

A Record of An Exhibition of Sculpture and Video

-- A Perspective of Memory & Time via Art

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Abstract: This article explores the intricate relationship between memory and time. It emphasizes that memory is intertwined with time, as it develops and forms through the continuous flow of time. Time is both objective and subjective, with various incomplete understandings, and it serves as a container for personal and collective experiences. The article also delves into the role of art in understanding this relationship, highlighting that time determines the context of memory, and memory is composed of moments within a given time. Memory is seen as the object, and time as the subject, both interdependent and essential for our existence. While we cannot access all memories, they leave traces in the passage of time, making us who we are. Memory and time are not just elements of the past; they are sources of creativity, knowledge, and instinct, aiding us in learning and creating for the future.

Keywords: Memory; Time; Experience; Art; Creativity; Moment.

1. Introduction

Memory is time. This is because memory is developed through time and time is an inevitable flow that carries us from the past, through the present, and to the future, leaving experiences to our memories. We experience moments in succession on a linear timeline, and our measurement of successive experiences creates what we refer to as time. On one hand, time is perceived as being objective and universal; on the other hand, time is unchangeably personal and subjective, even by the most stringent laws of physics. It is because each of us experiences time both universally and personally that we understand time in various incomplete ways. The concept of time is not simply a physical unit; it is a large receptacle of experiences that we refer to in memory. It is a record of our personal and collective lives.

The psychologist, Alan Baddeley, mentions in *Essentials of Human Memory* (1999) that human memory can be divided into long-term and short-term functions, each associated with

the way in which world experiences are integrated by individuals. [1] Both long-term and short-term memories are associated with one very important aspect: time. In the physical world, photography has been commonly used to preserve memory. For instance, a photograph taken during one's childhood reminds people of many things associated with the captured image. Artwork and photography are also viewed as means by which a community's culture can be preserved. Art and photographic documentation remind people of their cultural origins and of the transformations that have taken place over a given time. Even when specific cultures and communities cease to exist, their memories are preserved through relics, like ancient pottery. Artwork has been used to depict the relationship between time and memory and how this relationship influences the way people live. Our current world evolved out of past events. Many of today's innovations and systems are probably improvements of older, preexisting technologies and concepts that were preserved through artifacts. For instance, today's advanced

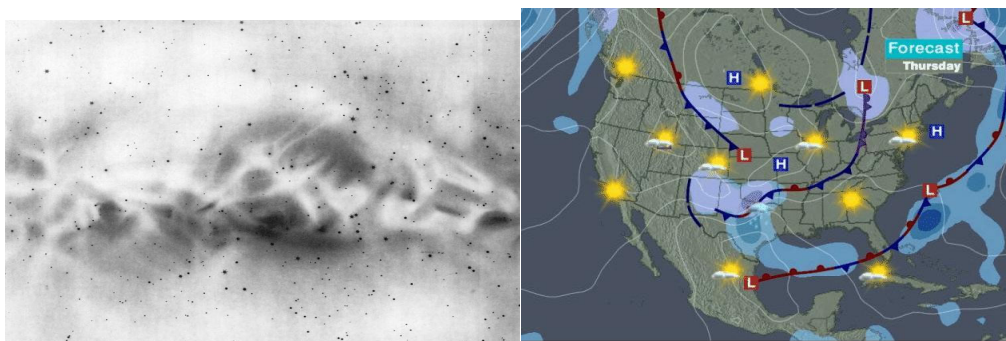


Figure 1. Detail of a Milky Way drawing by Anton Pannekoek from 1927(left) & Weather forecast mapping nowadays from CNN. (right)

weather forecasting is similar to the way images of the Milky Way in ancient paintings documented the way that star positions were used to forecast weather patterns. [10] (Fig. 1) From these relationships, it is very easy to understand that memory and time are interdependent, as memory is constructed over time, and time determines the extent to

which memory is preserved.

In reference to the statement that memory is time, American anthropologist Jonathan Boyarin offers a paradox about memory in his collection of ethnographic and philosophical essays. "On one hand, we pragmatically assume that time is a one-dimensional and irreversible phenomenon.

