

## TWO METAPHORS OF MEMORY IN EARLY MODERN PHILOSOPHY

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**Abstract.** *The article analyses the relation between two metaphors of memory: project and repository. These ancient metaphors in early modern philosophy describe memory as the origin of such a duration which is the foundation of autonomy of contemplating being. That description gives the opportunity to answer the questions: what is the necessity of memory, what is memorabilia (and why memory and mnemonical things are essentially the same), and what it means to remember “by heart”. The concept of duration, which is central for Bergson’s philosophy, has its roots in early modern thinking and is strongly connected with a special kind of memory machine: machine without movement.*

**Keywords:** *memory, duration, contraposition of memory and history, memory machines*

### Memory as a Problem

Frances Yates, who re-discovered the “dead” (in her own words) art of memory for European humanities, completes her research with Leibniz. In Descartes’ works, just as well as in Leibniz’s, she finds, on the one hand, some traces or echoes of the vast tradition of memory places and images; on the other hand, she holds trustworthy those descriptions of memory as an ability one can find in Leibniz’s works.

First, memory as an object of thinking occupies a rather marginal place in the works of early modern age thinkers (maybe excluding Locke). At any rate, it does not play any significant role in their metaphysical constructions. Memory is depicted as assumedly subordinate ability, which should be replaced, according to Descartes, or should be simply devel-

oped along with other abilities, according to Leibniz.

Second, after the encompassing work had been done by rational psychology in 18th–19th centuries, the concept of a faculty undergone some essential changes. Leibniz in his works thinks a “faculty” to be the part of soul that, while being an evidence of ontological status of simple substances, has nothing whatsoever to do with natural abilities or talents, which we habitually associate with faculties because of being quite well-read in psychological literature of all sorts.

Third, in the seventeenth century memory is described with the same metaphors the ancient authors used for it: impression, its depth, the strength of memory, and so on. Nevertheless, while Aristotle had these metaphors followed by the representation

of body as the unity which is composed by the harmony of four liquids (blood, phlegm, bile, and black bile), pneumatology of the seventeenth century is the physics of blood and animal spirits, which, in turn, are the substances that can hardly be talked about in such terms as trace (or impression), its sustainability, and its limits.

Early modern philosophy, though, has thought the concept of memory through in a way which would be a mistake to interpret as simply a development of a job done previously. That is why the modern concept of memory may be seen as an interesting vista of investigation, if this concept is taken not as a psychological faculty of living creatures, but as an ontological characteristic of creatures endowed with thought and perception. In order to make the first step of this investigation it is vital to analyze the metaphorical discourse on memory.

There are at least two basic metaphors in which we have always been involved to describe memory. We have to draw attention to them because they themselves are assumed to be in a familiar everyday notation of remembering. Two metaphors which, like Bacon's idols, always predict our statements about memory and what is remembered, are as follows:

1. Memory is a *project* of remembering. This can be understood in this way: there is a natural memory, one that is "simple", and there is also an artificial memory. Actually, this difference is always explained either through equipment or through fitness. It is usually overlooked that the reference to non-equipped memory is difficult. It is impossible to specify what is natural in the

natural memory: on the one hand, no adjustment can be made to remember — it can only be a combination of pre-established rules. Combinatorics is different from the art of remembering, because, although it reminds *something to someone*, to determine *what* to remember, and *for whom*, is the work of the autonomous remembering subject. On the other hand — even when we "just" remember, this does not mean a lack of preparation, or simplicity, as an independence from the circumstances of the memory. There are lots of things that I "just remember". However, these are themselves the result of my or anybody else's efforts which have been repeatedly renewed. Therefore, what I remember in the "natural" way is a result — hardly the final — of hard and skillful work. Even a detailed analysis cannot identify anything natural or simple in any of the acts of memory<sup>1</sup>. The refusal of the "natural" does not give as much methodological advantages as easy metaphorical structure. The field that we seek to describe by this metaphor is, above all, the field of history of thought. "Memory is a project" emphasizes that the meaning is sought, that there is a tune, or mood, in which the work of memory is able to stumble upon something that already exists independently.

But there is also another metaphor, which is often used to describe memory.

