

SCREEN-WORLDS AND THE FILMIC IMAGINARY: CINEMA AS AN ARCHIVE OF CULTURAL MEMORY

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Abstract: This article examines cinema as a dynamic generator of cultural memory, arguing that filmic images do not merely document or represent the past; rather, they produce and reconfigure the imaginary by activating the specificity of the filmic medium and its modes of affective and symbolic transmission. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks developed by Jan and Aleida Assmann, Bernard Stiegler, Vivian Sobchack, and Alison Landsberg, the study conceptualizes cinema as a “memory machine” capable of shaping individual and collective perceptions and affects related to history, identity, and belonging. Contemporary visual culture—marked by digitalization, distributed and ubiquitous archives, and algorithmic circulation—intensifies this mnemonic function, transforming screen-worlds into privileged spaces where memory is stored, negotiated, contested, and reimagined.

The analysis advances three interdependent directions: (1) cinema as archive, through which film consolidates cultural narratives and contributes to the formation of public memory; (2) cinema as a producer of “prosthetic memories,” generating affective experiences that complement or substitute lived experience; and (3) cinema as a space of resistance, where alternative or marginalized histories become visible and forms of counter-memory emerge.

By examining examples from both classical and contemporary cinema—including films that address trauma, political conflict, migration, and identity—the study demonstrates how screen-worlds construct mnemonic infrastructures that reorganize the ways in which communities (re)present their past. In conclusion, the article argues that film functions not merely as a medium of representation; it is, above all, a cultural and epistemic technology engaged in the continuous (re)shaping of the imaginary of modern societies.

Keywords: *cinema, filmic imaginary, mnemonic infrastructures, screen-worlds, prosthetic memory, cultural technology.*

Introduction

The present study advances a critical hypothesis that moves beyond the traditional conception of cinema as a medium of representation or archival preservation of cultural memory. The central argument maintains that film functions as an ontological apparatus for the production of the past and of reality itself, retroactively instituting the forms through which historical experiences become memorable, affectively accessible, and socially transmissible. In this sense, cinema establishes the very conditions of its possibility rather than merely preserving cultural memory. Through montage, temporalization, and affective embodiment,

screen-worlds determine what can be remembered, how it can be felt, and in what forms it may become part of the collective imaginary.

Such a perspective requires a repositioning of cultural memory theory. To this end, it is necessary to revisit the principal theoretical frameworks that have shaped the field. For Maurice Halbwachs, collective memory is socially structured and dependent upon the communal frameworks within which it is transmitted (Halbwachs 1992, 38). Jan Assmann subsequently extends this idea by defining cultural memory as “a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of a society” (Assmann 2011, 36). In this formulation, memory appears as a symbolic infrastructure organizing social experience. However, under the conditions of mediated modernity, these symbolic frameworks are inseparable from the technologies of the image and from the ways in which an image-saturated culture reshapes interpersonal relations.

In a complementary direction, Aleida Assmann emphasizes the reconstructive character of memory: “memory is never a passive storehouse of the past but an active reconstruction shaped by the cultural frameworks that give it form” (A. Assmann 2011, 15). If memory is indeed an active reconstruction, then the mechanisms through which this reconstruction operates must be examined. The thesis advanced here is that, in the audiovisual age, these mechanisms are fundamentally cinematic. The technological dimension of this shift is anticipated by Bernard Stiegler, who argues that “the human is constituted by technics” (Stiegler 1998, 141), and that memory is structurally exteriorized into technical supports (Stiegler 1998, 159–160). The concept of “tertiary memory” (*mémoire tertiaire*) designates precisely this sedimentation of experience within technical apparatuses (Stiegler 1998, 177–180). Film thus emerges as a technology for storing and reproducing the past.

Yet the present study proposes a further step: rather than merely exteriorizing memory, cinema ontologically institutes it, configuring the perceptual and affective regime through which the past becomes intelligible.