On the other hand, our commitment to the past and its representations implies the past affects the present in much more complex ways than the model of points on a straight line permits us to imagine.” [9] Our memory is created to erode over time; however, various sensational events would form multiple arrows of experience that move along the one-dimensional timeline. The concepts of memory and time are interrelated, despite having different meanings. Memory is formed through an accumulation of moments. Time is spent accumulating these moments and experiences, with each moment creating corresponding memories of variable significance and duration. For instance, people tend to remember moments that intensely engaged their emotions longer and more intensely than banal experiences. People cannot remember all of the finer details of a moment; however, emotions and feelings provide clues for memory and allow specific experiences and events to endure over time. This paper discusses the relationships between memory and time through an analysis of various elements of art.

2. Discussion

2.1. Dissolving Clay.

Anthropologist, Sapir-Whorf, argued that space and time are properties of cognition, not properties inherent in the world. [9] In other words, time is not an object, but rather a non-existent subjective perception. The same is true for space. German philosopher, Immanuel Kant insisted: “Time is therefore a purely subjective condition of our intuition, and in itself, apart from the subject, is nothing.” [9] Time is therefore a passive element like cold; without heat, there is no cold. “Memory,” however, is an object that is continuously created and formed from temporary information perceived by our senses. It will wear off and dissolve through the irresistible unit: time. My work “Capsule” is a good example to demonstrate and express the cycle of “memory” via a physical artistic way. “Capsule” is a video documentary that presents a clay sculpture being dissolved in water over a glass hemisphere (Fig.2). The clay sculpture represents a temporary object: “memory,” being dissolved by the water: “time.” One realizes that at the end of the dissolving process, the sculpture’s form no longer exists, but its particles are still suspended in the water. In relation to life and memory, the dissolving capsule scenario brings one to the thought of how memory represents one’s life. The dissolving particles represent the moments; while the container in which the particles are suspended represent that part of our organic system that stores memories.(Fig.3) These pieces can gradually be reformed and structured back when one starts to recall a vital moment.



Figure 2. “Capsule” (Video): Video presentation of dissolving clay in water.



Figure 3. “Capsule” (Video)

The glass container acts as a capsule that stores our experiences. Inside, it is empty, which indicates the unlimited space in our imaginations and our brains, organically speaking. Visible images and structures are created not only from sensory experiences but also through imagination. The philosopher Henri Atlan’s description of the Rabbinic Jewish conception of memory is significant in this connection. Atlan notes that “one conceives a memory as one conceives an idea and as one conceives a child.” [9] Perhaps we should further explore Atlan’s statement, as memory is neither something dormant in the past nor a projection from the present, but a potential for creative collaboration between present consciousness and the experience or expression of the past. Memory is created mainly through imagination and sensational information perceived at a specific time. Baddeley argues that the best way to appreciate memory is to imagine what life would be like without it. He explains that memory is not a single organ like the heart or liver, but an alliance of systems that work together, allowing us to learn from the past and predict the future. [1] In other words, our imagination is the main core or medium for creating memories. In my video work, the vacuum space inside the sphere refers to the organic part of our imagination. It does not store memories but contains all the virtual coding and clues that allow pieces of memory to reshape. Information we perceive can be lost easily through time; however, we are able to pick out the residue in our timelines to reform particular experiences. This reformation is not precise, but accurate enough to engage our emotions and recall specific moments.

The clay-dissolving scenario represents the cycle of memory through time. The clay material demonstrates the process by which memories decompose in time while the residue can be reformed and structured. If memories are a personal mental remembrance of past experiences, do they then represent the foundations of who we are, or are they only subjective traces of our lives? The answer is that memories are both; every day we create memories that inexplicably and miraculously make their way into the archives of our mind to be stored in abstract and amorphous containers. And memories, as precarious as they are, eventually dissolve in the solution of time to be returned to the dust of nothingness (Fig.4). From this perspective, time is not a universal unit, but instead, purely personal. The span of our timeline does not refer to the actual length of time we experience; rather, memories are created and accumulated to form our own personal meaning of time.



