent of Roland Barthes' 'punctum' - 'Occasionally (but alas all too rarely) a [photographic] "detail" attracts me. I feel that its mere presence changes my reading.' (1982, 42) Keathley proposes that the 'links between the cinema, personal memory, the anecdote (metonymy), and the uncanny are strong.' (Ibid, 151) Consequently, when remembering all that we have encountered, we promote certain reflections, and this set of preferences consciously and unconsciously forms a flow of favoured memories, which come to constitute a personal film.

## 'They've seen us'

Gorky's impressions were the guiding inspiration for José Luis Guerín's *Tren de sombras* (*Train of Shadows*, 1997). To explore filmic phenomenon and form, he creates a past through an amateur film enthusiast Gérard Fleury, who resided in Le Thuit, Normandy, till his disappearance on 8 November 1930, because one morning, on a nearby lake, he rowed a boat into fog and was never seen again.

These elements are introduced by an opening text which locates the material and establishes the imagined veracity of all that follows.[5]

*Tren de sombras's* self-reflexive composition concerns 'the nature of memory and history, and all other bordered domains, including documentary and fiction.' (Kinder 2003, 17) The film probes convention, expanding creative potentiality, which produces an experimental and associative effect. In this it references, one way or another, other forms and times, because, as Mullarkey contends, 'Film is hybridity itself', and it 'merges with the same messiness of reality.' (2009, 215) And Guerín's assemblage would trace and test our relationship with the medium's constitutional phenomena.

Films that present mysteries would make us detectives. *Tren de sombras's* non-linear structure directs attention and draws its strands together. If something is to be revealed it must be knowable and whilst it is hidden it remains incomplete, 'With its uncanny mingling of fear and play, the hidden seems to threaten a regression to childhood, a return to some forgotten world of unexplored possibility.' (Bull 1999, 1) The film proposes to unravel the Fleury's mysterious vanishing by scrutinising the films he shot. They also emphasise the process of filming and being filmed, how this shapes events and perception. However, the film's mystery, the cameraman's disappearance, is not meant to be solvable, but the clues exist to reveal film's shadow.

The film's lack of character driven psychological accounting privileges visual associationism. Fleury's 'home movies' invoke foundational considerations - the dichotomy of Lumières' realism and Méliès's fantasy - the medium's transformative qualities. The film's only dialogue - 'They've seen us' - is emblematic of the work's intent. These words are spoken by a young maid and relate to her clandestine affair with an older family member. The words are also an epitaph of sorts, which emphasises the film's investment in sight, all that it would show, all we are asked to reflect upon.

The 'restored' films show an affluent family between world wars, they are seen at rest and play in their large, comfortable house and its verdant grounds. This is seen in relation to meticulously documented contemporary footage of this environment. The suggestive layered and textured soundscape is an essential part of this investigative process, in which each audio-visual

addition enriches the overall sense of place. The film's inter-war narrative, the conspicuous complacency of the bourgeoisie, the display of 'innocent' pleasures, focuses of the film's formal engagement rather than being evidence for a societal critique. The house is seen across time, and its setting, and contents, the personal artefacts, suggest that despite witnessing the twentieth century not much has altered. However, the contemporary vision does not feature any occupants, which hints that the house is now a relic.



*Tren de sombras* (1997)

The artifice of the film's pre-created scenes is not hidden, there is a 'uncanny'[6] playfulness in their immaculate creation. These scenes are a form of 'preconstruction', (Beattie 2004, 158) to borrow the documentary formulation, which is 'a way of posing the question, "what now?"— a question whose meaning changes depending on how it is performed.' (Kahana 2009, 58) Also, Nichols, considering documentary dramatization, suggests that the 'reenacted event introduces a fantasmatic element that an initial [real] representation of the same event lacks.' (2008, 73) Every aesthetic and critical mode has the potential to be adopted (and understood) in unforeseen ways, which suggest contemporary preoccupations and intuitive connections, which bring new alignments to the fore.

The film's different dramatic and observational passages are augmented with archival photographs. These images are deconstructed. Their chemical constitution, the pictorial surface, is eviscerated. Laura Mulvey connects indexical material decay to human consciousness and the 'recognition of the intractable nature of time itself.' (2006, 31) The on-screen medium manipulation – the images slow, pause (for film's motion never stops), flower, fade, disintegrate - shows that which film usually hides and in doing so reveals its true fragility *and* endurance *and* possibility.

