

Memories of cinemagoing and film experience: An introduction

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Abstract

Over the past two decades, the relationship between cinema and memory has been the object of increasing academic attention, with growing interest in film and cinema as repositories for representing, shaping, (re) creating or indexing forms of individual and collective memory. This Special Issue on memory and the experience of cinemagoing centres on the perspective of cinema users and audiences, focusing on memories of films, cinema and cinemagoing from three continents and over five decades of the twentieth century. This introduction considers the relationship between memory studies and film studies, sets out an overview of the origins of, and recent and current shifts and trends within, research and scholarship at the interface between historical film audiences, the cinemagoing experience and memory; and presents the articles and reviews which follow within this frame. It considers some of the methodological issues raised by research in these areas and concludes by looking at some of the challenges facing future work in the field.

Keywords

audiences, cinemagoing, cinema memory, ethnohistory, historical reception

Over the past two decades, the relationship between cinema and memory has been the object of increasing academic attention, with growing interest in film and cinema as repositories for representing, shaping, (re)creating or indexing forms of individual and collective memories. This *Memory Studies* Special Issue on memory and the experience of cinemagoing centres on the perspective of cinema users and audiences, focusing upon people's memories of films, cinema and

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cinemagoing across three continents and over five decades of the twentieth century. It is organised to address a series of themes pertinent to current conceptual and methodological developments in historical film reception studies, in which attention to questions of memory has played a key role in understanding the cultural and social contexts and cultural instrumentalities of cinemagoing. This *Memory Studies* issue emerged from papers presented at two international conferences organised by the History of Moviegoing, Exhibition and Reception network (HoMER). From 60 or so draft papers submitted in advance of the conferences, five were selected for revision and inclusion here.¹ The materials presented in the Reviews section also follow a broad focus on cinemagoing and on film, cinema and memory.

In introducing this Special Issue, we propose to set its contents in context: firstly, by taking a brief look at the relationship between memory studies and film studies and, secondly, by setting out an overview of the origins of, and recent and current shifts and trends within, research and scholarship at the interface between historical film audiences, the cinemagoing experience and memory, and present the articles which follow within this frame. Third, we consider some of the methodological issues raised by research in these areas; and conclude by looking at some of the issues and challenges facing future work in the field.

Memory studies and film studies

Memory studies is a multi-, and at times interdisciplinary, area of inquiry that takes as its objects the processes by which collective memory is shaped in different cultures, the ways in which societies institutionalise collective memory through commemorations of the past in museums, festivals, and so on; and the part played by these activities in producing various forms of social and cultural identity. In a recent issue of this journal, it was proposed that, as a consequence of its increasing focus on the ways in which memories circulate and migrate in and between cultures, memory studies has become ‘one of the few truly interdisciplinary enterprises that travel easily – if not always comfortably – between the humanities and the social sciences’ (Vermeulen et al., 2012: 224), and the work presented here certainly supports this view. Memory studies is indeed a multidisciplinary field, if not always an interdisciplinary one. It draws on and addresses a considerable diversity of disciplines: psychology, literary studies, history, art history, sociology, cultural and media studies, film studies and more. While this can be a source of intellectual vitality, there is also the risk that memory studies can become an ‘incoherent and dispersed field, characterized by a host of different terminologies rather than a common, generally-agreed-upon conceptual foundation’ (Vermeulen et al., 2012: 224). Moreover, to the extent that a good deal of work within memory studies has concerned itself with issues like trauma and memory, Holocaust memory and ‘postmemory’ (Hirsch, 1997), there has been a tendency to emphasise the dysphoric as against the pleasurable aspects of cultural memory and to focus on event-memory as against everyday memory. In both these respects, perhaps, memory work on past cinemagoing offers an answer to the call for memory studies to ‘cheer up’ (Vermeulen et al., 2012: 232).