Figure 4. “Capsule” (Video)

2.2. Ceramics.

Over time, ceramic painting on pottery has transitioned from primitive drawings to computerized illustrations. The visual mode of presentation made through ceramic paintings usually gives identity to certain works, creating a raw and abstract illustration that is presented in a physical way. For example, ceramic remnants of the people who lived in the past are still being used today as evidence of how their culture was and what happened in their daily lives. The American anthropologist, Paul Shackel, explains that ceramics of household items can be used as evidence to reveal lifestyles in the history of old English, Russian, and French cultures. [8] (Fig.5) Ceramic art of the past contains pictures of various scenes that refer to individual civilizations. Besides pottery, primitive carving was also used as a recording tool in antiquity. Writing rules and styles evolved from carving. The text-formats we have now were created through centuries of history.(Fig.6)



Figure 5. Teapot, made at an unidentified factory in Britain, probably 1740s.

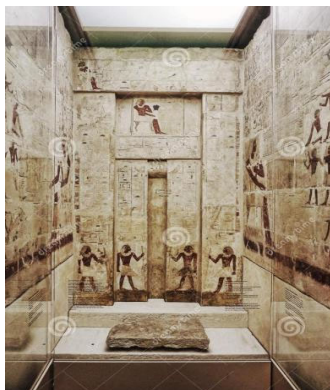


Figure 6. Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics in Metropolitan museum, New York

For example, in my work “Tablet,” I created a museum of formats which reflects the ways we think and how people are guided by institutions to create certain rules (Fig.7). My work “Tablet” aims to present different writing formats via primitive methods of carving. Each piece was made with ceramic according to a format from a specific culture or history. The same media was used, but in each case represented a variety of outcomes. I try to combine them and display the variations as a museum of literary disciplines. They are not words but rules that bind us to specific cultures and civilizations. Words present meaning while formats reflect the way we think. Rules and formats indicate the history of a civilization which also refers to a specific timeline; they were created not simply from the intelligence of the human race, but from our memories and past which are inherited from generation to generation. They were then modified and finalized through time carrying all the past intelligence within it.



Figure 7. “Tablet” (Ceramic) A museum of different writing format in ceramic plates.

An example from Ai Weiwei’s work, “Sunflower Seed,” is a situation where ceramics have been used to depict memory over time. In this case, information on barbaric governance is expressed through ceramic paints and displayed in public museums and places of public interest. (Fig.8) Each seed is made out of ceramic and painted individually. Each individual is unique and a part of the whole, a poignant commentary on the relationship between the individual and society. Time will fly but the seeds will not grow; they are trapped under the shadow of the government, as Ai Weiwei mentioned. [11] The statement of the work will remind subsequent generations of the dangers of involving themselves in such archaic modes of culture. The evolution of ceramics over time also depicts changes in associated memory values. For instance, in the past, ceramics were mainly comprised of primitive brownware, which has evolved to modern-day ceramics composed of drawings, painted plastics, and ironware. [7] With the large variety of available materials nowadays, ceramics provide a flexible form but also graphic representation. British culture historian, Murray Pittock, adds that ceramics of the past increased the contexts in which memory could be produced. From the evolution in the use of ceramics, one realizes that there is a close relationship between memory and the time context in which the memory is formed. The work, “Sunflower Seed,” by Ai Weiwei was presented not individually, but as a whole picture reflecting the dense population in China. These ceramic seeds are

perceived both in physical form and fresh visual images. The work generates memories that can be preserved over time and allows audiences to retrace the scene through their emotions in their long-term memories.



Figure 8. “Sunflower Seeds” 2010, Ai Weiwei

There are three types of memory: sensory memory, working memory and long-term memory. Baddeley explains that short-term memory represents a complex set of interacting subsystems that normally consist of sensory and working memory. [1] It is mainly used to contain fresh instant memories which lead to very little long-term associations. Baddeley also adds the hypothesis that experiences stored in long-term memory will not disappear, but only reduce in ease of accessibility over time. Time acts as a capsule, but the shell of the capsule becomes harder and harder to penetrate. In art, works are created that consist of the emotions of the artist and the identity of specific times. If the art is well-preserved, all the vital information can still be stored. However, without the original artist’s interpretation, an audience may not be able to fully access and perceive the concept and emotion of the piece

2.3. Abstract Shapes.

Memory has also been created over time through abstracts, which are short, artistic representations of certain elements in one’s life. For instance, seeing a familiar person whom a person does not quite recall makes that person imagine the place where they could have met. Through memory refreshing, people remember the place, time, and event in which they met the familiar person. Steven Luck, a professor of psychology at the University of California, explains that the use of visual memory is enhanced by abstract formations such as familiar faces. [5] The abstract brings a time element with it, and may easily induce a memory of the specific time in which the action happened. Luck also mentions that visual short-term memory capacity is limited. [5] Fresh visual information continuously overwrites older information. This is when abstract forms begin to be created, eventually replacing the original memory contents with abstract forms, which will be stored in long-term memory. Abstract forms are not visual information but a visual space that allows our imagination to elaborate. The memory being reformed is not a projection of the past, but the imagining of the past based on current emotions.

