

Running Head: Phenomena of Déjà-vu

Experienced Reading This Title Before? A Societal Examination Into the Phenomena of

Déjà-vu

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Abstract

Déjà Vu is an emotional experience that occurs less as we age and is most frequent when traveling, having vivid dreams, or following brain injury. Research of déjà vu may prove vital for advancing interdisciplinary research, our interpreting of the world, and answering, arguably, many of life's greatest mysteries: human consciousness and even comprehension of life & death. Societal views of déjà vu have often labeled it abnormal, mysterious, and magical. As déjà vu transitioned from the realms of literature to scientific inquiry in the late 1800s, it captured the interest of the rapidly developing psychological and neurological disciplines. This project seeks to help clarify this issue by exploring how the explanations of déjà vu shifted from literary and artistic interpretations to an empirical research question. In this project, a literature review of historical and contemporary studies of déjà vu will be conducted to help map the conceptual overlaps, theoretical shifts, and methodological progression of research on déjà vu. Understanding how déjà vu's reconfiguration is an empirical question will help us better understand the entangled relationships between the body and experience (i.e., embodied experiences). Additionally, advancing interdisciplinary research about the experience of déjà vu may be vital to advancing phenomenological and scientific (e.g., neuroscience) understanding of many of life's greatest mysteries, from differences in human perception to diverse experiences of lived reality.

What is Déjà-vu ?

Emotions play a vital role in understanding the world and are a fundamental aspect of personal and social interpretations. After all, an infant's introduction to the world is typically through their deep first breath and a loud cry marking the beginning of a lifetime full of a wide range of emotions, one which may occur in their very near future, Déjà-vu. Much like an infant's first emotional experience in the world consisting of a sense of overwhelmedness, this is also reported by one experiencing Déjà-vu (Forrer, 2019). Experiencing Déjà typically consists of a feeling of familiarity when experiencing a current situation despite the individual never having experienced it before (Paolo Virno, 2015). It is a French phrase meaning "already seen," which was coined by philosopher Emilie Boirac in the late 1800s (Elsherif, 2022).

Initial Accounts

Historical records dating back to 400 BC make reference to Déjà-vu, often in the context of reincarnation, death, and the soul. These references place Déjà-vu in the spiritual and metaphysical realm of understanding reality (A Brief History of Déjà Vu, 2018). Mysticism, magic, and otherworldly beliefs were often associated with Déjà-vu during its earliest traces. However, due to the contrast with collective Western society, the topic was not further explored.

Déjà-vu terminology falls under the category of Paremenisa, which also includes Jamais Vu, a feeling of uncanniness and strangeness used to describe memory anomalies (Burwell & Templer, 2017). During research into the phenomena, many recurring words were linked, such as

metacognition, disassociation, feeling, sensation, false recollection, false recognition, illusion, intellectual aura, dreamy state, soul, reincarnation, and time (Sno, 2010).

The Philosophical Intrigue

The two predominant locations that explore the notion of Déjà-vu would be Italy and Greece. This could be attributed to the majority of Western philosophers having resided within those regions. Since metaphysics is defined as a branch of philosophy that is set to understand the nature of reality and seeking to understand Déjà-vu correlates, it would make sense that the earliest figures were philosophers. Mowbray states that the initial accounts can be pinned between the first & sixth century B.C. respectively (Mowbray, n.d.). Pythagoras was an extremely influential Greek philosopher who lived around 500 B.C. and had a deep interest in the soul and human body eventually making his way to exploring Déjà-vu phenomena (Huffman, 2006). Following Pythagoras another prominent figure, Plato who is remembered for his works on the formation of a philosophical branch known as idealism has accounts that reference Déjà-vu in the aspect of having gone through a past life (Hurt, 2021). There are Eastern accounts that mention Déjà-vu in an essay by a Japanese monk Yoshida Kenko around 1330 AD mentioning a feeling of knowing the present moment has occurred in the past (A Brief History of Déjà Vu, 2018). The slow but progressive developments in the history of Deja Vu give great perspective & insight into the past society's perception of phenomena such as Deja Vu. They were heavily connected alongside reincarnation and death indicating the taboo feelings that were associated during that time. Déjà-vu has been attempted to be explained by many past and prominent figures such as Plato and Aristotle (Shamapant, n.d.).

