

sessões do IMAGINÁRIO

VOL. 22 | N. 38 | 2017 | <http://dx.doi.org/10.15448/1980-3710.2017.2>



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**Dossiê
Game Studies**

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Re-membering and dismembering: *memory and the (re)creation of identities in videogames*

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DOSSIÊ

Abstract

This paper will restrict its analyses to games which tell stories. After establishing the basic parameters which describe memory in videogames, a suitable analytical framework will be sought to encompass the multiplicity and complexity involved. Henri Bergson's famous conceptualisation of memory and its further implications in Gilles Deleuze's modern-day championing of Bergson will be the main point of departure, here.

Keywords

Videogames; memory; identities.



The Prince of Persia in *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*² (Ubisoft Montreal, 2003) is ever reluctant to accept an ignominious end to his story, whether after a fall from atop a tower or after being killed by the sand demons. Every time he fails, the Prince exclaims “no no, that is not how it happened at all”. Like the videogame player controlling his “avatar”, the Prince wants the game sequence to be reloaded and replayed; only he appeals to an entity that the player often does not notice – memory. The Prince justifies the reload because he does not “remember” the events as they happen and he hankers for a return to a “true” memory. There is an implicit problem here, however. We cannot ask the Prince what he remembers and during the game the player ends up remembering the “false” memories, albeit often unconsciously. To progress further in the game, the player needs to have learned from his mistakes or, in other words, to have remembered the previous iterations of gameplay. According to the Prince’s memory, these failed instances of gameplay never happened; yet they happened in the gameplay and are remembered by players. Often, many players share the same experience and this exists as a shared memory. Players might also be drawing on collectively recorded memories – the written step by step guidelines in a walkthrough and the comments left by players on various gaming forums or wikis. What the player remembers is also often influential in determining the in-game identity of the player. Videogames themselves, such as *Assassin’s Creed* (Ubisoft et al, 2008) and *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl* (GSC Gameworld, 2007)³, have started self-reflexively exploring memory in their plots. Therefore, it will be useful to move the study of memory in videogames out of its relative obscurity and explore its multi-layered complexity.

While acknowledging that the scope of this argument might be further extended, this paper will restrict its analyses to games which tell stories. After establishing the basic parameters which describe memory in videogames, a suitable analytical framework will be sought to encompass the multiplicity and complexity involved. Henri Bergson’s famous conceptualisation of memory and its further implications in Gilles Deleuze’s modern-day championing of Bergson will be the main point of departure, here⁴. Another important consideration to make at the outset will be the definition of multiplicity as it is key to the understanding of the following sections. Multiplicity is used in its Deleuzian sense where it is opposed to “essence”. Manuel DeLanda shows the difference as being characterised by a progressively developing identity and a lack of unity. Unlike “essences [which] bear to their instantiations the same relation which a model has to its copies, that is, a relation of greater or lesser resemblance, multiplicities imply divergent realisations which bear no similarity to them” (DeLanda, 2002, p. 28). In the course of this analysis, similarities will emerge between Deleuzian multiplicity and the remembered iterations of play in videogames, which, even though often very similar to each other and chronologically occurring in parallel, are nevertheless divergent realisations.

The analysis of memory has figured importantly in other disciplines and Game Studies itself has started exploring the role of memory in videogames. Commenting on in-game death(s), Barry Atkins identifies in *Sands of Time* a key characteristic of videogames: any

“understanding of games that is essentially linear, and one of a progressive movement in time and

space towards a finite ending where the interruptions of avatar death are inconvenient moments that must be quickly erased from the consciousness of the player [...] is not the dominant experience of play” (Atkins, 2007, p. 244).

The inconvenient moments are not erased from the player’s memory but they remain inconvenient nevertheless. In terms of the temporal scheme in the game’s plot, they might be considered parallel memories of the same moment in time that comprise of totally different outcomes. In effect, players might have multiple memories of what happened to them when they were attacked by a certain guard in *Sands of Time*. This is similar to Jorge Luis Borges’ *The Garden of Forking Paths* where the protagonist is told by his host: “In the present one (time), which a favourable fate has granted me, you have arrived at my house; in another, while crossing the garden, you found me dead; in still another, I utter these same words, but I am a mistake, a ghost” (Borges, 1964, p. 53). In Borges’s story, the protagonist obviously does not remember these parallel memories; in videogames the case is different and the player “does” remember. *Sands of Time* consciously problematises this by bringing in the Prince’s voice that challenge’s the player’s memory with its reference to an ideal and “correct” memory. Atkins rightly describes this as the voice of an ideal Prince who “according to the game’s internal logic of the game, [...] has completed all the actions the player is attempting to perform” (Atkins, 2007, p. 248). However, even the ideal Prince recognises the multiplicity of memories: in the final sections of the game, the Prince reaches the bedchamber of the Princess Farah, who earlier on had helped him in his quest. On speaking to the Princess, he discovers