A virtual memory abstract is also formed by someone who

influences our lives deeply in the past or present time; such moments can be instantly recalled. In my sewing works, the abstract sewing buildings represent my impression of childhood with my grandmother. It reminds me of not only the way my grandmother liked to sew but also the joy that is structured through the perspective of memory (Fig.9). Occurrences in the day-to-day lives of a person can also remind them of things that happened a long time ago. For example, the warm morning sun rays striking through one’s window or door gaps can remind them of the way they used to peep at their parents through windows or closet gaps. Through abstracts, we learn that there is a correlation



Figure 9. “Sewing” (2D) abstract on translucent matt paper.

between memory and time, and that the memory needs to be slightly stimulated by things that are similar to what it holds in order to bring out the time frame in which these things happened.

My work “Sewing” is about wonderful, warm moments. I sewed the abstract shapes of the buildings from my childhood memory. They are not lively images; however, they represent my moments staying with my grandma when I was a child. When my parents came to take me home, I would refuse and hide inside the closet. There was a gap between the closet doors where I could see my grandma when she was sewing. Other than that, I realized I could see the whole world differently from different perspectives. For instance, when the warm striking sunlight shined on my face through the door gap, it warmed the scene while I watched my grandma sewing. All of these emotions are represented through the abstract act of sewing. They are not pictures of events but pictures of my memories.

2.4. Physical Preservation.

Luck explains that in the memory world, our brain has unlimited capacity; however, time will make individual memories difficult to access. [5] The best aspect about technology is that it can be used to link the past and future by recording. Memory and time have also been explained through the advancement of technology over the years. In our physical world, the human brain holds a storage mechanism that has been emulated by scientists to create artificial memory storage devices, like hard drive systems. A security system, CCTV (Closed Circuit Television) can record all the moments in a given timeframe and one can download and review these moments later (Fig 10). The cameras are based on people’s flashback memory, which enables them to remember things that happened in the recent past. However, the only difference with human memory is that the camera memory can be stored over a lifetime while human beings tend to forget certain events over time.



Figure 10. CCTV footage screenshot image Screenshot
Source: (Youtubecom, 2016).

Another development in memory creation over time has been the assemblage of images in motion, which is used to create documentaries and historical movies (Fig 11). Through these movies, past moments are shared over generations. Baddeley states there is no doubt that verbal coding plays an extremely important part in human memory. Even when one is remembering visually presented items, or recalling actions or incidents. There is a strong tendency to supplement other aspect of memory by verbalizing; turning what may be initially purely a visual task into a combined visual and verbal one. [1] Film history professor at University of Iowa, Rabinovitz explains that watching QuickTime movies draws him into someone else's and a computer's memory, and even when the content is on contemporary issues, the content form reminds us of things that happened in the past. [3] In relation to memory and time, studies show that verbal and visual cues are the main elements that to help one recalls memories. With videos, not only specific incidents or moments can be saved, but various relevant memories will also be triggered and reformed by watching the video. In reference to the time capsule, videos or films work as softeners which allow more access to certain memories.

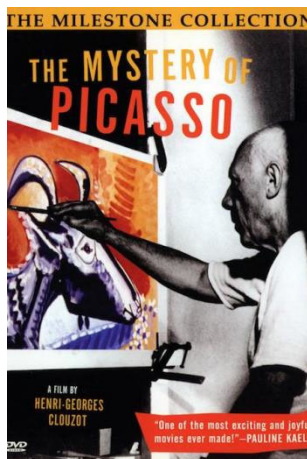


Figure 11. Movie “Le mystere Picasso”, 1956, Pablo Picasso.

