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Abstract

This paper attempts to extend the various existing lieux de memoire available hitherto in the perpetuation and (re)construction of social memory by looking at the cyber landscape. Marilyn Monroe as an icon of American popular culture and thus of popular memory in this context, is explored, by looking at various select websites designed in commemoration of her stardom. Within this investigation, I also invoke the link between the production of social memory, with frames of remembrance and collective memory that therefore indicates memory as indubitably, a social phenomenon. The value of cyber reminiscing is also addressed briefly, by exploring how the cyber landscape offers as an additional outlet for the perpetuation and maintenance of fan discourse. A short section that ruminates upon the Internet as an entity of postmodernity with regards to the presentation of knowledge and information is also submitted.

Keywords

Social Memory, Cyber Reminiscing, Frames of Remembrance, Fan Discourse, and Postmodernity

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The Case of Marilyn Monroe

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This paper attempts to extend the various existing lieux de mémoire available hitherto in the perpetuation and (re)construction of social memory by looking at the cyber landscape. Marilyn Monroe as an icon of American popular culture and thus of popular memory in this context is explored, by looking at various select websites designed in commemoration of her stardom. Within this investigation, I also invoke the link between the production of social memory, with frames of remembrance and collective memory that therefore indicates memory as indubitably, a social phenomenon. The value of cyber reminiscing is also addressed briefly, by exploring how the cyber landscape offers as an additional outlet for the perpetuation and maintenance of fan discourse. A short section that ruminates upon the Internet as an entity of postmodernity with regards to the presentation of knowledge and information is also submitted. Key words: Social Memory, Cyber Reminiscing, Frames of Remembrance, Fan Discourse, and Postmodernity

Introduction

Memory is social, collective, and constantly undergoing (re)construction.[1] With the advent of the Internet, the notion of memory undergoes a further transformation, for no longer are we presented with only print mediums of memory such as biographies and memoirs, or objects as memorabilia and collectibles. Indeed, the Internet extends various *lieux de mémoire* that are available hitherto, ranging from biographies, poetry, songs, monuments, films, to memorabilia, photography and canvas.[2] As "[e]lectronic memories do not admit to forgetfulness

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[1] Memory is, in a sense, both a product of construction and reconstruction, for as much as we attempt to remain true to facts of the past (to "construct" and thereby to pivot towards "authentic" memory), we are, simultaneously, reconstructing it through presenting history and the past in various versions, for by "crafting the past, we alter it" (Engel, 1999, p. 118).

[2] Richardson (2001, p. 156) remarks that "we are leaving an industrial society to enter a technological one based upon the dissemination of information that technology is so adept at making possible". In line with this, I suggest that Information dissemination through the Internet involves also, the transmission of memory, where cyberspace facilitates for easy access to information of all sorts, including, inter alia, write-ups on prominent figures, political dictators, icons of times passed, such as Marilyn Monroe in this case. On that account, the notion of memory undergoes transformation, where selective versions of history are presented through various websites that are set up. Just as the print medium selectively presents history in various ways (and for various reasons), so too, does the Internet, in allowing people from all walks of life to put up their own websites/pages, in selectively presenting information on figures such as Marilyn Monroe, where some web writers specifically state that their websites are meant as

and their recollections seem too real to be authentic, they form another class of memory and need interpreting" (Punt 1999, p.42).[3] The cyber landscape thus warrants a re-evaluation of how memory is (re)created and (re)constructed. Here, I address how the cyber medium transmits memories, as it offers a platform for social groups to recollect and commemorate in a myriad of ways. Focusing my discussion on Hollywood siren Marilyn Monroe, I explore how memories in cyberspace are also, like their print/offline counterpart, contextualized, operating within *frames of remembrance*. Emphasis will be given to websites[4] that commemorate her work and life, showing how such a cyber platform can draw together collective memory via *virtual communities*, akin to Anderson's (1983) *imagined community*. The web stands as a public medium where memories of the screen siren are encapsulated, reaching out to fans and general public alike. Undergirding this idea, is a larger project of attempting to demonstrate how popular culture perpetuates in popular memory, captured through what I term as *cyber reminiscing*. Memories that are constructed within the cyber landscape also point towards collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992), exemplified through the various online fan clubs and discussion forums specifically set up for Marilyn.

This paper therefore, locates scholarship concerning memory and memory processes not merely within such disciplines as psychology or philosophy, but also in sociology, where concerns, *inter alia*, include understanding the constructions of social reality, identity and community. For memory is indubitably a social phenomenon, forming as a vital and indissoluble part of social identity. The act of remembering and presenting the past is essentially selective. Hence, this paper strives also, to unpack social constructions of social memory within the larger context of popular culture and popular memory. To this end, the cyber medium as a tool of perpetuating and (re)constructing social memory is thus explored and analyzed, thereby ameliorating our understanding of social memory by looking not merely at print mediums of memory transmission, but also the cyber landscape, in a bid to extend various *lieux de mémoire* that are available hitherto.

