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Organizing images of futures-past: Remembering the Apollo Moon Landings

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Abstract

Organizational Memory Studies (OMS) has begun to consider the ways in which organizations construct versions of their own history. These histories have a broader significance through the ways they resource and are contested within cultural memory. In this paper we discuss the way that the National Aeronautical and Space Administration (NASA) constituted both its own past and future significance through the remediation and premediation of key images of the Apollo space programme. Drawing on visitor feedback from an exhibition in the National Space Centre in the UK, we identify three distinct narratives through which personal recollections of the Apollo landings are related espoused historical significance – ‘my generation’, ‘watching the landings’ and ‘remembering the future’. The images of the Apollo landings are a site of contestation where nostalgia for the supposed future that NASA sought to premeditate is mixed with acknowledgement of the failure of that future to materialise.

Key words:

Organizational Memory Studies; Cultural Memory; Social remembering; Remediation; Premediation; NASA; Thematic Analysis

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Routledge Companion to Alternative Organization. He owns no shares in Informa PLC, or interests in Inderscience for that matter.

Introduction: In remembrance of things fast

Organizational Memory Studies (OMS) is a phrase used by Rowlinson et al. (2010) to refer to the disparate body of work that considers how organizations enact procedures for storing and retrieving information over time (Walsh & Ungson, 1991; Moorman & Miner, 1998). The use of the term ‘memory’ here is something of a misnomer. Psychologists have acknowledged for some time the limitations of the ‘storage’ metaphor for understanding the activity of remembering. The focus of much contemporary psychological research on personal memory is instead on how past events are reconstructed in the present to support a current sense of identity (Nelson, 2009). Rowlinson et al (2010) assert that OMS is direly in need of an equivalent shift in focus away from a reified and narrow conception of ‘memory’ and towards a concern with the dynamics of reconstituting the present meaning and significance of past event.

Such a shift would connect OMS with work that has explored how organizations reflexively manage their own history. For example, Bryman’s (1995) work describes how Walt Disney Productions set about constructing their own history following the death of their founder, and how this work at historical and biographical reconstruction became embedded in the design of the Disney theme parks. Indeed, Durepos and Mills (2012) argue that an understanding of organization that does not include the historical is incapable of dealing with power. Processes of remembering and forgetting – their example is Pan Am – are then central to the making of organizations. Similarly, research on corporate museums has demonstrated the active way in

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which the past is selectively managed and presented (see Nissley & Casey, 2002; Rowlinson & Hassard, 1993).

However, just as organizations seek to control their own history, so they also become intertwined in a broader cultural memory. That is to say, they become part of the landscape of what is worth recollecting and telling about a given historical period for the generation who lived through it. For example – Fine Fare supermarkets, Saab Automobile SA, the Motown Record Corporation, or Woolworths, are all organizations that have become emblematic of a particular historical period. To remember the 1980s is, for many, to remember the Atari Corporation. There is here a double movement of mediation: the organization attempts to constitute an image of itself that constructs a particular kind of self-defined historicity; this image then becomes a resource that is taken up and elaborated in the work of reproducing cultural memory. The kind of ‘looking’ that interests us is the ways of engaging with these key images produced by organizations as part of the broader process of negotiating the meaning of the past in the present.

We can see process at work in the ways that the National Aeronautical and Space Administration – NASA – is recollected. For generations of inhabitants of the global north born in the latter third of the twentieth century, childhood memories of the US space programme that NASA directed from the late 1950s onwards are often highly significant. This ranges from images such as the first moon landing in 1969, to the Challenger Space Shuttle disaster in 1986. These stand in a metonymic relationship to the organization as a whole – Neil Armstrong’s first steps are ‘NASA’s success’ just as the moment when the Challenger shuttle explodes is ‘NASA’s failure’. For the forty something girls and boys who

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write wistful books on space travel, their memory seems central as a place to begin telling the NASA story. Constance Penley, who lived in Florida, tells us that she ‘grew up in space’, travelling with her father to make a ‘pre-dawn dash to the Cape’ to watch the launches (1997: 1). Marina Warner lived in London, filling her head and bedroom with Apollo trivia, and claiming that her ‘space-related hopes were boundless’ (2004:2). Or, consider Greg Klerkx, who starts his book quite simply. ‘When I was a boy, I wanted to be an astronaut.’ (2004: 5); David Bell, in the Midlands of England, daydreaming about model kits, science fiction and the year 2000 (2005); and Andrew Chaikin, a nine year old looking at the photos of Ed White in space that were printed in *Life* magazine (2002:12). Finally, rather beautifully, Andrew Light, also nine, watching Apollo 17 and listening to the communication with the astronauts – ‘...that inimitable *beeeep*, followed by the most spacious silence imaginable’ (1999: 129).

