

What is the Social Memory to which the Information Technologies are useful?

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We could start from the ideas of the French sociologist Tarde. At the beginning, there is a fact: the development of the human brain is not oriented towards any direction. The problem is solved thanks to imitation. Some societies are tradition-oriented, people imitate the past. Other societies are fashion-oriented, people imitate the fashions. Of course, the consumption society is fashion-oriented. Therefore, there is no role for Social Memory.

At the opposite, the French sociologist Halbwachs said: «behind any social activity, there is a Social Memory». Any social group needs strong beliefs to be stable, hence a sort of «tradition», or Social Memory.

Indeed, in the consumption society, some Social Memory remains. At least, examples are: religious memory, the Nation, institutions (Justice), Cultural Heritage ...

According to Halbwachs, institutions or some social groups need a Memory for two reasons:

Besides the technical skills, the tasks to carry out require personal qualities. Of course, it is at a high level. For instance, it concerns the personal qualities of a Judge. Concerning the social classes (aristocrats, bourgeoisie) the Halbwachs's remark is obvious. The group's memory highlights the personal qualities of a remarkable person belonging to the group in the past.

An institution displays the Order which has been brought by itself (according to its doctrine), opposed to the Disorder before. An «analytical space» (Foucault), useful to control its own activity, is not sufficient. There is also the use of Symbols in the space. In France, the courts are in the cities which are prefectures (chosen at the time of the French Revolution) by opposition to the old cities where the courts of the monarchic regime were and to show that all the territory is under control (by opposition to the past). Westminster in London symbolizes several political compromises which have saved the unity of the Kingdom in the past, hence the choice of this place for the Parliament.

There is an other reason, to pose the question of Social Memory and the impact of Information Technologies on it. We are not sure that the «widening of the mind» (Crooney) which is caused by Information Technologies does not change the activities. It depends on the activity. Photography and cinema have changed Painting, but not so much Architecture.

The main idea is that in the Social Memory, the past is re-constructed. According to Halbwachs, an individual who makes efforts to «localize» a remembrance (seeking to obtain accurate details) uses «landmarks» which exist in accordance with social life. These landmarks exist because of the re-constructed past in the memory of some group to which the individual belongs. They are explained by the stakes, the goals, the action, in the present, concerning this group. Otherwise, the landmarks do not exist, and an individual is unable to localize a remembrance. Not only the past is re-constructed, but it is permanently re-constructed.

1 THE PECULARITIES ARE PRESERVED THANKS TO A DELIBERATE CHOICE, AND CHANGED

The «globalization» could be presented as a «field of forces» (François Perroux). Anywhere, pressures trigger the adaptation to a competitive economy. The peculiarities originating in the past should disappear.

Now, who could propose a plan for a city imitating the old Muslim city? According to Braudel, in the center was the Mosque and the Prince's palace, then was the caravanseraï, the quarter of the merchants, then the ordinary craftsmen and finally the «dirty» craftsmen (butchers, those working on leather ...). Outside the city, poor people and the market gardeners. As it has been noticed by the French sociologist René Caillois, the center of the city was the place of Holiness and the periphery, the place of damnation. Of course, there is not a city in Arabic countries imitating this plan, even a little. Only are possible architectural details evoking the past (shapes), or patios, with the justification of climate.

The same remarks hold for the Jews. At the beginning, in European cities, there was the Jew in the Court and the Jew advising the Prince. According to Werner Sombart (we refer to his book «The Jews in the economic life»), they had a stimulating role in finance and trade, in the cities where they were accepted. It ended around 1850. After this date, in Vienna, for instance, they were an important part of the elite (entrepreneurs, intellectuals, artists). They inhabited a modern quarter where the unique peculiar feature was several synagogues. They were accepted, but having abandoned many of their customs. They conformed to the rules of Austrian Empire: civil status, degrees (in the University), laws ... They could maintain their cult, in private. This is an example of changes in Social Memory. There were two changes, among Austrian citizens and Jews in Austria. The Austrian people changed their remembrances on Jews, in the sense of tolerance («Jews are useful to our country»). The Jews changed their remembrances on «Goy» (adaptation to the social life in Austria). In these conditions, a minority, with its peculiarities, is accepted. It is a kind of deliberate choice, and Social Memory is changed. However the peculiarities of this minority change, also.