In order to study how popular memory of Marilyn Monroe transpires via cyber reminiscing, I employ a method (ology) termed as *discourse analysis*. Discourse analysis, as Philips and Hardy (2002) argue, is both a perspective and a method. It constitutes a perspective because it brings with it a particular view of social phenomena as constituted through structured sets of texts (2002, p. 59). It forms as a method because it is a way of approaching data collection and analysis, which involves unpacking and investigating how discourses are shared and social, emanating out of interactions between social groups and the complex societal structures in which discourse is embedded (2002, p. 4).

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tributes, commemoration (read: "in memory of"), and celebration of a star who even till today, epitomizes beauty and grace. Hence, the Internet extends various existing realms of memory by providing virtual space for "memories" to be posted online.

[3] "In the future, cultures and identities will exist in digital territory, across space and time, and so need specific strategies to help maintain social cohesion amongst a group of dispersed individuals so defining the electronic frontiers of their collective memory" (Brown, 1999, p. 48).

[4] Where Rachlin (2000, p. ix) claims that artifacts are "props of history, portals to the past that afford the beholder a glimpse back in time", I suggest that websites (set up to commemorate Marilyn), in a similar fashion, also form a medium of memory.

A Note on Method(ology)[5]

In line with Philips and Hardy (2002), van Dijk contends that "[d]iscourse should preferably be studied as a constitutive part of its local and global, social and cultural contexts. Text and talk in many ways signal their contextual relevance, and therefore context structures need to be observed and analysed" (1997, p. 29). In this manner, discourse analysis is therefore distinguished by its commitment to a strong constructivist view and in the way it tries to explore the relationships between text, discourse and context (Philips & Hardy, 2002). The context within which this paper operates, therefore, sets up a framework in linking popular culture, popular memory and cyber reminiscing. Social memories of Marilyn Monroe as an American icon are contextualized by intersecting American popular culture and popular memory. This is submitted in a later section.

As a corollary to discourse analysis as a method, I bring to attention, the notion of *text* within this *modus operandi*. Philips and Hardy (2002, p. 4) contend:

> Discourses are embodied and enacted in a variety of texts, although they exist beyond the individual texts that compose them. Texts can thus be considered a discursive "unit" and a material manifestation of discourse. Texts may take a variety of forms, including written texts, spoken words, pictures, symbols, artifacts, and so forth…Texts are not meaningful individually; it is only through their interconnection with other texts, the different discourses on which they draw, and the nature of their production, dissemination, and consumption that they are made meaningful. Discourse analysis explores how texts are *made* meaningful through these processes and also how they contribute to the constitution of social reality by *making* meaning.

Following the above understanding of *text*, the units of study for this paper are thus select websites designed in commemorating Marilyn Monroe, forming the *texts* for analysis. Meaning making in analyzing these texts therefore, operates within the framework of American popular culture, and thus, of popular memory that takes place through cyberspace.

With regards to how particular websites are employed as examples in the following analysis, I adhere to what is posited as *theoretical sampling* by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Theoretical sampling is understood as the process of "data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 45). This approach is therefore congruent with the orientation of discourse analysis, where the interest lies in "theory creation rather than theory testing… [where] choosing a [text] with particular characteristics, [therefore, would] make it more likely to produce certain differences or similarities that can be related to particular theoretical [and conceptual] positions" (Philips & Hardy, 2002, p. 68). Websites (*text*) are chosen based on the likelihood that they will provide theoretically relevant results. In this instance,

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[5] Blaikie defines methodology as the "analysis of how research should or does proceed, [which] includes…what kind of logic is used, what criteria [theories] have to satisfy, what [they] look like and how particular theoretical perspectives can be related to particular research problems". On the other hand, methods of research are the "actual techniques or procedures used to gather and analyze data related to some research question or hypothesis" (1993, p. 7).

theoretical/conceptual positions put forward in this paper comprise two main ideas; (1) memories are contextualized via what I term as *frames of remembrance*, and (2) memory is both social and collective, and hence, one can uncover notions of *collective memory* within the cyber landscape.

Biography

Marilyn Monroe[6] was born Norma Jeane Mortensen in 1926, Los Angeles, California. Her mother, Gladys Monroe, gave her to a foster family where she lived until she was 7. Soon thereafter her mother's friend, Grace McKee, had Gladys declared insane, committed her to a psychiatric hospital, and took custody of Norma Jeane.[7] At the age of 16, Marilyn married Jim Dougherty in 1942. In 1944, Marilyn was photographed by a journalist as part of an Army promotion demonstrating women's contributions to the war effort. The photographer asked to take more pictures of her, and soon, she launched a modeling career. By 1946, she graced the covers of 33 major magazines.[8] On July 23, 1946, Marilyn signed a contract with 20th Century Fox, thereafter using the stage name *Marilyn Monroe*. Her first screen appearance was in the 1947 film, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*. In the years to come, she won acclaim for her roles in *Bus Stop* (1956) and *Some Like It Hot* (1959).[9] Marilyn had two other marriages, one with baseball star Joe DiMaggio (1954), and a third with Arthur Miller (1956-1961). In all, she starred in 29 films,[10] the last being *The Misfits* (1961), a Miller production. She was found dead on 5th August 1962, of an overdose of sleeping pills.