In this regard, Deleuze’s contribution is essential. In *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, Deleuze argues that the cinematic image can grant direct access to time: “the time-image does not represent time; it presents it directly” (Deleuze 1989, 35). If the time-image does not represent time but produces it as a direct experience, then cinema becomes an ontological apparatus. It generates the conditions through which the past is experienced in the present. We are no longer dealing with mere mediation, but with a process of reproducing temporality itself.

This production is inseparable from the narrative dimension. Paul Ricoeur has shown that time becomes intelligible through narrative: “time becomes human time to the extent that it is articulated through narrative” (Ricoeur 1984, 52). Applied to cinema, this insight suggests that film does not simply tell stories; it humanizes time, transforming the past into a narrative experience. Cinematic montage functions as a configurative operation, akin to what Ricoeur terms “*emplotment*” (Ricoeur 1984, 66). It is important, however, not to collapse Ricoeur’s hermeneutic narrative model into Deleuze’s ontology of the time-image. Whereas Ricoeur conceives temporality as configured through *emplotment* and narrative synthesis, Deleuze describes a cinematic regime in which time is liberated from narrative subordination and presented in its coexistence and fragmentation. The present argument does not conflate these positions; rather, it treats them as complementary dimensions of cinematic temporality: narrative configuration and ontological exposure. Cinema operates both by organizing time into intelligible plots and by suspending narrative coherence to reveal temporal multiplicity.

At the same time, the affective dimension of this experience is analyzed by Vivian Sobchack, who emphasizes the embodied nature of spectatorship: “the film experience is meaningful not to the side of our bodies but because of our bodies” (Sobchack 1992, 9). The production of the past is therefore fundamentally affective. Spectators internalize temporalities and experiences through identification and empathy, and these experiences may become personal memories.

This internalization is explicitly conceptualized by Alison Landsberg through the notion of “*prosthetic memory*”: “prosthetic memories are memories that circulate publicly, that are not organically based but that are nonetheless experienced with one’s own body” (Landsberg 2004, 2). Prosthetic memory is not derived from direct lived experience; rather, it emerges from encounters with cultural media. Film thus generates an affective proximity to the past, producing subjectivities shaped by images.

From a political perspective, this reorganization of memory may be placed in dialogue with Pierre Nora, for whom modernity produces *lieux de mémoire*, symbolic spaces that compensate for the disappearance of living memory (Nora 1989, 7). Screen-worlds may be understood as such sites of memory, yet with a crucial difference: their function is not merely to conserve but to perform and transform the past. Likewise, Jacques Rancière’s claim that art operates through a redistribution of the sensible— “politics and art both produce fictions, that is to say, material rearrangements of signs and images” (Rancière 2004, 39)—is particularly relevant here. Within this framework,

cinema does not simply represent reality; it rearranges it, modifying what can be perceived and recognized as legitimate memory.

Finally, anticipating this shift, Walter Benjamin observed that technical reproducibility transforms the relationship between past and present, granting the image a new historical function (Benjamin 2008, 21). Within the cinematic regime, this function becomes central. By bringing these perspectives into alignment, we may formulate the central thesis of this study: cinema is not merely a support for cultural memory, but an ontological apparatus that institutes the past as an affective and narrative experience. It determines how remembrance becomes possible, not merely what is remembered. In late modernity, the collective imaginary is structured predominantly through cinematic logic. Memory itself is organized according to the principles of montage, fragmented temporality, and mediated affective experience.

Accordingly, the analysis of screen-worlds must not be confined to the dimension of representation; it must address the ontological infrastructure through which film produces the memorable reality of contemporary societies. By “ontological” I do not refer to a metaphysical production of being, nor to an essentialist claim about the nature of time itself. Rather, the term designates the level at which cinema structures the conditions under which the past becomes perceptible, intelligible, and affectively inhabitable. The ontological claim advanced here concerns the regime of appearing: cinema does not create historical events but configures the experiential field within which those events can emerge as meaningful past. In this sense, ontology is understood as a theory of conditions of manifestation rather than as a theory of substances.

