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Media Memory in the Digital Age: The Audiovisual Dispositif System and the New Sites of Memory

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Abstract

Objective: Rapid media change is profoundly altering the modes of audiovisual communication and pushing research on contemporary audiovisual media memory further toward digital memory. This paper asks how the audiovisual media of the digital age reconstitute memory, and whether that reconstitution answers the long-standing worry that media cause us to forget. **Methods:** A conceptual analysis drawing on dispositif theory. Three principal audiovisual memory dispositifs are identified and examined as a cooperating system rather than as separate media. **Results:** The three dispositifs are the physical space—the museum and its like—as a dispositif of activation; film and television as a dispositif of empathy; and short video and other social media as a dispositif of interaction. Working together, they realise the *site* of memory practice, the *site* of memory connection and the *site* of memory regeneration. Together these constitute the new sites of memory of the digital age, and in doing so they supply an answer to the anxiety of 'media amnesia' that has run through the field. **Conclusions:** Audiovisual media in the digital age do not simply store memory; they activate, circulate and renew it, and the dispositif system is what makes that circulation possible. The characteristics of digital audiovisual media memory — its collaborability, its mobility, its industrial character and its deep mediatisation — are what allow the new site of memory to form. Memory research should therefore attend both to the properties of the audiovisual medium and to the memory world its content presents.

Keywords: media memory, audiovisual dispositif system, digital media, sites of memory

1 Introduction: The Audiovisual Turn in the Dispositif System of Media Memory

Memory plays an important part in human social life, and philosophical reflection on it has never ceased. Augustine gave memory a place beyond compare, holding that recollection lets even a person in the midst of suffering feel happiness [1]. For David Hume memory is a kind of 'self-evident consciousness' whose chief office lies not in preserving simple ideas but in 'representing value' [2]. Locke held that in intelligent beings the value of memory is second only to perception: lacking it, the remaining faculties would for the most part lose their efficacy [3]. The pronouncements of Augustine and the other philosophers all point to the importance of memory for human beings and laid the foundation for modern memory research. In most cases memory is our inner record of prior events or experiences, a series of processes by which we encode, store, organise and form information. In modern society, through the work of Halbwachs, the Assmanns and other scholars, Western memory research has formed a plural theoretical system. In recent years Chinese scholars, on the basis of translating and introducing the classic Western theories of memory, have worked hard to develop memory research in China, and have not only achieved an initial theoretical connection with the West but also accumulated experience in practice and produced a good deal of original work.

Yet under the new media environment of the digital age there remains much room for contemporary memory research to open up. In particular, since 'media memory' was proposed as an explicit concept, the question of how to innovate media memory theory in a Chinese setting has drawn scholarly attention. On the one hand, existing research on media memory attends rather more to how 'media' function within memory; this path — 'media as the vehicle of memory' — can bring out the value of media for the development and evolution of social memory, but it also tends to fall into the anxiety of 'media amnesia'. On the other hand, in China's practice of digital media memory, audiovisual media play an increasingly important part in the system and the field of media memory. Research has attended to the material memory-bearing character of physical places such as museums and ruined sites, to the mnemonic efficacy of print media such as books and the mass press, and to the deep influence of film and television texts on people's memory; but writing that studies audiovisual media in depth from the standpoint of memory is not plentiful. This is chiefly because audiovisual media texts are fluid and

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therefore hard to store and to retrieve. And because of that strong fluidity, any analysis of them from the standpoint of memory must be carried out in a specific context. In recent years, of course, the work of Sun Wei, Zhou Zhiqiang, Ji Lingxiao, Pan Xianghui and others has brought audiovisual media research increasing attention — for instance, thinking from the angle of space about the interaction between 'soundscape' and the human senses, and about the recording of everyday scenes in short video.

In China's present practice of media memory, we find that audiovisual media have been widely applied as a memory dispositif in every corner of daily life and of the social memory system. A widely accepted theoretical position holds that 'seeing is not a simple record of light stimuli but a selective and creative process in which environmental stimuli are transformed into flowing structures capable of supplying the target organ with meaningful symbols.' Driven therefore by both reality and theory, this study attempts to unify the principal existing forms of audiovisual media memory by means of dispositif theory. The concept of the 'dispositif' is borrowed here because it can describe with some precision how media memory embeds itself in people's memory world in a covert way. On that basis the paper considers how the audiovisual media memory dispositif system of the digital age brings about the mobility, the collaborability and the industrial character of memory, and then examines the formation of the new *site* of memory in the digital age, so as to answer the worry over 'media amnesia' that the field has felt in recent years.