When Internet and easier and cheaper trips trigger more and more migrations (international or inside a country), this problem of Social Memory changing is posed. In general, two changes are required, if migrants are accepted. There is a change of Social Memory among the people inhabiting the country and an other among the migrants. In each case the question is: «What is our tradition?». The question concerns many topics: religion, customs, authority, gender, and even details (clothes ...).

According to Halbwachs there is not only a spatial stream, but also a social stream. Collective representations in each country allow, explain the migration. There are two opposed forces: representations retaining people in their country and taking them away from the foreign country, representations pushing off people. The existence of a migration depends on the stronger representations. During the trip, representations (of it) appear, and certainly remembrances. When the migrants have arrived, there are two possibilities. Either the Social Memory of the group vanishes and the migrants stay in the country. Either it remains vivid, and the migrants will return to their country, after many years.

2 THE IMPACT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES ON PAINTING AND ARCHITECTURE

Here we use the Malraux's book «Le musée imaginaire». The museums appeared two centuries ago in occidental countries. They transform the works of art they display. They are no more a decor in a palace or a holy means for a cult in a cathedral, they become works of art. First, the museums have glorified the «great occidental oil painting». At the beginning there was the finding of the blurred contour by Leonardo da Vinci. He created an impression of depth, an immense Space that things and persons fill. Other findings will be the use of Light and Shade, the foreshortening, the trompe l'œil (a minor finding). Oil painting brings Illusion, Spectacle, Fiction. Soon it will appear as boring. The museums display these works of art, only. It is restrictive academism. In the middle of the 19th century, Photography has an enormous impact (according to Malraux). People like these simple, clear pictures showing a familiar reality (landscapes, portraits). The painter's rebellion begins. In the era of bourgeoisie, the world becomes more practical, there is no more a Myth (the King, the Religion) to glorify. There is an indifference to Style. The old collusion of painters with rich and powerful people (artistocrats were Art lovers and knew it), ends. It was a rebellion in aesthetic matters and even in the lifestyle(1). The transition corresponds to Courbet, Manet. Modern Painting starts from Cézanne. What is refused is: Spectacle, Illusion, Fiction, the Topics, the constant reference to Nature. What is promoted is: abstraction, intellectualization, moving paintings, the way in which the painter paints, various sources (arts from other places and times). An other list of opposite choices is: achieved, rendered, imagination, affirmation, and: sketch, made, creation, interrogation. The goal is no more to imitate a Genius, but a constant personal creation. What matters is to create a «style». The photographic album and easier trips allow to know more works of art than before, and to compare them. It is the birth of the Musée Imaginaire. Are discovered Roman and Gothic sculptures(2), arts from ancient Egypt, Mexico, Persia and Asia (Japan, China, India ...). Other artefacts than paintings are discovered and liked, as sculptures but also mosaics, frescoes, stained glass, tapestries ... People are interested in «minor arts». The artists work for the Musée Imaginaire. According to Malraux, a work of art belonging to the Musée Imaginaire passes through metamorphosis. It is liked, then forgotten and re-discovered etc ... It is «eternity» and no more «immortality». This is explained by the existence of Universal Languages, involving Shapes.

The modern art lover has personal tastes(3) and takes pleasure in seeking and finding works of art he likes, in the Musée Imaginaire. He will find works of art he likes in various cultures and styles (many countries, many times). Photographic albums and Internet are useful to him. Also, he travels to look at the works of art in the Museums. It is the end of the old Museum. Today, spectacle is displayed by cinema, no more by Painting. The Musée Imaginaire has become the new «encompassing», that is to say the place where works of art have their sense and value, together with other ones. And the works of the painters of the Museum are liked as paintings, no more admired as masterpieces. They have become paintings.

The painter's rebellion continued after the end of the 19th century(4).

The same did not happen to Architecture. According to Malraux, Photography has been unable to render the «depth» of houses and monuments, and perspectives in the cities. Perhaps software and computers could remove this obstacle, today. One could admire a monument, looking at it as if one was moving in a three dimensional space, zooming on a detail, casting a glance at an interesting place etc ... thanks to synthetic images. However other reasons would remain, preventing Architecture to enter the Musée Imaginaire.