The Limits of the Dominant Paradigm of Cultural Memory

While the theory of cultural memory developed by Jan and Aleida Assmann has provided a foundational framework for understanding the symbolic mechanisms of remembrance, it remains predominantly anchored in a textual-institutional paradigm. Cultural memory is conceived as a system for stabilizing and transmitting meaning through durable media, whether texts, rituals, or monuments (Assmann 2011, 37–41). Although productive, this perspective implicitly assumes a relatively stable logic of archiving and sedimentation.

The present study challenges precisely this presumed stability. The critical move proposed here does not deny the explanatory power of cultural memory theory; rather, it shifts the analytical focus from symbolic durability to experiential modulation. While Assmann’s framework successfully accounts for the institutional stabilization of meaning, it leaves under-theorized the temporal instabilities, affective intensities, and perceptual reorganizations

generated by cinematic form. The difference is therefore not between archive and image, but between memory as storage and memory as event. The limitation of the archival paradigm lies not in its descriptive accuracy, but in its relative underestimation of the affective and performative dimensions of audiovisual mediation. Cultural memory theory has been predominantly concerned with durability, transmission, and symbolic stabilization; it has paid comparatively less attention to the temporal destabilizations and experiential intensifications generated by cinematic form. Within the contemporary audiovisual regime, memory no longer functions exclusively as a system of preservation; it is itself a dynamic process of affective and temporal reconfiguration. Cinema is not merely a medium for transmitting the past; it operates as an agent of its reorganization. Similarly, even when memory is conceptualized technologically—as in Stiegler’s work—the emphasis remains on the technical exteriorization of memory: “memory is always already exteriorized into technical supports” (Stiegler 1998, 17). While decisive, this claim still operates within a framework of conservation and transmission. It must be acknowledged, however, that Stiegler’s account of technics is already ontological in scope, insofar as technical exteriorization constitutes the very condition of human temporality (epiphylogenesis). The present argument does not reject this position, but shifts the emphasis from exteriorization as sedimentation toward cinema as a phenomenological reconfiguration of temporal experience. The thesis advanced here introduces a conceptual shift: cinematic technics constitute memory as an ontological experience. We are not dealing merely with a support for the past, nor solely with a process of exteriorization. Rather, cinema functions as a device for the production of temporality itself.

Likewise, Alison Landsberg’s concept of “prosthetic memory” accurately describes the affective internalization of the past through cultural media (Landsberg 2004, 2–9), yet it remains centred on the transfer of experience. The present study moves beyond this position by arguing that film does not simply transfer memory; it determines what can become memorable in the first place.

The polemical dimension of our argument thus concerns the way dominant theories treat memory primarily as an object of mediation. In contrast, this study proposes understanding cinema as an ontological regime for the production of the past. This distinction is crucial. If memory is viewed solely as cultural sediment, analysis remains confined to the level of representation. If, however, cinema is understood as an ontological apparatus, then analysis must address the mechanisms through which the past becomes experience.

The Trace-Image: Didi-Huberman and the Ontology of the Remainder

In order to sustain this theoretical shift, the integration of Georges Didi-Huberman's work is essential. In *Images malgré tout* (2003), analysing the clandestine photographs taken at Auschwitz, Didi-Huberman asserts that “l'image n'est ni toute la vérité ni son contraire: elle est trace” (Didi-Huberman 2003, 56). The image is neither the totality of truth nor a mere falsification; it is a trace—a material remainder of an event.

The concept of the trace-image introduces an ontological dimension distinct from the archival paradigm. A trace is not a stable document; it functions as a fragment, a lacuna, or a temporal fissure. Through the trace, the image does not conserve the past; it carries it as a remainder.

In *Devant le temps* (2000), Didi-Huberman formulates a fundamental thesis: “l'image ouvre le temps au lieu de le refermer” (Didi-Huberman 2000, 42). The image opens time rather than closing it. This claim is compatible with Deleuze's argument that the time-image presents time directly (Deleuze 1989, 35). Taken together, these perspectives support the working hypothesis advanced here: cinema does not fix the past; it (re)activates it as temporal tension. In this sense, the cinematic image functions as an active trace. It produces a spectral presence rather than referring to a stable, completed past.

