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The Economy of Memory: How Memcoins Enter the Market

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Shakespeare the Economist

The main thesis of this text is that the theoretical apparatus of memory studies, at least in its mainstream, has a hidden economy which is the classical liberal economy. The economy accompanies the often-declared left-wing nature of the studies, although there is no room in this text for a political analysis of this peculiar conceptual marriage. This thesis elaborates on a monologue only seemingly surprising in this context – as it received several commentaries in memory studies – a monologue by Hamlet:¹

O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?
And shall I couple hell? O, fie! Hold, hold, my heart,
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee?

Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat
In this distracted globe. Remember thee?

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A significant part of his work focuses on literary theory, Romantic literature, and memory studies. He is the author of four monographs and numerous articles.

The presented paper is mostly translation from his book *Ekonomia pamięci* [Economy of memory] (2016: IBL PAN), and it has never been previously published in English.

¹ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. David Bevington and David Scott Kastan (New York: Bantam Books, 1988).

Yea, from the table of my memory
 I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
 All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
 That youth and observation copied there,
 And thy commandment all alone shall live
 Within the book and volume of my brain,
 Unmixed with baser matter. Yes, by heaven!
 O most pernicious woman!
 O villain, villain, smiling, damnèd villain!
 My tables—meet it is I set it down
 That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain.
 At least I am sure it may be so in Denmark.

[Writing.]

So, uncle, there you are. Now to my word:
 It is "Adieu, adieu! Remember me."
 I have sworn't.² (1.5.93–113)

[Writing.] From the point of view of a reader who does not worry much about memory issues, this stage direction may not bear much importance. We may treat it as we usually do with stage directions: neglect them, and either treat them as tips for directors or a form of rudimentary narrative. However, it is interesting that this matter does not seem to concern researchers of cultural memory who refer to this fragment. What seems to be of paramount importance from this perspective is the question of what the Prince of Denmark writes down in his "tables" and, in particular, whether he records anything at all.³

2 Ibid., 31–32. Quoted lines are marked in text round brackets.

3 Shakespeare uses the word "table" as a synonym for memory or as a term for a writing-pad, tablet, slate or notebook. It appears more than once in Shakespeare's works, and we also find it in other works of Elizabethan writers. We might say that "table" refers to an ancient philosophical distinction between the mind and matter. Sometimes, a table means the mind, and sometimes it means matter. For example, Shakespeare refers to this memory metaphor in part II of *Henry IV* (William Shakespeare, *The Second Part of the History of Henry IV*, ed. John D. Wilson [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968], 72):

No, no, my lord. Note this – the king is weary
 Of dainty and such picking grievances,
 For he hath found to end one doubt by death
 Revives two greater in the heirs of life:
 And therefore will he wipe his tables clean,
 And keep no tell-tale to his memory
 That may repeat and history his loss

To the point. [*Writing*.] in some edition may appear as “Hamlet writes” or “He writes,” however it does not appear in the First Folio [F1; 1623] nor in the Second Folio [F2; 1632]. We find it neither in the First Quarto [Q1; 1603] nor the Second Quarto [Q2; 1604] nor in any of the later Quartos.⁴ It appears for the first time in the 1709 edition by Nicholas Rowe. We find there the word “writing”⁵ preceded by a square bracket and ended with a dot without the bracket.⁶ As it is almost commonly accepted among scholars, Rowe based his work mostly on the corrupt F4, the most recent edition at that time, and to a lesser extent on previous editions. In comparison with the earlier versions of Shakespeare’s works – as we mean more than just *Hamlet* now – Rowe introduced many major corrections, and one of the “improvements” were stage directions, including the “*Writing*” we examine. Rowe himself was a playwright and certainly based his conviction about the adequacy of changes on his experience. A particular staging of *Hamlet* could also have influenced Rowe’s decision. A director could assume that “meet it is I set it down” must involve a physical necessity to write down, as actors who played Hamlet often immediately received writing utensils. However, for us, both Rowe’s dramatic experience and stage practice may seem questionable arguments. On the other

To new remembrance. (4.1.197–204)

An extremely interesting article by four authors refers to the rich historical material and convinces us that the “writing table” was not just a notebook, in which one would irreversibly record in ink this or that information, but that it presented an opportunity to write down the text and then remove it. Some writing tables have survived to this day. They usually resemble a small-format handy calendar, which consisted partly of pre-printed cards and partly of cards intended for writing. This type of notebook was extremely common in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and – as the article suggests – it probably served Shakespeare as a technical model for describing Hamlet’s memory. See Peter Stallybrass, Roger Chartier, John F. Mowery and Heather Wolfe, “Hamlet’s Tables and the Technologies of Writing in Renaissance England,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55 (4) (2004): 379–419.