2. Memory is the *repository* (container, warehouse, general kind of receptacle). The concept of memory-repository is presented as a notion of memory like an archive, as

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<sup>1</sup> That "artificial" character of memory Casey calls a "thick" autonomy of memory in contrast to "thin" autonomy of imagination. See: Casey 2000: 262.

well as in the machine memory, when we measure the memory – whether by bytes or storage units — in general by some atoms of memory. It could be impressions, which should be reactivated when one refers to any form of memory, or the elements of order (as in the case of computer memory), or the efficient ordering of symbolic space, as in the case with mnemonic *nota*. To understand the nature of these elements, apparently, is to always clarify the character of the repository. Memory in the history of philosophy has been repeatedly described as a store: here we should remember Platonic “waxen boards”, the Augustinian definition of memory as “the stomach of the soul”, or Hobbes’ understanding of memory as a repository of forces. However, outside the certainty of items, the metaphor of repository has lost all meaning because memory is always turned to the genuine, to what is real, rather than as a metaphor for the entire store. Or as a repository of information (which, in general, is the same thing) that has lost sight of the conditions under which the “coincidence formats” are possible. Memory does not store anything (although we often realize that it holds everything we don’t want), it holds only that which already contains the key to understanding memory.

Thus, both these metaphors are only metaphors. Describing various aspects of the invention of memory, they do not have conceptual content; they only describe the possible understanding. But a possibility is a possibility of the perfected. And to demonstrate the validity of these metaphors is to write a unique history of philosophy.

Actually, why do we speak about two metaphors, if one of them refers to the past, and the other – to the future? And here the answer is obvious: speaking about memory, we would like to postpone the Aristotelian answer to the question of whether memory is of the past, while contemplation is of the present. To delay the answer is to indicate to the aforementioned fact: in memory we belong to certain duration, and we also know that there are several kinds of duration. This multiplicity should be described not in terms of “before and now”, but in terms of closeness and distance, vague and definite. The usage of that metaphor is to back us away from the opposition between time and eternity: if memory does not explicate itself in time, then the art of memory leads us not to the “continuous present” but to the proximity that we find in a memory already fulfilled –. memory exists as autonomy, but depends on location, image, and mood.

Aristotle, using the metaphor of memory as storage, speaks of the “movement change” – this change is “stored”. Stored reproduces the very movement by which a trace (*eikon*) was left, that’s why, when somebody remembers a certain image (trace), one remembers something which differs from the image. Remembering imprinting (“second” type of motion), one is reminded of the seal ring motion, of the first movement. Therefore remembering (*anamnesis*) is like a syllogism, according to Aristotle: it finds the middle, the change of movement. However, in early modern philosophy, first of all, in Hobbes and Descartes, the variety of movements is reduced to one: every movement is displacement,

therefore, a metaphor of memory-trace is excommunicated from the middle and, it seems, has to disappear as senseless. Then why does this metaphor for memory remain stable? Memory as the trace of powers in Hobbes, Locke's notion of *tabula rasa*, the distinction between impressions and ideas in Hume are for that old metaphor of storage-print. The intention of improvement of memory as a special mental ability in Descartes and Leibniz (we think here about his *characteristica universalis*) extends another metaphor of memory – project.

Is this adherence just the inertia of an academic word usage, or, since the point is the key concept of modern philosophy, there is the alteration in the very conditions of reading of the metaphors? What is the element in modern philosophy which keeps the ancient system of metaphorical descriptions of memory still alive?

When someone remembers something, one understands what memory is. This understanding presents itself even if one can't remember something (that is why we should think of oblivion as part of memory in concordance with Augustinian description<sup>2</sup>). It is easy to describe memory; to give an exact definition. This ease of explanation is amazing, but what exactly is our memory? Can different sorts or kinds of memory be identified? While “just remembering” in our everyday life, we never ask these questions. This “simplicity” of memory is the problem.

Regardless of simplicity, in every definition we could find in dictionaries or give

by ourselves, we encounter the fact that memory has some technical equipment. Moreover, we receive certain pleasure from the hard work that goes into remembering on that equipment. This pleasure increases our willingness to put forth the necessary effort to accomplish rote memorization, rather than remembering by heart, or even “by life” and that willingness to lose ourselves and trust autonomous and impersonal agents is what is usually demanded.

Delivering memory to memorabilia, we deliver rather our accomplished notion of memory than the memory “itself”. Of course, there is no such a process as “delivering someone's memory”, but when we ask somebody or something (e.g., a gadget) to remind us about future or past events, we have already engaged in an interpretive kind of memory and we should care for the given memory that corresponds with it. Thus, the question “what is the of simplicity memory” contains three questions: (1) what is the necessity of memory, (2) what is memorabilia, and (3) what is “pure” memory or the kind of memory which we have *simply, by ourselves, forever*.