In a very recent survey of the state of memory studies, Annamaria Dutceac Segesten and Jenny Wüstenberg (2016: 9) identify film, media and communication studies as among the ‘prominent fields’ within the discipline. This is not surprising, given that over the past century, collective memory has been crucially informed by mass media, including and perhaps especially audiovisual media like cinema. Arguing that mass media might be a privileged arena for the production and circulation of ‘prosthetic’ memories, Alison Landsberg claims that

cinema, in particular, as an institution which makes available images for mass consumption, has long been aware of its ability to generate experiences and to install memories of them—memories which become experiences that film consumers both possess and feel possessed by. (Landsberg, 1995: 176)

Scholarship over recent decades indicates that cinema's relationship with memory operates at several, sometimes overlapping, levels. For example, cinema memory – people's memories of the essentially social activity of going to the cinema – can form part of a broader stream of cultural or collective memory. Films may reference or commemorate past, often traumatic, events or bring to mind ones that have been forgotten or repressed; and they may even actively construct cultural memory. Memory can also, arguably, constitute a mood or sensibility in a film, and memory can be expressed and evoked through formal and stylistic features that are peculiar to cinema. Cinema's entire corpus can even be regarded as a repository, or an archive, of memory. Since the 1990s, alongside a rise of interest in questions of memory across a range of disciplines, film studies has seen the development of many and various inquiries into cinema and memory, including work on film as 'memory text'; on cinema, modernity and memory; on memory, intertextuality and pastiche in film; on cinephilia and memory; on trauma, memory and film; as well as on cinema, audiences and cultural memory (see, for example, Elm et al., 2014; Grainge, 2003; Jelaca, 2016; Kilbourn, 2010; Kuhn, 2005; Radstone, 2001).²

Historical cinema audiences, the cinemagoing experience and memory

This issue of *Memory Studies* is devoted to a very particular area of intersection between cinema and memory: people's memories of their past cinemagoing habits and experiences. Here, the relationship between cinema and memory can be seen as part of the historical study of film reception and of cinemagoing as a social practice, and thus of the ways in which we think about cinema audiences of the past. In film studies, a general attention to the historical study of cinema audiences was motivated by calls from within the discipline for attention to cultural, institutional and historical issues in the study of cinema alongside the discipline's often default focus on film texts, and to promote a rigorous, evidence-based approach to such historical study.

In the 1980s, in response to a series of debates within feminist film scholarship about female spectatorship in cinema, this challenge gave rise first of all to efforts to distinguish the essentially social and cultural notion of the cinema audience from that of the spectator, where spectatorship is understood as a mental or psychological relationship or engagement with the film text. This was an issue of particular concern for feminist film scholarship, especially given the well-documented popularity of the 1940s Hollywood woman's picture and the magnitude of cinema's appeal to female audiences in general during the heyday of Hollywood.³ A number of scholars investigated the woman's picture's themes and address as a means of exploring the relationship between films – in this instance, films of a particular genre – and the real women who watched them (Kuhn, 1984; Kuhn, 1994: 197–217; Walsh, 1984). Under the influence of cultural studies work on television audiences and on consumers of popular literature aimed at women (Ang, 1985; Morley, 1980; Radway, 1984), this new attention to the female cinemagoer fed into a number of small-scale empirical studies of female cinema audiences both past and present: Jacqueline Bobo (1988) conducted a study of black women's contemporary responses to the film *The Color Purple* (Steven Spielberg, US, 1985), Helen Taylor (1989) looked at female fans of *Gone with the Wind* (Victor Fleming, US, 1939); and, drawing on research conducted in the late 1980s, Jackie Stacey (1994) investigated British women's recollections of seeing Hollywood films during the 1950s.

At the same time, a similar turn towards attention to the reception of films was emerging within film history. In 1985, Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery's *Film History: Theory and Practice* argued for a rigorous, empirical approach towards research and scholarship in film history and for giving proper attention to the technological, economic, social and aesthetic contexts in which films were produced, distributed, exhibited and consumed. Alongside, David Bordwell, Janet Staiger