These recollected images of photographs, model kits and ‘Apollo trivia’ are clearly doing considerable work. But what is the nature of that work? What is it exactly that we are remembering when we recollect NASA through the complex image of itself that it sought to constitute and promulgate? Part of the difficulty of approaching this question is the contrast between the vast scale of NASA’s activities during its heyday and what now remains. Jones & Benson (2002) claim that in the 1960s around four per cent of USA Federal expenditure went towards space exploration, peaking at 5.3 per cent in 1965. In cash terms, this was around \$24 billion dollars on the Apollo programme and \$38 billion dollars overall between 1961-1972 (Wachorst, 2000). That kind of money buys not just the technology and capacity for space travel, but also paid for 36,000 employees and 360,000 contractors (Bizony, 2006). One might assume that such a staggering level of investment and economic activity would

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have left a significant material legacy. However, as Parker describes, there is precious little left:

The end of Apollo seems trivial compared to the means. A few rocks, some photos, a litter of urine bags, trampled dust and a collapsed flag. The final end of Apollo came only two and a half years later, with Apollo 17. No one has been back, and three of the astronauts who stood on the Moon are already dead. (Parker, 2009a: 328)

This stark contrast is typically addressed by pointing to the historical significance of what was accomplished by the Apollo landings, memorialised at Cape Kennedy and a few other sites. What matters here is not what was brought back from the moon, but the simple fact of having gone there. Or put slightly differently, NASA's purpose with the Apollo programme was to create the lasting cultural memory of landing on the moon. From the inception, this was an organization which was very careful with its public image, signing exclusivity agreements with certain magazines, demanding control over image rights, controlling the access to astronauts and their wives, and so on. This was an organization which was acutely aware that its public image was very relevant to the continuation of its funding, and huge efforts were made early to market NASA as a success for technology, America and capitalism (DeGroot 2007; Parker 2009a).

The fact that these images still resonate for us with such power might then be taken to signify 'mission accomplished'. But there are other kinds of ways in which these images matter, other ways in which they become invested with meaning and emotion. For some, the Apollo landings remain a potent symbol of the colossal folly of the 'space race' pursued by the Cold

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War superpowers to levels of obscene expense. For others, these are images which clearly display, to those who know how to look properly, a conspiracy which has hoodwinked successive generations into believing that the moon landings happened at all. In short, the memorial significance of the images is contestable and often highly contested. Whilst NASA may have been successful in constructing a place for itself in the cultural memory of the global north, future proofing the interpretation of the moon landings appears to have been beyond the reach of even its prodigious budgetary resources.

In this paper, we will be exploring how the 1969 moon landings are recollected in the twenty first century. We will be focussing on the role of key images through which the cultural memory of NASA is mediated. These images are, in effect, the crush point between NASA's auto-historicisation of itself and the contemporary discourses through which a cultural memory of the 1960s is enacted. The material that we draw upon was originally provided by visitors to an exhibition on the moon landings situated in the National Space Centre in Leicester, UK. As part of an exhibit about Apollo, the visitors wrote their memories of the time on small pieces of card, and we were given access to those cards. Our aim is to explore the gap between the colossal project of managing the visual representation of the space programme that NASA undertook in mid to late twentieth century and what remains of that project now in terms of the complex, mediated series of images that serve as objects of recollection. As we will show, what we now remember is not so much the events themselves, or their vicariously experienced traces, but rather memories of the image of the future that NASA sought to render as plausible.

Social and Cultural Remembering

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Our approach to remembering the moon landings is informed by recent work in ‘Cultural Memory Studies’ (Erll & Rigney, 2006; Erll, Nünning, & Young, 2008). This term is used to refer to a diverse series of approaches to memory, which have in common a concern to analyse how the work of remembering personal pasts is structured with reference to a cultural field of shared meanings and commemorative practices. Maurice Halbwachs (1980) used the concept of ‘collective frameworks’ to describe the scaffolding of individual memory in families and broader groups. What we take to be significant about our own personal biographies is, Halbwachs argued, typically explicable with regard to prevailing cultural values and social practices. For example, many of us have childhood memories based on situations of risk and separation, such as being lost in public space or being suddenly ‘out of our depth’ and alone. Halbwachs argued that such memories are significant, and therefore tend to be recalled, because they speak to moments of social transition, where we become aware of a space outside of the family, with the attending excitement and fear that involves. The personal is then shaped by the social. At a much broader level, the personal memories of a whole generation may be completely intertwined with the social and historical dynamics involved in both the events themselves and their subsequent recollection. For example, Harald Welzer’s studies of post-war intergenerational remembering in Germany demonstrate that what was speakable and unspeakable for each generation provides the context for the negotiation between successive generations over competing versions of ‘what happened’ as well as issues of accountability, blame and exoneration (Welzer et al, 2002).

Within cultural memory studies, there is also a concern with the interactional processes of joint recollection, or ‘social remembering’ (Middleton, 1997; Middleton & Brown, 2005; Wertsch, 2002). When we publically recollect some aspect of our personal past, that

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recollection has both interactional significance and accomplishes some social action in the present. Elena Bendien's work in a 'reminiscence museum' based in a Dutch elderly care home shows that the apparently spontaneous recollections of elderly clients as they tour the museum with staff or relatives are attending to complex matters of present and past identity, with accompanying issues of autonomy and dependence (Bendien, 2012; Bendien et al, 2010). Work such as Bendien's vividly displays that personal pasts are rarely 'settled', but rather acquire their particular meaning in the telling of situated accounts.

There are, however, certain kinds of constraints on how the past can be mobilised. Clearly others who act as recipients of our accounts of the past, or with whom we jointly recall, can correct, contest or reject our version. In fact the range of agents who have a stake in memory is quite extensive. Pierre Nora (1989) famously described the rise of the instrumental use of memory as part of grand national building projects in the nineteenth century, which stagnated into the diverse and dispersed concerns of the 'heritage industry' of the late twentieth century (see Samuel, 2012; Lowenthal, 1985). Echoing Foucault, we might speak of a contemporary 'memorial archipelago', comprised of memorial sites, museums, formal and informal commemorative practice, genealogy and popular local history, autobiographical publications and the endless self-recording of social media, which has as its major purpose the doing of history through the narration of personal pasts. Bent Meier Sørensen (2010) draws upon Susan Sontag's notion of 'collective instruction' to describe how this drive to memorialise tends towards a convergence on dominant 'first person' based narratives, which have the effect of both a general dehistoricisation and the narrowing of interpretive scope to that authorised by an original, first-hand experience that are then vicariously drawn upon to 'instruct' others.

