Introduction

I will be silent; yet that I may serve
But as a decade in the art of memory,
To put you still in mind of your own virtues
When your too serious thoughts make you too sad,
Accept me for your servant, honoured lady.

Ben Jonson, *The Case is Altered* (1609), D1r

A character in Jonson's neglected early Plautine comedy (written *c.* 1597) invokes a formal technique of the art of memory – dividing memorised material into sets of ten (decades) – as a means to express his devotion to his beloved Phoenixella, who remains in mourning over the death of her mother. Dismissively, Phoenixella rejects her suitor's comments as common and 'naught but ceremony'. The name of the admirer who knows about such mnemonic techniques, Francesco Colonna, can hardly be coincidental. The real-life Francesco Colonna, a Dominican priest, was reputed to be the author of *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, a heavily allegorical and mysterious erotic romance in prose. First printed by Manutius in Venice in 1499, the work included 172 woodcuts illustrating the hero Poliphilo's dream narrative quest to find his beloved Polia. Jonson owned a copy of the 1545 Aldine edition.[1] Robert Dallington's abridged English translation of this rich work, *The Strife of Love in a Dream*, was first published in 1592. In *The Art of Memory* (1966), Frances A. Yates tentatively connects Colonna's work with, first, Dominican memory treatises influenced by Aquinas's advocacy of the art of memory (discussed below) and the diagrammatic structure of Dante's *Commedia*, as well as with, secondly, emergent humanist mysticism; she proposes that the romance's 'Petrarchan triumphs and curious archaeology', featuring a description of Hell 'divided into places to suit the sins and their punishments, with explanatory descriptions' might be understood as a type of

[1] A. W. Johnson argues that several of Jonson's masques drew on Colonna's work. See *Ben Jonson and Architecture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

'artificial memory gone out of control into wild imaginative indulgence'.[2] Jonson (11.9), who does not refer to the art of memory directly elsewhere in his works (yet demonstrates an obvious awareness of its techniques), evidently associates Colonna with the general concept of memory training.[3] Yet could a reader connect Yates's seductive reading of *Hypnerotomachia* with the allusion in Jonson's play? Does the intriguingly named character's passing reference to the art of memory constitute serious intellectual engagement by Jonson with the subject? Moreover, what does a reference such as this mean for the cultural awareness and relevance of the art of memory in Renaissance England?

In *The Memory Arts in Renaissance England: A Critical Anthology*, we provide extended excerpts from over seventy works printed in English in England between 1500 and 1700. Our undertaking began with the 'art of memory', singular; that is, the practice of mnemonics rooted in the fourth canon of Ciceronian and pseudo-Ciceronian rhetoric (described below). Yet we are not simply concerned with tracking references to the 'art of memory' across the period. If we were to use the exact phrase 'art of memory' as our guide to the memory arts in Renaissance England between 1500 and 1699, it would turn up a reading list of 217 separate works for the interested scholar, stretching from Laurence Andrewe's 1527 additions to *The Mirror of the World* (entry 1.2) to four works printed in 1697, including Marius D'Assigny's *The Art of Memory* (entry 1.10).[4] Among these 217 works there are only six book-length discussions about the art of memory. The two earliest are translations of continental treatises, Peter of Ravenna's *The Phoenix* (1527; 1.3) and Guglielmo Gratarolo's *The Castle of Memory* (1562; 1.4). Four English writers (entries 1.6–1.9) write book-length studies. Yet these works barely scratch the surface of the dissemination of the art of memory, singular, in Renaissance England. Tracing references to the 'art of memory' across the period draws together an assemblage of texts, often with nothing linking them beyond the author's awareness of the phrase 'art of memory' (see Figure 0.1).

[2] Yates *AM*, p. 123.

[3] For the relationship between eros and memory, see Ioan P. Culianu, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, trans. Margaret Cook (University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 32–8.

[4] We used online resources such as *Early English Books Online* and *Literature Online* to complete this search. For further discussion about references to the 'art of memory' in the period, see Rory Loughnane, 'Shakespeare, Memory, and New Media', in *The Routledge Handbook of Shakespeare and Memory*, ed. Andrew Hiscock and Lina Perkins Wilder (forthcoming).