- 4 As we know, F1 and Q2 are usually considered to be the most representative and reliable texts, although Q1, depreciatingly labeled as “bad quarto,” is a fascinating editorial puzzle for many researchers. It is also believed that Q1 provides better insight into first onstage performances of Hamlet.
- 5 To be sure, I reviewed the facsimiles of seventeenth-century Hamlet editions. A footnote to an article by a well-known Shakespeare researcher convinced me that “there is no stage direction specifying that Hamlet writes until Nicholas Rowe’s 1709 edition.” Cf. Margreta De Grazia, “Soliloquies and Wages in the Age of Emergent Consciousness,” *Textual Practice* 9 (1) (1995): 83.
- 6 William Shakespeare, *The Works of Mr. William Shakespear*, vol. 5 (London: Printed for Jacob Tonson, at Grays-Inn Gate, 1709), 2387.

hand, we know not how appeared Shakespeare's own stage directions. In her essay on this particular topic, Bernice W. Kliman indicates that researchers remain skeptical about the stage directions printed in Q1, Q2, and F1. She then adds on behalf of Shakespeare researchers: "we gather that even if we had *Hamlet* manuscript(s), we might not understand Shakespeare's intentions for staging the play because he presumably clarified them in performance with his colleagues."⁷ Following Q1, Q2, F1, and Rowe's edition, there seems to be a certain latitude in this regard. Sometimes, Hamlet's monologue contains the remark about writing down; sometimes there is none. Under Rowe's influence, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century editions began to follow this small yet significant addition. Lewis Theobald's 1733 edition, which played a key role as the basis for all subsequent editions of all Shakespeare's works, contains exactly the same correction as does Rowe's edition.⁸ A few decades later, Samuel Taylor Coleridge will write without any hesitation or doubt:

But Shakespeare alone could have produced the vow of Hamlet to make his memory a blank of all maxims and generalized truths, that "observation had copied there," – followed immediately by the speaker noting down the generalized fact,
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain!⁹

Intuitively, Coleridge touches here upon the fundamental problem of memory studies, related to the use or omission of a seemingly banal stage direction. Coleridge was one of the key people who cemented the interpretation of Hamlet as a person incapable of action, despite his constant declarations to the contrary. Coleridge probably used different editions of the text, but I conclude from some of his remarks and additions that he relied mainly on Theobald's edition. It is possible that he did not bother with the question whether [*Writing.*] comes from Shakespeare or an editor of his works. Coleridge could have also assumed – regardless of the answer to this question and especially when it is impossible to find a solution – that a suggestion

7 Bernice W. Kliman, "Explicit Stage Directions (Especially Graphics) in *Hamlet*," in *Stage Directions in "Hamlet": New Essays and New Directions*, ed. Hardin L. Aasand (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), 75.

8 William Shakespeare, *The Works of Shakespeare*, vol. 7 (London: Printed for A. Bettesworth et al., 1733), 255.

9 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge's Essays and Lectures on Shakspeare and Some Other Old Poets and Dramatists* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1907), 147. Coleridge delivered his Shakespeare lectures in 1808–19. The problem is that the text of these lectures was reconstructed from the author's partial notes and the listeners' records. As in the case of Hamlet, it is difficult to really speak of a canonical version.

comes naturally to mind that Hamlet must write something down. We may come to a similar conclusion when reading editorial comments in nineteenth-century editions.

For a better understanding of the dilemma inherent in Coleridge's text, let us briefly summarize Hamlet's monologue. The prince delivers the monologue right after he speaks with the father's ghost, who commands his son: "remember me" (Act I, Scene V). In order to comply with the order, Hamlet decides to erase from his memory all book knowledge, all minor news, and all information that could compete with the memory of his father. Of course, Shakespeare refers here to the motif of memory as a book, widespread since the Middle Ages, which largely replaced (or at least transformed) the old Platonic metaphor of the seal imprinted in wax. Plato compares memory – a part of the soul – to a wax tablet upon which we imprint thoughts and perceptions.¹⁰ Shakespeare offers us a broader understanding of this motif. "Table [of memory – G. M.]" becomes a writing-pad or notebook or a handy notepad. Immediately, Sigmund Freud's "mystic writing-pad" comes to mind, especially as a few verses later Shakespeare adds the term "book and volume of my brain," which leads directly to the phenomenon of corporal remembering and forgetting; to use an anachronism, it leads to its neurology and psychoanalysis. The (alleged) liquidation of the previously acquainted memory data allows Hamlet to make room for his father's order, which from now on gains the rank of not one among many but the only mnemonic content: "all alone shall live."

