# PICTORIAL MEMORY – MANNERS OF THE INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

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*Abstract:* **The title of this study directly refers to the importance of the images, meaning material objects, personal memories or literal images – photographs one elects from the past in order to build up the individual identity and present it to others. Long ago, during the antique age, techniques of the remembrance by using pictorial memory and sequencing images from the past had been created, and those just developed during centuries. The goal of this paper is to stress that, basic concepts of the self representation did not change, but just used different media through time. In the first part of the paper, the difference between terms memory and remembrance, their relation to the culture and reasons why one remembers something will be discussed. As it is tended to be shown, the remembrance is always "pictorial", one always puts elected images of the past in the exact order and creates its own identity. Therefore, in the second part of this study, the idea of individual identity, creation of it and the representation of the self identity to the others will be examined and explained in the context of the pictorial memory and heritage on the one hand, and social determination on the other. Inspired by the wholes one leaves in its personal life story when presenting it to others, the need of forgetting as constituent part of memory will also be stressed.**

**Finally, the last part of this study points out that we still use the same concepts of remembering, electing and presenting images from the past in the creation of the image of ourselves, using the most popular media today - virtual space.**

*Key words*: **individual identity, remembrance, memory, pictorial memory, image, heritage**

## I. THE ART OF MEMORY

"At a banquet given by a nobleman of Thessaly named Scopas, the poet Simonides of Ceos chanted a lyric poem in honour of his host but including a passage in praise of Castor and Pollux. Scopas meanly told the poet that he would only pay him half the sum agreed upon for the panegyric and that he must obtain the balance from the twin gods to whom he had devoted the poem. A little later, a message was brought in to Simonides that two young men were waiting outside who wished to see him. He rose from the banquet and went out but could find no one. During his absence the

roof of the banqueting hall fell, crushing Scopas and all the quests to death beneath the ruins; the corpses were so mangled that the relatives who came to take them away for burial were unable to identify them. But Simonides remembered the places at which they had been sitting at the table and was therefore able to indicate to the relatives which were their dead. The invisible callers, Castor and Pollux, had handsomely paid for their share in the panegyric by drawing Simonides away from the banquet just before the crash. And this experience suggested to the poet the principles of the art of memory of which he said to have been the inventor. Nothing that it was through his memory of the places at which the guests had been sitting that he had been able to identify the bodies, he realized that orderly arrangement is essential for good memory. " (F. Yates, 1996: 1,2)

As Cicero comments in his *De oratore,* (Cicero, Ixxxvi, 351) the poet Simonides inferred that persons desiring to train the memorizing process must select places and form mental images of the things they wish to remember and store those images in the places, so that the order of the places will preserve the order of the things, and the images of the things will denote the things themselves, therefore, we shall employ the places and images respectively as a wax writing-tablet and the letters written on it. As Cicero suggests while discussing memory as one of the five parts of rhetoric, the story introduces a brief description of the mnemonic of places and images (*loci, imagines*) which was used by the Roman orators. Two other descriptions of the classical mnemonic, besides the one given by Cicero, have come down to us, both also in treatises on rhetoric when memory as a part of rhetoric is being dis-

cussed; one is anonymous *Ad C. Herennium libri IV;* the other is Quintilian's *Institutio oratorio.*

The first and the most basic fact which was to be remembered by the student of the art of memory is that this skill belongs to rhetoric as a technique by which the orator could improve his ability of memorizing and learn long speeches by hart. As a part of the art of rhetoric, this Art of Memory (F. Yates, 1996) travelled down through European tradition in which it was never forgotten that those infallible guides in all human activities have laid down rules and percepts for improving the memory.

It was not difficult to learn the basic principles of mnemonic. The first step was to imprint on the memory a series of places – *loci*. The most usual type of mnemonic was so called architectural type. Therefore, in order to form a series of places in memory, one should remember the building with all its chambers, walls and ornaments decorating it. The images by which the speech should be remembered are then placed in imagination on the places which have been memorized in the building. Finally, whenever the remembered facts are to be revived, all these places are visited in turn virtually, in the mind of the one memorizing. Consequently, of the ancient orator should be thought as wondering through his imagination in the memory building while he is making his speech drawing from the memorized places and images he has placed on them. This method ensures that the points are remembered in the right order, since the order is fixed by the sequence of places in the building. (F. Yates, 1996:3)

The Quintilian's and the other sources are describing the inner techniques of memory which depend on the visual impressions of very high intensity. Cicero underlines that the Art of Memory of Simonides lies on the fact that the order is very important in the memo-

rizing process, but also that the visual sense is the strongest of all senses.