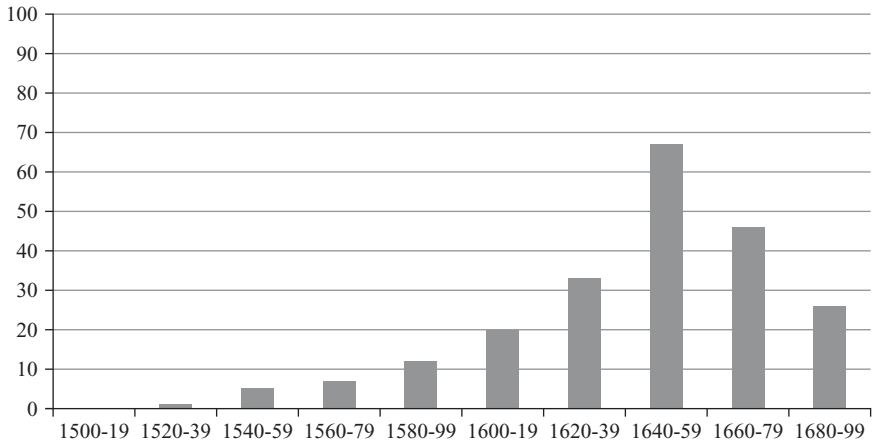

FIGURE 0.1 References to the 'art of memory' in early English printed texts, 1500–1699

It is intriguing to note, for instance, that historiographers such as Holinshed, scientists such as Robert Boyle and philosophers like William Berkeley were all aware of this phrase. Such personal awareness is interesting in and of itself on a case-by-case basis. But if we track their and others' printed references to the word sequence 'art of memory' across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we gain a partial insight into the general awareness of the 'art of memory' across the period.

Of course, some enthusiasm for these findings must be tempered by the fact that more works were lost from the sixteenth century and more works were printed in the seventeenth century. But, despite this caveat, we still get a general sense of the progression of awareness; the phrase 'art of memory' is like a meme spreading within English Renaissance culture. In the sixteenth century, it was infrequently discussed, principally in translations of continental works about the art of memory itself and works on rhetoric. Then there is a concentration of hits in the 1590s, building gradually through the Jacobean and early Caroline period until the most significant cluster of references to the 'art of memory' appear in the period of the Civil War and Restoration. The number of references drops off eventually over the last four decades.

The art of memory emerges out of classical rhetoric's preoccupation with helping public speakers recall their speeches for delivery. The practitioner of the classical art associates things worth remembering with images and then mentally locates these images in an architectural setting divided

into compartments, so that later he can revisit the setting and systematically retrieve the various deposits from the images. Yates argued that the medieval and Renaissance art of memory was not confined to the utilitarian trick of storing and retrieving information but actually shaped many Western ideas in a diversity of intellectual domains – from eccentric systems of thought (Ramism, Lullism, Camillo's theatre and Bruno's hermeticism) to aesthetic schemes (iconography) and architecture (the Globe theatre). One argument of Yates's that is frequently repeated is that after the 1580s in England the art of memory can be understood as a Brunian phenomenon, infused with occultish energies of Neoplatonism and hermeticism, and innately related to the Italian tradition. This is a critical narrative that has been perpetuated due to the residual influence of Yates's study. Yet as Yates's focus narrows she stokes the flames of a myth–that the art of memory possesses a univocality in England – which simply does not accord with the facts. Outside the Cambridge circle, and some outliers in the mid-seventeenth-century writing on the Rosy Cross, there is little English engagement with the art of memory in the form Yates describes. Hugh Plat dismisses Bruno's disciple Alexander Dickson as a charlatan in 1594 in *The Jewel House of Art and Nature* (1.5). The art of memory in England was not just a high art or esoterica, but aimed at a lay audience as Plat, Willis and Herdson each attest (1.5, 1.7 and 1.8). Even restricting a search to the word sequence 'art of memory' and reading through the 217 texts where these are found give a sense that, outside a distinct intellectual circle, the art of memory as understood in England was much different from the continental tradition Yates describes.