In the case of moon landings, we would then expect to find that memories of the events are framed as highly personalised accounts rooted in either direct or vicarious experiences. We would also expect that these accounts ‘do history’ in some way – that is, orient themselves to the historical significance of the events – but route the historical through the personal. Note that in stating matters this way, we adhere to the usual distinction made in the field (see Cubitt, 2007; Olick 2007) between ‘history’ and ‘memory’. ‘History’ refers to the construction of ‘official’ or politically legitimated efforts at telling the past. By ‘memory’, we mean the recollected versions of the past that are shaped around the transmission of personal experiences in collective contexts (i.e. shared commemoration, the maintenance of group or family identity, public narration). Finally, we would anticipate that the accounts would display features of dominant interpretative frameworks and cultural values.

Remediation and Premediation

The images that constitute the majority of the memories of moon landings come from a relatively small field. For example, the Earthrise photo taken from Apollo 8, Neil Armstrong climbing down the ladder of the *Eagle* lunar module, the astronauts experiencing weightlessness, or the moments where the space travellers finally returned to Earth. Each of these events were carefully managed at the time by NASA as part of the process of mediatizing the moon landings – of ensuring that a narrative of individual heroism supported by technological/organizational efficiency would be central to public understanding of the Apollo programme (Klerkx 2004; DeGroot 2007; Parker 2009a; 2009b).

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What appears to have given these images some of their holding power was the high degree of repetition across media sources, from television to print media. Bolter and Grusin (1999) describe this process as ‘remediation’. As mediatised images and narratives pass through different medial forms, they create webs of intertextual reference between one another, whilst at the same time referring back to previous mediatisations. For example, the famous images of astronauts dressed in their bulky protective suits walking towards the launch bay was repeated in the television programming for the majority of NASA launches, and subsequently became the key visual motif for the film of Tom Wolfe’s book about the first Mercury space flights, *The Right Stuff*. But the image itself deliberately references the slow walk of Cowboys in the cinematic tradition of Westerns, who are usually depicted at the beginning of a long journey to the ‘Wild Frontier’. This remediation also invokes the television reimagining of the popular Western show *Wagon Train* as the science fiction of *Star Trek*. Each successive remediation refers back to the previous as it hops across medial forms and genres to drive home an overarching heroic – and deeply sedimented – narrative of ‘boldly going’ into the great unknown.

Remediation is the means through which a particular framing can be established around an image in such ways that it appears to deny its own mediate qualities – the framed images pass for reality. Bolter and Grusin (1999: 55) therefore claim that remediation accomplishes the ‘inseparability of mediation and reality’, through a ‘double logic’ of immediacy and hypermediacy. The more we are exposed to repetition of a framed image through a variety of medial forms, the less likely we are to dwell on the mediatised qualities of the image. This double logic leads to a fundamental paradox in the way that the media is simultaneously visible and hidden at the same time. For example, many people have a very vivid recollection

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of the image of Neil Armstrong stepping onto the moon, but are probably unable to recall when or through which media they first encountered that particular image. Its sheer repetition – along with its framing as a ‘great leap for mankind’ – seems to be just ‘there’ as something that constitutes a moment of pure immediacy within our collective cultural memory.

Erlil (2010: 392) develops the notion of remediation in relation to memory by claiming that:

What is known about a war, a revolution, or any other event which has been turned into a site of memory, therefore, seems to refer not so much to what one might cautiously call the “actual events”, but instead to a canon of existent medial constructions, to the narratives and images circulating in a media culture.

Historical events become rapidly overtaken by their own commemorative practices such that what we think we know about those events refers to the subsequent medial constructions. Clearly, the “actual events” of the moon landings are buried beneath years of media speculation and all that remains is a set of iconic images that act as a powerful force in providing a collective memory of the event. In fact the very idea of reference to some neutral ‘actual events’ can be treated as yet a further form of mediation, such as in the genre of ‘exposure’ where the truth is ‘finally told’. There are a range of competing narratives that currently co-exist in the public arena in relation to the moon landings: narratives of immense pride and achievement, of military superiority, of a strong political agenda and of the many other conspiracy-based narratives that reject the possibility that the astronauts ever reached the moon at all. But what is interesting about these contested stories of the landings is that they are all equally fixated on the images of the landings themselves. Conspiracy theorists, for

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example, construct their rival account of what happened through forensic analysis of visual features in the footage such as the placement of shadows or the movement of the flag, in the same way that so-called 9-11 ‘Truthers’ pore over the seconds when the twin towers collapsed, and earlier doubters of the official version of the JFK assassination claimed the answers were to be found in the Zapruder footage. What is not normally contested (but which is actually highly contestable) is that the recorded image itself is the best place to start in telling the broader story of each of these historical events. In this sense, official and conspiracy versions of events might be seen to be mutually supporting and self-sustaining,

In recent work, Grusin (2010) has coined the term ‘premediation’ to refer to a related form of media logic. Premediation refers to efforts to construct mediatised frames that anticipate, in advance, likely futures based on a remediation of the past. For example, the promotion of a discourse of imminent ongoing terror and securitisation after 9/11 was, Grusin claims, an systematic attempt by the Bush administration to construct a scenario of future threats from ‘rogue nation states’ based on a remediation of 9/11 as state sponsored terror. In this way, premediation ‘seeks to make sure that the future is so fully mediated by new media forms that it is unable to emerge into the present without already having been remediated in the past’ (Grusin, 2010: 58). The future is thereby anchored in an already existing framework that arises from a remediation in the past and which seeks to ward off the kinds of shocks that events such as 9/11 presented.