## Conclusion: Memorious Experience

A film is always historical, and history is always present, as Hal Foster observed, 'Each epoch dreams the next, as Benjamin once remarked, but in doing so it revises the one before it.' (1996, 207) There is

epochal reference and reassurance in acknowledging pre-existing methods, but also through contextual awareness innovation can occur. Moreover, all films relate to memory, but not all films seek to actively invoke it, and to view film is to know memory's concurrent state, as it relates which memories are considered worth reproducing, a selective process that exposes and assesses form and content by example. The deployment of known filmic techniques allows for the representation of memory to occur, but the different forms of mediation produce different effects, and these should always be seen within the context of history and practice. This conception, which we as viewers internalise, affects a transference in which film's verisimilitude, identification and sensory interaction means images can come to represent *real* recollections.

A work's conceptual intention is determined by its modal, critical and relational positioning, which for *Muriel*, *Appearances* and *Tren de sombras* is formed through a combination of self-reflexivity, experimentation that 'asserts innovation' (Rees 2008, 2), and their hybrid appeal. In this Resnais sought to develop an approachable form, stating, 'I can't imagine a film in which the contact with the audience is not achieved by some form of dramatic construction.' (Roud 1969, 128) His influential approach developed a mode of memory work, in which individuals and place, time and its encounter, are sutured. His film image, sound, dialogue proposed an enquiry that personified historical effect, that related material inscription and temporal mediation. The trace of this method can be found in *Appearances*, the personal archival intervention, in which the images 'speak' of authorial intent, and *Tren de sombras*, in which its involved plains and textures are imparted through a combination of visual dexterity and aesthetic complexity.

Memory work engages with the procedure of recollection, endeavouring through form and technique to relate how memory occurs, its selective and seductive presence, and the influence of this contact. These films indicate ways of thinking in and through the medium, in which tracible formations and concerns are brought into productive discourse, that not only invokes the past but makes it present, and creates, informs, activates memory and our experience of time.

## Final notes

[1] Monaco is indebted to Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651) whom he quotes: '… after the object is removed, or the eye shut, we still retain an image of the thing seen, though more obscure than when we see it. And this is it, the Latins call imagination, from the image made in seeing […] So that *Imagination* and Memory, are but one thing, which for divers considerations hath divers names.' (1978, 11-12)

[2] Film's referencing of memory is made known through aesthetic techniques such as voice-over (present and past tense, first and third person), flashbacks, inter-titles, durational shots, repetition, audio/visual disjunction, still image(s), archival material, complex montage, inter-contextualities (like jump-cuts), multiple temporal streams, varied sonic resonances, which are deployed to give historical perspective to forms such

as personal and communal histories, autobiographical and biographical studies and different genres, such as thrillers and reflective documentaries.

[3] Regarding the differentiation of memory and imagination, Jean-Paul Sartre suggested that 'what distinguishes memory from imagination is not some particular feature of the image but the fact that memory is, while imagination is not, concerned with the *real*.' (Cited in: Warnock 1987, 34) Furthermore, he stated that 'if I recall an event of my past life, I do not imagine it, I *remember* it', asserting that this is a real action. (Sartre 2004, 181) This matter is further complicated if considered within the context of a work of art, because even within the imaginative realm we are constrained by what we know. Therefore, according to Sartre, if a memory is altered, for whatever reason, it becomes by degrees a work of imagination.

[4] Bellour's position is a contradiction of Barthes, who believed the fundamental difference between the photograph and film was movement and immersion – 'Do I add to the images in movies? I don't think so; I don't have time: […] I am constrained to a continuous voracity; a host of other qualities, but not *pensiveness*.' (1982, 55) But Bellour countered that when 'you stop the film [to view a photograph], you begin to find the time to add to the image' and in this he believed pensiveness could be found. (1987, 10) This suggests that a different viewing regime is being enacted, in which a still that is in motion appears to suspend a film's movement and this allows repose and reflection. Laura Mulvey suggested in her paper 'The Ghost in the Machine' (2013) that if Barthes had lived to see the advent of VHS and DVD culture that he may well have revised his opinion. She contended that through the adoption of this technology a version of the 'punctum' can be located in moving images, offering a series of gestures and looks from Marilyn Monroe in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Hawks, 1953) as evidence, which she elaborated on this idea in 'The Pensive Spectator' (2006, 181-196).

[5] 'Three months before he made one of his modest family productions, which would turn out to be his last film. Inadequately preserved for almost seven decades, it has been rendered almost irretrievable by the harmful effects of humidity, making its projection impossible. Starting from some photographs, we have tried to remake it; we have refilmed it all over again. Adhering to the criterion of maximum fidelity, we have recreated the original circumstances, reconstructing locations and scrupulously reproducing gestures, framings, and movements.'

[6] 'What is "uncanny" is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar. Naturally not everything which is new and unfamiliar is frightening, however; the relation cannot be inverted. We can only say that what is novel can easily become frightening and uncanny; some new things are frightening but not by any means all. Something has to be added to what is novel and unfamiliar to make it uncanny.' (Freud 1919, 2)

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