2 Memory, Media Memory and Digital Memory

In memory research, human mnemonic activity and mnemonic phenomena are often analysed through the lens of media. When Maurice Halbwachs proposed 'collective memory' he already noted the value of media in constructing and influencing collective cognition [5]. Astrid Erll goes further, pointing out that without the role media play at the level both of individual and of collective memory, cultural memory could not exist at all; the manner of remembering shapes the form of past things and the change in their meaning [6]. In memory research scholars have stressed the core function and value of media to differing degrees. Chinese scholars too have discussed in depth, in relation to Chinese questions, the important part media play in the process of memory: Zhou Haiyan, Huang Shunming, Li Hongtao and Shao Peng have long attended to questions of media memory, exploring respectively the mnemonic function of different media in the Yan'an production campaign and the online writing of the Nanjing Massacre memory, among other things [7]. In short, in memory research the role of media has never been neglected; the relation between media and memory, how change in media technology affects memory, how the types of memory shaped by different media differ, and how media exercise a mnemonic function in particular historical events are questions to which researchers have long attended.

From the earliest mnemonic forms — rock paintings, knotted cords, tortoise shells and stone inscriptions — through the mass media memory of books, newspapers and film and television, to the digital memory brought by the internet, the mnemonic value and function of media have become ever more prominent, and 'media memory' has grown into an important field of memory research. Carolyn Kitch was the first to define the concept of media memory; on her account, 'media memory, as the intersection of media studies and memory studies, aims to explore how media, by playing the role of a memory agent, complete the process of interaction with other spheres of society' [8]. Research on digital memory originates in Van House's critique of the relation between digital technology and memory [9]. The digital perspective on mnemonic practice further affirms the value of media in memory and the agency of media users. Given the properties of digital media, digital memory is fluid and unstable, and not a few researchers worry that digital storage space and encoding methods readily cause information to be damaged or to decay, holding that in the digital age media memory suffers from mnemonic obstacles and distortion, from media amnesia and the like [10]. The root cause of this worry is that researchers usually treat a given medium as existing independently of other media or media content, and this orientation is especially marked in existing research on media memory that takes audiovisual media as its vehicle. In such research media memory is merely a theoretical perspective and readily falls into the single path described above — 'media as a recording channel'. Another common path in audiovisual media memory research has opened up as audiovisual media have been applied in all kinds of physical space; it attends to how certain audiovisual media function and act within real material places, as when a museum uses digital audiovisual communication technology to carry historical memory forward. Given the importance of audiovisual media in contemporary social memory, to treat the different audiovisual media as memory dispositifs, to analyse in depth how these dispositifs form a connected dispositif system as they operate together, and then to examine the part they play in the new site of digital memory may on the one hand push memory research further in depth and on the other relieve the worry over media amnesia.

3 Activation, Empathy and Interaction: The Three Audiovisual Dispositifs of Media Memory

What is a dispositif? Foucault treats it as a system of relations that includes discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical and moral propositions and other

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unspoken elements. Albert Borgmann points out that the paradigmatic structure of modern technology is a 'device paradigm', and that concealment is the primary basic characteristic of that paradigm. Laura Basu, synthesising Foucault's and others' theories of the dispositif, treats the site of memory as 'an assemblage of different media texts, genres and technologies'. She uses the concept to explain how time, space, power and media in memory operate upon one another, and on that basis proposes the concept of the 'memory dispositif'. Basu's memory dispositif is systemic and covert, and its operating mechanism is very complex. In the contemporary system of audiovisual media memory we note three types of audiovisual memory dispositif deserving particular attention. The first is physical space — the museum and its like — whose concern is chiefly the activation of historical memory, and within which the various audiovisual media dispositifs are the focus of attention. The second is film and television, whose chief function is empathy: they commonly arouse the audience's emotional resonance and so carry it into some memory scene. The third is short video and other mobile social media, which can enter into mnemonic interaction with users in daily life. Together the three kinds of audiovisual dispositif construct the audiovisual dispositif system of contemporary media memory, activating, storing and running media memory.