that she remembers nothing of what happened. In a sort of role reversal, the Prince is now bewildered for a moment when Farah refuses to recognise the events of the game – “no no, that’s not how it happened”. Like the players whom he earlier upbraids with his appeal to a “true” memory, the Prince is now in a paradoxical situation where he has to accept the multiplicity that allows the same moment to coexist differently in memory.

Atkins (2007) makes another astute observation that implicitly connects to memory in videogames. He says: “When we describe our practices of play we, like the Prince, use the past tense. While we play, however, our focus is on a future of multiple and uncertain possibilities”. These multiple and uncertain possibilities, however, are constantly mediated by the memory(ies) of past experience. In the case of a reloaded sequence, there is the memory of past failures; in a previously unencountered moment, there are memories of earlier sections of the game and from other similar games; of-

ten, players engage with in-game situations through gut-responses remembered as a result of deep experience with the genres; finally, there are the collectively shared memories in walkthroughs and the now popular videogame wikis. When Atkins (2007) poignantly describes the pleasure of gameplay as the “struggle to wrestle the unstable future into the completed past”, he is highlighting the multiplicity of the future(s) in which game-time could possibly fork and also the fact that although the logic of the game pushes the player to actualise one such possibility at a given time, the others still coexist and may also be actualised as parallel events. This is a temporal scheme characterised by multiplicity where multiple and parallel pasts and futures are acceptable. Finally, besides the future moving into the completed past there is the inverse movement where the past memory(ies) exerts its influence on the possible future.

In his attempt to map time in videogames, Michael Nitsche also refers to the time-reversal inherent in the logic of *Sands of Time* and clearly highlights how the fu-

ture event is affected by the knowledge gained in the past iterations of gameplay (which the game cleverly incorporates into its narrative fiction through the trope of time-reversal). Nitsche modifies Brenda Laurel’s “flying wedge” diagram to illustrate the phenomenon:

To describe a player’s learning process Laurel introduced the ‘flying wedge’ that clarifies the gradual development of the player behaviour from the possible, via the probable towards the necessary. The above outlined time reversal in *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* skews this wedge because thanks to the added knowledge players do not return to a former state (a) but instead know more about the probable behaviour. Along the timeline of Laurel’s wedge their entry point moves forward towards (a’), (a’), et al. (Nitsche, 2007).