and Kristin Thompson's landmark formal-historical study, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1985), Allen and Gomery's book pioneered a 'revisionist' approach to film-historical research, emphasising the importance of systematic archival inquiry involving both textual and contextual primary source material, as against the emphasis on canonical directors and their masterpieces that had dominated previous histories of film and cinema. The revisionist approach transformed the historical study of cinema, of US cinema in particular; and in the historical study of the reception and consumption of American films, Janet Staiger's (1992) groundbreaking *Interpreting Films* was to prove especially influential in Anglophone film studies. Subsequently, a series of scholarly volumes published in Britain and edited by Richard Maltby and Melvyn Stokes, both with backgrounds in American Studies, looked at the history of Hollywood's audiences (Maltby and Stokes, 2007; Stokes and Maltby, 1999a, 1999b, 2001). A further historical volume, *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Cinema*, focused on the activity of cinemagoing and its social dimensions (Maltby et al., 2007). A few years later, *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies* (Maltby et al., 2011) marked a shift away from a dominant focus on Hollywood and its audiences, taking a transnational approach to the subject and launching the 'new cinema history', 'an emerging trend in research into cinema history [that] has shifted its focus away from the content of films to consider their circulation and consumption, and to examine the cinema as a site of social and cultural exchange' (Maltby, 2011: 3).

Extending the focus on historical cinema audiences and cinemagoing, several large-scale inquiries have engaged explicitly with the question of cinema memory, developing a range of 'memory work' methods. In the mid 1990s, inspired by both feminist work on female cinema audiences and revisionist film history, Annette Kuhn embarked on a long-term historical inquiry into cinemagoing in Britain with a study of cinema culture and femininity in the 1930s (Kuhn, 1996). The large-scale follow-on project, 'Cinema Culture in 1930s Britain: Ethnohistory of a Popular Cultural Practice', was a pioneering inquiry involving as participants male and female cinemagoers across Britain, with key findings published in the landmark *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory* (Kuhn, 2002). A study of the history of cinema culture in the British Midlands city of Nottingham by Mark Jancovich et al. (2003) emphasised film consumption and the place of the audience and involved a mapping of the cultural geography of cinemagoing, with each cinema in the city associated with a specific form of consumption. Beginning in 2005, inspired by the work of Kuhn and of Jancovich and his colleagues, Daniel Biltereyst and Philippe Meers led a series of film-historical projects on audiences, programming and exhibition cultures in the Dutch-speaking northern part of Belgium (Meers et al., 2010a, 2010b). All these inquiries were distinctive in attempting to reconstruct cinema cultures 'from below', gathering and drawing on informant-generated source materials – the testimonies of cinemagoers themselves, speaking or writing decades after the events being recalled.

Kuhn's adoption for her project of the term 'ethnohistory' (referring originally to a field of inquiry emerging in the 1940s whose objective was to document the histories of non-literate societies) signalled an intent to use oral and other informant-generated accounts as a key research resource alongside sources and research protocols of other kinds – film fan magazines of the period, for example – and to take a discursive and context-aware approach to sources and findings. Above all, the aim was to respect informants as collaborators while making no presumptions as to the transparency of their accounts (Kuhn, 2002: 6–7, 240–54). While all source materials can be treated either as evidence and/or as material for interpretation, the latter is perhaps particularly pertinent when working with accounts of events and everyday life patterns of the past: *how* people remember is as much a text to be deciphered as *what* they remember (Kuhn, 2002: 9–12). Cinema memory work involving informants' accounts is often conducted in tandem with other types of film-historical inquiry, drawing on conventional primary and secondary source materials to

research histories of, say, exhibition (the places where films are consumed) and programming (what audiences consume) (Biltreyst et al., 2012) – a multi-source strategy that opens up fresh perspectives on the physical and institutional contexts of film consumption while also allowing for the triangulation of research findings. As Robert C. Allen notes, inquiries that incorporate memory work on films and the cinema experience have profound historiographic and theoretical implications for film studies in that ‘they exponentially increase the number and variety of available film histories’ and ‘implicitly contest both the empiricist objectification of film history and the epistemological authority of the interpretive analyst’ (Allen, 2006: 23).

