

Reconstructions from memory. Recreating space

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Abstract

In my PhD thesis I explore the theme of memory and remembering. I am interested in remembering both on a personal and collective level.

On a personal level, I treat the processes which occur in memory as relative. Remembering is significant for me inasmuch as I can actually handle it irrespective of facts. I therefore reject the superiority of facts and reach for the shape of what we remember. I assume – as that shape directly stems from our condition, our life situation, place and time in which we find ourselves, as well as the collection of our experiences – that memories cease to be an actual, concrete to a degree and tangible reflection of the past but they start acquiring some vague shape, less connected with facts and history and more with the current state of ourselves. Things emerge from them, selected by the today's, contemporary ME, the ME from Here And Now. Those fragments of memories get highlighted which capture our attention; those which suit us, are somehow convenient to us, refer to the area of our interests. That is why memories, trying to build a vivid metaphor, are fluid in my view; they select only snatches of the past and based on their own expectations, they assume an already concrete and, it seems, objective form.

Looking at the process of remembering in this way, it turns out that a precise and accurate image of the past, the dry facts of what one has experienced, hardly have any significance in the process of recollecting. What I mean is, since our own memories are altered compared with the actual past anyway, they are in fact not a reflection of history, a fact or a specific event, but a reflection of the person the memories belong to. Thus what can become a memory can also be a situation, place or fact which did not happen but which we remember. It can be a story we heard, a dream, a photo we got a glimpse of or simply our conception of something.

Those slivers of a remote past mingle with our actual experience, creating a clear image in our memory. We can often recall it but we are not able to distinguish it from our "real" memories. Non-real events in our memory become real. Examining that relativity as an artist, I have decided to work with my own memories myself. I do not treat them, in full consciousness, literally, though. When I speak about my own memories, I do not mean what I have actually experienced but what my memory is, even though I have not experienced it. As recollecting is so very relative, I have decided to work with the material which I choose intuitively, entrusting myself to the situation, one that I feel and treat as mine at the moment. For this thesis I have chosen the photographs from my family archive which I am most impressed with, which I haven't been able to part with for some reason. While working with them I discovered that the photographs showed my own memories even though I had never been in the situations they depicted. I attempt to reconstruct the background for the situations which those photos present.

My reconstructions are scale models of places reconstructed based on the photographs, memories, other people's accounts and my own expertise in architecture. In those reconstructions I leave space for oblivion, reconstructing important fragments and leaving others incomplete, sometimes merely outlined.

When I was working on my thesis, the war in Ukraine started. The ensuing refugee crisis considerably changed my life. At that time my research on memory moved to the Ukrainian National Home in Przemyśl, where I worked as a volunteer. The evidence of my involvement is a series of

models connected with that place and a record of my thoughts of that time, which constitutes a conclusion of the descriptive part of my PhD thesis.

On the collective level I refer to the notion of social memory, created by sociologist and researcher Maurice Halbwachs. Social memory is composed of individual memories. It is a collection of beliefs, customs, traditions and shared thoughts, rituals or legends which, even though preserved individually, constitute a certain whole.

Social memory is not history taught in course books; it is alive and continuing, yet it lives in the presence and persistence of some community and passes along with it. It is not a collection of facts, though at the same time it is an intrinsic part of a group, the source of its identity. I therefore treat it as a certain energy connected with a community or even a place, accumulated over the years by concrete beings staying in a given spot. That energy, trapped in the cracks of walls, buildings and other places they left behind, is released through particular activities and impacts the shape and demeanor of the people who become part of it.

In my research I refer to the very essence of social memory, which for me is a basis for reconstruction activities, both on the personal and collective level. I am concerned with that inseparability of social memory and individual memory, when one depends on the other and arises from the other. I sense that interpenetration in the situations I arrange, in which I take part myself.

One form of reconstruction based on memory is for me the annual project *Centrum światów jest tutaj* (The centre of the worlds is here) carried out in Przemyśl. I am its co-curator (together with Jadwiga Sawicka and Paweł Korbus), but I treat this project as a space for my observations. I work with the "affective atmosphere" (phrase coined by Prof. Marek Krajewski), which depends on both the place and the people present in that place and interacting with each other.

A tangible and clear trace of such a reconstruction is the extensively described work on "The Plaque". That form of commemoration of three women from Przemyśl, which, due to tensions and emotions and the eventual destruction of the commemorative plaque, turned into a kind of a social sculpture, is a telltale fragment of my reconstruction activity.

My reconstruction work therefore assumes different forms. This thesis includes extensive descriptions of the works which I present as part of the exhibition, the documentation of the creative process and all the stages of their creation.

Keywords: memory, remembering, reconstruction, relativity of recollections, social / collective, memory, affective atmosphere, Przemyśl