Grusin’s work focuses on new media, but Erll argues that the concept of premediation can be equally well applied to describe commemorative and anticipatory practices in much earlier media forms. For example, the First World War acted as a model for the Second World War

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in terms of ways people were able to narrativise the intense events that took place. Erll further claims that ‘in the Western world, the Bible and Homer’s epics have premediated historical experience for many centuries’ (2009: 111). In this expanded sense, we can see that premediation is the future-oriented dimension of the effort to build a commemorative framework around historical events as they occur, to construct notions of the kinds of future that will be brought about by remembering the event in a particular way.

In summary, the image we have of the Apollo moon landings is one that is the product of a remediated history that invokes particular discourses (the Cowboy, heroism) in an effort to premeditate a future of bold discovery and technical accomplishment. We know that effort generated a significant affective climate at the time, evidenced by the almost euphoric tone of the recollections in contemporary popular writing about the space programme. But we also know that the future that was premediated in the NASA images did not, ultimately, come to pass. To remember the moon landings is then to remember the future that was promised in that present that is now past, alongside the history of those futures that did actually come about, and finally to reflect on what it is to live now in times where we have very little by way of belief in the kinds of futures envisioned by NASA. In the following sections we will now turn to explore the particular ways in which key images of the Apollo landings mediate cultural memory in the present, drawing on material provided by visitors to the National Space Centre, located in the Midlands region of the UK.

The National Space Centre, Leicester UK

On Deck 3 of the National Space Centre there is an exhibit that is dedicated to remembering the Apollo moon landings.

---- Insert Fig.1 about here ----

The exhibit is a replica of a 1960s living room that includes a space on the wall for people to pin up their memories of the moon landings. The exhibit features a number of iconic images and objects including: a television set, a classic writing desk, examples of memorabilia, and a number of household furnishings that were popular in the 60s (Figure 1). The exhibit is positioned opposite the rocket tower (the main event at the Space Centre) which also features a visual timeline of the early space programmes, a piece of moon rock and a lunar module simulator. The visitors are encouraged to relive the moments of the Apollo 11 moon landings and record their personal memories.

--- Insert Fig. 2 about here ---

Visitors are invited to write their memories on a small piece of card and place it on the wall. One set of cards has the title ‘my strongest memory of the moon landings is...’ while another states ‘things I associate with the 60s and 70s are...’ Visitors are encouraged to write their memories on one of the cards and then place them up on the wall under the title ‘your memories’ (Figure 2). The exhibition manager, Kevin Yates, states that the Space Centre was keen on visitors ‘having experiences, rather than simply being presented with information’.

The remainder of this paper is based on an analysis of some of the memory cards that were taken from the wall of the exhibit. Over 400 Cards were compiled during a six-month period from February to August in 2010. The cards were gradually removed from the wall and

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analysed in terms of the social and cultural practices of remembering. The analysis required a close reading of the 400 cards. This reading was guided by the inductive principles that are typically adopted in qualitative research (see Willig, 2012). We were looking at the internal structure of the brief accounts on the cards, what they defined as important and relevant, how they constructed a personal narrative, and the meanings that were accorded to the historical event. The following examples represent findings from the data corpus as a whole. All personal information has been anonymised in order to protect the identity of the participants.

In the following sections the findings will be grouped into three broad narratives that are present in the memories of the moon landings. The narratives were established by generating a series of themes that loosely organised the accounts offered on individual cards. The themes were inductively derived following the initial analysis in an attempt to surface some of the broader trends in cultural memory that were at work across the data corpus (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In what follows we offer specific examples because they illustrate in particularly vivid way a narrative that spanned a number of cards. The first narrative focuses on how the memory of the moon landings is organised in a way that signals membership to a particular time and culture as ‘my generation’. The second deals with the context of viewing the moon landings on live television broadcast as a family, and how this remediates and personalises the experience. The third shows that what is remembered are both the events themselves and the futures that they promised, which are now recollected in terms of present ambiguities and doubts that were felt at the time.

‘My Generation’

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The following analysis explores how the cards are able to open up the past memory of the moon landings through a range of social actions that perform the memory as part of ‘my generation’.

Example 1

My strongest memory of the moon landings is...

I was born the year man first landed on the moon.

I remember in my early days mum playing music from Beatles, Bee Gees and I can remember an old air raid shelter at the bottom of my grandparents house.

(Card 8)

Example 1 shows the mediation of a set of wider cultural influences that are recalled as part of the memory of the moon landings. In this example, the memory performs a connection to the moon landings as part of a generational sequence of events to which the author has membership. In this recollection the author invokes ties with music in order to signal a commitment to the collective image of the event. For example, the links to the ‘Beatles’ and the ‘Bee Gees’ performs a sense of belonging to a particular moment in history and forges the author as one of a collective of people who can access these cultural references. This collective is then positioned as a generation who stood at a pivotal point. The reference to ‘an old air raid shelter at the bottom of my grandparents house’ invokes the wartime generation, where the space programme had its origins. The mum who plays music then belongs to the post-war generation who shaped the 1960s and 1970s. But strangely it is the generation born under the sign of the moon landings, so to speak, who claim it as a defining feature of their

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lives ('I was born the year man first landed on the moon'), despite the fact that their personal experience of the events was often entirely vicarious.