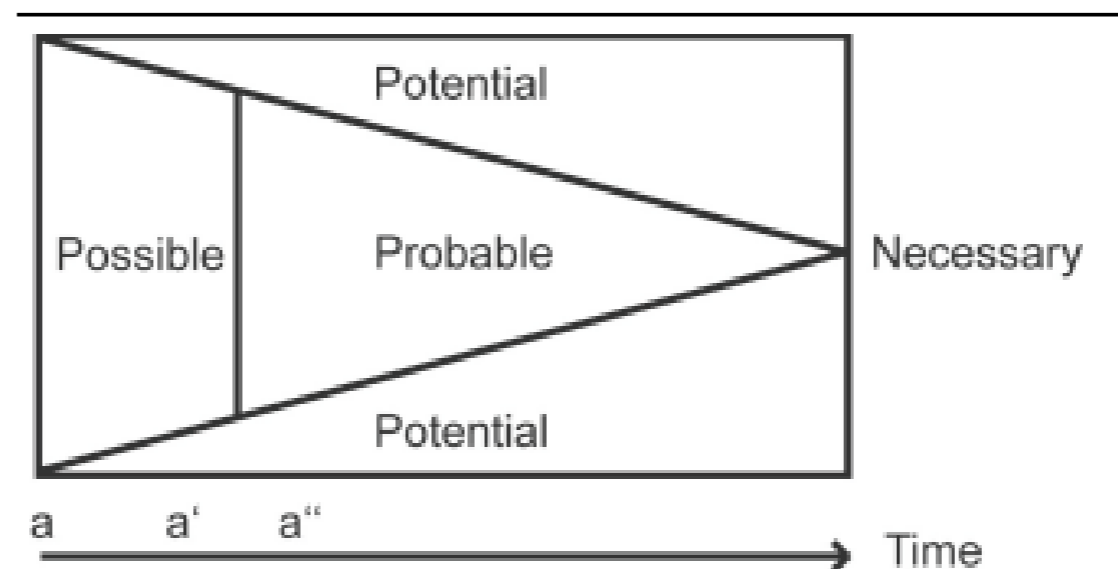


Figure 1: Laurel’s “flying wedge” diagram as modified by Nitsche. Note that due to added knowledge from past iterations, each new iteration of gameplay starts at a different position (marked by a’ and a’).
Fonte: Nitsche (2007).



The “added knowledge” Nitsche refers to is partly constituted by the player’s memory. Memory affects the future options in the gameplay. Often, this added knowledge and the memories that incorporate it become so ingrained in the play experience that they cannot be differentiated; the player plays as if by habit. During a speed-run, for example, players remember past games but the memory is almost a bodily memory and the player does not even need to acknowledge it. On the other extreme, self-reflexive games like *Sands of Time* and *Assassin’s Creed* force the player into thinking about the process of remembering because their plots use memory as a key device that melds the functional aspect (reloading and saving) with the narrative aspect. The role of memory, implicit in *Sands of Time*, takes on a more obvious form in the *Assassin’s Creed* games. The reload mechanism is available in the form of DNA strands into which the memories of the protagonist’s ancestors have been coded and which can be read via a *sci-fi* machine called the Animus. The fact that game designers have been thinking of memory as a multiple and reloadable entity, having parallel temporal consequences, is noteworthy especially in anticipation of the subsequent sections of this paper.

Ephemeral as each gameplay experience may be, it is still possible to record the memories of gameplay. Walkthroughs, after-action reports, wikis and forums contain a network of memories. Players from the world over post, either singly or in groups, about their gameplay experiences. The walkthroughs differ in detail and the (re)construction of memory is dependent on the writer’s preferences. Often walkthroughs themselves contain alternative accounts of the same event provided by a multiple number of players. Quite often, there is commentary to follow. A newer phenomenon, occur-

ring in between the walkthrough and the more free-form fan-fiction, is the so-called after-action report or game diary. These are detailed accounts of the player’s experience in a game that are often embellished with imaginative description and that do not have the step-by-step rigour of walkthroughs. *The Diary of DeGeen*, quoted below, is one such example:

13th April 1718

With the defeat of the rebels at Philadelphia, the British forces in the colonies turn their attention to problems further inland. Churchill’s army marches north, into Iroquois territory, where raiders, sensing the absence of European men at arms, have struck with increasing frequency these past years (Diary of DeGeen, 2009).

It is quite difficult to guess that this is a game diary kept by an anonymous player of *Empire: Total War* (Creative Assembly, Feral Interactive, 2009) until one sees the screenshot from the game that accompanies the text. To those uninformed, this might even seem to be recorded history, or the legitimate record of human memory. Besides the walkthrough and the game-diary, there is a newer form of memory archive – the game wiki where the story of the game is recorded by various players who regularly keep editing it thus creating a constantly changing collective memory.

The range of ways in which in-game memories can coexist in videogames indicates a multiplicity that is indeed hard to describe. Further, there are overlaps between the in-game memories and the real-life memories of the player as quite often one influences the



Figure 2: Screenshot from *Empire: Total War* that accompanies DeGeen’s journal entry.

Fonte: Screenshot from *Empire: Total War*.



