

## **In Search of Maximum Jeff: Time, Memory and Nostalgia in *The Band***

"I felt myself still reliving a past which was no longer anything more than the history of another person."

(Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*)

"Our memories, at a given moment, form one solitary whole, a pyramid whose point coincides with our present, - with a present moving ceaselessly and plunging into the future. But, behind the memories which crowd in upon our present occupation and are revealed by means of it, there are others, thousands and thousands of others, below and beneath the scene illuminated by consciousness. Yes, I believe our past life is there, preserved even to the minutest details; nothing is forgotten; all we have perceived, thought, willed, from the first awakening of our consciousness, persist indefinitely."

(Bergson, *Mind-Energy: Lectures and Essays*, 1920, p. 116)

"You do not get a sense of time by mechanically repeating what you did as a child. Time is truly sensed when memories rather than habits are repeated; for a habit is pretty much the same from moment to moment, while a memory recalls the specificity of a distinct moment of the past. When a singular and involuntary memory invades the present, then what is repeated is the force of time itself, for time is nothing other than this radical and singular difference."

(Colebrook, 2002, p. 178)

"And indeed there will be time...  
Time for you and time for me,  
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,  
And for a hundred visions and revisions,  
Before the taking of toast and tea."

(T.S. Eliot, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, 1917)

As I enter the Theatre Royal, Newcastle on a Saturday evening in April 2018, I see a giant image of a television replicating the screen from a 1993 Ceefax page. As I read the headlines: Bill Clinton elected as President of the USA, the Bosnian war, the IRA bombing of Warrington, and the charts for that year (featuring Take That's Pray at number one), I am already flooded with memories of twenty-five years ago. This very obvious (but not unwelcome) strategy – of reminding the (very obviously middle-aged) audience of their formative teenage years – places me in a flux between then and now, although not one that actually makes me think of the Clinton presidency or other world events, but a flux that stimulates and generates a flood of involuntary memories.

Before I continue, there are two things to confess. Firstly, I am not a particularly big fan of musical theatre and, secondly, I am not a fan of Take That in any of their iterations. So, settling down to watch a musical based on the music of Take That was not an altogether exciting prospect. As I watched the show, however, I found myself becoming increasingly interested in the emerging themes and motifs used in the production. Extrinsically, *The Band* – written by Tim Firth - is about a group of women reliving their teenage years and the heady excitement of following their teen idols, through an unexpected trip to Prague. Intrinsically, however, *The Band* is about memory, time, nostalgia, friendship and dreams. There is a hauntological quality about *The Band* – of a “nostalgia for lost futures” (Gallix, 2011); the friends attempting to rekindle their past, perhaps a past that did not really exist. The band themselves – five young men styled to replicate Gary et al – had seemingly not aged since 1993 and, in 2018, when the story is set, they appeared like ghosts of the past floating around in the present. This hauntology gave an oneiric quality to the production and, in some ways, made me feel as if the central characters were somewhat delusional. Trapped in an idyllic past where the future was full of promise and potential, these characters were shaken when confronted with their pasts in a present that, for them, had not quite lived up to their

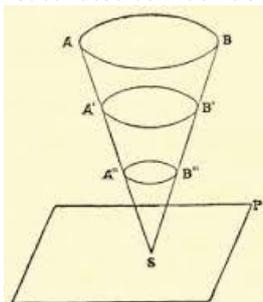
expectations. The reality of their pasts – which, for them is hidden by the nostalgia of an idyllic and carefully constructed mechanical set of memories – is maladjusted by the experience of this unexpected trip to Prague.

What makes this possible is the flood of unexpected involuntary memories that return to the present moment and, somehow, shape the future. This cascading of the past, travelling down the upside-down cone<sup>1</sup> of memory described by Bergson in his 1896 book *Matter and Memory*, is a powerful tool in changing the perspective of each of the characters. This is most acute in the experience of the central protagonist – Rachel (played by Rachel Lumberg) – who longs to find her Gary, Mark, Howard, Robbie, or Jason, but is left with Jeff, a middle-aged anorak wearing Czech beer enthusiast (played by Martin Miller) who, when hearing about the trip to Prague, cannot wait to work his way through the various brews on offer in the post-Communist city of stags and hens.