2.5. Fossil art.

Historians and archaeologists have also derived meaning and constructed memories from fossil excavations. Through archeology, we understand that time is more than the physical change of periods and hours; it is a slow erosion of memory itself. Patrick Hutton, author of History as an Art of Memory, explains that local memories are built up over time and eventually result in the realization of a more comprehensive past. [4] Local memories in this aspect are definitely found through historians and local people who have either studied the phenomena of the local place or lived to witness its history.

As Mads Mordhorst insists, scholarly history is not meant for the benefit of the future generation, but to reflect on how the past actually was. [6]

2.6. Drawing art.

Drawing as art has also been used over time to preserve memories, with the art evolving from simple artifact drawings, to applications that can produce images through software programs such as Photoshop. Over a long period of time, the art of drawing has been used to express an individual or group's attributes such as culture, hobbies, encounters, and interests. The moments expressed through drawing serve remembrance. For instance, a drawing in a traditional culture reminds people of a given culture's norms, such as what happens during harvesting, initiation, festive, and climatic conditions (Fig.12). Therefore, memory is reinforced every time the drawing is viewed, passing from one generation to the other. In some mental therapy sessions, drawing is also utilized as a healing aspect through memory creation. Patients suffering from conditions who have to be isolated and stay alone find it difficult to cope. Scientists have devised a healing process where the patient is given drawings of the people they love and cherish, like family members or other best moments in life. Through this process, a patient's memory is ignited, and the hope of healing and seeing their families revived, which has been proven to accelerate healing.

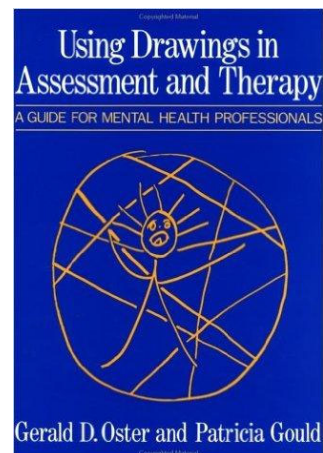


Figure 12. “Using Drawings on Assessment and Therapy”, Gerald D, Oster and Paticia Gould
Image source: (Amazon.com, 2016)

2.7. Build to destroy art.

Ian McMahon uses the medium of clay and plaster to make large sculptures and installations which are designed to be destroyed. These sculptures are mostly large and sophisticated; curtains and inflatable pillow shapes are evident in his recent works (Fig.13). His sculptures are thin shells with delicate white plaster showing fine details. The sculptures are not permanently displayed in one place; instead, shortly after their completion, Ian will crack every one of them during the exhibition. The collapse and disappearance of the sculptures is part of the work. Obviously, McMahon's sculptures have nothing to do with permanence; they are more in the spirit of “build to destroy.” [12] In the world of memory, we understand that experiences cannot be destroyed, but instead are simply made increasingly more difficult to access. However, McMahon's work suggests that the experience of seeing the works destroyed will be more unforgettable rather

than the experience of merely viewing the sculptures intact. When we experience the destruction of a work, the event consists of many sensational elements including the audience's emotions and like a burst of ecstasy, the moment of regret cannot be reproduced. The emotions help preserve the event in our memories.



Figure 13. Live destruction of Ian's work: Curtain, 2016.

3. Conclusion

Through art, we learn time is an important component in memory creation as it determines the phase in which the memory's context lies. Likewise, memory is made up of moments which occur in a given time span. The relationship between time and memory are object and subject where memory is an object and time is a subject. They are both interdependent to be existed. In personal perspective, memory is time as one's existence doesn't rely on the time it has passed; however, it matter with worthy experience and past that make one to be exists.

Although we know it is impossible to access all memory, fortunately their footsteps and

traces are stored to make who we are over time. As in my artwork, "Capsule," memories are residues while time is the water. Even though memories are dissolved by time, they are infinitely contained inside the capsule; the remains will not disappear, but simply become harder to access. Each of our brains holds an imagination-space to recode and reform the pieces back in various ways. Therefore, memory and time are not elements in the past, but are aspects of creativity, knowledge and instinct that help us to learn in the present and to create in the future.

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<http://www.cnn.com/WEATHER/NAmerica/frct.html>
- [15] Figure 5: Teapot, made at an unidentified factory in Britain, probably 1740s (left)
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