other; it is therefore difficult to segregate them in watertight categories. In this scenario, some game-narratives concern themselves with memory as a trope for building the protagonist's character. *S.T.A.L.K.E.R* is one such where the protagonist starts the game suffering from amnesia and exploration of the game environment occurs simultaneously with the remembering of who he is. *Fallout 3* (Bethesda Game Studios, 2008) has its protagonist following his father's footsteps and relying on the memory of others to chart his quest; like wasteland narratives in other media, there are other remembering and mis-rememberings that affect the protagonist's understanding of the wasteland. Remembered vestiges of the pre-apocalyptic past are used to construct the imperfect picture of the world that the wastelanders aim for. In a scene that is almost straight out of Philip K. Dick's novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (Dick, 1968), the protagonist comes across an android that has started believing it is human due to implanted memories; only a code can unlock the buried android memories. The memory, whatever its type, is instrumental in constructing the identity of the characters. The clearest example of this, arguably, is found in *Assassin's Creed*. As said before, in the *sci-fi* part of the game, the Animus technology is able to find the memories of the subject's ancestors from his DNA but it does not stop there. It can resuscitate the subject's ancestor in his present memory and make him relive his ancestors' lives from centuries ago. As such, the protagonist Desmond Miles can relive the lives of his ancestors, Altair ibn-Ahad from the time of the Third Crusade and Ezio di Firenze from Renaissance Italy. The remarkable part in this is that the player's avatar is seen as getting his physical form from the actual memory-sequences in Desmond's DNA. Memory, therefore, quite literally

"creates" the character. Whether it is the amnesiac protagonist in *S.T.A.L.K.E.R*. trying to find out who he is or the DNA constructed memories of Desmond Miles, in-game memories are shown as shaping the identity of the protagonist. Indeed, this could be seen as a reflection on a related phenomenon that is more generally applicable to videogames: it could be argued that memory, by adding knowledge to the subsequent instances of play (as Nietzsche describes), besides skewing the possibilities in the game also simultaneously changes the identity of the avatar in that the avatar now can act differently and be smarter in tackling problems.

The building of Altair through memory is of prime importance as a metaphor for the function of memory in videogames. Here, a play on the word "remember" might be of interest. To remember can also be to "re-member" or recreate "members" or body parts, taking the meaning of "member" in its less common meaning of "a part or organ of the body" (*OED*, 2010). In *Assassin's Creed*, the act of remembering Altair is also the act of remembering. Every memory, of parallel moments in time and otherwise, is such a re-membering. When the event is actualised and then over, the re-membered moment slips back into memory and with death or other forms of termination of the game (such as "desynchronisation"), Altair is "dismembered". Moving from this very specific example where the process is most evident, these metaphors of remembering and dismembering will be used to explore how memory shapes events and characters in videogames.

That memory figures in complex and often unnoticed ways in shaping game narratives is obvious now; the question, however, arises as to how to describe the multiplicity within which it functions. How is it possible to have a framework that supports the remembering

(or re-membering) of parallel iterations of the same action and is there a precedent of this in earlier media? Bergson's *Matter and Memory* (1896) offers a description of parallel time-schemes and memories that may be reflected in videogames. To introduce this, two key Bergsonian deviations from standard theories of time and memory need to be stated at the outset. As Alia Al-Saji clarifies:

Time is not internal to consciousness, nor are memories stored within the consciousness or in the brain. Rather, as Deleuze and the Bergson of *Matiere et memoire* have argued, 'it is we who are internal to time', the flux of duration, and who move between memories of different levels and intensities in our acts of recollection, reminiscence and perceptual recognition (Al-Saji, 2004, p. 204).

Al-Saji draws attention to the flux of duration – yet another important concept in Bergson. As Leonard Lawlor describes it, "for Bergson, we must understand the duration as a qualitative multiplicity — as opposed to a quantitative multiplicity" (Lawlor; Moulard, 2010), which is heterogeneous yet interpenetrating and which cannot be expressed by a symbol (as would be possible with homogenous quantitative multiplicities, say a flock of sheep being represented by a sheep icon).

Here, duration intrinsically links to memory and Bergson's conception of multiplicity implies the existence of a range of options which concurrently form the past and even the present. Bergson poses the question:

How is it that the same images can belong at the same tune to two different systems, the one in which each image varies for itself and in the well-de-



finer measure that it is patient of the real action of surrounding images, the other in which all change for a single image, and in the varying measure that they reflect the eventual action of this privileged image? (Bergson, 1911, p. 13).



Figure 3: “Re-membering” Altair - The genetic construction of Altair’s memory and the memorial construction of his identity go hand in hand in *Assassin’s Creed*. This phenomenon is evident only when the memory is desynchronised and dismembered in the game.

Fonte: Screenshot from *Assassin’s Creed*.

