

# Memory

## Memory as an image-based (synaesthetic), communicative and contradictory activity

*Claudia Dreke & Erhard Stölting*

The relationship between images and memories is always important in social science when it comes to collective memory. According to this, memories are mediated visually.

Memory images can be differentiated into (1) internal images as components of individual and often synaesthetic memory, (2) images as external, aesthetically perceptible and mediated objects of memory, among which (3) variously published iconic images become particularly important for collective memories.

The increase in technical possibilities for the mass dissemination of images since the 19th century has also qualitatively changed the corresponding areas of memory: Ever larger publics and more and more subject areas can be incorporated into pictorially mediated communication – not least through social media ([Social Media](#)). This also expands and changes the possibilities for promoting social homogenization and differentiation. This is reflected in mass movements, social conflicts, and the increase in increasingly differentiated subcultures.

### **1. Memories presuppose sensory, often synaesthetically perceived experiences. They can trigger chains of further memories.**

Remembering something presupposes a previous experience through which a person has been sensorily affected ([Affect](#)). The person then remembers something they have touched, seen, heard, read, smelled, tasted or felt. A memory can trigger many things: a current sensory impression, a current emotion, a report, an incident, etc. – but also the mere memory of it. Images or acoustic, haptic, olfactory phenomena can refer to each other. The concept of "synaesthesia", in its anthropological-phenomenological tradition, is fundamental here (cf. e.g. Bosch, 2022). In every memory, something appears situationally that was not conscious

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immediately before.

## **2. Forgetting and remembering are mutually constitutive of each other.**

On different occasions, memories of the same experience can emerge and yet differ. After each current experience, the memory of it begins to fade. New influences can impact the previous memory. In this way, what is important is distinguished from what is unimportant according to criteria that are themselves changeable. Remembering everything is impossible. Memory also requires selection.

There are events that can no longer be recalled from memory. There are those that remain stored but are only remembered at certain occasions. Following Sigmund Freud, they could be described as "preconscious", i.e. invocable. They would then have to be distinguished from the "unconscious", i.e. experiences that are actively "repressed" from conscious memory and are at best symbolic, albeit influential.

The concept of "repression" becomes important where aspects of collective memory need to be considered. Collectively attributable crimes or other discrediting, potentially embarrassing collective phenomena tend to be banished from collective memory. In intergenerational relationships, this mechanism can contain a high potential for conflict (Hamburger, 2022). While one side strives to transfer the repressed phenomena into morally necessary memories, the other aims at final forgetting, in the old strategic sense of a "damnatio memoriae" (Schwedler, 2021, pp. 11-52).

## **3. Depending on their normative contexts, memories and their communication are selective. Their visual mediation presupposes visibility.**

Situational interactions and their normalizations influence what and how a person remembers – but also what and how they convey memories to others. Just as memories can be censored or emphasized, they are subject to additional censorship in the media's transmission to others: What the situationally conceived social environment approves or condemns determines whether and how certain memories (should) become accessible to others.

Language is not the only medium through which memories are communicated to and taken up by others. Images were and are important for mediation; technical developments have

accelerated this mediation enormously.

The pictorial mediation of memories presupposes visibility ([Visibility](#)): Only that which can be communicated (even pre-linguistically) can be connective. However, communication through intentionally hidden images can also become socially significant: By contextualizing the invisible pictorially and/or conceptually, but not showing it or only showing it exclusively, communication leaves room for one's own potentially momentous imagination in memory discourses.

#### **4. Publicly and privately circulating images are increasingly included in the communication of memories. They have an effect on individual memory images.**

Memory images arise in external perception. The material substrate of memory and its communication are the bodies (Heinlein & Dimbath, et al. 2015; Kanter, 2015). The physical ability to store and change memory images makes it possible to distinguish "inside" and "outside". Today's "external" world also includes artificial, e.g. digitally produced images ([Social Media](#)). They especially are increasingly circulated en masse. The awareness that these images were artificially produced does not cancel out the fact that they appear authentic. They can also be used to prove or refute counterfactual statements or enrich the game with fictions.

What is remembered as an "internal image" influences the perception of the outer world and the corresponding communication. How external perceptions and previous memories permeate each other, how internal and external images (mutually) transform each other, is the subject of empirical questioning (Wulf, 2014, p. 26f.).

#### **5. Experience-based terms and images can specify and be linked with each other and with other memories in communication.**

The understanding of communicated memory images requires experience-based concepts. One's own messages are taken up by others and made understandable and incorporated by them with recourse to their own experiences. Anyone who participates in a communication process by seeing, hearing, touching or otherwise will relate the messages of others, including their sensory presentation, to their own remembered experiences. As in all communication, misunderstandings can occur here.

The relationship between terms and images deserves special attention. Kant already pointed out that concepts without intuition are empty and intuition without concepts are blind (Rothacker, 1957). Certain terms are associated with earlier views and are only "understood" when they also update the corresponding links. The meaning of what is written or spoken is revealed by the perceptual gaze going from word to word and relying on the grammatical connections and contexts of meaning. Images, on the other hand, initially present themselves to perception as a whole, but are then made more precise bit by bit as the gaze wanders over the picture – a peripatetic procedure during which the perceived meaning of the entire picture can also shift and become more precise.

In the process, images as well as terms can remain ambiguous. In most cases, numerous other – possibly synaesthetic – connections are possible that further shift the meaning.

## **6. Media icons in particular contribute to social communication and the transformation of memories.**

Photographic media icons in particular are implicitly associated with the assertion of authenticity ([Photography](#)): They have a high potential for affect ([Affect](#)) even if they are deliberate fakes: They are also fed into the collective memories and transform them. In certain social units, they seem to be immediately convincing – but even there, their understanding presupposes terms saturated with experience. By means of media icons, the perceived social reality is co-created – intentionally or not.

## **7. Hegemonic images and terms open up collective action and collective submission as elements of memory banks.**

Images and terms not only have a unifying effect, they also feed social struggles for recognition and power. They are the basis for efforts to assert one's own interpretations as the only legitimate ones in the face of resistance and supposed lack of understanding. Their enforcement is all the more successful the more they shape individual experiences and thus the corresponding convictions. Antonio Gramsci based his politically significant concept of "hegemony" on this (Leggewie, 1987). According to him, hegemony consists of the oppressed adopting the conceptual and iconic arsenals of their oppressors. In this way, they "internalize" their

own subjugation (Stölting, 1987). This could explain why oppressed people passionately support their oppression.

Through social communication, social units can perceive each other, but also misjudge each other. Some of the forms of perception that are socially established through terms and images are as short-lived as the social units to which they can be attributed. Others can stabilize and be handed down in the long term, especially if they can stabilize their differences through hostile attributions.

### **8. Conflicting affective references to hegemonic images and concepts emerge above all in contemporary historical upheavals.**

Societal upheavals not only change societies, they also emotionally affect the involved individuals, dividing their experiences into a "before" and an "after" (Dreke et al., 2022). The life-world memories of the past can thus change just as much as expectations of the future.

In connection with this, the upheavals themselves are remembered in a specific way. For this, images intertwined with narratives prove to be particularly relevant. At the same time, social, political, and visual-cultural upheavals appear to be intertwined (Führer & Weixler, 2022, p. 9f.).

The new images of memory and the future that emerge from specific hopes or fears during upheavals differ according to the social units that produce them. They correspond more or less to the images and concepts that have become hegemonic in each case (Dreke, 2022). In this respect, the dispute over memory is also a dispute over the most powerful images.

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