However, Hamlet soon remembers his mother and uncle, which results in a sarcastic aphorism about villains with smiling faces. He decides to write this thought down in a handy notebook. We do not know for sure, if Hamlet writes it down, although the way in which Q2 and F1 differentiate between

¹⁰ Memory as a book is the main motif of a very interesting work by Mary Carruthers (Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990]). The idea of memory as an imprint appears in *Theaetetus*, in which we find the other, equally important metaphor of aviary-like memory (see Plato, *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*, trans. Christopher Rowe [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015]: 70–79). Aristotle in *De memoria et reminiscencia* also refers to the metaphor of a seal in wax:

"Now, one might raise the difficulty how you remember that which is not present, since it is the affection that is present, while the thing is absent. For clearly one must think about that which is so generated through sensation in the soul, that is, in that part of the body which contains it, as a sort of picture, and the state of having this we call "memory"; for the movement produced stamps almost a sort of impression of the sense-impression, similar to what is done by people using their seals." See Aristotle, "On Memory and Recollection," trans. David Bloch, in *Aristotle on Memory and Recollection*, ed. David Bloch (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 31.

grammatical types of tables is noteworthy. When Hamlet speaks of his memory, he uses the singular *t a b l e*, but when he refers to an external object, he uses the plural *t a b l e s*.¹¹ Hamlet's monologue ends with a statement that it is time to return to the words of the father and his order.

In each of the known variants, the monologue is to some extent ambiguous. It is only seemingly understandable and transparent, which is largely due to the presence or lack of the stage direction under investigation. If there were no stage direction – and it is probable that there never were any directions at all, which we, of course, will never know for sure – then Coleridge's and others' assumption that the act of writing down does happen is not supported by any specific proof from the text. In Coleridge's interpretation, such a statement is very comfortable: Hamlet decides to remove from his memory all inferior thoughts and then he does exactly the opposite, because writing thoughts down in a notebook does not equal their definite removal from memory. However, let us notice – again this Shakespearean ambiguity! – that such interpretation could support an opposite situation. Namely, one when Hamlet does not write anything down but seems to wish that he did. Even without stage direction, we may say that writing down remains only a potential choice, a verbal possibility, an empty illocutionary force; only with the direction does it become an act. Hamlet who writes down is the Hamlet who acts. Moreover, from the viewpoint of modern readers, Hamlet deprived of any support of stage direction and in front of a potential choice would have a special charm reminiscent of Beckett's dramas, whose characters often declare to act and do not act. This is, perhaps, especially visible in *Endgame*. The difference is that Beckett usually informs about the lack of action in stage directions, so a fully analogous situation would require another Shakespeare's stage direction: "Hamlet does not write" or "Hamlet writes not."

However, let us assume that Hamlet does indeed record something in his notebook. Since none of the versions of the text suggests what Hamlet could write down, we are left uncertain with four possibilities. First, according to Coleridge's conviction, Hamlet records his aphorism about villains. Second, he writes down both the aphorism about villains and the command to remember his father. Third, only the obligation to remember his father. Fourth, we do not know what he writes and, as the text suggests, whether he did write anything at all.

I already tried to diagnose the dilemma of the first of the above proposals. At first glance, the problem is that the behavior and conduct of Hamlet are as

11 Q₁ differs from Q₂ and F₁ in double appearance of the plural version ("tables"). In any case, it seems only right to assume, as Shakespeare's English editions do today, that the grammatical difference is here justified.

consistent as possible with his verbal declarations. He gave his father a place in mind and heart, having prepared them beforehand, and he recorded all which is “trivial” – like the maxim on villains – not in his memory, but in his handy notes, which serve as a convenient *aide-mémoire*. But according to this term, what would the notes serve if not memory? External carrier only postpones future use. It may even happen that Hamlet will never use the notebook again, but the mere carrier of something in the “memory” of pages, notes, or cards is connected with the assumption that whatever is stored may finally return to the proper memory, in this very case to aberrant, deviant memory monopolized by a particular mnemonic order.