3.1 The Dispositif of Activation: Physical Space as a Point of Connection with History

The museum, the memorial hall and the ruined site are the physical sites of memory most familiar to people in places of historical memory. There one may come to understand a 'bygone history' through the objects on display. Every nation or people must construct a shared collective memory within a common historical process, and the existence of the museum supplies a fixed physical space for that need: it is a key element in constructing collective memory and forming an 'imagined community'. A museum's exhibition is not merely a display of the visible; it must carry forward the historical narrative of the written record through specific objects on display, show the visitor scene upon scene of history, and so effectively connect the visitor's personal on-site experience with historical memory. Within the museum, artefacts and collections, as the bearers of historical memory, are set into exhibition themes and content frames — 'origins', 'history', 'foundations' — and are arranged in order for people to see. The purpose of the various verbal and audiovisual annotations is to deepen the visitor's understanding of history and to awaken the visitor's individual perception and collective memory of it. Susan A. Crane holds that national history and personal memory are sometimes inconsistent, and that the museum may therefore rethink the relation between personal memory and History with a capital H by attending to individual narrative. That argument points to the way the museum, as a public and open place, offers through its displayed objects the possibility of a dialogue between individual and collective, and that dialogue has a strongly connective effect, joining the visitor's personal memory to collective memory. Contemporary museums, memorial halls and ruined sites, of course, attend not only to activating and awakening past historical memory; such activation and awakening are also grounded in the present and the future. 'Heritage is not a retreat from the present but is animated by it. It is late modernity itself that has re-presented forms in which the past appears to be intensely real (especially the simulation of all-round, interactive living history). The desire to touch the past can be seen as embodying a contemporary mode of representation capable of offering us multi-sensory, multi-voiced and clamorous experience of place.' Especially today, museums and the like have strengthened the construction of digital audiovisual dispositifs. Take the audio and video dispositifs in museums today: their content is often an audiovisual commentary on the relevant collections, with the aim of bringing static objects to life, so that the visitor may experience historical scenes more immersively within a multiplicity of audiovisual dispositifs. A museum is a comparatively quiet environment, of course, so the digital audiovisual interaction within it is usually chiefly visual with hearing as an auxiliary; silent film and projection thus become the museum's auxiliary visiting devices, and in the familiar guided-tour sequence visitors generally listen through earphones. In the age of digital audiovisual technology, museums have added digital interactive dispositifs such as touch walls, which engage the visitor's other perceptual systems so that the visitor may understand the objects more fully, and thereby activate historical memory more effectively. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, in order that people unable to visit in person should come to know museums better, Beijing, Xi'an and other cities have launched 'cloud museum' programmes, allowing visitors to enter the museum by 'cloud visiting'; this digital construction has become a trend for museums and other physical sites.

The museum connects history with the present, and individual memory with social memory. In the digital age, digitisation and mediatisation allow the museum to attract visitors in more varied forms, so that visitors may not only visit in person but also browse and experience online through the internet. In the museum's digital audiovisual dispositif, historical memory is no longer static and unitary but a fluid process of memory activation bearing multiple emotional forces.

3.2 The Dispositif of Empathy: Film and Television Directed at Emotional Resonance

Alison Landsberg uses the concept of 'prosthetic memory' to explain that mass media technology can connect us to the past more directly than written history. 'Media such as film and experiential museums, unlike writing, allow people to arrive at another person's memory experience through bodily sensation and emotional identification, and so form prosthetic

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memory.' In Landsberg's view, social memory is a product of the modern mass media. James Berger criticises this, pointing out that human long-term memory is formed through conscious symbol use and extension, whereas the efficacy of the mass media relative to the traditional written text consists merely in having a larger audience; a 'prosthetic memory' formed through media may produce empathy at the emotional level but will hardly change people's existing memory frame at the cognitive level. Berger's criticism of the 'prosthetic memory' wrought by film and television is not thoroughgoing, however: drawing on cognitive neuroscientists' experiments on the 'mirror neurons' system he explains that emotion and cognition cannot be separated in the formation of memory, and uses this to show that 'film or a museum visit is more conducive to emotion or bodily sensation than reading'. That is, the sound, image, dialogue, characters and plot that film and television require can simulate for people an environment that looks exceptionally real — a 'transferential space'. Put otherwise, social memory and people's lived experience can interact through film, television and other mass media; the way memory works is in fact a kind of empathic experience, and if a person can internalise another's memory at the emotional level then he can experience that other's experience. As early as the beginning of the twentieth century the film theorist Hugo Münsterberg pointed out this 'empathic function' of film: through close-up, through the central character and the like it can move the audience, arouse a strong desire to watch, and make the audience recall the past alongside the protagonist or share in the protagonist's 'fantasies of the imagination'.