3 THESE OTHER REASONS ARE:

- There was not the architect's rebellion. In Paris in Montparnasse around 1900, there were mainly painters and poets. There were a few architects. Rarely painters are also architects(5). The customer of a painter buys a painting for his pleasure. The customer of an architect buys a house to live in it. There are more constraints for an architect, even if the modern building techniques (steel, concrete) are at disposal. The search for new shapes is easier for painters. While painters rejected the «great occidental oil painting», the Painting of the Museum, and invented new shapes and a new use of colour, the architects only proposed «historical styles». Only around 1900, some architects adopted the findings of Cubism and it was the beginning of Modern Architecture: «invention of the wall», geometric shapes, use of volumes and surfaces etc ... (6).

(1) The painter's rebellion is described in the Zola's novel «L'œuvre». Perhaps the «model» was Cézanne. In fact, Cézanne suffered to paint according to his will, did not commit suicide and succeeded. His paintings are the very beginning of the Musée Imaginaire. Zola made a mistake on Painting. He wished large paintings showing the real social life. A few paintings have corresponded to his wishes.

(2) It was ignored by Viollet le Duc, who destroyed the gothic sculptures of Notre Dame de Paris, when he restored it.

(3) Malraux liked the «severe style» (opposed to Illusion), the clear (not the «asphalt» described by Zola), simple (opposed to the «brilliant style») colours allowing a dissonant harmony. Taste is personal. The general theories of Malraux on the Musée Imaginaire are often accepted.

(4) The French painter Marcel Duchamp stopped painting. He also wanted to exit from style and even sense. Wanting to not imitate himself, he made replicas of his own works. He sold ready-mades. A ready-made is a (fictitious) object for the everyday life, manufactured by industry, and a little changed. Often a message is added (a wink, a play on words) and it is signed.

Duchamp posed the question of the impact of reproduction techniques on Art. It is worth to define some words:

- Replica. An artist obtains a new work by changing an old work (for instance, colours). It is signed. It is sold.
- Copy. An imitation of the work of a dead artist.
- Multiple. Just similar to a work, without modification. Possibly, many.
- Appropriation. An artist re-makes the work of another artist, in his own way.

Also, these details show the complexity of the market of works of art. Walter Benjamin thought that a work of art loses its «aura» when it is reproduced. It is not the opinion of Duchamp, since he considered his replicas as having value.

(5) The Mexican painter Diego Rivera was also an architect. He designed the Anahuacalli museum in Mexico City, to display his own collection of Aztec artefacts. It is an imitation of an Aztec pyramid. The idea could not be applied to another project. Indeed, the Anahuacalli museum belongs to the Musée Imaginaire.

(6) According to Francastel, the earlier work in Modern Architecture is a house in Vienna, which was designed by Loos around 1900. Loos refused any ornamentation (the «floral style»).

- Paintings and sculptures are more flexible objects than buildings. If you live in a big city, if you wait some time, you can always look at the paintings you like. If you want to look at monuments, you have to travel.

- Each city is unique. We do not choose a return to Nature, or immortal rules of Beauty, speaking of the «Soul» of a city. An historical city is unique if we consider its history, its Art, its present atmosphere and its Social Memory. We refer to what is said by Max Weber on the history of cities. Two cities differ by the «great consumers» (the rich people benefitting from rents and spending their money in the city), the social classes which were allies or struggling one against the other, the political institutions, the aesthetic tastes and the successes in art etc ... The present atmosphere, which is in part explained by the past and tradition, is displayed only by some famous novelists(7).

The peculiarity of some cities is obvious:

Paris. The capital of France, the world capital of luxury during centuries.

Vienna. Habsburg dynasty, baroque, brilliant intelligentsia around 1900.

Naples. Powerful aristocracy, christian mysticism.

Etc...

No wonder that the Social Memory on each of these cities is built locally. If you like one of these cities and want to look at it, you have to come into the city. It is uneasy to transfer an architectural solution from one of these cities to another, given the peculiar, unique, social environment of the city. It is obvious concerning the climate, but concerns the social environment, history, aesthetic styles, the atmosphere etc ... It is not the same for paintings. Perhaps it is one of the reasons why an international style in architecture appeared late. That was already found by Cubist painters was adopted.