The author of *Ad Herrenium* recognizes two kinds of memory, one natural and the other artificial. The natural memory is that which is engrafted in our minds, born simultaneously with thoughts, while the artificial one is the one strengthened and confirmed by training. A good natural memory can be improved by this discipline and persons less well endowed can have their weak memories improved by the art. The artificial memory is established from places and images. Locus is a place which is easy to remember, such as a house, a corner, and arch etc. Images are forms, marks or simulacra of what we wish to remember.

The art of memory is like an inner writing. Those who know the letters of the alphabet can write down what is dictated to them and read out what they have written. Also, those who have learned mnemonics can set it places what they have heard and deliver it from memory. Frances Yates concludes a half of the century ago: "What I have spoken of as being done in a house can also be done in public buildings, or on a long journey, or in going through a city, or with pictures. Or we can imagine such places for ourselves. We require therefore places, either real or imaginary, and images or simulacra which must be invented." (F. Yates, 1996: 22,23)

## II. The Culture of Memory

The term "the art of memory" – "ars memoriae" or "ars memorativa" has a firm foundation in Western tradition. It is considered to have been invented by the Greek, already mentioned, poet Simonides, who lived in 6th century B.C. The Romans codified this art as one of the five fields of rhetoric and they transferred it to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Simonides has seen poetry, painting an also mnemonics in the terms of visualization; painting, as well as poetry lie on the advantage of the visual sense between all the other senses. The poet and the painter both think in images which one relives through poetry and the other trough painting.

It is not hard to draw a parallel between Simoides's "art of memory" as the base for the artificial, contrary to the natural memory and the terms which can be recognized today in the contemporary culture of memory as remembrance and memory. Still, while the art of memory is about the individual capacity and it gives a person the techniques through which he can improve his techniques, on the other hand, "the culture of memory" (The expression used by several authors together with T. Kuljić, 2006) is about fulfilling the social commitment. Unlike the art of memory as an antique phenomenon, the culture of memory is a universal phenomenon that appears in all social groups. What the space or place for the art of memory is, can be recognized as the time in the culture of memory. Todor Kuljić suggests that we should take a step forward: as the art of memory is a part of practicing, the culture of memory is a part of planing, hoping id est building the social and time horizon. The past is being reconstructed in the memory. In this sence is also a thesis that the past is made when we have a relation to it. However, for men to have a relation to past, it needs to come into his counciosness. Two preconditions are necceseary for this: past mustn't dissapear completely, it is important to have proves about it. These particular proves are actually the most

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different images of the past, memorized for the future. These images of the past, having the Simonides technique in mind or not, all take place in some empty, real or virtual spaces and communicate through the exact order.

However, writing about *memory* and *remembrance*, the authors such as Todor Kuljić, Jan Assmann and Fernando Catroga agreed on an obvious difference between these two ideas. The remembrance, according to Catroga, stops being the memory when archived, as it parts from the only mediator who could bring him to life, that is, from the subject. Thus, in this state, memory has the status of the "raw material" which needs to be examined in order to be turned into a document. (Katroga, 2011, 54) On the other side, Asman considers that memory includes not only the involuntary perception, but unconscious reaction as well, while remembering represents the premeditated attitude towards the past, more related to the institutions and media that conserve and transfer the past's contents. The memory puts the selected past's contents into a rational system and makes consonance in accepting and interpreting the world, not just by keeping the certain contents, but also by forgetting the others. Asman recognizes the term of the *cultural memory* as a dimension of "outer memory".