'Though the parameters within which an experience takes place are artificial, the experience itself is quite real.' Chinese contemporary film and television are rich in content, and the stories they tell often involve different regions and different groups; but their manner of speech, their gallery of social characters, their urban spatial physiognomy and the like, as distinctive codes that arouse people's collective and cultural memory, are embedded in the Chinese story now being generated. To bind together a sense of community among people of different regions, Chinese film and television work hard in practice to construct a common historical memory through empathy. The series of new mainstream works that have won audience approval in recent years — *A Lifelong Journey*, *Minning Town*, *The Awakening Age* — all use a narrative that makes individual destiny isomorphic with national development, and through a shared history and collective memory give audiences in different places an emotional resonance. Christian Metz once observed that film and television is a veritable mental machine, a prosthesis we apply to a limb that was dislocated from the start. The historical memory in film and television is already embedded in human society; we need only summon it up again by way of the audiovisual dispositif, in the mode of empathy.

For Foucault, film as a memory dispositif shows the meaning of its discourse precisely in its construction of popular and historical memory; where a film takes a nostalgic, grand historical narrative as its subject, the heroically epic story it presents and constructs can answer the audience's expectation of historical heroes. The sound, image, dialogue, plot setting and narrative mode of film and television all serve to mobilise the audience's feeling and give it a situated perceptual experience. As a memory dispositif capable of arousing the audience's emotional resonance, film and television, in a particular narrative mode and together with audiovisual language, plays a marked part in awakening people's emotional experience and shaping a common cognition. In the digital age, the development of VR, 3D and other technologies lets this audiovisual capacity of film be exercised even more fully.

3.3 The Dispositif of Interaction: Participatory Social Media Memory Practice

Whether in the museum's audiovisual dispositif, which activates memory, or in film and television, which seeks to arouse emotional resonance, the starting of the memory dispositif is usually led by official or professional media institutions. With further technological development, however, audiovisual media technology in a socialised, mobilised and digitised environment stresses ever more the participatory value of the individual user, and the mode of memory generation turns toward a mode of interactive practice. In the internet society the networked public becomes the principal producer of meaning, and an entirely new ecology of mnemonic practice takes shape.

In the new interactive dispositif of memory, people's memory generation depends on interactive processes between person and person, person and society, person and space. In the media practice of the short-video 'check-in', for instance, the individual takes part through personal practice in the reproduction of a local or historical memory. Bodily media practice becomes an important part of media memory generation, and the individual's memory of a space unfolds through the interactive dispositif. This differs in essence from the one-directional memory produced by professional media institutions in film and television. The diversified memory generated in interaction cannot after all escape the collective unconscious, but plainly the individual's subjective agency is strengthened in interaction. On social media platforms, every year as the anniversary of the 12 May Wenchuan earthquake approaches, posts of spontaneous online remembrance spring up. On 12 May many netizens not only launch remembrance topics of their own accord but also carry on an interactive memory writing — in text, image and audiovisual text — around some rescue video or news report from more than a decade before. Interactive memory writing makes the details of different individuals' traumatic memory more real, more complete and more palpable. Zhou Baohua and Zhong Yuan, taking the Weibo comments on Dr Li Wenliang as a case, point out that

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mourning for public figures on social media brings a new 'social media ritual': the vehicle through which the public express grief and memory is no longer the official media but the social media account a public figure has left behind. Through such an account the public no longer mourns as scattered individuals in private space or as an imagined community but can gather directly in the public space of social media. In this process the public's remembrance and grief infect one another, and unlike traditional commemorative behaviour around a media event, which is short-lived and television-centred, 'social media mourning for a public figure can endure, becoming a social process that preserves memory'.

Through the 'activation' of the audiovisual dispositifs in the museum, the 'empathy' of film and television, and the interactive writing of short video and other social media, the three memory dispositifs together drive the formation of the contemporary audiovisual media memory dispositif system, and ever more deeply affect people's individual and collective memory. As technology continues to change, the properties of digital media determine that future memory research must think further about how the continued operation of the dispositif system turns digital audiovisual media into a new *site* of memory.