Currently, a consolidation or critical mass in investigations of cinemagoing memory is observable, in that many recent and new projects are both enriching and confirming the findings of earlier ones, in relation to the *how* as well as the *what* of cinemagoing memories. While there are nuances in terms of local or national context, period, gender and so on, it is repeatedly observed, for example, that informants tend not to recollect details, or even titles, of the films they saw – rather, memories of ‘going to the pictures’ – when, where and with whom – are most prominent in memory accounts, as are descriptions of the cinemas regularly patronised, especially their location in the neighbourhood and the topography of the journey from home to cinema. Broadly speaking, too, cinemagoing memories are expressed in collective rather than individual or personal terms – informants tend to implicate themselves in events being recalled by saying ‘we’ rather than ‘I’: the recurrence of this trope confirms a persistent sense of recollected shared experience, suggesting that informants associate their past cinemagoing with sociability and with membership of particular social, cultural or familial groups. However, rather than suggesting that we have reached a point of data saturation and no longer need to pursue these studies, such repeated observations may be seen as an indication of the robustness of the research methods and the reliability of the findings. They add appreciably to our understanding of how cinema memory – and cultural memory more generally – works, while building on these findings enables further sophistication in research design and increased nuance in research findings.

For example, the simple strategy of bringing together findings from different inquiries opens up promising possibilities for comparative studies. Over the past decade or more, the field of cinema memory studies has seen expansion in Australia (Huggett, 2002), as well as in the United Kingdom (Martin, 2000; Richards, 2003) and other parts of Europe, including Spain (Labanyi, 2005; Luzon et al., 2014; Paz, 2003), Sweden (Jernudd, 2010) and Italy (Treveri Gennari et al., 2011). More recently, cinema memory research has also begun to emerge elsewhere: for example, in Mexico (Frankenberg and Lozano, 2014; Lozano et al., 2016; Rosas Mantecón, 2015) and Brazil (Ferraz, in press). The articles in this issue showcase this international wave of cinema memory studies, with work from Italy, the Czech Republic, the US/Mexican border area, South Africa and the United Kingdom that looks at memories of cinemagoing across entire nations as well as within cities, city neighbourhoods and towns.⁴ Alongside their geographical spread, the case studies presented in the articles cover the period from the 1920s to the 1960s – the decades of the twentieth century before the arrival of the multiplex, home cinema and other changes in modes of film exhibition and consumption when going to the cinema was an essential leisure-time activity for millions everywhere. They document experiences that are no longer available, but which remain vivid in the memories of those who took part in them, and their findings raise important questions for the future of inquiry into cinema memory.

This Special Issue opens with an article by Jacqueline Maingard on memories of cinemagoing in a mixed-race neighbourhood of the South African city of Cape Town that was effectively razed in the 1960s on the orders of the then apartheid government. In ‘Cinemagoing in District Six, Cape Town, 1920s to 1960s: History, politics, memory’, Maingard argues that these memories reference not

only the inevitable lostness of the past, then, but also the literal erasure of the sites of those memories, the impossibility of revisiting the places of one's youth. The author searches for memories of cinemagoing in a set of recorded and transcribed life history interviews with former District Six residents: these were conducted as a community project during the 1980s and 2000s and are preserved in a local museum. Embedded in the interview transcripts, she finds cinemagoing memories that go as far back as the 1920s. Analysed discursively, three key cinema memory themes emerge from these fragmented life stories: cinema and place; cinema, culture and identity; and films, film shows and stars – with residents' remembered experiences revealing the peculiarities of cinemagoing in a vanished locale that remains vivid in collective memory.

From the liminal space between the United States and Mexico, José Carlos Lozano's 'Film at the border: Memories of cinemagoing in Laredo, Texas' records memories of cinemagoing between the 1930s and the 1960s of 28 men and women ranging in age from 64 to 95 years living in the border town of Laredo. Lozano explores their recollections of United States and Mexican films, actors and local cinemas against the background of a fluid and complex border. In particular, he considers what these memories of cinemagoing reveal about the negotiation of cultural identities among citizens with strong connections to their Mexican cultural and linguistic heritage who are also formed by the structural characteristics of the US political, economic and educational systems.