To better understand how the art of memory came to influence English thought, let us trace several paths from the beginning. Memory training originates in ancient Greece and is based on a technique of impressing 'things' and 'words' on the mind, using images. Simonides of Keos (*c.* 556–468 BCE) has been traditionally credited with the invention of formalised memory training.[5] In *De memoria et reminiscentia* Aristotle proposes that 'memory, even memory of the objects of thought, is not without an image' and suggests that memory belongs to the same part of the soul as imagination.[6] Aristotle insists that 'Exercises safeguard memory by reminding one.'[7] He separates remembering as an experience from the act of deliberate recollection, which

[5] Yates *AM*, pp. 1–2. On Platonic and Aristotelian theories of memory, see Coleman, pp. 5–38, or Small, pp. 81–94.
[6] Aristotle *MR*, 449^{b}47–8, 450^{a}22–3. [7] Aristotle *MR*, 451^{a}12.

is an exercise, and suggests that if a person wants to recall a certain memory then 'whatever has some order . . . is easily remembered'.[8] Aristotle also suggests laws of association for recollection where one image recalls another.[9] In his example, one chain of associated images may be 'from milk to white, from white to air, and from this to fluid, from which one remembers, the season one is seeking'.[10] The abstract and non-specific set of images of 'milk', 'white', 'air', 'fluid' and 'autumn' reveal little about Aristotle's concept of the pictorial (or evocative) aspect of the image. This may be because Aristotle's treatise is about remembering and recollecting in general and not specifically oriented towards memory training. However, a number of the precepts that will reappear in later memory-training traditions can be identified: the necessity of images as prompts to memory; the need for order; the importance of creating associations to prompt memory; the need for repetition in memory exercises.

Techniques for memory training next appear in treatises on rhetoric in ancient Rome.[11] Classical rhetoric is divided into five canons, of which memory (*memoria*), the ability to recall the parts of the speech and speak extemporaneously, is the fourth.[12] The usual technique is 'architectural' in approach whereby the student of memory forms a series of places (*loci*) in the mind by walking around a building and remembers places in that building in a certain order. The student then attaches images (*imagines*) to these places, and thus, when called upon to make his speech he can move in his mind from place to place in the building and retrieve the images stored there.[13] Cicero describes this in Book II of *De oratore*. Calling it a 'memory for things' (as opposed to a 'memory for words' which is much more exacting[14]), Cicero says that

[8] Aristotle *MR*, 451^{b}34–5.

[9] See Lina Bolzoni, 'The Play of Images', in *The Enchanted Loom: Chapters in the History of Neuroscience*, ed. Pietro Corsi (Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 19.

[10] Aristotle *MR*, 452^{a}14–16.

[11] The three main Ancient Roman sources for memory training are *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (*c.* 86–82 BCE), Cicero's *De oratore* (55 BCE) and Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* (*c.* 55 CE). Yates *AM*, p. 18. For an account of the Roman method see Rossi *LA*, pp. 8–9, Yates *AM*, pp. 17–41, Coleman, pp. 39–59 and Small, pp. 95–116.

[12] The other four parts are *inventio* (invention), *dispositio* (arrangement), *elocutio* (style) and *pronuntiatio* (delivery).

[13] Yates *AM*, p. 22.

[14] Memorising an image for each individual word is the second, more difficult, technique. Cicero acknowledges this when he states: 'But a memory for words, which for us is less essential, is given distinctness by a greater variety of images; for there are many words which serve as joints connecting the limbs of the sentence, and these cannot be formed by

orators can use this 'special property' to 'imprint on [their] minds by a skilful arrangement of the several masks that represent them, so that [they] may grasp ideas by means of images and their order by means of localities'.[15] The anonymous writer of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (attributed to Cicero until the modern period) instructs his students that the images used must follow certain rules.[16] These dictate that the place for the image must not be too crowded, that the images must be neither too close nor too far apart, and that the images must be seen clearly. A significant development in this method is the use of evocative imagery to prompt recollection. As *Rhetorica ad Herennium* instructs,