Effectively, in Bergsonian terms, the “image” can be seen as a temporal strand that is concurrent with other temporal strands (in the manner of the Bergsonian forking paths mentioned above) and that will be effected as an action (or “actualised”) under the influence of the constraints of the body. From this perspective, instead of considering a single unchangeable past, Bergson considers a multiplicity of events, all occurring simultaneously and irrespective of any chronology.

One might now ask: if the past defies all attempts of chronological order, where then are the recollections of events stored? For Deleuze, this is a “false problem” as he sees recollections as being characterised by subjectivity – “recollections do not have to be preserved anywhere other than ‘in’ duration. *Recollection therefore is preserved in itself*” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 54, original italics). In Bergson’s novel empiricism, the idea that the brain is the seat of recollections is untenable because he equates the brain with matter and perception, both of which are objective entities and therefore cannot serve as the reservoir of recollections. Instead Bergson and Deleuze⁵ both locate the site of memory elsewhere.

This is the Bergsonian concept of the “virtual”. For Bergson and Deleuze, the virtual is a fully real entity where all the divergent realisations of a multiplicity are valid. Recollection occurs here within a mesh of interconnected pasts from where “little by little it comes into view like a condensing cloud” and passes from the virtual into the actual. Memory is coextensive to dura-



tion and the recollection of events is in effect the actualisation of certain divergent realisations of the multiplicity of the past contingent upon the associated factors of the present. The recollection of events occurs in the present and as such as it is a “contraction” of the past actualised in the present. Therein, Deleuze’s claim that recollection is preserved in itself can be explained. The past is not something that ceases to be but rather its only difference with the present is that it has ceased to *act*; both past and present can be coexistent in the concept of Duration because present is not a Being but is instead a “becoming-actual” of the past. Recollection, therefore, can exist in itself because it is part of the multiplicity of duration and is manifested via an actualisation in the present.

In an earlier paper (Mukherjee, 2009), I have drawn attention to the perception-affection-action complex in videogames where there is a similar actualisation of the in-game action from within an affective virtuality as Bergson and Deleuze describe for recollection. The recollection exists as a Bergsonian image that translates into the present and that links with the perception-image so that the memory can be perceived and we know that we have remembered a past event. Bergson does not expound on the mechanism but Deleuze provides a lengthy explanation where he describes how recollections “intervene” in perceptions and actually influence these – “they are necessarily extended into the movements that correspond to perception and they become ‘adopted’ by it” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 68). Bergson, of course, also speaks of the “habit-memory” which is more a function of the motor-nerves and does not involve the intermingling of perception and recollection; instead the actualised recollection is directly subject to motor action and the act occurs as if by habit.

Within such a framework of virtual memory and a multiplicity of pasts that are actualised under specific conditions to a contraction that forms the present, similarities emerge with the multiple iterations and the parallel temporalities found in videogames. Earlier it was observed how memory affects videogame events and how each such event is perceived differently after memory, as it were, intervenes in the perception and implicitly in the final action. The similarities to Bergson’s model (as explained by Deleuze) are evident. In some cases, say in a sequence that has been played many times, the player is not even conscious of remembering the sequence but plays it almost automatically. In Bergsonian terms, this corresponds to the “habit memory” described above. Given the emerging similarities between the Bergsonian framework and memory

in videogames, it may be worth pursuing the analysis of the memories of instances of gameplay using this framework.

When the gamer revisits and replays a certain part of the videogame many times, the actions might look the same and the remembered instances might all be seen as copies of each other. However, these remembered instances vary and paradoxically, although they might represent the same event, they are different. When the Prince of Persia denies an event that happens in the game, he is invoking a parallel memory that is ignored. Further, every time the player replays a section of a game, the new iteration is, as discussed earlier, influenced by previous memory. It will be useful to take another look at Nietzsche’s modified “flying wedge” diagram.