The story of Rachel and Jeff was the most powerful of all in *The Band*. Having conceded that Rachel should take her old schoolfriends to Prague to see the boys rather than the trip becoming a beer tour from Branik to Staropraman, Jeff waits loyally at home for Rachel's return. It is Jeff's welcome at the airport that fully exemplifies the power of the imagined, hauntological past bearing on the present. As Jeff reads Take That lyrics from his cue cards, poorly concealed in his anorak pocket, Rachel realises that the idyllic past (a

---

<sup>1</sup> Bergson uses an upside-down cone to represent how memories from further back in time are actualised in the present on an involuntary basis. Once prompted, memories travel to the plane of existence (i.e. reality) and, as they have been 'hidden', the memories are reactivated as much deeper and more profound experiences.



From Bergson, 1896/1910, p. 211)

past that never really existed anyway) is something that cannot be recaptured and that she is finally happy with Jeff. In a touching scene, where Rachel admits that her life had felt only eight out of ten and that perhaps she might have found the remaining two on her trip to Prague, Jeff remonstrates that 'this IS Maximum Jeff', hoping this will be good enough for Rachel. This moment surely must have resonated with many of the audience members in the Theatre Royal that evening, as they too held a hope that the two out of ten – perhaps existing somewhere in 1993 – might somehow be found. In fact, this two out of ten may be the hauntological reality of the past, a past that never really existed anyway. While the sublime past may now have been exposed as a fraud, as a ghost that is somehow lingering in the present to fix something about its past as a way of making its future more satisfactory, the hauntological acts as a conduit to reality.

The importance of time – past, present, and future – and memory was foregrounded in *The Band* early on. In the first scene between Rachel and Jeff, in which we learn that she has won a trip to Prague, Jeff – in a tacit acknowledgment to the audience that he (or the actor Martin Miller) is waiting for the laughter to subside and thus deliver the next line – glances at his watch to check the time. This moment – referencing the diegetic world of Jeff who is anxious to leave the house for his lift to work as well as the non-diegetic world of Miller – is much more than simply a comedic checking of the wristwatch. It is a direct reference to the fact that time is a powerful force on our everyday lives, and that memory – as the real force of time - is a means of finding the past self in the present self as a channel through which to shape a future.

Even if you were not (or claimed to not be a fan of Take That's music), *The Band* will resonate with anyone who has ever dreamed of being something or doing something and, when given an opportunity to recapture that dream, perhaps realises that the true reality of dreams is found in the

involuntary memories brought into the present. These memories become like dreams through which we may feel cannot be logical although they are truly capable of logic as they make sense of our present lives. In a hauntological sense, “[w]hen the present has given up on the future, we must listen for the relics of the future in the unactivated potentials of the past” (Fisher, 2013, p. 53), *The Band* does just that; it converts the lost real memories into a future that holds more promise than the past.

## References

- Bergson, H. (1910). *Matter and memory*. (N. Margaret Paul & W. Scott Palmer, Trans.). London, United Kingdom: George Allen & Unwin. (Original work published in 1896).
- Bergson, H. (1920). *Mind-Energy, lectures and essays*. (H. Wildon Carr, Trans.). New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company. (Original work published in 1920).
- Colebrook, C. (2002). *Understanding Deleuze*. Crows Nest, NSW, Australia: Allen and Unwin.
- Eliot, T.S. (2002). *Collected poems: 1909-1962*. London, United Kingdom: Faber & Faber.
- Fisher, M. (2013). The Metaphysics of Crackle: Afrofuturism and Hauntology. *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music*, 5 (2), 42-55.
- Gallix, A. Hauntology: A not-so-new critical manifestation. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2011/jun/17/hauntology-critical>