Recurring Demographics & Societal connections

Throughout the research conducted, many subjects that have experienced Déjà-vu have overlapping demographics when experiencing the phenomena. There seems to be a prominent theme linking them all. This would be the human perception of the passage of time during a Déjà-vu experience. Our main focus will be on the two predominant demographics which have the highest representation in Déjà-vu experiences: the youth and frequent travelers.

The big two

The major demographic that is most affected by Déjà-vu is the youth. As age increases reports of Déjà-vu face a significant decrease (Brown, 2003). Specific sensations & terminology are connected to Déjà-vu which are represented by feelings of curiosity and information seeking also highly associated with younger demographics (McNeely, 2023). The occurrence of this phenomenon seems to change the observer's perception of time creating an expansive and eternal feeling (Vardoulakis, n.d.). These same feelings are reported to be experienced by a second important demographic. Frequent travelers are among one of the major demographics affected by this phenomenon. One study found that 11 percent of subjects without travel experience reported experiencing Déjà-vu compared to 36 percent who were frequent travelers (O'Connor & Moulin, 2013). Subjects with a well-educated background were more likely to have Déjà-vu experiences (Brown, 2003) this may be attributed due to the connection between education and frequent travel.

Societal

Societal implications are mentioned in numerous forms on behalf of Déjà-vu. Some verbatim others as fancy terminology to reel an audience in (Krapp, 2004). Nonetheless, the phenomena are referenced in numerous areas of concern including science, literature, media, and even politics (Krapp, 2004). When researching it is important to note many references are made that directly reference Déjà-vu, but are used as merely a filler word. This can be seen in many categories such as higher education documents, COVID- 19, political jargon, and even booming current technological advancements.

Separate but Equal on College Campuses: A Case of "Déjà Vu'All over Again".

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Note: Upon conducting a thorough search on Déjà-vu through Google Scholar, there seemed to be a significant number of articles merely using filler words to captivate their audience. These articles failed to provide any substantial information on the phenomena, suggesting that we have

yet to reach a consensus on what Déjà-vu truly entails. It seems that the utilization of Déjà-vu as a hook is frequently aimed at eliciting an emotional reaction from the reader.

1



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Note: The following are the first four searches using Shoreline Library and the keyword “Déjà-vu”. It can be noted that the usage of Déjà-vu is associated with a wide variety of topics

such as political science, COVID 19, and AI & emerging technologies. There are no initial articles that specifically go into adequate detail regarding the phenomena. The above headings give proof of many writers using the phrase Déjà-vu in order to bring about an emotional reaction.

A notable recurring societal understanding is captured by a current philosopher, Paolo Virno. Virno states how the Déjà-vu experience tends to be reported by a vast majority of society. Often we mistake our current experience for a copy of an original experience that never actually happened. We convince ourselves that we recognize something that we've only just become aware of. This is why we can describe Patients are seen to have a defect when recollecting memories and thoughts, which is a high indicator of false memory implantation. as a form of "false recognition". Our brains are tricked into thinking that we've experienced something before, even though we haven't (Virno, 2015, #12). This is indication regarding why this phenomena is still under researched due to many individuals believing that the experience may have never occurred.

Literary References

Déjà-vu is mentioned in various literary works indicating that it can be found in even the earliest of accounts. In Charles Dickens book David Copperfield, the sensation of Déjà-vu is referenced as an emotional experience by including past seen terminology such as “strange” “before” and “indefinite time” (Dickens, 1850). I. A. Richards, a 1900's literary critic is also said to have referenced the phenomena in his works on literary memory stating it as a partial return of memory (Richards, 1930). In a translated passage by Howard Eiland, Walter Benjamin

references the phenomenon of Déjà-vu alongside the importance of sounds when the moment is occurring (Eiland, 2008).