Actually, the first level in which the human's memory is constructed is the biological level. The basic assumption of the remembrance and memory is the organism with a brain and the central neuro-system. This basis is not an autonomous system, but needs fields of interaction in order to develop itself and survive. The non existing primer experience is being replaced with the secondary experience, the experience of other humans. The two fields of interaction constantly feed and stabilize

biological memory and the brain: one of those is the social interaction and the other is the cultural interaction with the use of signs (images) and mediums (places). Memory is labile until the moment it is externalized and fixed in these external storages.

## III. Selectivness of the Memory

The organized social (the term used by Todor Kuljić) or cultural (Jan Asman, Alaida Asman) memory is not just simple storing of experiences from the past. Its important function is the structuring of results of different interactions by which the group infers one particular relation towards the world, but also towards itself. Kuljić advises that "remembrance" – "storing" the past's contents should be separated from "memory", i.e. the actualization of those contents well kept, because memory is a step to the past but always from a new present. Hermeneutic has pretty convincingly demonstrated how, with the help of memory, and by remembering only the selected contents from the past, we create the frames of interpretation and meanings for the present. Within both activities, the criteria of election, such as personal, family, national, political, etc., have an important role. Memory mediators (oral, written, visual, electronic) also have an active influence on the memory. They organize and give structure to field of communication between the subjects and attune the distribution of information. (Kuljić, 2006: 32)

The process of remembering is very complicated and it is based as on biological processes which are common for every man, as well as on the psychological factors characteristic for the individuals, for each particular person. This person is afterword being put in

some social or cultural context, family, religion, epoch and it is being influenced by the whole Zeitgeist of that epoch. The selective memory, therefore, is made of those past events which are important for the individuals when they define themselves as a member of some group. These believes are not exclusively of cognitive character. The actors of a memory and its reconstruction are mostly of a social nature: they can be institutionalized (state authority, the educational system, mass media), but also no institutionalized (family, the circle of friends, informal groups).

Finally, I will conclude that, contrary to memorizing which is more an inner process, the remembrance elects the others, some social environment, and that remembrance is created by the individuals or groups who put the selective contents from the past into a meaningful order by making a harmony in accepting the world, but of course, not just by keeping the specific contents, but also by forgetting the others. Therefore, remembrance and forgetting as well is a social construct. Consequently, remembrance comes from the principle of election, because electing is nothing but the set of assignments that make one be committed and by any chance can be forgotten. In that way, the individuals, as well as societies depict their (own) self-image continuing their identity through generations by building the culture of memory.

## IV. IMAGES OF THE MEMORY

Whenever speaking about remembrance, metaphors cannot be avoided. It does not refer only to the literal and basic reflection. Confronting the perpetual dialect which exists between the remembrances and forgetting, Paul Riceour has tried to reveal the secret of presenting the past in the memory. He has found the answer which Plato gave in *Theaetetus* through the image – remembrance, to stress that this image is the presence of some absent thing in the persons' spirit, or just, the presence of absence. The remembrance would be able to have the roll in its own worships, directed to induce just those traces – relics of the unexciting which are in the mood to inspire and encourage. This is why their content is bond to hope into the future, but also to the fields of fluffiness of the self. The remembrance cannot be developed without the existence of the inner inscriptions (traces or those mental images which Simonides has sang about), which can be enliven by the external, material, social and symbolical reliance. (Katroga, 2011:19)

The problem of remembering, therefore, makes us be imaginative, and extremely diverse. The number of those images is basically unlimited. Together with the material culture of life surroundings, remembrance metaphors are changing. Actually, they continue to modernize. In that way we have Walter Benjamin who changed the letter metaphoric to photography metaphoric in 20th century. "The history is like a text in which the past has stored the photographs as if they were on a photosensitive board. Only the future possesses chemically that will help the photo to develop in all its sharpness." (Benjamin, 2007:79)

Susan Sontag in her paper *Regarding the Pain of Others* writes: "Photographs that everyone recognizes are now a constituent part of what a society chooses to think about, or declares that it has chosen to think about. It calls these ideas "memories," and that is, over the long run, a fiction. (…) All memory is individual, irreproducible—it dies with each person. What is

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called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that *this* is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds. Ideologies create substantiating archives of images, representative images, which encapsulate common ideas of significance and trigger predictable thoughts, feelings." (Sontag, 2003: 67,68)

Hence, concrete proves, images (in the widest sense of this term) of our existence, enable the possession of some past, and our positioning and directing towards that past. Collections of images are carriers to which we bond and keep the selected memories.