Historically, the third question is the question of the relationship between natural and artificial memory or, more psychologically, between abilities (facultates) and development. But to divide memory into natural (or natal) and artificial is to forget how much effort was spent just to keep something in memory, to remember *simple things*, like the number of an apartment or father's name. The skill of remembering something *forever* can be the sign of pride or horror, but in any case an accomplished

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<sup>2</sup> On oblivion as part of memory see Augustine 1981: liber 10; Ricoeur 2004: 96-101.

memory is a product of intensive work, time, and effort, spent on memorization. To be proud of a memory is to be proud of the hard, or even terrible, work involved. That work produces an effect: when we remember something, changes occur in the world. Memory, thus, is the most profitable of currencies: memorizing takes finite efforts, but memory lasts an indeterminately long period.

Memory constructs the duration of things revealing them as items nearest to memory's factory and – in that sense – just as perfect. Memory is involved in perfection, but it is not the principle of perfection. We know that memory can betray us and that the saying “he is lying like a witness” is true. That is why we cannot follow Descartes — from perfection to the perfect subject. We can't trust memory even if it is perfect: it has no self-evident structure of truth, in contrast to *cogito*. To be proud of memory is to be proud of that power which exists besides *us*, the power that changes the entire world when one remembers something forever. This power, which takes place in other way than the power to remember something, is a sign of the necessity of memory; it allows us to differentiate between what we have a real reason to remember from the merely accidental. What goes on when we remember something well, goes beyond and besides direct efforts to remember. It is just a satellite of an accomplished memory. Being involved in it, we are not consciously in the process, but – in obligation: I remember, therefore... And since we cannot choose the exact duration for ourselves, we often don't remember exactly what we want.

## Memoria and Duration

In the works of early modern thinkers we can find the word for that power: duration (*duratio*). This word will become the term later, in Bergson's works<sup>3</sup>. Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza uses it as well-known, but rather obscure point: duration is something, which is becomes a time. Since time is the measure of movement, so time is relevant only for *res extensa*, thus duration as memory's specification is beyond any movement.

The first change we encounter when dealing with an accomplished memory is the very notion of what memory is. That is why in order to answer the second question we have to point out that memorabilia is not the determination of ability to remember, but rather it explains (already) performed mnemonic schema. Thus memorabilia or we should call it memory machines — inasmuch as machine is not just a tool but has certain autonomy — is the only evidence of the right way to perceive what memory is. Hence duration is a motionless machine.

When we think about memory it doesn't make sense to ask what is primary – corporeal things or anamnesis addressed to them. As memorabilia do not exist without mnemonist, so mnemonist discloses itself in corporeal similitude. The memory machine by its extension is an intension of productive efforts of memory. And vice versa: intension of memory, as long as it proceeds, is how we create the actual

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<sup>3</sup> The notion *Durée* has its own history in Bergson's evolution. Here I mean the first intuition of duration as “true succession”, which was introduced in Bergson 1910: 100–104.

memory or “memorabilia”. Memorabilia indeed reminds us of something, insofar as we should invent them and reveal how they are produced. To give something for memory is to explain what memory is about. The effort of memorizing is a mere trifle, which makes the repetition of memory easier, and the dichotomy of intensive/extensive effort that we are faced with refers to the point in which personal memory disperses with its duration. Duration can be grasped in the concept of “collective memories” (Halbwachs 1950), in the descriptions of structures of everyday life and in the essays on history of sensuality (Foucault, Hatton 1993). But it is essential just to mark the convergence of intension we deal with when we are fixing: “I remember” or “I keep in mind” and extension — that set of corporeal things (including the human body) which gives the tension to the memory.

The invention of memorabilia should be reproduced and this reproduction is addressing a sphere of memories (places, images, etc.) that cannot differ from the mnemonist, a sphere, in which mnemonist can recognize himself. This reproduction-recognizing has its own history and reveals the variety of circumstances, on which Leibniz wrote: “Thus it all often comes down to *circumstances*, which form a part of the combination of things. There are countless examples of small circumstances serving to convert or to pervert” (Leibniz 1996: 178). Such a set of circumstances which transforms the circumstances themselves creates a specially marked place of memory. Thinking about places of memory, we answer the first part of the ques-

tion, what the necessity of memory is. The necessity of memory discloses itself in memory places where we, being involved in memory, experience the memory as gratitude.

Memory, therefore, has its own history. Contraposition of memory and history has already become a common place<sup>4</sup>. Memory possesses that intimacy which we would not usually find in history. History is the places of others, but memory is always personal. History deals with past time, while memory, being based on what is close, originates in duration. In this sense memory takes precedence over history: memory reveals the perfect, because memory is always an accomplished memory, whereas history is in the past, which is, as Aristotle points out, a lack of present. Duration overcomes the set of moments.