Art

In a painting titled “Déjà-vu Painting,” the description encapsulates a deep & profound feeling that arises from experiencing Déjà-vu and the connection it creates to what it means to be human alongside honesty and a generational understanding of collective humanity (Strunowa, 2015).

This art piece is great at encapsulating the emotional components that many experience during Déjà-vu. The color scheme is associated with primary and secondary colors.



Note: Déjà-vu Painting by Larissa Strunowa

A shift in understanding

As time elapsed Déjà-vu shifted from the literary realms and became a main interest in many developing scientific disciplines in the late 1800's such as Psychology, Neurology, and Neuropsychology. This shift is attributed to being sparked by the 19th-century boom in technological and scientific advances brought about by the industrial revolution signaling deep and profound changes within the emerging societies.

Neurological: Cognition & Memory

Neurology seems to be the center of current research in which Déjà-vu is studied. With a specific emphasis on temporal lobe epilepsy. Very rarely have experiments been set up outside of this parameter (Wells et al., 2014). When evaluating experiments on this phenomenon, patients who are prone to anxiety seem to have substantial occurrences of Déjà-vu compared to individuals who didn't report anxiety (Wells et al., 2021). Metacognition has recently taken a significant interest in being investigated in progressive neurological research to understand what occurs in a dissociative state (O'Connor et al., 2021, #). When the phenomena is mentioned in easy to digest neurological popular sources such as Cleveland Clinic it indicates that experiencing the phenomena may indicate a misfiring occurring in the brain (*Déjà Vu: What It Is and Why It Happens*, 2022). Experiences of déjà vu often lack empirical clues, leading to speculation about possible causes including past lives, precognition, brain pathology, and even schizophrenia

(Looking at Déjà Vu for the First Time: False-Familiarity Experiences May Fit a Plausible Framework, 2005).

Psychological: Anxiety, Psychoanalysis (Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung)

As the term Déjà-vu was coined (Elsherif, 2022), many key psychological figures such as Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud discussed their speculations of understanding the causes of Déjà-vu and embarked on investigating the phenomena. Carl Jung, who had dedicated time to investigating this phenomenon came to the understanding that Déjà-vu is an interconnection between the two realities (outer and inner) that an individual experiences at a rapid rate known as the collective unconscious (Boeree, n.d.). Freud also believed it occurred in the subconscious regions of the brain but described it in connection to having a “guilty subconscious” which attempts to retrieve a false memory or forget a memory entirely (Déjà-vu Theories Still Fascinate Experts – The UCSD Guardian, 2004). Freud's and Jung's understanding both overlap in understanding Déjà-vu through the unconscious regions of the brain. Indicating a reason why there has been slow but steady progress in reaching a unanimous understanding of the causes of Déjà-vu may be attributed due to the complexities of exploring the unconscious regions of brain functionality.

Neurophysiological: Temporal Lobe, Epilepsy, and Brain injury

Based on a present understanding Déjà-vu is mostly seen in patients that are experiencing seizures due to a glitch in the temporal lobe (Halgren, 1997). It should be noted that the temporal lobe is responsible for memory recollection and recognition, alongside other extremely important functions (Temporal Lobe: What It Is, Function, Location & Damage, 2023). Findings examined

a connection between Déjà-vu experiences during seizures while patients are reported to have unilateral temporal-lobe epilepsy which is abbreviated to (uTLE) (Martin, 2021) patients are seen to have a defect when recollecting memories and thoughts, which is a high indicator of false memory implantation. Furthermore, a study conducted with 50 epileptic subjects found that 88 percent reported having experienced Déjà-Vu (Zeman & Charlotte Warren-Gash, 2023).