At this point, Walter Benjamin's observation regarding the dialectical image becomes particularly relevant: “the true picture of the past flits by” (Benjamin 2008). The past is not a solid object; it appears intermittently, as a flash. Cinema amplifies this intermittence and renders it visible through the very structure of the image.

The integration of the trace-image concept thus allows us to reformulate the central thesis: cinema is not an archive in a static sense; it becomes an apparatus of the active remainder. If, for Pierre Nora, “lieux de mémoire” are sites of symbolic preservation (Nora 1989, 7), then screen-worlds perform and destabilize memory. They operate through montage, repetition, reenactment, and fragmentation. This dynamic is consistent with Jacques Rancière's notion of the redistribution of the sensible: “politics and art both produce new configurations of the visible and the sayable” (Rancière 2004, 39).

Cinema produces new configurations of visibility, and these configurations determine the regime of collective memory. Film does not merely mediate the cultural past; it challenges the reduction of memory to a stable archival model. Rather, cinema operates as an ontological apparatus of the trace, producing the past as an open and affective experience.

By integrating the concept of the trace-image and developing an explicit polemic against the archival paradigm of cultural memory, the present study reconfigures the status of cinema. Within this framework, the contemporary collective imaginary is structured cinematographically not simply because films represent the past, but because they determine the conditions under which the past becomes a lived, recurrent experience.

Archive, Trace, and Spectrality: Toward a Cinematic Ontology of Memory

The claim that screen-worlds construct mnemonic infrastructures capable of reorganizing the ways in which communities (re)present their past presupposes a radical reconsideration of the notion of the archive. In this respect, Jacques Derrida's intervention appears decisive. In *Mal d'Archive* (1995), Derrida asserts that “il n'y a pas d'archive sans un lieu de consignation” (Derrida 1995, 19).

The archive is therefore not merely a collection of documents; it is first and foremost an institutional structure that determines what may be preserved and what may be transmitted. Moreover, Derrida introduces the idea that the archive is animated by an internal tension between preservation and destruction: “l'archive travaille toujours et a priori contre elle-même” (Derrida 1995, 12).

This formulation is crucial in the present context. If the archive contains within itself a force of destabilization, then cinema—as an audiovisual archive—cannot be understood as a stable repository of the past. It is a space of tension, recurrence, and reappearance. This reappearance is conceptualized by Derrida through the notion of spectrality (hauntology), developed in *Spectres de Marx* (1994).

The specter is neither present nor absent; it is a mode of return. Applied to cinema, this logic suggests that filmic images do not fix the past; rather, they reactivate it as a spectral presence. This perspective may be placed in continuity with Didi-Huberman's argument that the image is a trace—the material remainder of an event that cannot be fully recovered: “l'image est trace d'un réel qui s'est retiré” (Didi-Huberman 2003, 60).

Within this framework, screen-worlds become sites of active spectrality. They make the past return repetitively. This return is also a problem of temporality. For Deleuze, the time-image suspends chronological succession and produces a coexistence of present and past (Deleuze 1989, 82). Derrida, in turn, emphasizes the disjointed temporality of the spectre (Derrida 1994, 10). Without forcing an equivalence, one may nevertheless observe a convergence: the cinematic image operates through a desynchronization of

time. Accordingly, the mnemonic infrastructure of screen-worlds is better understood as spectral rather than archival in the traditional sense.

The Algorithmic Image and Synthetic Memory: Extending the Mnemonic Infrastructure

Recent digital transformations require an expansion of our reflection on the mnemonic infrastructures generated by screen-worlds. If the analogue cinematic regime organized memory through montage, temporality, and material archiving, the contemporary regime of the algorithmic image introduces a fundamental and decisive mutation: memory is no longer merely recorded and reactivated; it is generated and recalculated.

