

Florian Brody, San Francisco, and Vienna

The Digital Penumbra of Memory

Memory defines who we are who we think we are. It allows us to put our thoughts and actions into perspective and reliable ways to store memory in an individual and communal way are essential to language and the semiotic aspect of our being with ourselves and each other. The written, the printed word has been the trusted foundation we could rely on for thousands of years to guide us and provide a sense of safety and belonging as digital media create a shadow over traditional memories. Joseph Weizenbaum¹, AI pioneer turned one of his leading critics, shared with me in a personal conversation: “My father used to say, ‘it is written in the holy books,’ today it’s ‘the computer said.’”² This unique position of the automated message is fundamental to digital memory. Digital memories created on the Web are unique as they cannot be erased. They create a rhizome across networked machines. At the same time, all digital memories are prone to loss in an instant when a machine fails or – more likely – when their document format becomes unreadable. The shadows of digital memory may change how we perceive ourselves and our shared history. Will there be a post-digital age? How will people access digital memory then? Or will the digital age be perceived as an a-historic time between the printed word and the next memory type? Beyond the written word, images have maintained our understanding of the past. Cave paintings are still visible; what will happen to 3–D VR experiences?

Paper forthcoming in : IDEA-Interdisciplinary Discourses, Education and Analysis (IDEA) Issue 2 2022

About IDEA

<https://idea.lcir.co.uk/>

The journal’s editorial project is the definition of a scholarly work on interdisciplinary subjects. The interdisciplinary approach, which we firmly believe has constituted in recent years a decisive turning point in the academic work, finds in the humanities research field a perfect space of application. IDEA will explore in depth the relations and intersections that can be defined in this perspective. IDEA is an online academic journal dedicated to the scholarly exploration of some of the riches and most fascinating subjects in an interdisciplinary perspective.

Dr Gabriele Biotti, Editor in Chief:

(London Centre for Interdisciplinary Research member and lecturer, postdoctoral research fellow at the Institut d’Histoire du Temps Présent, University of Paris 8) gabriele.biotti@lcir.co.uk

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Weizenbaum

² Personal conversation on the occasion of a conference at the Johannes Kepler University, Linz, Austria, 1974.