In "'Feel the film": Film projectionists and professional memory', Lucie Česálková draws on sociological concepts of professional memory and communities of practice in investigating the profession of film projectionist as a phenomenon at the boundaries of memory studies, sociology, social anthropology and film history. Drawing on interviews with two generations of film projectionists in Brno in the Czech Republic, Česálková revises and refines the concept of cinema memory as it is more usually conceived – from the cinemagoer's perspective. Her article sets out and discusses the tropes of projectionists' memories in the context of the occupation's legal background, professional status, standards of good practice and of relationships between colleagues. It takes into account informants' perceptions of the obsolescence of traditional screening techniques and explores the significance of *film screening quality* and the related perception of the projectionist as *creator of a screening* as key motifs in informants' memories.

'Mapping cinema memories: Emotional geographies of cinemagoing in Rome in the 1950s' explores the power of visualising, through maps ('geo-visualization'), audiences' remembered experiences of cinemagoing in urban spaces ('emotional geographies'). In their contribution, Pierluigi Ercole, Daniela Treveri Gennari and Catherine O'Rawe use geo-visualisation to illustrate the emotional dimensions of cinema memory. Examining the imbrication of memory and space, the authors offer a case study of one female informant to construct a map of her cinema memories. In this way, the article adds to our understanding of broader issues around remembering place and experiencing space – of the relationship between objective-geographical and subjective-remembered space, the importance of mobility and the relation between all these and the life-course.

In 'Windows on the world: Memories of European cinema in 1960s Britain', Melvyn Stokes and Matthew Jones consider the appeal of continental European and other non-English language films for the British 1960s generation. Of close to a thousand men and women who contributed memories of their youthful cinemagoing through questionnaires and interviews, a surprisingly large number mentioned seeing and enjoying films from continental Europe, naming such favoured directors as Bergman, Fellini and Truffaut. As the authors point out, the 1960s expansion of British higher education coincided with the heyday of the film society movement, extending the availability of art cinema and non-English language films outside the metropolis and making them available to a new audience of educated young people, and in the process perhaps forming a distinctive generation of film-lovers.

Doing cinema memory studies: methodological issues

Covering a range of remembered experiences of cinemagoing across various spatial and temporal confines, the contributions to this issue also present striking degrees of input from different humanities and social science disciplines: area studies, ethnography, history, geography and sociology. This is true of both their objects of study and their approaches to, and perspectives on, these objects. Also noticeable is the degree of interdisciplinarity they demonstrate. All the contributions are rooted in film/cinema studies and memory studies, but each also engages other disciplines: the sociology of professional formation (Česálková), Latin American and Chicano studies (Lozano), social and cultural geography (Ercole et al.) and social history (Stokes and Jones, Maingard). As noted above, cutting across this disciplinary variety is the ever-broadening range of national contexts and territories coming under examination in terms of their cinema cultures. From very local micro-identities in a neighbourhood of Rome (Ercole et al.) through ethnically defined and state-imposed identities (Maingard) to intercultural and cross-linguistic encounters (Lozano), these various inquiries shed light on the role played by cinema – and cinema memory – in the complex and dynamic processes of identity formation – be it national, ethnic, local, professional or even cinephilic identity, or a combination of any of these.

Another distinctive feature of cinema memory research is the mix of approaches, modes of investigation, source materials, data and uses of data it deploys and creates. Among the contributions to this issue, Jacqueline Maingard's is exceptional in drawing on a valuable archive of oral history life-story testimonies already in the public domain to unearth the cinemagoing memories embedded in them. Among the many benefits of this underused approach is that past cinemagoing is by definition recalled in the broader context of memories of everyday life. Other contributions draw mainly on informant-generated source materials gathered expressly for the project. Both these approaches give a voice to ordinary cinemagoers – or, in the case of Česálková's project, cinema employees. A number of the contributions also offer novel perspectives on some classic tropes of film studies. Stokes and Jones's work on memories of 1960s cinemagoing, for example, offers up a perhaps surprising perspective on film studies thinking on art cinema and authorship by setting these within a social history of 'film appreciation' and expanded educational opportunity (MacDonald, 2016). Life in apartheid South Africa acquires a very concrete meaning when government policies are supplemented – or countered – with detailed accounts, like those discussed by Maingard, of daily life in this racist regime. Similarly, in Eastern-bloc Czechoslovakia state policy affected the working lives of the cinema employees interviewed by Česálková and her colleagues. In both cases, informants' cinema memories shed light on everyday tactics of accommodation to – and subversion of – the official line (De Certeau, 1984).

