

## MEMORY, IDENTITY AND CHANGE

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The great poet Rumi, who is buried in Konya, starts his masterpiece with the Song of the Reed, which recounts a reed's memory of where it came from, and how it wants to return there. The reed complains about being cut from the reed-bed, and being misunderstood by those who have played it ever since. These first lines, which are said to contain the key to his masterpiece, tell a story of separation and displacement, of painful memories of the past, a yearning for home and a desire for reconnecting the fragmented pieces.

Memory is a source of individual and collective identity. It is a bridge to the past, and the ability to have that bridge, to be aware of it, and to have some control over it, is fundamental to our sense of self and wellbeing, both individually and collectively. Individually, it is an important part of the sense of personal identity, through which we think that we are the same person as yesterday and the day before. Identity, in its classical sense, is how something remains the same over time. In people who suffer from dementia and Alzheimer, the loss of this ability to link with the past erodes their sense of themselves. Disconnection from the past is equal for them with a disconnection from the sense of their self. The self becomes an alien. For their friends and relatives, a gap is created between a body that they recognize and a mind that they no longer know; an identity that is lost and a mutual recognition that has dissolved. Collective memories play the same role for social groups and communities, through which they can relate to each other and a sense of their group identity and continuity of existence. Through collective memories, they share common experiences and identities. The loss of collective memory may be equated with a loss of the sense of group and community, dismantling important parts of what makes them a group, alienating a group from itself. The loss of individual and collective memory, therefore, is the destruction of a bridge to the past, and the disruption of shared subjectivities.

Memories are mediated through the material environment. The process of remembering is complex, and may be mediated through the images and experiences of objects, places and relations. Remembering becomes a spatially-mediated temporal process. The images of places and experiences form the pillars of the bridge to the past and the construction of identity. In particular, the memories of childhood and the places associated with growing up, with their pleasures and pains, become significant elements of the sense of personal identity. Some places become a nucleus of memories, where a density of images are clustered around particular people and situations. Collective memories are mediated through objects and places which have been collectively experienced. The natural features of a collective habitat, such as rivers, mountains, fields and other elements of the landscape, are often important constituent parts of collective memory. The built environment is similarly a source of collective experience, from important monuments to significant objects and spaces. Individual and collective

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subjectivities, therefore, are mediated through significant elements of the natural and built habitat. Their physical presence, and the images of events associated with them, ensure the continuity of memories and the survival of these bridges to the past. It is through these objects and images that individuals and collectives can relate to their past, and to an idea of their own selves.

Radical change of places disrupts memories and identities. Radical change of places, as experienced in the processes of modernization and transformation, loosens the connections between people and places, and throws in a challenge to these memories and identities. The modern society is characterized by a sense of confidence in its technical and scientific abilities. The modernist manifestos explicitly announce this sense of confidence. For the modernists, the past had little relevance and use, and it needed to be revalued according to rational and functional standards. As Le Corbusier famously announced, he thought that European cities were no longer fit for the modern age and needed to be radically transformed. What was needed was rational ideas and habits, functionally designed and built buildings, technologically relevant roads and open spaces, and an aesthetic attitude that no longer paid attention to the sensibilities of the past. The bridges to the past and their pillars were threatened with destruction. As a result of going through radical transformation of society and space, however, the sense of the self, individually and collectively, may suffer. Radical change in the composition and constitution of places may lead to a rupture in memories and a loss of identities. While the memories of the past may remain, individual and collective identities may suffer from the disjunction between the memory and its mediating objects. Without some physical continuity, in individual body and the environment, these memories may be more easily forgotten.

Heightened mobility also disrupts memory and identity. In addition to the radical change of places, the radical mobility of urban populations is another form of disconnection. One of the key tenets of modernism was its enthusiasm for mobility, which has continued and accentuated ever since. The Charter of Athens, and the following episodes in urban planning, design and development, were geared towards reorganizing cities for faster movement across space. In the nineteenth century, the technologies of mobility, such as trains, helped people move around and were instrumental in the emergence of modern cities. In the twentieth century, the technologies of transport, in particular the private car, expanded cities in all directions, creating a mobile lifestyle for large numbers of the urban population to travel far and wide every day. In today's urbanized world, high levels of mobility are an integral part of the urban experience. Technologies of communication and information have also accelerated the pace of urban life and have enlarged this net of mobility to new proportions. In addition to transport mobility, the more frequent changes of household arrangements, jobs and housing, as well as the threats of climate change, challenge the possibility of stability and continuity. For a highly mobile population with accelerated tempo of life and weakened social and personal bonds in highly unequal societies, displacement and discontinuity is a permanent experience. In the age of heightened mobility, the everyday urban experience becomes a travelling experience, undermining the possibility of developing meaningful and longstanding connections to places and people. Memories of places become faint or even lost in the rush of the city.