- There is not the equivalent of «past cultures» as in Painting. We refer to what remains of the art of ancient Egypt, or Aztec art etc ... Now it is part of the Musée Imaginaire. There is not the equivalent in Architecture. There are only a few «dead cities», as the «ghost cities» in USA, Macchu Picchu, Pompei, Herculaneum etc ... The interesting architectural remains are often in the big cities of today. It is because the development of big cities is often in the same place, where they are located today(8). They are part of the Social Memory of these cities. The end of a city is considered only as a sad event. A city is not a decor that one could replace advantageously. When in some novels the destruction of a city is described, it is only a sad event. Zola has described the destruction of Paris («La débâcle»), Sienkiewicz the destruction of Rome («Quo Vadis?»), Margaret Mitchell that of Atlanta («Gone with the wind»), Malaparte that of Naples («La pelle») etc ... Perhaps an explanation is that the «right to conquer» is no more accepted. It has been highlighted by the American historian Prescott in his book on Cortes, written in the middle of the 19th century. If we believe Max Weber it was admitted in the city of ancient Greece. We do not admire an Alexander the Great, destroying cities but creating Alexandrias by tens. Perhaps it is linked to the present refusal of the use of nuclear weapons (or other terrible arms), which exists in the opinion. In many parts of the world, it is no more admitted to destroy a city to exert pressures on people(9). When there are architectural remains in a big city, it is uneasy to imitate them to build an international style. What is possible is historical styles. Probably, at the same time, representations concerning Society are diffused. Of course, as other works of art than paintings, other cultures (in other societies, in other times) were discovered, vernacular architecture has been discovered. However imitating it was possible only when it concerned architectural details. In particular, the plan of houses and buildings expresses social and religious collective behaviours, and cannot be transferred into a Modern Architecture.

We find in the Francastel's book «Art et Technique au 19^{ème} et 20^{ème} siècles» the confirmation of the Malraux's ideas. According to this author, there is at a given time and in any society, a «figurative competence», thanks to some artists. They invent new aesthetic shapes. It is an «operational activity» which can be compared to mathematics. First, there is a search, then there are findings. It is like a kind of experiment. New problems are posed, there is a new search etc ... The findings of artists are «parallel» to those in science and technology, but there is not a transfer from an activity to the other(10). There is a kind of «analytical approach», at a given time, in a society, which is common to Art, Science and Technology. For instance the Cubist Painting breaks up and recomposes objects along geometric lines (cubes) like technicians break up and recombine the human work (when technology replaces the ancient methods of craftsmen). Or sculptures made of wires suggest the scientific notion of field of forces.

The Cubist painting brought the novelties:

Perspective. It is not the traditional perspective. The «bird's eye view» and the view from above are invented.

Speed. As speed becomes omnipresent in the world, it is also present in paintings.

Internal structure. The importance of the internal structure of an object (an idea which exists in science and technology also) explains that details of an object are in evidence, of that the same details of objects which are far one from the other, are displayed.

Later Cubist painters have chosen another style: planes the positions of which are relative one to the other, appear in the paintings. Volumes and surfaces are displayed. The fact that architects have borrowed shapes from Cubist painters is apparent, when we consider the two trends of Architecture after 1900: the cult of the «lightened room» (Le Corbusier), and the taste for freed volumes and surfaces.

Around 1930, Abstract Art brings other novelties:

(7) Zola for Paris, Malaparte for Naples, Margaret Mitchell for Atlanta and the south of USA etc ...

(8) The French economist Sauvy has called «syndrome of the plane tree» this phenomenon.

(9) The «right to conquer» and its end are topics concerning the «social morphology» according to Halbwachs. It concerns the distribution of the population in Space, and the representations (the «collective psychology»), also.

(10) It is not the thesis of «Art impliqué» («involved art»). This art is linked to Industry. The shape of an object is beautiful if it displays the technology used to produce it («the Shape expresses the function»).

Colour. A new way of using colour is invented (Gauguin). It is a two-dimensional painting (Malraux), but an impression of depth is obtained thanks to colour. It is the end of the «local tone».

Rhythm. It is not, as before, a rhythm the measure of which is Man. The rhythm is anywhere in the Cosmos. It is present in all the phenomena.