Popular Culture, Popular Memory, and Cyber Reminiscing

Through the brief biography presented above, it is ostensible that there is potential for reminiscing Marilyn in various ways. Videlicet, many things could be said about her films, her iconic[11] status as a sex symbol, her marriages, and even her death, which some speculate that it was not simply a case of suicide, but murder. There is a myriad of ways in which we recollect and transmit memories of Marilyn, depending on how we choose to present information on, and memories of her. Given that Marilyn made a mark in American life as a movie star, I draw a link between American popular culture and popular memory, to show how memories of Marilyn are contextualized.

American popular culture here is to be understood as accessorized with "icons, recurring events, or retold contemporarities that are familiar, favorites, and fun" (Elledge & Swartwout,

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[6] Some websites list other details of Marilyn that are not so well known. For instance, Marilyn claimed that she had been raped at 7 or 8 years of age. Also, she suffered two miscarriages and was said to have a child as a teenager, and had given it up for adoption (see http://www.handwriting.org/archives/98feb_02.html). Another website features a page titled Ten Things We Might Not Know About Marilyn (see http://www.destinationhollywood.com/celebrities/marilynmonroe/)

[7] http://sg.netor.com/m/box200009/m17.asp?BoardID=17

[8] http://www.artsandmusicpa.com/popculture/marilyn.htm

[9] http://www.who2.com/marilynmonroe.html

[10] For a listing of her films, see http://kopteri.net/koti/milaja/mm/Bioframe.htm.

[11] Schwartz (1982, p. 377) contends: "Iconography is one of the means by which society commemorates extraordinary people and events".

1999, p. xv). In this, popular culture may encompass everything from "baseball scores to political cartoons and seemingly everything in between" (Cullen, 2001, p. 3). On that account, American popular culture contains such facets as Hollywood movies and celebrities, sports, poetry,[12] music,[13] art,[14] and photography, amongst many others. Locating Marilyn as one of many features of American popular culture (with her as a Hollywood icon), this would set up expectations of how we perceive her role as a celebrity, where more often than not, news that are shocking, sensational, and popular, are what we most probably would be interested in reading about and learning about, as we think about Hollywood, Marilyn, and her private life. It follows that popular memory of Marilyn stands as an extension of American popular culture, where *expectations*[15] are in place as we reminisce about her. For where news and stories concerning Hollywood stars are usually sensational, often of rumours and gossip, then so too are popular memories of Marilyn. In this manner, memory is contextualized by both the creators and readers of websites, since we perceive Marilyn as one of many symbols of American popular culture when we recollect her life. This would set up *frames of remembrance* within which the traits of popular culture and thus, of popular memory, would transpire.

Memories Contextualized, Frames of Remembrance

There is always a context/frame for remembrance and memory, depending on what is the intent of presenting memory on particular events and people, to people who learn about the past. Where Japan's role in World War II was to be perceived as "military advance" instead of "military aggression", (Buruma, 1995, p. 195) and where the Japanese Ministry of Education forced a textbook author to "reduce the number of killings by Japanese soldiers during one day of the Nanking massacre from twenty-five thousand to fifteen thousand people" (Chang, 1997, p. 208), these go to show that memory transmission is highly selective and manipulated by those who present it. In the case of Japan, strict regulations concerning how history should be presented in school textbooks underscore the intent to portray Japan in a positive light, not as a military aggressor, but as a liberator of Asia from Communism. Memories of Japan during that time therefore, are contextualized *viz.* "benevolence" rather than "malevolence". As such, there could be "falsification of memory, falsification of reality, [and] negation of reality" (Levi, 1989, p. 31), where memory/history producers choose to present memory[16] in a particular context

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[12] Elledge and Swartout's 1999 work showcases an anthology of poems that create distinct visions of popular culture in America, which featured a few poems on Marilyn Monroe. See Appendix 1.

[13] Elton John's hit song *Candle in the Wind* is a tribute to the life of Norma Jeane Baker and the memory of Marilyn Monroe, released twelve years after her death (see Appendix 2). There is also another song penned for Marilyn, which was written in such a way that it seems as if Marilyn herself was singing - see http://www.ku.edu/carrie/docs/texts/marilyn.htm.

[14] Andy Warhol's pop art rendition of Marilyn comes in the form of acrylic and silkscreen, presenting Marilyn in a colourful light. See http://www.usc.edu/schools/annenberg/asc/projects/comm544/library/images/441.html. Drawings of Marilyn are also posted on the web - see http://www.dsptech.demon.co.uk/marilyn/.