4 Digital Audiovisual Media: The New *Site* of Memory

Today an individual can take part in collective memory through the small screen of a phone. This shows that digital media have embedded themselves in every aspect of human media memory and, with strong connectivity, draw people into a still larger *site* of memory. The theory of the *lieu de mémoire* was proposed by Pierre Nora. In Nora's account the *site of memory* means 'any unity of material or spiritual significance which, by the will of people or the work of time, has become a symbolic element of the mnemonic heritage of any community'. Symbol, sign and nation are the keywords for understanding Nora's sites of memory. The *site* of memory in digital audiovisual media is not the museum, memorial square and other physical places that Nora enumerated but digital audiovisual space and place. The *Grand Robert de la langue française* defines the *lieu de mémoire* as 'any set with material or intellectual significance which can embody human will or the work of time and is a symbolic element of a community's mnemonic heritage'. That is, the site of memory can refer not only to a physical place of memory but also to an abstract space with symbolic meaning. Here we need to understand more fully the main characteristics and basic forms of digital audiovisual media memory.

4.1 The Characteristics of Digital Audiovisual Media Memory

First, the collaborability of memory. In a digital audiovisual environment ordinary people have more platforms and channels for producing their own audiovisual works, and the discursive power of memory is accordingly redistributed. The legitimacy of the 'online memory' written by the masses rests on a technological democracy — social audiovisual media in which 'everyone may speak' empower those with network access, so that users may make their voices heard on audiovisual platforms and carry on an 'autobiographical' memory writing, and online memory writing finally takes on a 'popular standpoint'. As noted above, Zhou Baohua and Zhong Yuan, taking the Weibo comments under Li Wenliang's posts as their example, point out that in mnemonic mourning social media possess not only a 'readable' publicness but a 'writable' interactivity, and that around an individual death an interactive space of social intercourse is formed as well. In recent years there have been ever more such digital sites of memory on social media platforms, and netizens' participation has grown ever deeper.

Second, the mobility of memory. Erll has pointed out that 'memory fundamentally means movement: movement between the individual and collective levels of memory, circulation through social, medial and semantic levels. This means that memory escapes research confined by place, by nation and naively by cultures, and shows an interest in the dynamics of memory across and beyond boundaries.' Memory's movement between different platforms forms an interesting phenomenon as well. Historical memory in different audiovisual media, for instance, will be presented in different forms around a single theme: a little-known documentary, if it can play a trailer on Douyin and other short-video platforms before release to draw traffic and attention, can make content that would otherwise draw little notice far better known. The movement of memory between cultures and between platforms has become ever easier in the age of digital audiovisual media.

Third, the industrial character of memory. Bernard Stiegler points out that 'our age is indeed the age of the programming industry and of industrialised memory, with the consequence that the products of industrialised memory become the process'. 'Whether in the written record chiefly of print media or in the film and television art chiefly of electronic media, human memory is being customised by the newly arisen machine technologies of memory, and the industrialisation of memory has become a fact.' Seen in the perspective of the industrialisation of memory, cultural memory produced in industrial batches shakes the original distinctiveness of memory, and the homogenisation of memory is severe. After the photographic game 'my military portrait' spread widely through WeChat Moments, for instance, a series of mnemonic photographic games followed — 'my Republican-era portrait', 'my photograph at eighteen'. These photographs

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connect the contemporary individual's self-image by digital technical means to an imagined historical era, and that connection is itself rich in meaning, expressing the desire of different individuals to take part in and draw near to history in a distinctive way; at the same time, in the digital age such cultural memory is produced in industrial, entertaining batches and to some extent breaks down and damages authentic history itself.

Fourth, the deep mediatisation of memory. The arrival of digital media has overturned the relation between memory and the person: what was once thought of as 'externalised memory' has now plainly embedded itself in our bodily memory. A smartphone not only records the contact details of frequent correspondents but records matters beyond the reach of physiological memory, and can even modify and reconstruct, according to personal habits of use, the memory a person has built up from past experience. Ours is today an age of deep mediatisation, and compared with memory led by one's own experience people sometimes trust the memory media supply more. When someone looks at an unfamiliar name in his phone and cannot recall the face, he will lament that his memory has gone wrong, yet will also firmly believe that this person in his WeChat contacts was really in touch with him; and by way of media memory, if only he wishes, he can still re-establish connection with that person. In the digital age, then, media memory is not merely an extension of human memory but has plainly embedded itself as a part of it.