Material. It concerns the sculptors. They use the suggestive power of emptiness. They invent the tension of inside and outside. Sculptures in wires suggest a shape which is an empty volume. This use of material is new (the traditional sculptures displayed nice shapes, only).

Having painted the «Nature», then what is seen, one paints a construction.

These findings have influenced architecture.

Francastel does not speak of Information Technologies(11). He poses the question of the links of Technology in general, and Art. We live in a world full of objects produced by Industry. Are they nice? The only finding of figurative (plastic) Art adopted by Industry has been aerodynamism. The shapes of many objects produced by Industry are aerodynamic, the surfaces are smooth and polished. Perhaps an effort to educate the public is necessary. In the past, often, the patterns which were used by craftsmen were brought by artists.

The «figurative activity» is a social activity. Thanks to this activity, the meanings of shapes are chosen, inside a culture. It is partially determined by the past (for instance the letters of alphabet in occidental countries). It is also invented. This activity is neither totally autonomous (specific), neither the mere reflection of an other activity. Benedetto Croce is right when he highlights the role of geniuses in Art, but he insists on Spirit too much. The development of Art is «parallel» to that of Society. Francastel cites Halbwachs: Art is necessary because it is common to individuals belonging to groups which do not communicate one with the other.

4 THE SOCIAL MEMORY ACCORDING TO HALBWACHS

Halbwachs has examined the Social Memory in some institutions: Religion, Family, Social Class. Take the example of the Christian Church. It is uneasy to it to explain the Revelation, or the Moral Revolution (the other is an equal) because all happened a long time ago, in the first century. It was more and more uneasy, after more time, because the social environment of the events was more difficult to understand for people. The first recourse was the dogma, with its rigour, well controlled, but also triggering a few sentiments. The second recourse is the words of Saints and Mystics. These words are not a well controlled discourse, but they trigger a strong sentiment of the presence of God. Often, but not always, the Church has accepted the words of the Saints, even if there was some opposition from the proponents of the dogma (the Saints often knew theology, and this helped the Church to accept what they told). In general, the two recourses for Social Memory are objectivity and seduction. There is a kind of dilemma, because these means are of opposite kinds, and you cannot use one of them too much, because it would make impossible to use the other.

To sum up what we have said on Social Memory:

Often an institution needs a Social Memory. Halbwachs has examined Religion, the Family and the Social Class. We could find examples concerning professional groups (Justice ...). The Nation is an other example. Of course, the Cultural Heritage needs a Social Memory.

A recourse is to tell the exact story. The risk is that it is not very «appealing». It is more uneasy to explain facts when they are far away in the past. The discourse which is chosen is well controlled.

An other recourse is to accept the role of imagination. One chooses words which are seductive. It is not a very much controlled discourse. If people like «embellishments» too much, they will refuse any exact story. An institution wants to be attractive, but also to be able to give explanations. If there are too many embellishments, it triggers a reaction from the proponents of objectivity. However, seduction (appealing to imagination and sentiment) will be tried if objective explanations are not well understood.

There are conflicts, the stake being the re-construction of the past. It depends on how the present stakes (for the institution) are considered. There are proponents of objectivity and proponents of seduction. It is similar to the dilemma (for institutions) described by Foucault. Any institution needs a doctrine, and there are two opposite goals. The institution wants to explain its ability, its performance, its goals to people inside and outside. It also wants to influence representations to be acceptable. None of these means, objective explanations or attractive words, can be used too much. For instance, a professional milieu can recognize difficulties (because it is better to avoid promises which will not be kept), but not too much (because it would be to allow doubts in the opinion). There is the same for Social Memory. To embellish remembrances very much is to encourage dreams (it could be out of control). However, only objective explanations could trigger indifference.

Concerning Social Memory there are conflicts, mystifications, utopias (as the picturesque novel of D H Lawrence on Qelzatcoat!). There is often a polarity: Social Memory, in two groups, evolves towards tolerance or hostility, at the same time.

What will change, at the time of Internet? Of course, it will be one of the battlegrounds, concerning Social Memory. It will be used by the proponents of objectivity and the proponents of seduction. There will be two kinds of Internet sites. Some will expose rational arguments, referring to Science and Knowledge, seriously. Other sites will appeal to sentiments, using simple words and images.