In this regard, Lev Manovich’s observations in *The Language of New Media* remain essential. Manovich argues that new digital media are structured according to the logic of the database: “we may even call database a new symbolic form of the computer age” (Manovich 2001, 219). This assertion suggests that the organization of information—including images—is governed by a non-narrative, modular, and recalculable structure. If classical cinema articulated memory through narrative, digital culture articulates it through indexing, search, and recombination. In this sense, collective memory is reconfigured through algorithmic logics that determine the accessibility and visibility of images.

This structural shift is further elaborated by Mark B. N. Hansen, who in *Feed-Forward: On the Future of Twenty-First-Century Media* argues that contemporary media operate at infra-perceptual levels: “Twenty-First-Century media operate at temporal scales and levels of technical processing that exceed direct human perception” (Hansen 2015, 4).

Whereas the cinematic mnemonic infrastructure was still centred on the spectator’s perceptual experience, the algorithmic infrastructure functions partially independently of perception. Processes of classification, filtering, and image selection are automated, and this automation indirectly shapes the experience of memory. The production of the past thus increasingly depends on invisible computational procedures rather than solely on visible montage.

This transformation may be placed in dialogue with Stiegler’s concept of the technical exteriorization of memory, yet with a decisive difference. If, in the analogue regime, exteriorization implied material sedimentation, the digital regime confronts us with a dynamic, recalculable, and inherently unstable form of memory.

At the same time, Hito Steyerl draws attention to the new condition of the image in the digital age. In her essay “In Defence of the Poor Image”,

she describes the contemporary image as degraded, circulatory, and recompressed: “the poor image is a copy in motion” (Steyerl 2009, 32).

This “poor” image is no longer fixed within a stable archive. It circulates, transforms, and is continuously reused. In this process, collective memory becomes mobile and fragmented, exposed to constant remixing. The image thus functions as a node within a network of distribution rather than as a singular material trace.

Moreover, the proliferation of images generated by artificial intelligence introduces a new ontological problem. If the trace-image presupposed an indirect relation to a past event, the synthetic image may be produced without any original referent. This capacity for artificial generation transforms the status of memory insofar as the past can be reconstructed through probabilistic modelling, and the visual experience of an event can be simulated even if it was never filmed.

Memory thus becomes not merely dependent on reactivation, but increasingly oriented toward anticipatory construction. Within the algorithmic regime, the mnemonic infrastructure operates through prediction and generation, not solely through preservation. The image is no longer exclusively a trace of a withdrawn reality; it may be produced as a visual hypothesis of a possible past. This mutation does not abolish the cinematic function of memory; rather, it amplifies and complicates it.

Screen-worlds now coexist with algorithmic flows that select, prioritize, and generate images, shaping a collective imaginary dependent upon globally distributed technical infrastructures. Within this ecosystem, cultural memory becomes a matter of technological architecture, extending beyond the domains of representation and affect.

Extending the analysis toward the algorithmic image therefore does not constitute a rupture with the ontological hypothesis advanced in this study. If film instituted the conditions of possibility of memory within audiovisual modernity, algorithmic technologies now institute new conditions in which the production of the past is accelerated, decentralized, and at times partially automated. This transformation compels cultural memory theory to consider not only the symbolic and experiential frameworks of remembrance, but also the computational structures that mediate the circulation of images. In the age of artificial intelligence, the mnemonic infrastructure is no longer exclusively cinematic; it is also algorithmic.

In conclusion, deepfake technology introduces a radical mutation in the regime of the trace-image, producing representations with documentary appearance yet lacking a stable original referent, thereby destabilizing the

distinction between trace and simulation and transforming visual memory into a field of negotiation between authenticity and algorithmic generation. At the same time, AI-assisted restorations of historical archives do not merely recover the degraded materiality of images; they reconfigure the visibility of the past through predictive interventions, in which the algorithm fills in gaps and reshapes the contemporary experience of memory.