4.2 The *Site* of Digital Audiovisual Media Memory

In arguing for 'the necessity of tertiary memory', Stiegler shows through the evolution of the forms of writing which technology bears memory and thereby determines human modes of thought and the structure of society. In digital audiovisual media, how does the change of mnemonic vehicle affect the formation of the *site* of memory? In a field of digital audiovisual media that seems to know no bounds, how can people form a common collective memory? How does the dispositif system of memory operate in the new *site* of memory? And when events are submerged in the digital flow of information, how is memory to be evoked and reconstructed again?

First, the *site* of memory practice. In Paul Connerton's account people rely on bodily practice to act, and by way of performance a set of behaviour patterns is sedimented in bodily expression, which Connerton calls 'bodily memory'. Memory in the past depended to a degree on bodily practice as well, of course, but a *site* of memory practice could hardly form.

Media memory is generally thought to be constructed uniformly by the mass media, with the scattered public assumed to be passive recipients. Now, however, the audience's attention is dispersed across different platforms, different screens and a growing number of applications, and carrying on mnemonic practice across these platforms has become a habit of the public. Take again the short-video 'check-in' familiar to people. As a practice requiring bodily presence and recorded through media, the short-video check-in is a principal mode of contemporary memory practice. More importantly, the short-video check-in has become a popular culture: people will travel to a destination to 'check in' because of someone else's check-in video. That is, not a few users take another's short-video check-in as a guide for their own check-in practice. So it is precisely under the pull of others' memory practice that the individual memory practices of many users converge into the *site* of digital audiovisual media memory.

The *site* of memory practice shows that digital audiovisual media memory is dynamic, fluid and in the making, and highlights the value of the user's personal practice. It is the countless individuals, in the manner of 'embodied' practice, who have constructed the principal content and cultural form of media memory in the digital age.

Second, the *site* of memory connection. In the digital media ecology, unlimited connection becomes the norm, and strong connectivity leaves people, relations and events permanently in a state of 'motion'. In these circumstances how digital audiovisual media memory connects individual memory with collective memory becomes a topic memory research must attend to. On the seventh National Memorial Day a wave of 'lighting the purple-gold grass' swept the whole internet. The Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders launched the topic #National Memorial# on Sina Weibo, and within 48 hours the topic reached 2.95 billion reads and 5.41 million discussions. Through the online memorial users lit candles, laid flowers, rang bells and left messages for the victims of the Nanjing Massacre, connecting themselves with collective memory. Beyond the official narrative there is also a collective memory in digital audiovisual media built up jointly by users, forming a *site* of memory with connections at many points; and through the online memorial day we may also note the connective relations between different memory dispositifs — for instance, how a dispositif of activation in physical space connects with an online dispositif of interaction. This shows in the way the physical Memorial Hall, as the initiator of the topic, guides the form and content of the online memorial activity, while the new memory content formed by user interaction in that activity further affects the offline memorial hall as a dispositif of activation — the hall, for instance, screens the messages left in the online memorial on a loop on the screens within its grounds. In the internet space, netizens' participation sometimes makes up for what official memory writing lacks: 'memory content produced by individuals is becoming a source of collective memory, and individuals thereby take part in historical writing, realising a public participation in history writing. For issues neglected by the authorities and the mainstream media, individual memory is an

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alternative resource for writing their history and a means of resisting forgetting.'

The *site* of digital audiovisual media memory connection is woven from physical place and online network space; it embodies the mobility and collaborability of digital audiovisual media memory, and includes the connection of individual with collective memory, the connections between different memory dispositifs, and the connections among individual memories.