Concerning Cultural Heritage, Internet will allow experts a better (more efficient) formation. Some sites (in countries, in cities) will diffuse an objective information on the local cultural heritage. They will present the local history, concerning Art, with objectivity. Other sites will have more commercial goals. They will present the sites to visit, in a country or a city, without many explanations,

(11) Except a few times. Le Corbusier wanted to suppress nomadism, the consequence of an «excess of communication», according to him. Cinema familiarized people with speed (in Art). An Italian writer, Raghianti, showed that photography has destroyed naturalist art, around the middle of the 19th century.

but insisting on «sensations». There are two means to strengthen Social Memory: objective information and appeal to imagination. Internet sites (it is the same for guidebooks or presentations by tour operators etc ...) will propose two kinds of visits: one for those having an interest in Cultural Heritage, an other for those searching sensations and spectacles.

5 CONCLUSION

Technology, activity and Social Memory are intertwined. The example of the effects of Photography and Cinema(12) on Painting and Architecture shows that. The effects of Information Technologies depend on the activity, and are often complex. Sometimes the effects which are triggered are simple (only a growing productivity). They are often more complex. In the case of archeology, the effect is a growing productivity: the work on the sites of the excavations is carried out more rapidly, computers allow to design an ancient building on the screen thanks to the data collected on the site of the excavations. Concerning the museums, too, the productivity is growing: the formation of experts is more efficient, software is used to manage some historical sites (as castles). However, in the case of museums, there are other effects. Information Technologies could be used to format the behaviour of those visiting museums, too much.

Sociologists have described how the behaviours of «users» in the city, are formatted by various kinds of specialists(13). These professionals collect information on the networks they manage, the behaviour of the users etc ... and return services for the users: water flows from the taps, electricity and gas are provided, safety is real, traffic is easy etc ... This «analytical space» (Foucault) involves signs, orders, constraints ... The behaviour of the walker, the driver, the buyer etc ... is formatted. There are so many signs to inform the user, and orders for him, that his brain is near from saturation. To stroll while enjoying some pleasure is possible only in parks. Otherwise the walker has to watch his itinerary, the traffic lights, the orders for him (choose this sidewalk, walk in the underground passage etc ...). Or he cannot walk. The behaviour of those visiting sites could be formatted too much, also. The decisions concerning Social Memory are somewhat imperative. Therefore one can decide what will be displayed in some museums, in what order, what explanations will be given, how the works of art will be lightened etc ... The risk is to influence the «customer», to saturate his brain. Even if some education of the public is good, one should let the visitor have his own opinion, choose what he looks at etc ... Of course, Internet can be used to influence the tourists who visit a city, or to allow them some freedom. For instance, the mobile giving access to explanations for the tourists visiting a city, could allow to choose the sites which are visited, to obtain information on some topics if one needs it, to choose one's itinerary etc ...

In some regions and cities in Western Europe, but not everywhere, there is a consensus, concerning the quality of landscapes. It is not conservative, but it is to preserve the Cultural Heritage, to be aware of a stake, the aesthetic quality of rural or urban landscapes. In the country, it is, say, to avoid a pink coloured rococo villa in a Swiss pastureland(14). In the cities, it is to preserve the historical sites, to choose a nice modern architecture, to maintain and create parks. Will Internet strengthen this consensus, or not? There will be two kinds of Internet sites:

Those stressing the Social Memory, exposing arguments to justify the choices which are made. The customers will be lured if they accept, or like these choices.

Those proposing entertainment in a decor. They will not insist on the local tradition, except folklore.

In principle, the Internet sites of the first kind will be located in regions where a consensus to preserve the quality of landscapes, exists. They will present photos of monuments and landscapes. They will give explanations on local sites. The Internet sites of the second kind will be located in the other regions.

(12) The Ragghianti's book «Les chemins de l'art» is on the movies showing works of art. He describes what technical means a cameraman can use to show works of art. A story is not told. The essential is images, the resources of the language of cinema used to show the works of an artist. The goal is to show a dynamics, a process, the «way of doing» of an artist. A movie corresponds to the book. It has been directed by Ragghianti. The movie shows what is explained in the book.

(13) For instance, this is described in the case of Paris in the Bruno Latour's book «Paris ville invisible».

(14) And ads alongside the roads etc ...