

Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice
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ANAMNESIS –
(RE)CONSTRUCTION OF VISUAL AND MEMORY IMAGE

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DOCTORAL THESIS ABSTRACT

This thesis – Anamnesis – *(re)construction of visual and memory image* – is an attempt to picture individual, biographic and private memory apprehended in the framework of collective remembering, which oscillates around the secret of recollection. The recollection, considered as Greek anamnesis understood as a process of memory reconstruction, is – as this doctoral thesis will prove – a complex, multifaceted and multidimensional process covering several aspects.

The defined term “*visual image*” is understood as an image that is a mechanical recording of surrounding reality on retina. The “*memory image*” are memories that exist somewhere in *Bergson's* virtual spacetime. (Re)construction and recollection happens at the interface of these two representations, where *the visual image* activates the *memory image* through recognition. In this study the philosophical notion of memory is mostly approached from phenomenological perspective. While examining this notion, the process between what the eye records (thus what it “sees”) and then how it perceives (ergo “*understands*”) and finally matches memories to the image to update them has become a particularly important field of this research and deliberations. Apparently perception, observation, unreflective and reflective consciousness considered in temporal dimension are factors which significantly affect the shape of recollections. As a product of memory the evoked recollection is no longer just a copy, an event that happened in the past and its clear 1:1 reflection. (Re)construction of a recollection results from a certain memory work. It is not only matching the recollection to the perceived image, but also the process of recovering unclear images from the darkness of memory. Bits of previous experiences and events preserved as a set of recorded codes in our “*temporary condensed*” consciousness and subconsciousness swirl somewhere and wait to be updated. Reaching to memory components, dreams and imagination that is based on recognition of these signs triggers an interaction between successive events, and consequently a creative, unconstrained materialisation of an artistic form – an image which takes up the already processed and re-mixed form.

Imagination and fiction seem to play a particularly interesting and creative role in this process. Owing to the accompanying irresistible temptation to reach to details of a recollection or its global overview the image that is invoked by the associative external stimuli is prone to a certain distortion. In place of blurred, unclear images of recollections or their fragmented snippets other pieces of information coming from the rich resources of memory conglomerate start to embed. Different facts from magazines, newspapers, television or other personal experiences and stories that are stored there are reconstructed in manifold configurations. Memories that are implied in this way start gaining new meanings. New narrations are built also when representational layers recorded in the past, the sources of which originate in imagination, overlap. In consequence, instead of triggering memory there is fiction and a false image – a kind of *simulacrum* – creeping in unconsciously. It is imagination – a simulated reality.

All assumptions, depicted and briefly reviewed in the thesis, have been scrutinised and discussed in three ensuing chapters that constitute the whole study.



Chapter one is dedicated to considerations given to the place that Polish art occupies in the process of commemorating culture. These reflections are set in the context of collective as well as individual and personal remembering. Apparently, division of these two categories of remembering is neither simple nor unequivocal. Divagations are based on some selected and discussed papers by authors who took up the topic of memory in their works. The field of search is set within the caesura from the 20th century post-war period up to contemporary days. The explored topics refer to commemorating the post-war "difficult memory" and "post-memory". The further part focuses on analysis of different memory mechanisms as well as remembering, storing, interpreting and other. They are applied by different authors and occur in various configurations and serve different artistic strategies.

Dissatisfaction with definitions of memory singled out by research within other humanities, which basically reduce memory to the ability to remember and recall information or sensory impressions, directs the area of the present considerations towards philosophy in belief that this is the only way to truly access it. Chapter 2 is an attempt to understand the phenomenon of memory. It focuses on vetting memory's complex nature and then on finding its new meanings, which are then examined one after another. By referencing the notion of memory to selected philosophical concepts – from Plato and Aristotle, through Henri Bergson, Jean Paul Sartre, Roman Ingarden and up to Paul Ricoeur – this chapter strives to investigate its ambiguity and nuances.

Chapter 3, which constitutes a description of and a commentary to author's artistic and research work, examines photography as the starting point for the author's all artistic searches. Deliberation over the nature of photography is brought down to a few conclusions, the most important of which is Ronald Barthes' statement that memories shaped based on photographs are not repetitions but their representations, a pure emanation. Such understanding assumes a margin of difference between perception and recollection of the perceived, which encompasses various forms of memory configuration enriched with an element of fiction. However fiction, understood here as imagination, is not treated as a creator of completely new creations. Nothing is generated here, there is no fanciful overproduction occurring either, but only shifts of figurative memory forms instilled in differentiating planes of time and perception. In author's understanding these actions induce generating new meanings, new spaces, creating new realities, the abovementioned simulacra.

Anamnesis – (re)construction of visual and memory image summarises three years of doctoral study. The topic of memory and associated recollections materialised spontaneously as a result of author's personal experiences. The thesis assumes that the only relevant way to elucidate and investigate the intricate nature of this topic is to explore and pursue it within the context of history of art and above all philosophy. Any divergences and convergences in the analysed philosophical concepts led to probing the studied matter even deeper to find correlations between them and understand the matter's complex structure.

The study strives to translate the discussed intertextual philosophical concepts into visual language, so that textuality and complexity of their record could be reflected in pictorial forms. It was a multistage process, preceded by

research and decisions on taking up or rejecting various tentative representational conventions. By way of this search the formal record crystallised, which involves combining photographic documents (selected through *punctum* search) recorded as a print on canvas, with painting tissue produced in oil paint technique. The medium does not constitute a formal recording of the work, whilst memory appears as a set of operation rules, a conceptual and procedural material. The author's personal experiences, consciously and subconsciously remembered past, involuntary retrospections and hidden nostalgias have become the determinant and canvass for this work.

Based on old photographs unexplained memory mechanisms are shown: processes of selection, interpretation and disappearing, which not only reproduce but also create reality that could not have happened rationally. On one hand memory selects and highlights events from the past, while on the other it blurs or obliterates its details. In the study images created in this way are termed "simultaneous" images.

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