[15] Just as we expect a work like *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* to be largely situated on his political career (as we know him as the Senior Minister), then so too, would we expect any memory/information on Marilyn as tied in with traits of popular culture, with her iconic status in Hollywood (which forms as one of many constituents of American popular culture).

[16] As Ross puts it:" [A]*ll* memory content is socially determined" (1991, p. 152).

to serve their own interests instead of constructing the past as it actually took place. In essence, memory is contextualized, presenting only certain select versions of the past.

In like manner, memories of Marilyn are also contextualized, based on different frames of remembrance, either to shock, sensationalize her life, commemorate her grace and beauty, probe into her private life, or to remember from her point of view.[17] These therefore, show how memory is often employed - to inform, shock, memorialize and commemorate via different contexts. One particular memory of Marilyn that stands as an oddity, is that there exists an urban legend which claims "Marilyn Monroe had six toes on each foot".[18] This claim originated from a photographer Joseph Jasgur, who in March 1946, took some test shots of Marilyn Monroe. She was then 19, a teenage model going by her birth name Norma Jeane. Some of those photographs (which apparently showed her sixth toe) were used in the British tabloid *Daily Mirror*, eventually denounced by some fans as nothing more than a hoax. Some other ways to proof that the sixth toe was non-existent include: (1) none of Marilyn's family members mentioned anything at all about the extra toe; (2) there were/are no other photographs that showed Marilyn's "sixth toe"; (3) this "fact" has not been recorded in any known article or biography of Marilyn. In all, the issue of a probable sixth toe stands as news/memory of Marilyn that would draw readership and appeal, since it reflects oddity for the curious reader to feed upon. By highlighting the toe that was not there, such a way of presenting Marilyn's life, or anatomy for that matter, adds on to the unfathomable mystique of Marilyn as a screen siren; well-known by the public, but sometimes, a rather equivocal figure as well.

Other memories of Marilyn that are sensational include speculations over her death.[19] Such a memory points to that which contains a touch of surrealism, seen the following description: "As with all legends, however, the image left by Monroe's death is as much fable as truth: A voluptuous starlet found sprawled nude across silk sheets with an empty barbiturate bottle on her nightstand. An alcoholic. A publicly adored but tortured actress who chose the numb, giddy world of drugs and tranquilizers over the burden of reality – so much so that it finally killed her".[20] The website revealed, also, that Marilyn was undergoing psychiatric treatment under a New York Freudian psychiatrist Dr. Marianne Kris. Kris saw Monroe five times a week and ultimately provided her with powerful barbiturates that she abused until her death.

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[17] Barris's (1995) *Marilyn: Her Life in Her Own Words*, is a picture-text book that was produced as a result of him having worked with Marilyn between 9th June to 18th July 1962. In there, the memory of Marilyn is produced via her own words, interspersed throughout the text, revealing her innermost thoughts and feelings. She says for instance: " Lies, lies, lies, nothing but lies. Everything they've been saying about me is lies. You are the first one I'm telling it to. I'll tell you all about my childhood, career, marriages, and divorces - but most important, what I want most out of life" (1995, p. 3). Such a method of presenting the past appears to evoke a sense of authenticity, as we learn about Marilyn from her own words, from the horse's mouth. This would seem to bridge the gap between us and Marilyn (according a touch of intimacy with the past, with her life), just as we taste a momentary slice of history as we see or touch certain objects of the past (such as letters written during wartime, or a drinking mug displayed at Changi Museum).

[18] See http://www.snopes2.com/movies/actors/mmtoes.htm

[19] There is a webpage (http://biblebelievers.org/lmonroe.htm) titled *Visions: Prophesies Death of Marilyn Monroe*.

[20] From http://www.cchr.org/art/eng/page06.htm.

Another website titles one of its pages as *Marilyn Monroe: Was she murdered?*,[21] in a seemingly innocuous manner, but indubitably, with the intent to arouse curiosity and interest for remembering Marilyn, wondering how exactly did she die? On the page, we are told that "several theories abound as to how Hollywood's biggest sex symbol met her demise". One theory was based on suicide, as Marilyn had been hospitalized several times for depression, and sources close to Marilyn also revealed that the actress had attempted suicide many times. Another speculation was that of foul play, due in part to her romantic involvement with U.S. President J.F. Kennedy and his brother Robert. It was believed that the Kennedy's organized her murder because the presidency could be harmed if Marilyn's affair with JFK was exposed to the public.[22] Ostensibly, as we learn about the various surmises over Marilyn's death, we also, by chance, learn about other "facts" of her life, such as her medical treatment, and her affairs with the Kennedy, which further augment our memory of her as a sex symbol.