Screen-Worlds as Mnemonic Infrastructures: Cinematic Applications

The notion of mnemonic infrastructure employed here designates the ensemble of formal, technical, and affective operations through which images organize collective temporality. It exceeds the concept of archive insofar as it includes not only preservation but also reenactment, fragmentation, repetition, spectral return, and algorithmic selection. A mnemonic infrastructure does not merely contain memory; it structures the conditions under which memory circulates, intensifies, and acquires experiential force.

The claim that screen-worlds construct mnemonic infrastructures capable of reorganizing the ways in which communities (re)present their past can be demonstrated through a careful analysis of cinematic works that do not merely represent history but produce forms of experiencing the past.

For instance, Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) remains one of the most sophisticated cinematic meditations on traumatic memory. The opening sequence, in which intertwined bodies are covered with a powder resembling atomic ash, does not directly represent the explosion in Hiroshima. Rather, the image evokes its trace—not as a document, but as an affective materialization of a historical event that cannot be fully represented. In this sense, we may invoke what Didi-Huberman terms the “trace-image”—the image as the remainder of a withdrawn reality (Didi-Huberman 2003, 60).

The film's temporal structure is fragmented. The protagonist's memories of Nevers infiltrate the narrative present, and montage produces a coexistence of temporal planes. This dislocation recalls what Deleuze describes as the time-image, in which the past is not recounted retrospectively but coexists with the present (Deleuze 1989, 82). Within this framework, memory is unstable and returns as a specter in the Derridean sense: the past is neither fully absent nor fully present; it persists as continuous return (Derrida 1994, 10).

The film thus reorganizes the collective memory of war through affective internalization. Historical trauma is transferred through embodied experience, confirming Sobchack's observation that the film

experience is lived through the body (Sobchack 1992, 9). Through cinema, Hiroshima becomes an affective mnemonic infrastructure.

A similar dynamic can be observed in *Videograms of a Revolution* (Andrei Ujică & Harun Farocki, 1992). Here, archival material—video footage from the Romanian Revolution of 1989—is reorganized through montage, and this reorganization produces a new regime of memory. The event, initially broadcast live, is replayed and reordered, transforming the archive into a performative space. Derrida observed that the archive implies a place of consignment and an authority (Derrida 1995, 19). Through montage, the film destabilizes this authority, revealing the constructed character of official memory. The historical event no longer appears as given; it emerges as the result of visual mediation.

The repeated image of the regime’s fall generates a spectral return of the revolutionary moment. Each replay modifies the collective perception of the event. In this sense, the film contributes to the reorganization of the post-communist imaginary not by adding information, but by reconfiguring the ways in which the past is seen.

In another production, *The Act of Killing* (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2012), the memory of the Indonesian genocide is reconstructed through reenactment. The perpetrators stage their own crimes in settings inspired by Hollywood cinema. This theatricalization of the past produces a profoundly destabilizing effect in which memory becomes performative. Didi-Huberman argues that the image is not a totality; it is most often a fragment (2003, 56). In Oppenheimer’s film, reenactment exposes precisely the impossibility of a coherent memory. The past appears as simulacrum, and this simulation reveals the gaps within the official archive.

Spectrality is evident here. Absent victims return through reconstructed spaces and gestures. The film does not provide a traditional archive; rather, it produces a counter-memory insofar as it reorganizes the global perception of a neglected historical event. The refusal to rely on conventional archival footage constitutes a fundamental theoretical gesture.

A comparable strategy can be observed in Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* (1985), where contemporary landscapes—fields, railway tracks, forests—are filmed as carriers of an absent memory. Space itself functions as trace. As Didi-Huberman suggests, the image may open time rather than close it (2000, 42). In *Shoah*, the long takes of landscapes do not explain the past; they compel it to return in an ongoing sequence. The spectator confronts an absence that generates spectral presence. Through this strategy, the film contributes to the reorganization of Holocaust memory. It does not offer an illustrative archive; instead, it constructs an affective experience of the

trace. In this sense, Shoah becomes a paradigmatic example of cinematic mnemonic infrastructure.