### V.  BUILDING THE IMAGE OF THE SELF

John Locke defines the identity as a reflective relation of a person towards itself. That relation is not just rational, but also referential. A man who comes to the world as a physical and rational being has to create an identity for himself and be responsible for it. Locke has been writing in the beginning of a bourgeois epoch, in the historical situation in which the identity administration together with its, today well-known, manners of collecting personal data such as: day and place of birth, name of a parent, eye color etc. He has neglected these external factors of the identity, believing that the personal identity is founded exclusively in the relation of a person towards itself. The most important assumption of the identity is a consciousness, which we can equalize with the memory, because Locke understands memory as a retrospective projection which traces back to the past. The individual identity becomes when one person recognizes itself as a self in a process of the time changing. The signification of a personality Locke discusses as: "a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and, as it seems to me, essential to it (...) For, since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes every one to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists personal identity, i.e. the sameness of a rational being: and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self now it was then." (Locke, 1999:318,319)

Locke has built his conception of a personal identity with the help of memory. Our identity is consisted of that what we can prescribe to our consciousness and what can be developed more with our memory. Personal identity therefore, following Locke's thoughts, becomes from the facts a man identifies with during his life story and with which a man can take a responsibility to stand behind, as his personal and conscious acts.

However, Locke's theory of an individual identity is more directed towards the recent ego-state but a memory. Still, those ego-states are of less importance for our memory than images we build about ourselves and which we project from a particular presence back to the past. Many years later, the conception of a reconstructive projective identity, was developed by a French sociologist and theoretician of memory, Maurice Halbwachs. Differently than Locke, he based the individual identity not in a person itself, but in a social group a person belongs to. Identity, therefore for Halbwachs, is not a result of a memory, but the assumption of it: memory becomes and is being shaped with a social relations, identities and

group loyalties. About remembrance and forgetting, do not decide individuals, but these *social frameworks,* as Halbwachs called it. Introducing the term *framework,* he has based the consideration of memory on a different level. Contents of memory, following his theory, are not some particular and unchangeable referential points, but they change together with social and political conditions of every new correctness in which we recall our memory. This is considered for a constructive power of a memory: silently, we are ready to adjust memories to the values in accordance with the actual picture of our self. What cannot find place in that framework will hardly ever be a memento and become a remembrance. (Halbwachs, 2006:21)

### VI.  IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND THE CULTURE OF MEMORY

*"The idea of the identity, its becoming and surviving, is not separable from the ideas of memory, remembrance and reference to the past, nor from the history and tradition, and changes of perception of the time and space which are brought by different ideological backgrounds and technical inventions." (Kuljić, 2006, 151)*

The culture of memory is, as it was earlier mentioned, a link between memory and a relation towards the past, identity and imagination, as well as the cultural continuity and tradition. Thus, every culture has something what we could consider its connective structure. It is linking on two levels: social and temporal. It links people to other people by creating a common symbolical world of sense and space of experience, expectations and actions; it also encourages orientation with its connective and bonding power. Rituals of remembrance, cultures and believes are one of the vectors – transmitters of socialization and

identification of an individual. Generally, humanistic scientists believe that the process of cultural identification enables to an individual a good functioning of a personal "I" by entering one symbolical and virtual continual body. (J. Asman, 2011: 11-23)

Writing about social constructivism as a phenomenon of a social psychology (which is a product of combined influences of authors from different fields such as: sociology, psychology, postmodern art and art theory), Vivien Beer answers the question: what the presumption that a person is socially constructed should mean.

Humans are social beings and they can only be found in the society. "The thing that makes us be a person is not our inner essence, but discursive creations which represent a product of social interaction." (Ber, 2001: 19) It could therefore be said that we construct our own versions of different realties (as culture or society) between ourselves. From the perspective of social constructivism there is now an objective fact. All our knowledge, we develop from the observation of the world around from one or another perspective and it serves to some interests more than to others.