The symbolic references in Example 1 demonstrate an effort at ownership of the particular experience of the moon landings. The act of claiming something as 'our time' relies on being constructing a discontinuity with the present (Middleton, 2002). In using the references to different musical artists, the author in Card 8 is accessing a shared past which affords a privileged vantage point on the present. It signals a time when *things were different* and signifies a distance from the present. This act is further evidenced in the following example:

Example 2

My strongest memory of the moon landings is...

Twin tub washing machines and 'blue'
washing powder.

Angel delight (yoghurt was that strange,
Sour stuff that health freaks ate).

A time when we knew exactly who was
responsible for late trains, powercuts and
overhead phone lines! (Card 13)

Example 2 references a number of culturally specific objects such as 'blue' washing powder and 'angel delight' that emphasises membership to a particular experience, which offers a unique perspective of past and present values. For example, in presenting yoghurt as something that 'health freaks ate', the author establishes an ironic distance from both current-

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day norms of healthy eating behaviours and past norms where this now unremarkable practice was thought entirely bizarre. This is further developed in the latter sections of Card 13 where the author states that the 1960s presented a time when people knew who was ‘responsible for late trains, powercuts and overhead power lines!’. What is accomplished here is a contrast between past certainties and present ambiguities.

The opening image of the twin-tub washing machine neatly captures this dynamic. By modern standards this was a highly labour intensive device, but at the time it promised a vast improvement in the time spent on performing domestic activities. Significantly, the washing machine was also classically a symbol of upward social mobility. The implied moral contrast here is with the present contemporary generation who are blissfully unaware of their relatively comfortable lives. But this contrast is then somewhat reversed in the last section, where the present day is treated as in some ways in a worse position. The present lack of accountability for late-running trains and power cuts signifies a world going backwards. The reference to power cuts, for instance, invokes the period in British history during the 1970s, immediately after the moon landings, when there were regular disturbances to the national power supply as a result of industrial disputes in the coal mining sector and elsewhere. In a polarised political landscape – such as that between two superpowers competing with one another and spending unimaginably vast sums of money to reach the moon first – there are certain clarities. All of which have been now lost.

It is further noteworthy that the recollection of the moon landings relies on the use of a number of sensory images such as ‘blue’ washing powder and angel delight (a notoriously unhealthy and cheap dessert made from a powder of artificial ingredients). It is tempting to

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see this as an instance of dehistoricisation, where the significance of the moon landings is buried under highly personal and seemingly trivial memories. The conflict between superpowers has no greater relevance than a nostalgic longing for the days of sugary desserts. And yet, as we have seen the second half of the card clearly does have an explicit moral and political message, suggesting that these visual images are not purely nostalgic. Middleton & Brown (2005) argue, with reference to material featuring elderly speakers talking about their youth, that the use of sensory images serves to construct a ‘habitable past’ for recipients of recollection. To hear or read these images is to be drawn into a work of imaginative reconstruction of a vicariously ‘felt’ past. But in doing so, the recipient is also drawn into an implicit moral order that becomes difficult to explicitly critique, or even properly articulate, since it is primarily experienced as a matter of feeling. Here the moral order appears to be something like the following: “my generation may have lived with cheap and nasty things, but we managed to put a man on the moon, whereas you lot now don’t even know how to get trains to run on time”. Nostalgia can then be a way of doing politics that lures the recipient into an empathic engagement with a ‘habitable world’ that blunts their capacity to respond effectively.

In the following extract there is a slightly different example of how the moon landings are recollected through explicit association with other images:

Example 3

Things I associate with the 60s and 70s are...

Men landing on the moon and various people
getting assassinated in USA the year before:

Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy (apparently

he'd had a brother who had also been shot, but

I had been too young to remember that).

- 1969 was when I passed the eleven-plus and

got a free scholarship to [name of School].

This year my own son is 11. (Card 208)

Example 3 shows a distinction being performed between individual and collective memory, the personal past and the historical. For example, the mediation of the presidential assassinations are intertwined with the recollection of passing the 'eleven-plus' (an examination taken at age 11 in the UK that enabled select state educated pupils to move to the better resourced semi-private 'Grammar School' sector). The historical importance of the event is performed through the rhetorical contrast between the two events. Middleton (2002: 92) argues that 'succession and change are 'built-in' in the sense that they are emergent effects in communicative ordering of reported experience'. The comment on passing the eleven-plus appears to be couched in the final aspects of the card where the author states 'This year my own son is 11.' Change is embedded in the act of reporting experience, discursively marked in the above example with reference to the contrast between father-as-11 and son-as-11. Therefore, the change marks what should be remembered, what should be forgotten, and the social implications of the difference between then and now.

Note that this card was written in response to a slightly different task, where visitors to the Apollo exhibit were asked to recall the things they associated with 60s/70s. The first item here is the moon landings, reflecting the context in which the task is being performed. But the

subsequent items are interesting packaged as ‘various people being assassinated’. This lends an interesting set of connotations where the moon landings are seen not as a triumphant accomplishment, but as one facet of turbulent times. There is a three-part list of figures of murdered political figures. Lists in this form (classically known as a ‘tricolon’) are considered as rhetorically important by discourse and conversation analysts because they seize attention by formulating ‘completion’ (see Jefferson, 1990). Here the third figure – John F. Kennedy – is not explicitly named. Given that the JFK assassination is one of the other major images in collective memory of the 1960s, this is highly significant. The speaker may be simply drawing a contrast between what direct and vicarious experience – they were just ‘too young’ to remember JFK. But in another sense, the two subsequent murders in 1968 and the moon landings in 1969 displace the death of JFK in 1963. These chronologically later events mark both the end of the 1960s, and also the end of the aspirations and political ambitions on which that decade was launched. It was of course JFK who announced the Apollo programme in 1961 in his ‘we choose to go to the moon’ speech before the US congress. The achievement of that ambition is here recollected as one that erases him as a political figure and spells the end of the political order that saw the race to the moon as a crucial move in international relations.