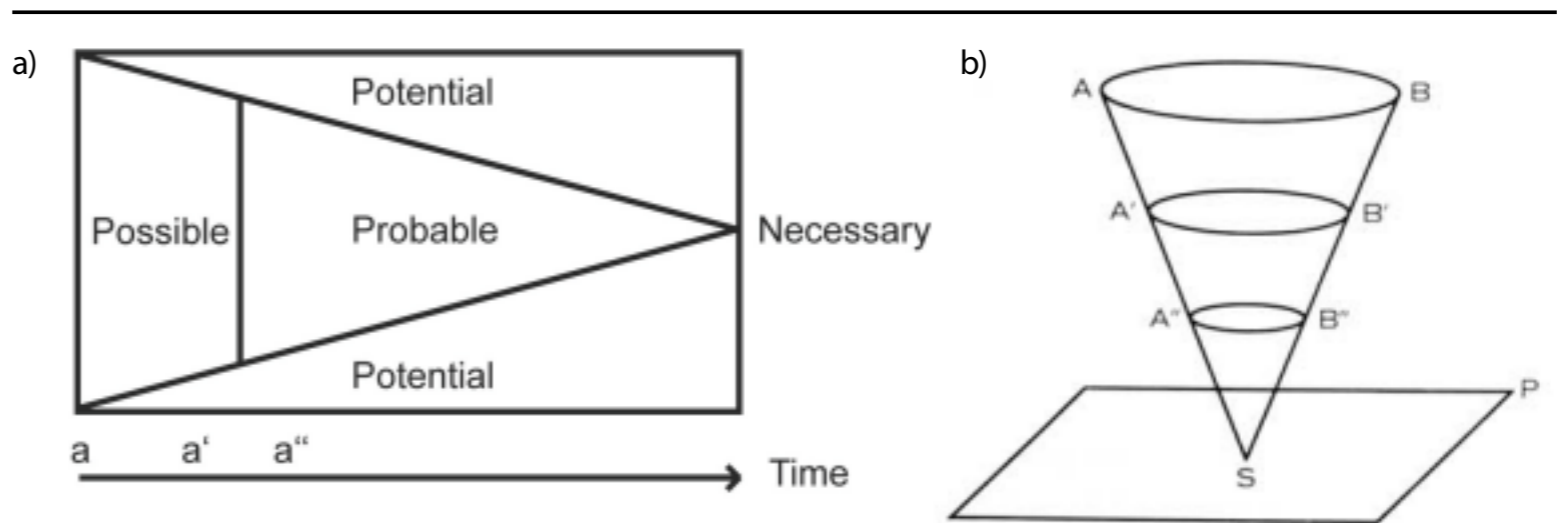


Figure 4: The modified “flying wedge” (from Nietzsche, figure 1), when turned over clockwise resembles Bergson’s famous cone (figure 4.b) with which he represents memory.



Turned clockwise, the wedge diagram superficially resembles Bergson's famous cone of temporality. Like Nietzsche, Bergson too has plotted points *a*, *a'* and *a''* that in the cone represents the multiple iterations of the past. In Bergson's philosophy, the cone represents the paradoxical concept of the past coexisting with the present following on from his concept of the multiple past. How can the past coexist with the present? To understand this, Deleuze comes up with the following formulation of Bergson's model:

It is all our past which coexists with each present. The famous metaphor of the cone represents this complete state of coexistence. But such a state implies, finally, that in the past itself appear all kinds of profundity, marking all the possible intervals in this coexistence. The past *AB* coincides with the present *S*, but by including in itself all the sections of *A'B'*, *A''*, *B''* etc., that measure the degree of purely ideal proximity or distance in relation to *S*. Each of these sections it itself *virtual*, belonging to the being in itself of the past. Each of these elements [...] includes not particular levels of the past but always the totality of past itself. It includes this totality at a more or less expanded or contracted level (Deleuze, 1988, p. 59).

In terms of this Bergsonian comparison, the events *A*, *A'* and *A''* therefore all exist as forms of the whole past, differently contracted and expanded to form the present moments (represented by *S*). By contraction and expansion, one can infer the level of constraints that the surroundings (i.e. the body etc.) impose on the virtual state. For example, Deleuze describes this through the comparison between the dreamer and the automaton

– the dream state almost represents a “dispersion” of memories while the automaton is the opposite in that it cannot discern more than one recollection at a time. Basically then, the Bergsonian parallel when stretched to videogames, explains the multiplicity of the game iterations as being a virtuality wherein in the whole past is contracted differently at different moments and to be contract into different presents. One might then say that *A'* and *A''* are the same as *A* but that they are contracted differently into recollections that are actualised under the influence of differing factors (often prior recollections).