> Now nature herself teaches us what we should do. When we see in everyday life things that are petty, ordinary, and banal, we generally fail to remember them, because the mind is not being stirred by anything novel or marvellous. But if we see or hear something exceptionally base, dishonourable, extraordinary, great, unbelievable, or laughable, that we are likely to remember a long time [. . .] Thus nature shows that she is not aroused by the common, ordinary event, but she is moved by a new or striking occurrence. Let art then imitate nature, find what she desires, and follow as she directs.[17]

Thus in the pseudo-Ciceronian method we can see the governing principles of order and repetition and instructions for the use of evocative imagery.

Augustine's contribution to the art of memory could be said to be the conversion of the *loci* system into a theological space, a second creation locked in the subject's interiority. Augustine makes the memory palace private and personal, not just instrumental. In Book 10 of *Confessions*, a person's own depths unfold like a memory palace or landscape, consistent with rhetoric's fourth stage and yet more expansive, heuristic, even unconscious.[18] In addition to the memorative locational setting of *The City of God* contrasted to the earthly city of Rome (written in response to its having been sacked in 410 CE), medieval readers were drawn to Augustine's 'trinity of the mind' consisting of memory, understanding, and will.[19] Resonances of Augustinian thought can be found as late as Digby's *Two Treatises* (1644; IV.8) and Bunyan's unwavering faith in the truth of the Celestial City (1681; VI.20). In the late medieval period

any use of simile – of these we have to model images for constant employment' (Cicero *DO*, II.lxxxviii.359).

[15] Cicero *DO*, III.lxxxviii.359–60.
[16] *Ad Herennium*, III.xvi-xx.29–34.
[17] *Ad Herennium*, III.xxii.35–6.
[18] Yates *AM*, pp. 46–9; Carruthers *BM*, p. 193; Helfer, pp. 48–56.
[19] *De Trinitate* in Augustine *TR*, XV.iii.5.

Scholastic writers advocated memory training as an essential aid for prudent Christian behaviour.[20] Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas both rationalise memory as a part of prudence, by explaining memory as reminiscence, which is found in the rational part of the soul.[21] In *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas states that since 'experience is stocked with memories . . . consequently recalling many facts is required for prudence'.[22] Memory training is therefore used to remember useful lessons from the past with a view to prudent conduct in the present and future. Aquinas recommends 'four aids to cultivating a good memory':[23]

> First, one who wishes to remember should pick certain images that, while fitting his ideas, are somewhat out of the ordinary, for what is unusual rouses wonder, and so the mind dwells on it the more intently [. . .] Second, a person who wishes to hold things in his memory should arrange them in order for his consideration so that he may readily pass from one to another [. . .] Third, a person should put his care and concern into the things he wants to memorize [. . .] Fourth, we should frequently ponder over the things we want to remember [. . .] custom is like second nature.[24]

We can see that the prompts used in memory training described by Aquinas are indebted to the pseudo-Ciceronian method, emphasising the need for evocative imagery, order and repetition. The fourth aid, which advises meditation on the memory itself, conflates the idea of repetition from the third rule with additional emphasis on those things which should be remembered (Christian tenets). Together, these constituent parts aid customary or habitually moral Christian behaviour.

[20] See Bolzoni *GM*, p. xvii.

[21] Yates, *AM*, p. 81. See Albertus Magnus, *De bono*, Tractatus IV, Quaestio II '*De partibus prudentia*' in Carruthers *BM*, pp. 267–80; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, vol. 36, Prudence (2a2ae. 47–56), 49.1–6 trans. Thomas Gilby (London: Blackfriars, 1974), pp. 61–75. Rossi observes that Albertus and Aquinas's rationalisation is 'explicitly derived from Aristotelian and pseudo-Ciceronian sources (*Ad Herennium*) and [is] particularly indebted to Cicero's inclusion of memory as a part of Prudence' (Rossi *LA*, pp. 10–11). Similarly, see Coleman's discussion of the pseudo-Ciceronian technique (*Ad Herennium*) and other (correctly) attributed Ciceronian (*De inventione* and *De oratore*) texts illuminates how Aquinas appropriates his source material for the new Christian doctrine: '[Cicero's] primary interest . . . is in the practice of virtuous behaviour. So that in the Cicero *DI*, II.liii.159–60, he defines virtue as a habit of mind in harmony with reason and the order of nature. Virtue has four parts: prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. Prudence is the knowledge of what is good, bad, or neither, and it too has parts: memory, intelligence and foresights (*memoria*, *intellegentia*, *providentia*).' See Coleman, pp. 41–2.