Current technological and methods used in documentation of Déjà-vu experience

Although conducting lab-based simulations to mimic Déjà-vu experiences in real-time is quite difficult, there are quantitative ways in the scientific field to evaluate the phenomena. One method would be placing subjects in an environment that has been previously shown to them and then later shown again leading to a false memory implementation (O'Connor et al., 2021, #30). The recurring documentation methods seem to be through retrospective surveys, prospective surveys, and case studies (Brown, 2003). Déjà-vu methods lean towards subjects self-reporting typically reflected under the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale and personalized questionnaires (Is There Anything Distinctive About Epileptic Déjà Vu?, 2023). Memorization tasks that include remembering specific words and then identifying them as a significant amount of time elapsed (O'Connor & Moulin, 2013). Based on the research conducted there was a lack of adequate technology that is used solely for Déjà-vu exploration pointing to the difficulties in being able to conduct comprehensive experiments.

Conclusion

The early records of Déjà-vu are hard to pinpoint due to the lack of terminology available. However, there is enough documentation from both Western and Eastern societies that discuss the phenomenon through a metaphysical understanding, which was a common perspective in past societies. Various references to Déjà-vu are evident in different ways, such as literary statements and artistic takes. The terminologies used to describe Déjà-vu include spirituality, reincarnation, death, and soul, which provide an understanding of the phenomenon. As time progressed the relevance of Deja Vu began to be more extensively explored. The start of this would be set in the late 1800s when the term Deja Vu was formally coined. As this occurred it would then make its way into the psychological field having been referenced and experimented on by two of the most important figures in psychological development: Jung & Freud. Their findings coincide with both each other & accounts of the past pointing towards an unknown understanding of what is occurring in the subconscious regions of the brain. Indicating that the coming understanding and knowledge will take some time to find due to the complexity of where Deja Vu had been speculated to be occurring. It then reaches the present lens of understanding which is seen through the neurological lens and is hypothesized to be occurring mainly in the temporal lobe region of the brain.

The developments of the history of Deja Vu give great perspective & insight into the past society's perception of phenomena such as Deja Vu. Allowing for accurate visualization of how

far society has come within the advancement of technology & reality, but simultaneously that there is much more work to be done to reach a conclusive and unanimous consensus behind the causation of Déjà Vu.

Past & Current Connections

The feeling that Déjà-vu induces seems to be consistent when described in the past as well as the present. Indicating that there is a common theme that has remained relatively constant, the emotional aspect of this phenomenon. There seems to be frequent use of terminology that goes alongside explaining Déjà-vu: recurring, past, paramnesia, feeling, familiarity, having seen, overwhelming, sense, memory, cognition, and human are all frequently used and repeated terminologies that coincide with the phenomena. Yet despite current developments, Déjà-vu is still used as fancy terminology to reel an audience into anything but exploring the phenomena.

Gaps in knowledge

Creating a Déjà-vu experience in real-time is a challenging task for scientists due to a lack of advanced technology that can detect the signals fired during such an experience. As a result, conducting thorough experiments is difficult. However, there is a unanimous understanding that Déjà-vu is a deeply emotional experience, whether it occurs in the context of literature or science. Although many subjects report having a deeply emotional experience tied to Déjà-vu there is a lack of recurring markers making it much more difficult for scientific fields to pin down a definitive causation.

Future investigations

The future of Déjà-vu depends on advancements in technology and society's ability to connect past emotional experiences with methods that can recreate the Déjà-vu experience in a lab setting. Based on research, future investigations will most likely align with scientific understandings that occur in the brain regions concerning brain injury and psychological implications. The history of the phenomena indicates that societies that were interested in this topic did not make it far in the public eye due to the stigmas of magic and reincarnation centering around the phenomena. However, society today has made significant progress in researching mysterious phenomena, which indicates a positive progression in dealing with the unknown. The rapid advancements from the past to the present signifies societies current standing is on the brinks of coming one step closer to understanding the true causation behind the phenomena of Déjà-vu.

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