In the extracts we have described here, we see the moon landings cast as a key image in constructing a generational collective memory. This is performed as a time of moral and political certainties that is ‘capped’ by the moon landing. But these certainties have proved to not be durable, and from the perspective of the present may even appear to have come to end with the ‘small step’ made by Neil Armstrong.

Watching the landings

The Apollo 11 moon landing was a multi-media event. As we noted earlier, NASA carefully managed the public image of the space programme across print and broadcast media. One of the key features of the moon landing was the live television coverage of the event. As a then relatively new media, television clearly presented both opportunities and risks for NASA. This is clearly born out in the Challenger space shuttle disaster in 1986, which was broadcast live across US schools because of the presence of a teacher, Christa McAuliffe, in the crew, who has been selected for the 'NASA Teacher in Space' programme. Live television enacts a very particular form of remediation, with the need to supply an immediate interpretative frame around the unfolding images, typically in the form of an ongoing commentary (but also, more recently, through banners and captions). For instance, the unbearably long seconds of silence in the live transmission of the explosion of the Challenger, during which it is clear to the viewer that something dreadful has happened, before the NASA flight commentary finally offers the words 'Flight controllers here looking very carefully at the situation. Obviously a major malfunction', is for many an abiding recollection of the event. But that memory is made up of a mixture of the event itself, the televised images, the pauses in the commentary, and the reaction to the juxtaposition between the two. In other words, it is a memory of a remediation.

The cards contain numerous examples of these mediated memories:

Example 4

My strongest memory of the moon landings is...

Being allowed out of bed to watch 1st

landing, live, Tiny T.V that we got just
before the landing. We were all glued to the
screen. It all went so quiet as the first
steps were taken. I remember being
really scared for the astronauts – the take-off
from the surface was every bit as amazing
- they'd done it! (Card 55)

Example 4 includes the reference to a 'Tiny T.V' and the feeling of being 'glued to the screen' in a way that signifies both the mediated event of the landing itself and a feeling engendered at the time by the event of watching on live television. The practice of coming together to watch the moon landing on the television situates the memory of the moon landings as a communally experienced event – one that speaks to a discourse of family life and the collective importance of watching the moon landings on the television. What is particularly significant here is the recollection of the efforts made by the parents – who facilitated 'being allowed out of bed' – to constitute the event as memorable for their children. This is not an event that was incidentally experienced and then subsequently recalled, but rather an event that was at the time deliberately constituted by viewers to render it memorable, and moreover one in which one generation felt compelled to ensure that the memory would be embedded with the younger generation, even to the extent of specially purchasing a television 'just before the landing'.

The recollection is also not just of the landing itself, but also of the 'every bit as amazing' take-off. There is a clear narrative structure to the event, with initial fear for the astronauts,

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the awed silence at the landing and then the relief and excitement at the completion – ‘they’d done it!’. This narrative is a reasonably well-rehearsed one of exploration/danger/escape, and one that would be culturally available in different forms to the majority of viewers. It is also a common narrative arc for many televised dramas. In this sense, the televised moon landings are as much part of the history of television viewing as they are the history of space exploration. Arguably, what is being recalled here is as much an initiation into televised drama as it is a recollection of an historical event. Even before Apollo 11 launched, the moon landings already had a place in an established genre of filmic and televisual depictions, dating back to the George Méliès’ (1902) *A Trip to the Moon* (a copy of which plays on loop in the National Space Centre at the start of the Apollo exhibit). In the time intervening between the event and the writing of the cards, the genre has expanded significantly, with films such as *Capricorn One*, *The Right Stuff* and *Apollo 13*. If at the time it was difficult to disentangle the event from the mediations in and through which it was experienced, then forty years after it is practically impossible.

The remediation of the event at the time had numerous layers, as shown by the following example:

Example 5

My strongest memory of the moon landings is...

... getting up in the middle of the night

to watch Armstrong + Aldrin walk

on the moon; and my father taking

photos of the TV screen as Armstrong

climbed down the ladder. (Card 54)

Example 5 has the author recalling ‘my father taking photos of the TV screen as Armstrong climbed down the ladder’. From a contemporary perspective this seems rather peculiar, but at the time no other means of recording television images was widely (and cheaply) available. However, given that images of the moon landings were printed in almost every newspaper the following day, we have to ask what exactly is the father taking a photograph of? What does this gesture mean? One possibility is that the father is recording not just the literal image on the screen but the event, understood broadly. In doing so, he is inscribing the moment where the family are gathered together ‘in the middle of the night’ as something memorable enough to merit entry into the shared memory that is the family photograph album. As such, the historical event is personalised in a similar way to that which we observed in the last extract.