Modifying the concept in terms of videogames, one might need to consider the workings of the virtual and the actual on multiple conceptual planes. As said before, these actualised recollections intervene in our perceptions but on a separate conceptual plane, there also exists a region of virtual memory (Deleuze's “affection-image” in his *Cinema* books - 1986) between perception and action – in videogame terms, the recollections arising out of the virtuality of *A* and *A'* will affect how perception occurs in *A''*; simultaneously, the virtuality of *A* and *A'* (in their not-actualised states) will also form the zone of possibilities from where the ensuing game action is actualised. Quite differently from videogames, these processes, however, are not obvious in real life when we think of memory, perception or action and the different contractions of the virtual.

Commenting on why the coexisting past does not become obvious in the present moment, Al-Saji says that the past coexists as a virtual image that is “limited to doubling the present perception” (2004, p. 212) and hence is normally unable to contribute to perception or action. However, this is not the case always. Bergson describes a situation where due to the failure of percep-

tion, the subject experiences the present and also a parallel “memory of the present”. A more common name for the latter is *déjà vu* or the situation when people experience the feeling of having already experienced a new present. What is inexplicably weird in real life, is commonplace for the videogame player. However much the Prince of Persia denies it, in terms of the game-time the player can experience the same present in various ways and repeatedly. A reviewer of *Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones* (Ubisoft Montreal. Casablanca Studios, 2005) makes a direct comparison between gameplay and *déjà vu*:

There are subtle references to both the other episodes of the game which are so well incorporated that veterans will immediately have a feeling of *déjà vu*, while newcomers will be pleasantly intrigued and feel involved as this great epic story unfolds (TechEnclave, 2006).

Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood (Ubisoft, 2011) even has an in-game achievement called *déjà vu*. All that the player needs to do to gain this achievement is to replay a memory. Whether consciously or unconsciously, videogames, especially those that self-reflexively attempt to comment on temporality in videogames, show links between gameplay and Bergson's “memory of the present”.

As seen earlier, player memory extends beyond the individual player and it is possible that players fall back on someone else's memory or on a collective memory. As far as it has been described here, the Bergsonian framework for memory, although characterised by multiplicity, has not focused on collective memory. In fact, Bergson's one-time pupil, Maurice Halbwachs (1980)



takes him to task for this. However, Halbwachs's theory too has come under scrutiny as it confines collective memory only to the experience of a single generation or lifetime (Connerton, 1989). From Al-Saji's reading of Bergson, however, it seems that Halbwach's criticism was perhaps hasty. Reading further into Bergson's theory of memory, to make sense of his distinction between conscious perception and the unconscious universe, his concept of the virtual image or the "memory of the present" comes in handy again. According to Al-Saji:

the virtual image is not only the bridge between memory and present perception; it opens onto the materiality and richness of the present that extend beyond what is simply seen. [...] Unlike the relation of the possible to the real, the virtual is more expansive than the actual – [therefore] we can extend the memory of the present beyond what is explicitly found in Bergson (Al-Saji, 2004, p. 220).

The memory of the present is like what Deleuze calls a "world memory" or a world made present. Put simply the virtual image consists of an assemblage of possibilities – speaking from a Deleuzian perspective, Boudas states that "in the virtual, intensive multiplicities of singularities, series and time subsist" (Boudas, 1996, p. 192). The intensive multiplicity, described here, is not characterised by an ontology that opposes the many to the one; instead, the divisions and subdivisions of the multiplicities nevertheless leave their natures unaffected and simultaneously coexist with the whole entity. This is similar to the "whole past" that has been mentioned earlier in the article – such a whole past is not just an individual's whole past but is a collective whole.

How does this, therefore, work in terms of videogames?

Taking the *Assassin's Creed* example again, consider a player playing *Assassin's Creed II* (Ubisoft Montreal, 2009). At different levels (Bergson would say "contractions"), the player possibly has recollections of prior instances of gameplay which might include those by other players as reported in walkthroughs besides his or her own. Those who have played the earlier and later games in the series will remember elements from these. There's also the possibility that at a certain iteration of gameplay they have consulted the game's wiki page or a game guide; in some cases, like the writer of the De Geen blog mentioned earlier, they might have recorded their play experience in a game diary for later reflection or maybe just to share with others. Therefore, prior to any instance of gameplay there is the possible "plugging in" to an assemblage of memories that is an extension of the Bergsonian concepts of virtual memory. Some of the multiple strands of possibilities get actualised as recollections and on a separate plane as actions, as described above. Only they are not restricted to the individual but rather partake in a larger memory assemblage of which they might not necessarily even be conscious.