Third, the *site* of memory regeneration. Henri Bergson points out that things which once existed always leave their particular traces in the material world, and that these particular traces are no more than a relic or a ruin — they cannot constitute the historical event itself. This means that historical memory must always be told again in some narrative form, which is in fact the process of the regeneration of historical memory. With the starting of the dispositif system, the representation of memory no longer fastens on any one medium, and the content of memory can flow between the dispositifs in different forms. The concerted action of the memory dispositifs lets memory reappear in the public gaze in many forms, and even long-buried historical memory can be regenerated in different memory dispositifs. When a historical object in a museum, for instance, is brought to the screen for commentary, or is performed within an interactive dispositif, the memory formed around the same mnemonic core in different memory dispositifs is the cross-media regeneration of digital memory. The value of the *site* of digital audiovisual media memory regeneration shows also in the digital image transcription of traditional culture, historical artefacts and intangible cultural heritage. Reproducing artefacts or cultural heritage through VR, AR and other virtual-reality technologies is not only a process by which historical memory is reconstructed so as to be publicly known but also lets originally single memory content be regenerated in different forms in different media vehicles, forming an entirely new journey of historical retrieval. Another typical case of the regeneration of digital audiovisual media memory is digital image restoration, which 'includes restoring the original colour, saturation and brightness of the image, increasing its contrast, and effectively carrying out noise reduction and scratch removal', and brings old films that could not be shown back before the audience. This example shows the technical support for 'memory regeneration': professional digital image restoration technology makes once blurred historical memory clear again. Digital practices of memory regeneration of this kind give history a new life, and the *site* of digital memory regeneration affirms both the technical vehicle and the content of memory.

The 'site of memory' has symbolic meaning and can shape and transmit memory. Pierre Nora proposed the concept in order to explain the break between experiential memory and narrative history. Admittedly, the contemporary *site* of digital audiovisual media memory differs from the site of memory that Nora proposed on the basis of the origins of French nationalist history in research background, context and range of application; but the *site* of digital audiovisual media memory can be verified in memory connection, memory practice and memory regeneration. It is generated on the basis of users' shared memory practice, connects different mnemonic subjects by algorithm and big data, and when memory fades or is submerged the properties and technical advantages of digital audiovisual media can regenerate it, restoring those vanished lives and histories of humankind.

5 Coda: The Future of Digital Memory Research

Research on digital memory is still at its beginnings, and in China's present social context in particular there is much that deserves discussion: how do the cultural, technical and capital elements behind the digital audiovisual media memory system affect the individual's embodied cognition, emotion and behaviour as they take part in constructing memory? How is the transmission of memory to avoid being misread? How is the dispositif system of memory dominated by digital audiovisual media? And what theoretical innovation can China's practical experience of digital audiovisual media bring to the global system of digital memory? All of these need to be clarified in further research.

Digital memory is a new mode of memory brought into being by the appearance of new technology, and it exhibits marked technical properties. An examination of the technicality of digital audiovisual media, and of its materiality in particular, is therefore indispensable. The materiality of digital audiovisual media consists in this, that 'it contains operating features such as the numerical, the modular, the automatic, variability and transcoding — all of which profoundly shape the particular cultural experience of the user'. From the standpoint of materiality, then, we must first attend to the numerical and modular character of the mnemonic vehicle. In concrete research — on the mobile phone as a daily medium, say — we need to attend to its functional properties. Beyond that we must think further from the relation between digital media and the material and infrastructural environment: having asked what digital audiovisual media technology is, we need to think more deeply about how it interacts with people in a particular setting.

In the digital age, because memory is not experience itself nor a simple reproduction of experience but an active organisation of past responses or prior experience, mnemonic subjects in different cultural backgrounds will generate different memory content, and the memory of different places and regions is a distinctive record of local history, culture and people's emotional structure. In digital memory research, therefore, it is of real value and significance to ask how digital technology may be used to excavate, record and organise local memory.

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Finally, where digital audiovisual media technology connects the world, research on cross-cultural memory likewise deserves attention. Existing theories of cross-cultural memory are chiefly 'travelling memory' and 'cosmopolitan memory'. Once digital audiovisual media become the veritable context of people's production and life, any kind of memory may be 'world memory', and the 'memory' of any event may undergo a worldwide 'travel of memory' within a short time. In contemporary media memory, digital audiovisual media can bring any memory within the scope of global memory through their very strong connectivity, and research on the cross-cultural dimension of memory is therefore very necessary.

In sum, the field of memory research today has developed from 'media memory research' to 'digital memory research', and digitised, socialised audiovisual media have formed a new *site* of memory. In future, research on digital memory must start from the properties of digital audiovisual media and, taking audiovisual media as its basis, attend to the profound influence of the media properties of digital audiovisual media on memory; nor may it neglect the memory world that audiovisual media content itself presents.

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