In all these cases, the archive is destabilized, time is fractured, and the trace becomes active. Cinema produces a spectral experience of memory, reorganizing the ways in which communities represent their history. Screen-worlds reactivate the past and transform memory from sediment into a dynamic process of return and reconfiguration. Within this logic, the mnemonic infrastructure of cinema is inherently tensioned, evoking a space in which the past is continually renegotiated through image, affect, and montage.

Conclusion

Consequently, the study of cultural memory in the audiovisual age must move beyond the paradigm of preservation and adopt a perspective oriented toward production and transformation. Cinema is not merely a vehicle of remembrance; it functions as a technology that configures the conditions of possibility of remembrance itself. Within its visual and affective infrastructures, the past is continuously reshaped, and communities define their continuity not through sedimentation, but through reactivation.

The contemporary collective imaginary is therefore inseparable from the cinematic logic of the trace and of return. Memory is (re)produced through the filmic imaginary rather than merely preserved on the screen. This dynamic becomes even more visible in the current digital context, where images circulate through algorithmic networks, are recontextualized through automated montage, and regenerated through artificial intelligence technologies. If analog cinema produced mnemonic infrastructures through montage and archiving, the digital regime amplifies this function through multiplication, remixing, and synthetic generation. Within this new framework, the past can be reconstructed through visual simulation, digital restoration, or algorithmic re-creation.

The emergence of AI-generated images further complicates the status of the trace. If the trace-image presupposes a material relation to a withdrawn event, the synthetic image introduces a new ontological problem: what occurs when memory is produced without an originating event? In this sense, contemporary mnemonic infrastructures no longer operate solely through the return of the specter; they also generate “specters without origin,” configuring an imaginary in which the distinction between document and construction becomes unstable. Unlike Derridean spectrality, which presupposes the return of a prior presence, algorithmic generation introduces a spectral logic without anteriority. These images do not return from the past; they

simulate a possible past through probabilistic modeling. The mutation is therefore not the disappearance of the trace, but its displacement into predictive computation. What emerges is not the ghost of what has been, but the hypothesis of what could have been. The algorithmic image thus marks a mutation of the trace rather than its disappearance.

At the same time, the digital archive—once fixed within a stable place of consignment—is now distributed across global networks, subject to algorithmic selection and platform-controlled logics of visibility. Collective memory is thus filtered through technical mechanisms that determine which images circulate, which returns are privileged, and which traces are marginalized. In this context, mnemonic infrastructure becomes inseparable from technological infrastructure.

Accordingly, the analysis of screen-worlds must be extended toward the broader field of digital visual culture, where traditional cinema coexists with streaming platforms, social networks, and automatically generated images. If, in classical modernity, film reorganized memory through montage and temporality, in contemporary culture this reorganization is accelerated, decentralized, and in certain cases technologically automated.

In light of these transformations, the ontological hypothesis advanced in this study gains renewed relevance. Not only does film configure the conditions of possibility of cultural memory, but emerging audiovisual regimes—including those supported by artificial intelligence—continue to reconfigure and expand these conditions. Within this framework, memory no longer appears as stable sediment of the past; it is instituted as a dynamic process of generation, reordering, and simulation. The collective imaginary thus emerges at the intersection of trace, montage, and algorithm.

The originality of this argument lies in relocating cinema from the domain of representation to that of ontological modulation. Rather than treating film as a medium that reflects cultural memory, this study conceptualizes it as a regime that structures the experiential field within which memory becomes possible. In doing so, it reframes cultural memory not as a repository of stabilized meanings, but as a dynamic process of temporal production.

In the digital age, the question is no longer solely how we represent the past, but how it is produced, redistributed, and reimagined through visual technologies that exceed the limits of classical cinema. Screen-worlds remain essential mnemonic infrastructures; yet they are now embedded within a broader ecosystem of images in which return, simulation, and generation coexist. In this configuration, memory does not disappear; it

transforms its mode of existence, becoming a field continuously negotiated between materiality, affect, and computation.

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