Attendant upon these varied disciplinary inputs and perspectives is a range of preferred source materials, research designs and methodological approaches. This is perhaps one of the most distinctive and vital aspects of research on the cinemagoing experience and cinema memory. Among preferred sources, informant-generated materials are clearly prominent, and it has been customary for these to be gathered expressly for the project in hand. A diversity of styles and methods is deployed in creating such source material: these may range from the quantitative and nomothetic (questionnaires, for example) through semi-intensive focus group work to highly qualitative and idiographic projects adopting variants of oral or life history methods, or open interviews (sometimes filmed so that nonverbal information can be included, as in the Italian Cinema Audiences project presented in this issue). However, in order to locate the lived experiences of cinemagoers in their social, historical and cultural contexts and to investigate the role of cinemagoing within everyday life and leisure culture, scholars turn most often to qualitative methodologies, small research designs and micro-level ethnographic approaches – interviews, observations, diaries and other written and spoken

accounts, testimonies and memories. Oral history gives a voice to the kinds of memories that are seldom written down and would therefore normally be lost. The aim of oral history research on cinemagoing is not to objectively reconstruct the past based on subjective memories of respondents, but to look at how memories of cinemagoing are constructed and how they complement (or contradict) institutional, economic or text-based approaches to the historical study of film reception. The methods of oral history research and the ethnohistorical methods used in cinema memory studies are not identical, however; but cinema memory researchers do draw very productively on the idea of 'history from below' that is the foundation of the oral history movement.

Most of the informant-generated source material deployed in cinema memory studies is qualitative rather than quantitative, therefore. This throws up difficulties of its own. Unstructured interviews in particular can be difficult to manage, presenting challenges of storage, handling, accessibility, searchability and analysis. However, new digital research tools are transforming opportunities and practices in qualitative research. Computer-aided qualitative data analysis tools such as NVivo ease the searchability and systematise the analysis of interview materials. Digital audiovisual recording tools make it possible to engage with informants' nonverbal communications. The Internet has opened up countless opportunities for communication with informants: Stokes and Jones, for example, were able to gather cinemagoing memories from nearly a thousand informants by means of the simple device of an online questionnaire, and were able to make initial contact with a number of their interviewees in this way. Some projects allow users to add their own experiences and memories via online platforms, transforming them into data-gathering tools. More specialised applications such as the geo-visualization and geographic information system (GIS) deployed by Ercole et al. map and analyse the topographical cinema memories that are so prevalent in informants' accounts. Digital tools can also contribute to the dissemination and valorisation of research findings, and a number of cinema memory studies have grasped the opportunity to share their findings, interviews and analyses with other scholars and with the wider public through websites and apps.⁵

Conclusion: challenges and opportunities

As the study of cinemagoing and memory expands in scope and grows in sophistication, future research in the field will face new opportunities and challenges, some of them substantive, others epistemological or methodological. The best of this work is undoubtedly intensely methodologically aware, with research procedures that are robust in terms of production of good data, rigour in analysing it and clarity in presenting it. There is wide variation here, however. Substantively, a number of issues call for further in-depth investigation. The place of film(s), for instance, remains a significant challenge for cinema memory studies: how far can we trust the impression given by informants' memories that the actual films they saw were relatively unimportant to them? ⁶ Is this observation an effect of long-term memory or of the fact that investigators' research questions tend to focus on cinemagoing as a social habit? Perhaps not surprisingly, in comparison with studies of past cinemagoing, responses of contemporary cinema audiences (Aveyard, 2011, 2015b, reviewed in this issue) show a significantly higher tendency to include the titles of films seen. And how are we to assess the repeatedly observed shared or collective quality of cinema memory discourse? While this is a useful reminder of the intertwining of personal and collective in cultural memory, some researchers have pointed to the 'inherently (and continuously) reconstructive character' of memory and to the convergence of memory narratives among people of the same generation, suggesting that this might prove somewhat problematic when oral history material is interpreted alongside other kinds of informant-generated data. Some have even warned against 'a new fetishism of oral sources', replacing the fetishism of the written document (Bourdon, 2015: 16).