[22] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, vol. 36 (2a2ae. 47–56), 49.1, pp. 61–3.

[23] Ibid., 49.2, p. 63. [24] Ibid., 49.2, p. 63.

Memory training was in fact diffusely influential in several emerging cultural, literary and artistic practices in late medieval and early modern continental Europe, and the treatises that are written can be understood as 'just the backdrop of a cultural drama developed on many levels'.[25] A major source for this 'cultural drama' is the Scholastic advocacy of memory training as an aid to Christian devotion. While the treatises of Albertus and Aquinas are not the only medieval commentaries on memory training in this period, they are the most influential.[26] This is evidenced in the repeated references to Aquinas alongside Aristotle and Cicero in later memory treatises.[27] Moreover, in conflating classical accounts of memory training (both the Aristotelian 'philosophical explanation for using arbitrary associations as a basic mnemonic tool'[28] and the practical applications found in the writings of Cicero, Quintilian and *Rhetorica ad Herennium*) with contemporary religious thought, the Scholastic writers address how a trained memory can be used to influence behaviour; this intention marks the advent of a major shift in the memory-training tradition's sphere of influence.[29] Whereas until this point, memory training offered the individual student of memory a method for retrieving a variety of materials, now, following this appropriation, what was to be retrieved was essential material for virtuous Christian behaviour.[30] Thus, Aquinas states that 'the aptitude for prudence is from nature, yet its perfection is from practice or from grace. And so Cicero observes that memory is not developed by nature alone, but owes much to art and diligence.'[31] The precepts of memory training are now found in multiple practices that become a central means of directing Christian conduct in the wider community.[32] Carruthers describes this development (identified as *memoria*) as creating a modality of late medieval culture (drawing on Clifford Geertz's argument that cultures can be understood as 'symbol-systems'), with culture understood as a public and social phenomenon, reliant on these modalities that enable such a symbol-system to operate.[33] Thus, *memoria* is a modality of medieval culture

[25] Bolzoni *GM*, p. xvii. See also Yates *AM*, pp. 91–2, and Engel *MM*, p. 13.
[26] For example, see San Concordia's *Gli ammaestramenti degli antichi* (*c.* 1347), Carpinis's *De nutrienda memoria* (1476), and Ripa's *Iconologia* (1593, 1603). See Rossi, pp. 12–13, 24, 26. Also see Coleman on John Blund, David of Dinant, John of La Rochelle, Averroes, Albert the Great, John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham (pp. 363–421, 465–537).
[27] Yates *AM*, p. 122 and pp. 128–30.
[28] Carruthers *BM*, p. 123.
[29] Bolzoni *WI*, p. 4, and Bolzoni *GM*, p. xiv.
[30] Carruthers *CM*, p. 21.
[31] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, vol. 36, Prudence (2a2ae. 47–56), 49.2, pp. 61, 63.
[32] Bolzoni *WI*, p. 4. See also Spence, p. 15 and Yates *AM*, pp. 69–72.
[33] Carruthers *BM*, p. 259.

that has 'identifiable and verifiable practices and procedures that affect a variety of cultural phenomena . . . and it is also a value in itself, identified with the virtue of prudence'. These 'values enable certain behavior', and 'thus become conditioners of culture'.[34] Similarly, Bolzoni describes the pervasiveness of mnemonics in late medieval culture in terms of a code that is structured so as to be creative, as well as recuperative.[35]