In these circumstances, the basis of identity shifts from the past to the future, from memory to anticipation, anxiety, and aspiration. When a building or a neighbourhood is demolished to be replaced by another, memories are lost and a bridge to the past is destroyed, undermining the temporal basis of identity of the place. By its reference to now and future, it becomes a symbol of the desire to be free from the bonds of temporality. In its place, it aims at constructing a spatial basis for identity. But identity has both temporal and spatial dimensions. In the context

of these changes, even when temporal continuities are broken, the need to have a clear sense of identity is still felt. The search for identity, however, finds a spatial expression that no longer mediates the memories of the past, but aspirations for the future. In many professional and general discourse, the term identity is used to indicate uniqueness. Rather than continuity, it is disruption and distinction that are used to define identity: it is something that stands out. In architectural and planning discourse, this becomes resorting to the erection of iconic buildings, significant monuments, and spectacular imagery.

The historic landmarks are used as a vehicle of distinction. When the place loses its historic features, it resorts to the construction of new icons and symbols to assert its singularity. If the bridges to the past are destroyed, the place is reconstructed with bridges to the future. It is engaged in the generation of new points of reference that may create new memories and new identities. This has been the argument of those who looked to the past with contempt, convinced that it had nothing to offer to the new generations, who now needed to build their own identities and the cities of the future. Despite this desire for uniqueness, the new constructions are simultaneously creating a pattern of similarity to other places. When too many cities erect similar iconic buildings, they are no longer unique, but similar. When a city erects a tall building, it is an indication of a desire to stand out, but also to belong to a club of elite cities. With the increasing level of competition between cities in globalized economies, the drive for singularity is paralleled with a drive for maximizing the marketability of a place. The identity of a place, therefore, is constructed through the relations of similarity and difference. Identity is often built on difference, but identity is primarily built through continuity, through material continuity and through memories and narratives.

The response to the loss of these continuities by some is an attempt to repair the bridges to the past and turn them into permanent and fixed structures. The gates of change are closed and the past is forever fixed into a singular image. And yet, change is somehow inevitable. Memories, identities and places are all subject to change. They are never fixed and permanent, but always a process of reproduction and reconstruction. The bridges to the past are rebuilt everyday anew. Memory, therefore, is never fixed. It is a mental process that reproduces a previous mental state. It is always a reproduction, rather than merely being taken from the shelf of a static archive. It is always partial too, as we never remember a situation fully, but only parts of it. Any experience has many ingredients, but we will only remember some of its parts, bringing these fragments of images and stories together to reproduce a new mental state. Memories also lose their significance with age, and have different levels of importance for different temperaments. Some people have stronger attachments to their memories, while others are more prepared to think ahead and let the memories of the past fade away. For some experiences, forgetting is as much important as remembering.

Places are also continually changing. Heraclitus, who was from Ephesus, not very far from Konya, thought the world was in a flux, always changing: you never step into the same river twice. This means a memory cannot be linked to a particular place, as they are both changing. Both the place, and the memory I have of a place, are subject to change. We can see the change of the place through its physical transformation, but cannot see how our own memory is always a reconstruction, and each time it may be a reiteration of the last memory, which may not be identical to it. One of the ways of overcoming this flux has been the creation of representations that would stabilize this relationship: myths, stories and monuments are some of the forms that this representation takes. Through them, we try to fix our relationship with the past, but this fixture is very unstable.

Memories are always recreations. In individual memories, the recreations may not be the same, as each recollection may be slightly different from the last. Sometimes they are purely

manufactured rather than remembered. The maelstrom of industrialization triggered the invention of new traditions by the nineteenth century Europeans, who felt the need to construct some bridges to the past. Individual memory lasts only during the lifetime of a single person, while collective memories run through generations. The problem with collective memories is that they may simply reflect a powerful narrative to which others may not submit. A key question becomes how and by whom this change is initiated, who is affected and in what way, and what the consequences of such change are for those affected. How these symbols are created, by whom and to what purpose, becomes an important concern. Change, therefore, may be inevitable, but it can take many forms and have many different purposes. While temporal and spatial uniqueness is sought in the new developments, destroying the bridges to the past and standing out as unique icons, the relations of similarity and continuity cannot be avoided. Some forces are always changing the place. If we feel part of those forces, or benefiting from them, we may identify with these changes. But if not, the feeling of being treated unjustly may become overwhelming, losing our connections to the past, and our sense of continuity and identity.

Identity, therefore, relies on memory to secure its continuity through maintaining and inventing bridges to the past. Identity, however, also relies on aspiration, expectation and anxiety, hence engaged in the construction of the bridges to the future. Places, identities and memories are never fixed, and are always changing. The important question is the sense of control over this change, and the extent and pace of change, which can help secure democratically managed change, or an imposed transformation with unfair implications.