Other ways in which memories of Marilyn are contextualized and posted on the web include a peek into her private life such as an analysis of her handwriting,[23] photographs of her last home[24] at 12305 5th Helena Drive, Brentwood, some documents including Marilyn's will, a love note to Joe DiMaggio, and some information on her sex romps with the Kennedy's, all appearing as if they were scanned from actual documents, evoking a sense of "authenticity" for the reader, where such records "offer a vivid reminder of the late screen goddess".[25] Photographs of her grave at Westwood Memorial Park are also available on the web, which included this statement:" Cause of death - Drugs Overdose".[26]

Evidently, memories of Marilyn (and of other figures, or of history for that matter) are contextualized, portraying her in different ways, evoking memories through the use of different frames of remembrance, which allow the reader to learn about Marilyn's past by getting to know her through various slices of her life and experiences. The different memory versions of Marilyn posted on the web can be perceived as information that is meant to shock, sensationalize or to make the private public. Dreyer's viewpoint sums it up when she opines how (and in what *context*) she remembers Marilyn:" I'm not as interested in Marilyn Monroe as I am in the image

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[21] http://www.publicdebate.com.au/is/778/bg.html.

[22] Monroe had embarrassed JFK with her infamous rendition of "Happy birthday, Mr. President" at a Democratic fundraiser at New York's Madison Square Gardens. And when JFK stopped taking her calls on his private line, she started calling the White House switchboard and demanding to be put through. Robert Kennedy, who was Attorney General at the time, apparently went round to Monroe's Brentwood home to tell her to stop calling the president, then embarked on an affair with Monroe himself. During his involvement with Monroe, Robert Kennedy apparently confided classified information to her about the Cuban Missile Crisis and the government's battle against organised crime. Monroe reportedly took notes of these conversations. Robert Kennedy ended the affair abruptly, not returning Monroe's calls and then disconnecting his private line. Heartbroken, Monroe reportedly threatened to call a press conference to reveal her affairs with the Kennedy brothers (ibid.).

[23] See http://www.handwriting.org/archives/98feb_01.html. Through an examination of Marilyn's handwriting, we get to learn about her life as a "repressed soul", constantly "consumed with anxieties and insecurities".

[24] Some websites contain photographs of her home, while one posted a floor plan that offered a virtual tour of Marilyn's residence. See http://home.att.net/~sallyann3/

[25] See http://www.thesmokinggun.com/monroe/monroe.shtml

[26] The photographs show Marilyn's wall plaque, as well as a memorial bench placed in front of her crypt. See http://www.hollywoodusa.co.uk/WestwoodObituaries/marilynsgrave.htm. Such an online obituary of sorts, lend a sense of intimacy for readers, as we "witness" her final resting place.

of Marilyn Monroe. I'm fascinated by *whom we choose to be our immortals* [italics added]. She was quixotic, charismatic, and, in spurts, talented. I wonder if it wasn't *her vulnerability more than her beauty* [italics added] that still speaks to us after all these years. I wonder if the *appeal* [italics added] isn't simply that *she's another of the Young Dead Club…Would Marilyn have lost most of her mystery if she'd lived long enough* [italics added] to bore us with half a dozen ghosted biographies and a long term on *Hollywood Squares*? [italics added]" (1997, p. 242).

Collective Memory in the Cyber Landscape

As previously mentioned, memory is social and collective, where transmissions are carried out in reaching certain social groups with particular memories. Collective memory is to be understood as the "common landmarks of everyday life…which constitute shared social frameworks of individual recollections" (Boym, 2001, p. 53). As Halbwachs argues: "It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories" (1992, p. 38). Halbwachs contends that it is impossible for individuals to remember in any coherent and persistent fashion outside of their group contexts (Olick, 1999). Group memberships provide the materials for memory and prod the individual into recalling particular events and into forgetting others. Therefore, a Halbwachsian definition of collective memory could be that which comprises socially framed individual memories and collective commemorative representations and mnemonic traces. This can be readily applied to the vast amounts of individual websites/pages that are created in a collective memory of Marilyn.[27]

Collective memory in the cyber landscape is also evident, as cyber reminiscing of Marilyn takes place not in a cyber vacuum, but that such information and memories of her are put up on the web, alongside online fan clubs, discussion forums and electronic mailing lists, which appear to bring her fans together, forming a *virtual community*. For all participants in this interaction, "privacy becomes vicarious and virtual; no longer the property of a single individual, [the Internet] turns into a place of projection and interaction" (Boym, 2001, p. 349). Anderson's (1983) *imagined community* is perhaps a precedent towards understanding communities that form on the web.

Anderson's concept of an imagined community is traced back to his idea that a sense of nationhood is produced out of the sharing of a range of myths and knowledge. He argues that the newspaper started as one means through which such sharing could take place. For "the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life" (Anderson, 1983, p. 35). Therefore, "newspapers help to produce the imagined community of the nation-state by imparting information to an audience" (Stratton, 2000, p. 727). Where "[c]ommunities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (Anderson, 1983, p. 6), then so too, do virtual communities operate in this manner in the cyber landscape:" The context of computer-mediated communication necessarily emphasizes the act of imagination that is required to summon the *image of communion* [italics added] with others who are often faceless, transient, or anonymous" (Foster, 1997, p. 25).

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[27] A check on the Internet using search engine *Google* informed that there exists between 330,000 to 350,000 websites/pages concerning Marilyn Monroe.