How, then, can cinema memory researchers gauge the reliability (are similar results found when a study is repeated?), the validity (how far do our findings really represent cinema memories?) and the transparency (is the design and conduct of our research properly explained to colleagues?) of our data? And is the fact that findings are repeated or confirmed from one study to another a problem or a strength? It certainly suggests that research methods are robust and even predictive. Is information saturation positive here, though, or does it point to a lack of imagination in the formulation of research questions and/or the design of interview theme checklists? One suggestion might be to make raw data – interviews, surveys and so on – more widely available, possibly for re-use by future researchers. Although not currently a widespread practice, this could be helpful in testing the validity and reliability of research findings, as well as offering opportunities for further analysis and deeper interpretation of existing research data.

When combining qualitative memory data with data of other kinds, issues around the triangulation of different source materials and findings can arise (see Biltereyst et al., 2012): the amalgamation of very different kinds of data can be a source of confusion as well as of complementarity. Also, depending on the time period under scrutiny, simply collecting cinemagoing memories assumes some urgency: with every year that passes, fewer and fewer survivors of the era of everyday cinemagoing remain to tell their stories – another good reason, too, for revisiting data from earlier investigations. As living sources disappear, it is ever more important to reflect on the afterlife of cinema memory findings once a project is completed and the academic publications have appeared. Digital tools offer considerable opportunities here, questions of research ethics notwithstanding: the benefits of making research material widely available for consultation and re-use have to be balanced against the rights to privacy of informants, deceased or otherwise, and their families.

Non-theatrical modes of film distribution and exhibition, including but not limited to home cinema, downloads and television (broadcast, satellite and cable), have substantial implications for future cinema memory studies, methods and findings (Kuhn, 2013). For younger generations, the contemporary multiplex is the main public space for consuming film; but even more significant is the fact that people's earliest memories of film will in future be associated first and foremost with consumption via television, downloads and portable devices: 'digital natives' typically consume large quantities of films in domestic or other private contexts before ever setting foot inside a cinema. The complexities of the contemporary cinema and media landscape, in which the cinema memories of the millennial generation will be forged, make future cinema memory work ever more fascinating, demanding constant rethinking and re-evaluation of research resources and strategies.

As already noted, another particularly fruitful path towards refining and expanding cinema memory research is comparative work – at a micro-level (between cities, towns and villages within a single region), mid level (between different regions within a single country) and macro level (between countries and continents) (Biltereyst and Meers, 2016). Some research of this kind, involving several national and regional research teams operating in networks, is already under way.⁷ Comparative study can be particularly productive in that it allows for a better understanding of larger trends, factors or conditions, and thus for an improved grasp of differences and similarities in remembered experiences of cinemagoing.

A particularly valuable area for comparative inquiry is suggested by the relative underdevelopment of cinema memory research outside Europe, the United States, Australia and other regions associated with Eurocentrism. Investigations conducted in Mexico and Brazil, for instance, suggest that alongside the similarities noted above, in terms of such issues as social class, ethnicity and race there is also a degree of distinctiveness both in what people remember about their youthful cinemagoing and in how they frame these memories (for example, see Biltereyst and Meers, 2016).