The relation between memory and history, thus, is intermediated by intimacy and generated by pretension on autonomy. Memory explicates itself in the self-dependence of evidence: if I remember correctly, and it is only my own recollection, but historical data has no autonomy: it is submitted to the order of material, of classification, to the collection’s strategy etc. As a researcher, I would rather trust historical data than evidencies, or corporeal traces than promises of sincerity. I can check historical data – and this check is a sign of non-autonomy, of dependence. Thus, the question on memory is: what is evidence and what is the autonomy of evidence?

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<sup>4</sup> On the role of this distinction for historical science see Wood 1994: 123–150; Hutton 1993: 147–154; Halbwachs 1950; Bevan 2006.

Today there is a lot of research on memory. The abundance of trying to understand what memory is clearly demonstrates the lack of understanding. The lack is not felt in the forms of memory. On the contrary, it is possible that memory today is equipped so well and is more varied than ever before. Fundamental memory expansion projects are numerous and their achievements surpass imagination: numerous internet projects involve people from all over the world; an abundance of museums where memory – every memory, including the poorly understood ones – finds its place in any number of places; historical and political archives, various and ever more intensive methods of education, and so on. This many attempts to detect memory should put us on guard. Memory is inconceivable without its artificial masterpieces, but if the art becomes a matter of design solutions and does not keep the intimacy, when any event is no longer stored, but reproduced, then memory's claim to autonomy seems disingenuous<sup>5</sup>. If life and its richness is the ability to specify a limit of the true, then the forgotten in any mnemonic project, which could be based on the intensity of feelings, is what is an addition to memory, although it happens due to "remember well": the duration. Looking for life, one flocking after the bright moments, but the duration does not consist of the moments.

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<sup>5</sup> As pointed out by Heidegger, "a third, equally essential phenomenon of modernity lies in the process of art's moving into the purview of aesthetics. This means the artwork becomes an object of experience (*Erlebens*) and consequently is considered to be an expression of human life". Heidegger, 2002: 57.

Memory, as based on aesthetic assimilation of space, is also dependent on the concept of humanism. As a consequence, it has become shorter, and is manifest in various forms. Memory is not so lacking that something is missing, on the contrary, memory, built in a set of information and competencies, is available in abundance. Places of memory strongly demonstrate the need for a qualified assessment and grow systematically in an attempt to improve the quality of life. Techniques of remembering, as well as memorabilia, are not related to each other directly in an understandable way. They can be generally unrelated, because they are perceived outside sensuous sequences. Being involved in the need to remember, we can allow ourselves to forget the connection of things. Memory, losing the distinctiveness of connection, ceases to be an intelligible thing. Memory itself is insufficient. It should be supplemented by "active mode of living" or even by will to memory. Both, however, are the signs of the lack of memory. If Yates (1966) describes the tradition of artificial memory as contamination of memory and *loci*, then contemporary modes of intertwining consciousness with places we should describe rather as oblivion. As Paul Connerton writes: "We live our lives at great speed; cities have become so enormous that they are unmemorable; consumerism has become disconnected from the labour process; urban architecture has a short lifespan; and social relationships are less clearly defined – all of which has eroded the foundations on which we build and share our memories" (Connerton 2009: viii).

It would seem there is an unfailing remedy, which we can find in St. Augustine<sup>6</sup>: if you violate measure, literary forget yourself, i.e., have become spread in different places, you should recollect yourself inasmuch as memory is the universal way of search. But everyone who is trying to make a clear way for himself, faces the fact that it is memory which challenges the intelligible mode of life. A loss of the center, around which would meet the events and their subsequent understanding results in the need to remember more and more.

Such a loss, however, is not a unique feature of “our” (or any) time at all. Any relation to memory or time is problematic. Because at any time and any moment, no matter how homogeneous it may appear to jealous descendants or fill them with hope, Hamlet’s exclamation “the time is out of joint” is fair. On the contrary, the growth of machine-oriented memory forces us to rethink the relation of memory to global and universal places. Possession of information does not add the autonomy to a subject. On the contrary, a witness, the sole carrier of memory, is replaced by data warehouses which refer to another form of mind rather than autonomy. Locke’s concept of “identity” is, as pointed out by Ricoeur (2004: 106), nothing but memory. But this is special memory, presented not by evidence, but by documents.

In other words, the person in a usual modern sense is produced not by memory, but rather by history, and that is exactly what has neither the autonomy nor the duration. Personality is formed by the

passage of time and is defined as the one whose time has passed. Because identity is derived from an objective evidence of the time, it is something external to the duration, which is connected with memory. Locke wrote that memory makes the identity<sup>7</sup>. If we realize that duration is both essential for memory, not for history, and duration is beyond movement and time, then we should add – to get identity is to forget the self.