In tandem with the concept of an imagined community, virtual communities can be perceived as "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on…public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (Rheingold, quoted in Graham, 1999, p. 158). Community,[28] therefore, is "built by a sufficient flow of 'we-relevant information" (Foster, 1997, p. 25). *Videlicet*, "[t]hat which holds a virtual community intact is the subjective criterion of togetherness, a feeling of connectedness that confers a sense of belonging" (Foster). The "we-relevant information" and sense of connectedness in relation to the remembrance of Marilyn manifest through websites that either commemorate Marilyn, or act as online directories/bibliographies that direct the web user (the Marilyn fan) to other various sites that are about Marilyn. One such example is *The Marilyn Monroe Ring*,[29] which lists twenty-nine Marilyn sites, ranging from her gallery, portraits, message boards, to desktop themes containing Marilyn screensavers and wallpapers. Reading such a listing of Marilyn sites, one gets a feeling that there exists a virtual community out there, where the members, coming from all walks of life, are simultaneously remembering Marilyn in a plethora of ways. Through this, one does not remember as an isolated individual, but rather, as a social being who shares memory collectively via the cyber landscape.

Another distinct website that stands as a platform for a Marilyn virtual community is the *Forever Marilyn* website that claims itself as a "fan club dedicated to the memory of the number one Goddess of the silver screen".[30] Founded in 1999 by Crystal Burke, this site offers as a

> wonderful fan club [that brings] *together Marilyn Monroe fans from across the world* [italics added]. The club provides an adult forum for fans to discuss and reflect on Marilyn's amazing career and life. *Forever Marilyn* [italics added] strives to bring you the latest news and information on Marilyn Monroe. We have a wonderful links page that feature our very own members and their amazing websites dedicated to Marilyn Monroe. In addition, *Forever Marilyn* [italics added] has its own Book club where we read and discuss books written about Marilyn Monroe. And we even have a Los Angeles based club member who will bring you the latest on the Marilyn Remembered Meetings, Marilyn Los Angeles Sites and other Los Angeles Marilyn related news.

Burke's website invites interested individuals to become "part of the *Forever Marilyn* family", offering member privileges such as a Marilyn Monroe "Picture of the Day", "Quote of the Day", and more importantly, for purposes of this section, "Exciting discussions with fans across the world!". Evidently, such a website contributes towards the perpetuation of an online Marilyn community, as it offers many realms of memory in commemorating Marilyn, ranging from book clubs to even Marilyn Remembered Meetings, all of which open the door for collective memory.

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[28] Foster (1997, p. 25) elaborates: "The term 'community' is broadly used to refer to an ideal type of social relations known as *Gemeinschaft*, the embryo of which is found in the relations of kindred individuals. Succinctly stated, the term embodies a set of voluntary, social, and reciprocal relations that are bound together by an immutable 'we-feeling'. This is typically contrasted with its polar opposite, *Gesellschaft*, or impersonal association".
[29] See http://www.bomis.com/rings/marilyn/
[30] See http://www.angelfire.com/my/forevermarilyn/

Akin to this website, *Eternally Marilyn Fan Club*[31] is another one that helps in the maintenance of a virtual community which remembers Marilyn. The formula is similar - benefits for members include monthly newsletters, weekly chats, and even the chance to meet Marilyn fans face-to-face. On this account, the notion of a virtual community is augmented, to allow for the community to come together not only in cyberspace, but physically as well. Hence, group interaction both on and offline, would allow for memories of Marilyn to be further transmitted collectively, demonstrating that cyber reminiscing acts as a new medium for collective memory to transpire, where the Internet[32] offers a qualitative increase in communicative possibilities (including memory transmissions), "a testimony to interdependence and a perpetual reminder that our lives are intrinsically and inescapably social" (Healy, 1997, p.64).

Beyond Marilyn Monroe – A Note on Celebrity/Fandom Culture

In a bid to locate our understanding of how websites of Marilyn Monroe are established and therefore resonant of popular memory transmission, this section adds another dimension of analysis by putting forth the stance that the impetus for a pursuit of popular memory can be largely attributed to celebrity/fandom culture. The purpose of this section is twofold – first, I explore briefly, the ability of celebrities in provoking curiosity of fans towards looking for lurid details or mysteries surrounding famous people. Second, I explore how the notion of fandom can be interpreted as audience consumption *and* production, suggesting that fan writings appear to be central to the practice of fandom (Harris & Alexander, 1998).

The category of celebrities, as Marshall (1997, p.3) opines, is better understood by reflecting upon the following: What makes a celebrated individual unique? What particular moments in his or her life led to fame? What traits have allowed the individual to rise to public acclaim? Marshall contends that a celebrity biography appears in many forms and guises. Sources of such information can be culled from popular magazines, television, and within this context, the Internet as well. The meaning of the celebrity, the supposed unique talents of celebrities are vulnerable and subject to dramatic falls as well as equally impressive moments of contrition and resurrection (1997, p. 3). Following this, celebrities are therefore, the "production locale for an elaborate discourse on the individual and individuality that is organized around the will to uncover a hidden truth…*to uncover the "real" person behind the public persona*" [italics added] (1997, p. 4).