As regards extending the interdisciplinarity of cinema memory research, some interesting potential lines of inquiry are suggested by a number of recent studies in neuroscience, psychology and object-relations psychoanalysis. For example, memory psychologists refer to the ‘reminiscence bump’, a critical period in individual development between the ages of 5 and 30 when personal and collective memories are laid down, with personal memories tending to be associated with childhood and collective memories with adolescence and early adulthood (Schuman and Corning, 2014). Here, it is worth noting once again that cinema memory research has repeatedly signalled an association between collectively-framed cinemagoing memories and late childhood and adolescence. Interestingly, the neuroscientist Jeffrey Zacks notes that for many people, the very act of watching a film as an adult stimulates memories of late adolescence (Zacks, 2015). This observation seems to be backed up, from a different perspective, by the sociocultural psychologist Tania Zittoun, who draws on the work of the object-relations psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott, on current research in sociocultural psychology and on informants’ testimonies to investigate how, during adolescence, films can figure as significant ‘symbolic resources’ that support creativity and development through life (Zittoun, 2013). In turn, these findings are supported from within cinema memory research by Kuhn’s observation that the embodied topographical tropes that are so frequently observed in informants’ cinemagoing memories may be interpreted as re-enactments of processes of childhood and adolescent attachment, individuation and separation (Kuhn, 2011, 2013). The importance of the years of late adolescence and early adulthood for the formation of cinemagoing memories and the prevalence of embodied topographical tropes in cinema memory discourse also emerge in the contributions to this issue, especially in the articles by Stokes and Jones and by Ercole et al.

Ever more cinema memory studies, both singular and comparative, and covering various time-frames, regions and continents, are contributing to an increasingly detailed and nuanced picture of the role of cinema in society, offering an indispensable view ‘from below’ of remembered everyday lived experience. We are convinced that cinema memory research offers a refreshing take on both the history of cinema cultures and on the nature of cultural memory more generally.

Notes

1. History of Moviegoing, Exhibition and Reception (HoMER) is an international network of researchers interested in understanding the complex phenomena of cinemagoing, film reception, exhibition and distribution from a multidisciplinary perspective. It was founded in 2004 in Washington DC by a small group of researchers and has expanded into a global network with members from all continents. HoMER promotes collaborative work and data sharing on these issues and is involved in promoting the deployment of digital methods in research in film and cinema history. The HoMER website provides an overview of projects using oral histories, mapping or datasets, and combinations of those methodologies: <http://homernetwork.org/> (accessed 27 July 2016). The network regularly organises seminars, workshops and conferences, and the HoMER events from which articles in this issue were selected took place during the annual conferences of the European Network for Cinema and Media Studies (NECS) in Prague (2013) and Milan (2014).
2. See also the reviews of Landy (2015) and Seamon (2015) in this issue. For a brief discussion of memory studies and film with some filmic examples, see Kuhn and Westwell (2012): <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199587261.001.0001/acref-9780199587261-e-0439#> (accessed 27 July 2016).
3. For a definition and overview of the woman’s picture, see Kuhn and Westwell (2012): <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199587261.001.0001/acref-9780199587261-e-0769?rskkey=oN7Y97&result=767> (accessed 11 August 2016).
4. Most informants in the studies presented in this issue are from urban rather than rural areas, though see Fuller-Seeley (2008), Aveyard (2011, 2015a) and Treveri Gennari et al. (in press).

5. See, for instance, the Brno project's website: <https://www.phil.muni.cz/dedur/index.php?&lang=1> (accessed 11 August 2016), reviewed in this issue; *Italian Cinema Audiences*: italiancinemaaudiences.org/ (accessed 2 August 2016); (Crofts, 2011); 'New App Celebrates Curzon Cinema History': <http://info.uwe.ac.uk/news/uwnews/news.aspx?id=2246> (accessed 17 August 2016).
6. Although the findings set out in Stokes and Jones's contribution to this issue are unusual in this respect, suggesting that an investigation of cinephilia and memory could prove productive.
7. See *European Cinema Audiences* <http://europeancinemaaudiences.org/> (accessed 11 August 2016), a pan-European comparative project on exhibition, programming and oral histories in the cities of Bari (Italy), Ghent (Belgium) and Leicester (United Kingdom) during the postwar era; the Brno project website <https://www.phil.muni.cz/dedur/index.php?&lang=1> (accessed 11 August 2016); *Italian Cinema Audiences* <http://italiancinemaaudiences.org/> (accessed 2 August 2016). See also *Cinema City Cultures* (<http://cinemacitycultures.com>) for replications of the Belgian 'Enlightened City' project in the United States, Mexico, Columbia, Spain and elsewhere (website online November 2016)

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