### To Produce and Locate

“We are unjustly forgotten about...”, “we must remember on...”, “we must not forget that...”, “eternal memory to...” – all these appeals, periodically renewable, show that enumerated in them are elements that need attention. Memory today is a fair distribution of attention (however it would be expressed — in financial investments, in honor or Citation Index). This distribution, in its own turn, has become a political or economical instrument. And this distribution destroys the notion of memory, because it treats the memory as something to be grasped. It is concerned with what is produced and does not concern itself with the production of memory. Indeed, for each living memory it is important to interpret elements of the memory machine. Interpretation is the discovery of the intimate, immediate features, all of which are uncomfortable in public places. So the thing to remember is that there is always a risk, and that this is a venture rather than an enterprise.

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<sup>6</sup> On the collecting power of memory see: *Confessions*, X, 18.

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<sup>7</sup> On Locke’s conception of memory see Ricoeur, 2004: 102-108, where Ricoeur analyses the famous 27th chapter of “An Essay” (see Locke 1999: 311–332).

There is another side to the risk of memory. The circumstances of memorizing may not have anything to do with the character of memory, or with its content. So, although I do not remember the circumstances which forced me to remember my name, I can remember it, or how I've learnt to translate the words of a foreign language. However, what we remember is binding, and memory increases our presence: to remember the Boston Tea Party is not the same as to commemorate the Battle of Thermopylae. And now we are in a peculiar situation: while nothing is understood about why we remember, we have already invested some effort. This peculiarity, again, is akin to the adventure story: if I demand a memory before it was realized, then I myself am not at liberty to dispose my own memory. It would seem that the memory should shape my identity. Delving into my own memory and looking at its fathomless pit, I am deprived of any hope for identity. Is it possible to escape from this labyrinth of non-autonomy? Do we really need to get back on our feet again, or will we have the courage to remember ourselves, *memento aude!* We need to take this risk, this absence of well-founded senses to get even a hint at what memory is. Obviously, the answer to this cannot be found without going into an analysis of the nature of memory and the nature of the diversity of techniques or machinery through which memory is gaining strength.

In the early modern philosophy, traditional distinction between artificial and natural memory ceases to play a crucial role in the understanding both the nature of memory and in the descriptions of the

ways of memory improvement. The nature of memory for Hobbes<sup>8</sup>, Locke, Descartes, and Leibniz is the rational order. Hence to improve memory is to reflect on instruments of thinking. As soon as the nearest mode of definition of thinking is in force, memory-depository becomes the depository of forces and power. Best way to reveal the power of ratio is to conceive and to fulfill the project. This is the way to distinguish memory from history. Concept of duration, which is central for Bergson's philosophy, has its roots in early modern thinking. Multiple forms of duration are crucial to understanding the past. Both history and memory depends on such modes of cultural reflection as economics, politics, city architecture, ecology, and so on. Forms of memory are actively identified in terms of memory machines, while memory in the unlimited dynamic universe, the notion of which was produced by early modern philosophy, has not its own language.

So, summing up, memory, as it is described in early modern philosophy, is the memory written in a language of machines. Mechanical character of Modern Age is not a discovery of something altogether new and not-ever-heard-before. It is an attempt to apply the rationalistic tools for understanding duration that were created by means of scholastic language. That is why we, who inhabit digital universe, are all heirs to the event of this description. Working out the scholastic instruments of this description, along with being a site of historical-philosophical investigation, also turns out to be the task for actual philosophy.

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<sup>8</sup> On Hobbes' notion of memory see Малышкин 2011: 101–125.

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## DVI ATMINTIES METAFOROS ANKSTYVOJE MODERNIOJOJE FILOSOFIJOJE

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**Santrauka.** Straipsnyje analizuojamas dviejų atminties metaforų – projekto ir talpyklos – santykis. Šios senos metaforos ankstyvoje moderniojoje filosofijoje nusako atmintį kaip kontempliuojančios būtybės autonomijos pagrindą sudarančios trukmės šaltinį. Toks aprašymas suteikia galimybę atsakyti į klausimus – kokia yra atminties būtinybė, kas yra atmintini daiktai (ir kodėl atmintis iš esmės yra tas pats kas mnemoniniai daiktai) ir ką reiškia išmokti mintinai. Trukmės sąvoka, centrinė Bergsono filosofijoje, yra kilusi iš ankstyvojo moderniojo mąstymo ir glaudžiai susijusi ypatingos rūšies atminties mašina – statiška mašina.

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** atmintis, trukmė, atminties ir istorijos priešprieša, atminties mašinos.

*Įteikta 2013 03 28*