Given that, the modern usage of *celebrity* is therefore, connected to the significance of popular culture, and thus, of popular memory in this case. The celebrity forms as an active area of discursive negotiation in contemporary culture (Marshall, 1997, p. 12), in part arising from the way in which the media, including the Internet, throw emphasis on the lurid details of celebrities, ranging from scandals, to marriages, and even possible brushes with the law. In this

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[31] See http://members.aol.com/eternallymarlyn/index2.html

[32] Some writers such as Graham (1999) and Richardson (2001) question whether new communities such as virtual ones that form through the Internet, would be a meretricious phenomenon, given that even if electronic communication "make relationships possible and facilitate the confluence of shared interest…it does so in a restricted form and the restriction means that an Internet community of thought and interest…is a second-rate form of community" (Graham, 1999, p. 145). In like manner, Richardson contends that "interaction with technology can give nothing but an illusion of intimacy" (2001, p. 156).

manner, we as consumers of popular culture/memory, and of celebrities, zoom in on the iconic quality of any celebrity, and that what the icon represents is "the possibility that the celebrity has actually entered the language of culture and can exist whether the celebrity continues to "perform" or dies" (Marshall, 1997, p. 17). This reasoning is therefore, tenable, as we attempt to understand why audiences, consumers of popular culture continue to be curious about celebrities such as Marilyn Monroe. This paper has thus investigated not merely into how popular memory transpires selectively via the cyber landscape, but on a larger level, attempted to account for how popular memory of celebrities, whether still living among us or departed from us, still continue to possess our varied curious minds concerning the person behind the public persona.

Having understood briefly how popular memory of celebrities not present with us still holds relevance and attention in today's context, I now move on to discuss further, how fans consume celebrities through their fandom production. Where newsletters, songs, and fanzines are some of the communications produced as a result of fandom (Harris & Alexander, 1998), the cyber landscape furthers interactivity among fans, thereby ensuring that fan discourses of particular celebrities would continue across time. Baym's (1998) study on soap opera fans point out that fans of popular media have moved their discussions to computer networks, which in many ways enhances the social potential of fandom while simultaneously making these aspects of fandom far more accessible to scholars. Baym argues that with the provision of online discussions by like-minded fans, there is therefore, an "enhancement of interpretive resources, [as well as] the creation of a performance space with the potential status and recognition that entails…the opportunity to engage in public discussion of normally private socioemotional issues" (1998, p. 113). In this manner, cyber reminiscing here, offers as a valuable outlet in terms of studying interactions between fans, but more pertinently, it contains broader implications for the study of fan communities, "suggesting ways in which fan interaction appropriates the media around which they form, supplementing them, personalizing them, altering them, and using them as a springboard for creativity and social exploration" (Baym, 1998, p. 126). Consequently, this ties in with my earlier argument concerning how audiences of popular culture/memory are not merely passive consumers, but are also active producers, in helping to perpetuate popular memories of celebrities such as Marilyn Monroe. Cyber reminiscing therefore, offers a further, more accessible outlet for the production of fan discourse on celebrities, extending not only tools for perpetuating memory, but also, fan discourses.

Postmodernity, the Cyber Landscape and Social Memory – Some Ruminations

Before I end this paper, let me add a section, acting somewhat as an after note, in looking at how the Internet may provide contributions to knowledge, communication and collective memory within a postmodernist context. Here, I consider how mechanisms of postmodernity, generally, are reflected via the workings of the Internet, thereby locating the use of cyber reminiscing in comparison to other mediums of memory transmission.

For heuristic purposes, I employ the term *postmodernity* to include features such as (1) the saturation by communication technologies (Miller & Real, 1998), and (2) an emphasis that "as a human creation, knowledge is relative to, and contingent on, the circumstances in which it was generated" (Turner, 1998, p. 599). Miller and Real argue that one central feature of the postmodern landscape is saturation by communication technologies. They contend that "people are caught up in the play of images, simulacra, that have less and less relationship to an outside,

to an external reality…[where] we live in a world of simulacra where the image or signifier of an event has replaced direct experience and knowledge of its referent or signified" (1998, p. 30). With this, communication technologies, such as the cyber landscape in this case, places people into a universe of simulacra where it is difficult to distinguish between the spectacle and the real (Miller & Real). The authors sum up the notion of *simulacra* astutely (1998, p. 31):

> The postmodern experience is one of synchronicity; it plunders the past for its images and in using them denies their historicity and makes them a kind of eternal present. A simulacrum means an image, the semblance of an image, make-believe, or that which conceals the truth of the real. He assumes that in the postmodern moment the simulacrum is true, images and signs have come to stand for the objects and commodities that make up everyday life.