Taking a photograph of what is happening on a television screen layers one type of remediation on another. It also translates the televised images into a material form that allows for other kinds of operations. As a photograph, the image can be mobilised and shown to others. It can also be combined and arranged with other photographs – such as a series depicting the events in a single year, or a series denoting extraordinary moments to which the family as a whole was witness, or it could be part of a package of photographs intended as a ‘keepsake’ to be transmitted across generations. Remediation here makes the past into a flexible resource that can afford a variety of memorial activities. Once again, this suggests that what is being remembered is not solely the event itself, but rather the remediation of the event by the father and the efforts to project family memory into the future.

The two extracts together show how recollections of the moon landings are then ‘punctualized’ (cf. Middleton & Brown, 2005) through the act of families gathering around the live television broadcast. The layering of remediations together then embeds the event in a variety of narrative structures such that it becomes difficult to imagine the moon landings outside of the context where they were first experienced. History then becomes personalised, folded into the collective memory of the family.

Remembering the future

In *Premediation*, Grusin (2010) analyses forms of remediation that he claims have an anticipatory role. These are efforts to create a frame around images and narratives that can anchor events yet to come. This is, in effect, a way folding the future into the present such that it becomes already anticipated and manageable. Grusin’s key example is of the Bush administration’s response to 9/11. The massively remediated image of the twin towers – which was repeated endlessly across media forms so that viewers felt themselves almost to be direct witnesses to the event – became the cornerstone for an emerging discourse of securitization which rendered the future as a struggle for ‘democracy’ against the ‘axis of evil’. Premediation created the frame in which the ‘Bush Wars’ (Afghanistan, Iraq) that dominated the first decade of new millennium became not merely intelligible but in some sense inevitable.

If we follow Erll & Rigney’s (2009) argument that premediation exists in all media forms (and not just the contemporary ‘new media’ that Grusin is concerned with), then we can treat NASA’s management of the representation and remediation of the Apollo programme as an

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attempt to create an anticipatory framing of the future in the present. Consider, for example, some of the key images that were repeated around the Apollo missions – the massive Saturn V rockets launching in an orange blaze of fire, the rows of flight controllers and technicians at the Cape Canaveral launch site, the suited astronauts walking towards the launch tower. The images project a simultaneous sense of technical power and heroic vulnerability. It takes the combined might and ambition of a nuclear superpower to launch a human into space, but it depends on the character and skills of the astronauts themselves to ensure that they can complete their mission and return to earth. And recall here the images of the ‘splashdown’ practice of landing at sea used for all the Apollo missions, where the astronauts were plucked from the sea by military vessels, which visually referenced the wartime rescue of heroic downed air force pilots.

NASA managed not simply its contemporary image, but also that of the future that it claimed its activities would bring about. How has this premediation of the future in what is now the past fared? In the following example one respondent states how the positive implications of the moon landings became ‘quickly lost’:

Example 6

Things I associate with the 60s and 70s are...

I remember my mother and father
waking in the middle of the night
to watch the landing on the moon.
It was a really exciting event that
seemed to open an exciting

and modern new era. So quickly

lost. (Card 253)

Card 253 opens with a similar story to some of cards we discussed in the last section, with the moon landings being situated in personal family history. The mother and father appear so determined to mark the event that they are prepared to wake themselves up in ‘the middle of the night’. This is an unusual ‘really exciting event’ not only because it was a novel moment in family life, but also because it signified an historical transition – the opening of an ‘exciting and modern era’. The card concludes abruptly with an evaluation of that promise from a contemporary perspective: ‘so quickly lost’.

Clearly things did not turn out as NASA planned. After six moon landings, and \$24 billion spent, the Apollo programme came to an end. There were no bases built on the moon. No missions to Mars. But there was one, perhaps unintended accomplishment. Commenting on a photograph of the earth taken from space during the Apollo 17 mission, Michel Serres states that:

Our first direct and beautiful view of planet Earth as a whole, as photographed by astronauts, constituted an authentic revolution in the spirit and perception of human beings of all languages and cultures. For the first time we can imagine at least the beginnings of a universal solidarity, like that which unites the crew of a ship. (Serres, 1995a: 270)

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The photographs of Earth taken during the Apollo missions revolutionised how we conceived of our dwelling on the planet, Serres claims. For the first time we were properly able to see the Earth as a common environment, to imagine a new kind of solidarity amongst its human inhabitants. This vision proved to be double-edged. Elsewhere, Serres (1995b) notes that the photographs from space also enabled humans to imagine that Earth itself as something like a subject, weighed down by the scale of human activities. The ecological movement and consciousness that emerged in the decades following the moon landings developed this notion to the point where we are now all too aware of the irreversible effects of those activities. The lesson of the Apollo programme is not that of extending our reach ‘to the stars’, but rather of realising just how far we have already over-reached on the Earth, and what the consequences are likely to be.

The previous extract is a retrospective evaluation of the premediation of the moon landings, which has the benefit of knowing the future that actually came about. There are some cards, however, which recollect an ambiguity towards the moon landing at the time. Take the following extract:

Example 7

My strongest memory of the moon landings is...

I was 11 yrs old and had been
allowed to stay up to watch the
moon landing.