This brings up the issue of how memory affects the action in the videogame as well as in what way it influences the identity-formation in videogames. Herein, the Bergsonian-Deleuzian concept of the "affect" is of major importance. Al-Saji provides a detailed account of the functioning of the affect:

Instead of an excitation causing an action in predictable sequence, the future action is interrupted or delayed, and replaced by an affective state within the body. Affects prefigure or symbolize possible

future actions which are no longer merely automatic outcomes. This has two important consequences: (i) The delay or interruption in the body's immediate reaction allows conscious perception to arise [...] (ii) The body waits before acting; it has the time to remember. In light of the delay opened up by affect, memories can be actualized and inserted into the present to help determine the future course of action. The way in which affect delays and prefigures action defines my body's hold on time – its access to memory and the openness of its future. To feel is to no longer play out the past automatically, but to imagine and remember it (Al-Saji, 2004, p. 221).

The affection-image, if we are to go by Deleuze's analysis, is key to the formation of the action. It "surges in the centre of indetermination [...] between a perception which is troubling in some respects and a hesitant action" (Deleuze, 1988). Al-Saji's account makes memory an important part of the affection-image – during the "wait" between the perception and action, the body remembers. She clarifies further that memories can be actualised and inserted so as to intervene in the affective state and influence the forthcoming action. Her use of the words "play out the past" is interesting in terms of videogames. Like the Prince of Persia or Altair, during the gameplay the player plays out the past because his or her memory influences the action. Memory shapes the body's responses that help in forming the player's actions. As described earlier, memory itself is a multiplicity that exists as various contractions of the past: parallel memories of an event influence parallel (re)constructions of the player's actions. Contrary to the Prince of Persia's complaint, the various iterations of the



game, the occurrence of which he denies, are each as valid as the other and in each of them the player's identity is (re)formed influenced by memory, whether it be the individual recollection, the bodily 'habit-memory' and the collective memory.

If one is to consider the building up of the player-identity within the game as the cumulative result of the player's actions, then surely memory forms a key part of the process. As the player passes through the affective state into active, the act of remembering can also be seen as a "re-membering" or the reconstruction of the body through memory. The process, of course, is not as literal as in *Assassin's Creed* where memory is coded into the DNA of the protagonist. As a "re-membering", this example of course suffers from the problem that although the player can have multiple memories of parallel existences of Altair and Ezio, memory coded into DNA can only accommodate one set of memories. Instead of a physical location for the 're-membering', therefore, the Bergsonian model of the virtual memory is a more appropriate location that can accommodate the multiple re-memberings.

As players experience the multiple lives and deaths of Altair, the Prince of Persia, the amnesiac protagonist of *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* and numerous other videogame protagonists, the complexity of memory in videogame-narratives unfolds and baffles. In each new iteration and reload, the protagonist's in-game identity is subtly changed by a multiplicity of memories. Each instance of remembering by the player is now also a re-membering. Despite his complaints about the story not being as he remembers it, what the Prince of Persia does not realise is that each time he protests he has actually been 're-membered' or recreated by the player's memory. At the close of each play instance, the protagonist's iden-

tity might be lost or dismembered but the memory remains - to be "re-membered" again and again.

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Notes

- 1 DPhD English Literature and Cultural Studies (Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, 2009). Post-graduate Diploma in Research Practice (Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, 2008). (Presidency University, 86/1 College Street, Kolkata - 700073, West Bengal, India). Email: souvik.eng at presiuniv.ac.in.
- 2 Referred to as Sands of Time, hereonwards.
- 3 Referred to as S.T.A.L.K.E.R., hereonwards.
- 4 Bergson's concepts faced considerable resistance from later philosophies such as that of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre. However, more recently other key philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze and Paul Ricoeur have revived interest in him. It is Deleuze's interest in Bergsonism that is germane to this analysis.
- 5 Constantin Boundas (1996) uses the composite 'Deleuze-Bergson' in his essay to mark their similarity. It must also be noted that the premise that memories are not stored in the brain may raise objections following current scientific experiments. Al-Saji counters this by stating that 'an alternative interpretation of this experiment is plausible based on Bergson's theory that the brain (or body) is the organ of attention to life and acts as a filtering or selection mechanism allowing only certain memories, which are useful to the present, to break through into consciousness, i.e., to be actualized (Al-Saji 2004, p. 231).