In order to explain better the construction of the individual identity, the socio-constructive theory uses the notion of discourse. Discourse refers to an assembly of meanings, metaphors, representations, stories, images etc. that, together produce a particular version of some event. If we understand discourse as a particular image or picture of an event, then it is clear that there are many more alternative versions of an event so a subject – person, can be surrounded with many different discourses while all those discourses tell the storey about the given object and present it differently to the world. Discourse takes a pretentious right for truth. Of course, different words, pictures, expressions

can be part of different discourses, whilst, every time those create different narratives.

Identity is, therefore, constructed with the use of discourses we manipulate with, in the frameworks of our culture and which we use while communicating with others. Human identity becomes in interlacing of different filaments. We are the final product of a combination of different images of the past, different versions of all memories we have. For every "filament" of our identity, there is a number of elected discourses (images of the past) with which we shape ourselves.

## VII. Different Images as Bearers of the Individual Identity

The example of a photo album can easily be interpreted as a metaphor of the entire culture of "visual remembrance" which acts in the service of creating the cultural identity both of the individual and the group. The word itself *album,* is of the Latin origin and it denotes whiteness, white table to write something on, a nicely decorated notebook to remember things. Only with time did the word gain meaning of notebook for collecting photographs, stamps, newspapers, articles.

Therefore, this album, from the very idea of its existence, can and must be understood as a deliberate monument, the one whose goal is not ever to allow certain moment become the past, but to keep him present and alive in the conscience of those who are yet to come. With no hesitation, the deliberate commemorative value of the album possesses the right to infinity, eternal present, to the state of ceaseless beginning. (Rigl, 1982: 20-51).  In the same way as the ancient poets developed mnemonic abilities by memorizing the order of

information imagining it on empty walls of the big temples, the photo album on its empty white pages keeps the stories about the past written with images.

As it is already mentioned, every construct, whether it is the culture, memory or any other identity representation, or even the order of photographs and the purpose of a photo album as a medium, one of the bearers of memory, depends on the time and the place it originates. The 19th century family photo album is a representative form that, on the one hand, has to "copy" the power distribution inside the family and, on the other, to point out the family position within the social context. Hence, in the 19th century family album, the family museum, what is constructed is the idea of a perfect family and its identity which is meant for the public. With its internal structure and impressive code of photos, family album was a visual mediator that articulated – symbolically – both the relations inside the family and the classes in 19th century society. As a part of a private sphere, its purpose was the communication with the public and its principal task was to give a nicer image of a peaceful bourgeois life and the sweet family home.

In the same way the modern and technological society developed, the photo album started to communicate through its new, different photos. The 20th century private photo albums look as if their pages with small photos will disperse in any minute, which will, as a consequence, change the conception of previously settled visual narration. Some family albums have never been firmly connected and shaped as a book with pictures. Instead, they had their separate pages placed into the marked folders. Therefore, the structure itself of the 20th century photo album has not followed the linear flow of a visual narration, but its flexibility of-

fered the possibility for the open form of representation, followed by the interpretation/reading of the family history. In other words, ephemerality and inconsistency, and not the 19th century stability and permanency, have become the basic principles of the structure of the 20th century family albums. Those were, at the same time, the new values modern era has insisted on. That exciting, inconsistent and varied content of the photo albums, of those personal museums, was not at all, like it was in 19th century, meant to construct the family, but to define the individual identity inside the family community. (Ristović, 2007: 29-56)

The final word in an album does not belong to the photograph. As the identity is created of the most different discourses, the connotations of the photographs, traces, engravings, inscriptions have turned in the meantime from material to more abstract media. Additionally, what is left unchanged is the fact that things should be inscribed (*inscrire*), either into the gray matter, the cerebral cortex, or into what has been called writing (*escriture*) by the socio-cultural terminology. Therefore, thinking without writing, without material support, is not possible. Every medium can give this support. Finally, what represents the individual virtual "profile" on the Facebook social network on the Internet, but the image of the personal identity inside the collective one, the global network in which we construct our own identity in accordance with what we want to show to the others about ourselves, while those "others" at the same time comment about us and they create an external image of us by writing on our "profile wall", that is, by leaving some of their mental in-

scriptions on the white pages of our album, this time in a new space.

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