But – I fell asleep just as
Neil Armstrong was coming

down the steps to walk on the
moon. (Card 5)

Unlike many of the other cards, here the moon landing are not recollected in terms of a vision of an unstoppable future or a high level of optimism, but rather in mundane terms of an event in family life where the author ‘fell asleep’ at the critical moment. The memory is of a funny story from childhood, not of bearing witness to a monumental event in human history. We can see here a normalization of the moon landings, which are shorn of their premediated qualities. This is also occurs in the following example:

Example 8

My strongest memory of the moon landings is...
being at my uncle’s wedding
on the day of the moon landing.
They divorced shortly after Apollo
13 mission. (Card 3)

Again, the recollection is personalised in terms of family history, but without any sense of the historical importance of the event. The author reports a family wedding in 1969, followed by rapid divorce (in 1970, assuming the author has correctly recalled the corresponding mission). Whether or not the details are accurate, the structure of the story is nearly framed around initial high hopes and subsequent disappointment. Doubtless citing Apollo 13 is significant, as this is famous failed mission that was aborted following an explosion in space,

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with the famous words ‘Houston we’ve had a problem’ uttered by astronaut John Swigert. The juxtaposition of the divorce with Apollo 13 suggests that it was both the uncle and NASA who ‘had a problem’. Here family life is used to ironically comment on historical events. The implication of the story of the short marriage is that NASA (as well as the uncle) should have ‘seen it coming’.

The cards in this section demonstrate that recollecting the moon landings also involves recollecting the premediation of the event at the time. The aspirations and grand ambitions of the Apollo programme can be seen from the present as misfounded, as having come to little. But they may also be recollected in terms of an ambiguity at the time, of a failure to have been persuaded of the historical shift that NASA intended the moon landings to inaugurate.

Concluding Remarks

Rowlinson et al (2010) have called for a shift in Organizational Memory Studies away from the narrow concern with how organizations make knowledge and information durable over time, to a concern with the way that organizations manage their own historical legacy and render themselves memorable in particular ways. We have explored how NASA engaged in a remediation of images of the moon landings in the effort to project a frame of meaning around events, such that they become memorable in a particular way. NASA clearly saw itself as enacting an historical mission, and attempted to ensure the nature of that mission, as it saw it at the time, would be embedded in the images that the Apollo programme generated, which it managed extensively.

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The premium that NASA placed on managing its own visual identity and the ‘look’ of the Apollo programme demonstrates the pre-eminence of the visual in shaping cultural memory. Memory operates in a multi-modal fashion. We remember sounds and smells, the taste and the feel of things past. In fact these non-visual elements are often central to highly personal recollections. Images of the past often feel more open to debate – we are well aware the ways in which visual media (e.g. television, cinema, live broadcast) mediate our memories. Awareness of the particular forms of remediation and premediation of the Apollo landings runs throughout all of the cards. But as we noted early, what the emphasis on the visual does, on looking at the past (rather than hearing, smelling, tasting or touching it), is to vastly restrict and narrow the debate about the meaning of what we are recalling. The more clearly we focus on the image of the Apollo 11 lunar module (as a ‘real event’, a ‘vicarious memory’ or even a ‘faked images’) the less likely we are to ask about the organizational, political and financial complexities that surrounded its mission.

Despite all this, from our present perspective, we can see that the future that NASA sought to bring about did not come to pass. Our recollections of the moon landings have a complex structure. They are a mixture of direct or vicarious experiences of the images of the 1969 landing at the time, which are typically personalised by the family context in which they occurred. But they are also mixed with elements from the remediation of the images, and are oriented toward the premediational frame that NASA attempted to construct around the landing. The complexity of the recollections we have analysed, which is apparent despite the brevity, demonstrates that Organizational Memory Studies also needs to focus on how the past is made relevant in the present, and the work of situating the historical with respect to recollected personal pasts. NASA may have been breathtakingly well funded, but seemingly

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no amount of money could guarantee that the frame of meaning it sought to place around the moon landings would persist.

As we write, an expedition funded by the founder of Amazon.com, Jeff Bezos, has recovered pieces of the engines of Apollo Saturn V rockets from the seabed of the Atlantic Ocean. The news reports have focussed on Bezos' expressed personal relation to the Apollo missions:

Bezos, who was five when Apollo 11 blasted off from its Cape Canaveral launchpad, said last year that the moon missions had "a profound influence" on his life. With his fortune from Amazon, the world's largest online retailer, Bezos founded Blue Origin, one of several private spaceflight companies currently vying for contracts to send astronauts into lower earth orbit following the retirement of Nasa's space shuttle fleet two years ago. "Nasa is one of the few institutions I know that can inspire five-year-olds," he said. "With this endeavour, maybe we can inspire a few more youth to invent and explore." (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2013/mar/20/saturn-v-rocket-engines-recovered-jeff-bezos>)

Bezos is part of the new entrepreneurial drive to make space travel commercially available at least for the super rich, the 'capitalists in space' (cf. Parker, 2009b). It all started watching Apollo 11, Bezos claims, and his own recovery of the engines will, he hopes prove to be an equivalent moment to 'inspire' a 'few more youth'. Note the relative paucity of these ambitions. The space race sought to demonstrate the power and reach of the superpowers, to lift humanity 'to the stars'. Bezos hopes to promote his new business venture and maybe seed a little future uplift in the current pre-teen market demographic.

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It seems the space is no longer the place that inspires our common ambitions and hopes. It is just somewhere else where there is some money to be made. Ironically, as Serres suggests, it may be that the images that NASA first transmitted back of the planet became the moment when ecological consciousness could be properly visualised: this is the world where and through which we commonly dwell. The kind of future that is premediated by that particular image is of a vastly different order to that of the moon landings. It is a future freighted with threats, anxieties and dilemmas. Small wonder that we look back on NASA's version of the future with a bittersweet mixture of nostalgia and derision.

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Figure 1. Recreation of a 1960s living room at the National Space Centre (copyright Lewis Goodings)

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Figure 2. Writing Desk with Memory Cards on the Wall (copyright Lewis Goodings)