To expound on the notion of *simulacrum* in the cyber landscape, I locate the mechanisms of the Internet in terms of information presentation. In the cyber landscape, websites are presented via a multi-linear nature of hypertext writing, termed as *smooth* writing space, understood as "mediated by discontinuities…[where it] propagates in a matrix of breaks, jumps, and implied or contingent connections which are enacted by the viewer or receiver" (Moulthrop, 1998, p. 240). This is understood in opposition to *striated* writing space, which is defined as the "domain of routine, specification, sequence, and causality…defined and supported by books" (Moulthrop). Content presented in striated space therefore, "fosters an objectified and particularized view of knowledge" (Moulthrop).

The multi-linearity of information presentation offered by websites in this case, stands as perhaps, an exemplification of postmodernity, in terms of how knowledge defies sequence and causality in time or space. Instead, knowledge in a postmodern context, and within the textual presentation of the cyber landscape, is offered as fragmented, with selective pieces of information provided, at the click of the mouse. Unity, linearity and sequence are therefore not the established order in memory transmission. Instead, the paradigm of simulacrum takes over, where popular memory via cyber reminiscing contains many versions, demonstrating how social memory is therefore highly selective and contextualized. Ostensibly then, postmodernity affects the consumption of popular culture/memory, not just in terms of contemporary consumption, but also, nostalgic consumption of the past, in this case, popular memory of Marilyn Monroe. Popular memory transmission via websites comprises mixing codes which are subjective, and highly selective. Thus, memory becomes contextual, and highly deliberate and intentional. Consequently, the Internet forms as an interesting link between the transmission of knowledge/memory and popular culture, evoking the idea that cyber reminiscing stands perhaps, as a postmodernist entity.

This section is but a tentative one where suggestions concerning how we may perceive the Internet as an instrument of postmodernity are submitted. By drawing attention to such a proposition, it is suggested that scholarship on social memory and the (re)construction of it, would be further comprehended and analyzed with how societies at large transmit, transfer and perpetuate knowledge and information in a postmodern era.

Conclusion

This paper has addressed the notion of cyber reminiscing as a new medium of memory transmission on two levels. First, (popular) memory of Marilyn Monroe feeds upon American popular culture, with a possible penchant for sex, lies, murder, and stuff made of oddity for the curious consumer. These have been exemplified through the various ways where memories of Marilyn are contextualized, to inform the reader slices of her life experiences from different angles. Second, the Internet provides a platform for the transmission of memories on a collective basis, as it contains numerous websites that allow individuals who share similar interests (in this case, fans of Marilyn), to come together, either on or off the Net, to communicate information and memories. In this, Halbwachs' concept of collective memory transpires in the cyber landscape.

Following the larger framework of how popular memory transpires collectively through the cyber landscape, I have also discussed how cyber reminiscing can prove to be valuable in terms of scholarship regarding fandom, as well as how the Internet can be perceived as a tool of postmodernity in the dissemination of information and knowledge with its multi-linear nature. The field of popular culture, specifically fandom and celebrity discourses, is thus better understood in terms of selective popular memory transmission, within the domain of postmodernity.

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Appendix 1

Mom Did Marilyn, Dad Did Fred

by Jack Meyers

We sat there, her tiny audience,
as she slunk downstairs, poured
into her sparkling blue gown,
"Diamonds are a girl's best friend"
into each of our little faces
that blushed at how deeply she was
committed to being sexy, and at Dad
Suavely twirling her out the house

The tunafish sandwiches, the blitzed TV
faded in an obliterating glitter
of glitz and wet kisses, and I
with my face turned toward
the heaven of things I would do someday
made up my mind too soon
to have other notions of beauty.

From *Real Things: An Anthology of Popular Culture in American Poetry*. Eds. Jim Elledge & Susan Swartwout

Appendix 2

Candle in the Wind

Music: Elton John   Lyrics: Bernie Taupin

Goodbye Norma Jeane,
Though I never knew you at all
You had the grace to hold yourself
While those around you crawled.

They crawled out of the woodwork,
And they whispered into your brain
They set you on the treadmill
And they made you change your name.

And it seems to me you lived your life
Like a candle in the wind.
Never knowing who to cling to
When the rain set in.

And I would have liked to have known you
But I was just a kid.

Your candle burned out long before
Your legend ever did.
Loneliness was tough,
The toughest role you ever played.

Hollywood created a superstar
And pain was the price you paid.
Even when you died
The press still hounded you
All the papers had to say
Was that Marilyn was found in the nude.

Goodbye Norma Jeane,
Though I never knew you at all
You had the grace to hold yourself
While those around you crawled.

Goodbye Norma Jeane,
From the young man in the 22nd row
Who sees you as something more than sexual
More than just our Marilyn Monroe.

From *Marilyn Monroe: Candle in the Wind*. Elton John and Bernie Taupin. This is a picture-text book that merges the poetry of the lyrics with photographs from Norma Jeane Baker's life, presented with touching style and intimacy, and with a beloved collection of images.

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