The importance of memory to late medieval society, insofar as it affects subject behaviour, cultural phenomena and institutionalised practices, reveals several paths whereby the primary rules of memory training could be passed to the later period.[36] Thus, cultural transmission of medieval writings on memory into early modern culture cannot be estimated by enumerating the widespread publication of new mnemonic treatises alone, but rather through examining how the cultural, socio-political, literary and artistic practices that can be traced back to this mnemonic tradition (of ordered, coded associations based on repeated evocative and associative imagery to instruct prudential behaviour) continued to develop in the later period.[37] The central precepts uniform to all the disparate memory-training traditions, of ordered repeated uses of evocative and associative imagery, can also be isolated in multiple cultural, literary and artistic practices in late medieval and early modern Europe.

Renaissance English culture was not entirely alienated from the European phenomenon Yates and others describe, though its engagement with the memory arts cannot be understood solely within the framework of the continental memory treatises. In discussing the emergence of the art of memory in England, Yates points towards Robert Copland's translation of Peter of Ravenna's work as foundational to this development. We have worked through Copland's translation (1.3) and it is, in no better words, a hideously corrupt text. Copland translates a French translation of Ravenna's Latin. At times, it seems clear that he has little idea what the underlying text is saying, and his translation represents a best guess of a once-removed text. Copland's translation was printed only once in 1545. Yates, in writing about Ravenna's text, used his original Latin work to guide her discussion. There is an obvious dissonance between Ravenna's study of mnemonics as she describes it and the bastardised form in Copland's translation. Simply put, this work could not be foundational in English studies of memory. Rather we must attempt to trace a

[34] Ibid., p. 260. [35] Bolzoni *WI*, p. 6. See also Samuel, p. 36.
[36] See Yates *AM*, p. 112.
[37] See Samuel, p. viii. See also Small, p. 101, Carruthers *CT*, p. 144.

more circuitous means of transmission to illuminate how information about the memory arts, plural, was disseminated and assimilated in Renaissance English society.

With respect to its social impact and interdisciplinary scope, memory studies may lay claim to being one of the richest and most prominent research fields in the humanities and the social sciences over the last four decades. By using the designation 'memory arts', this volume, however, endeavours to preserve the historical and cultural difference of premodernity, a difference that contemporary memory studies threatens to collapse with its distinctly post-Enlightenment orientation around trauma, repression and political protest as well as issues of cognitive philosophy and evolutionary psychology. Perhaps more than any other period, the Renaissance – whose name signifies a rebirth of culture – invites research into this fertile field, since during that time humanists strove to revive the works, discourses and practices of Greek and Roman cultures. 'Memory arts' designates Renaissance activity, and, rather than denoting the modern sense of 'fine arts', resonates etymologically with *ars* and *techne*, ancient terms for the skills, techniques and technologies that humans deploy to build civilisation in contradistinction to the works of nature.

For our purposes, the art of memory constitutes a significant Renaissance *techne.* Its distinctiveness and creative plasticity is exhibited by recent scholarly work. For example, Lina Perkins Wilder considers how a synthetic knowledge of natural memory and artificial memory enables spectators to uncover the gendered inflections of recollection in Shakespeare's props and characters, while Rebeca Helfer explores the many ways in which the ancient art of memory, better grasped as a story about history rather than through rhetorical terms, illuminates the pivotal role of ruins in Spenser's poetic theory and practice. Responding to such recent scholarship, our title gives the art of memory its full intellectual due, but also registers the necessity to acknowledge other kinds of Renaissance memory art. A memory art broadly conceived performs valuable social and collective labour, enhancing, supplementing, or externalising a person's mental ability of storing information so that people can recollect the information at later times. In English mnemonic culture, rhetoric's fourth stage is thus only one *techne* among many: the memory arts may encompass in some form or another the liberal arts; the art of rhetoric; the art of logic; *ars poetica*; the arts of genre; *imitatio*; memoir; Ramism; the art of printing; iconographic arts including emblematics, painting and allegory; *ars historia*; antiquarianism; the scriptural arts such as typology and