On the other hand, the physical recording of his father’s order, that is, writing it down in a notebook – the third possibility – would simultaneously break the promise given to Hamlet’s father. Commitment based on external memory – in this case writing – would be worth very little. It is a type of order that must be engraved “in the heart and mind,” and that is what Hamlet promised to do. The only acceptable currency here is the handwriting of the heart. Because father’s words are an order, an imperative, thus Hamlet must transform himself into a mnemonic entity, a walking memory, as the function of the imperative radically changes the form and role of what would normally be a mere memory of a father.

It would certainly be possible to present this fragment of the drama as a model example (or synecdoche) of the distinction between functional and storage memory introduced by Aleida Assmann, widely popular in memory studies. In a nutshell, the distinction attempts to present the history of memory after oral cultures began to use external memory carriers and actually abandoned the oral stage. In this respect, there is an agreement between Assmann’s views and the ideas of Walter Jackson Ong. Before the breakthrough postulated by Assmann, a given culture – or actually a group of people who created a given culture – was the only carrier of memory. Everything worth remembering and what decided about the specificity of the culture was its exclusive property later ceded to the next generations. The Latin “*omnia mea mecum porto*” would probably be an adequate description of this somewhat ideal situation. Everything changes with the introduction of external carriers of memory and the transition to the writing culture. From then on, there was a growing gap between what people know or remember and what is stored on carriers other than human memory. Successive carriers, print and digital media in particular, only widen this gap, which is why memory studies is to a great degree interested in the overgrowth of archives and online content of various kinds, the issue of organizing and cataloging them, and how they can return to the functional memory of societies and people. Functional memory is the memory shared and used in a given moment by a group of

individuals. Especially today, it is disproportionately small when contrasted with the external mass of information that forms storage memory. In oral culture, the memory of individuals was actually functional memory in the strict sense, with the simultaneous absence of any other form of memory.

Plato's criticism of writing in *Phaedrus* seems to be the natural philosophical foundation that accompanies this terminological division and its related theory. Of course, *toutes proportions gardées*, one of Plato's fundamental questions was how the written message could guarantee the truthfulness and validity of thought that was ultimately forced to assume the form of signs external and alien. This is not the key question of memory studies, but the fundamental trait remains common: Plato also refers to the breakthrough transition from the culture of speech to the culture of writing and tries to dress it in a conceptual robe. Anyhow, it is hard to resist the impression that the division into functional and storage memory repeats the characteristic Platonic distance to what happens to memory, especially after the spread of electronic media. This seems stronger than just distance: rather coldness and reluctance. As far as I know, such physical-astronomical metaphors and comparisons do not appear in Assmann's works, and yet storage memory presents itself as a kind of antimatter or dark matter. Meanwhile, memory studies would serve as a theoretical diagnosis of the problem and, at the same time, a remedy, thanks to which we would perhaps learn how to deal with this alienation of antimatter and how to transform it into ordinary matter, so as to return it closer to functional memory. In any case, it is all arranged into an intriguing story. People used to be at home. We felt at home, we knew as much as we remembered, and we only used functional memory. Jan Assmann claims that this was a time of constant festivity: "originally, there was only one order, which was festive and sacred and which had a guiding influence on everyday life."¹² Later, we were banished from this paradise: the spirit of storage memory emerged in our world. But it was blind and still needed the eyes of functional memory. Today, the study of cultural memory allows the spirit to open its eyes, to unite with functional memory, and people to return to themselves through explaining the phenomenon of remembering. This agrees with Aleida Assmann when she interprets William Wordsworth and the concept of the "wound of time," which distracts us from the form of existence typical for living in nature: "disappearing into time entails alienation, but every theory of alienation contains a salvational vision of unity."¹³ Thus, memory studies

12 Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 43.

13 Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 96.

adopts a different method than Plato for dealing with the alien. At least theoretically and as far as he did not have to write down his own dialogues, Plato unconditionally rejected writing. Memory studies is interested in how matter from one level can become matter of the second kind, while the movement goes both ways, as stored memory can become functional, while functional memory can be stored.¹⁴

Hamlet's monologue perfectly exemplifies the dichotomy of both memories, but it does it in two ways; I will remark on the second one later. In the first variant, functional memory is the individual memory of the Prince of Denmark located in his mental apparatus, defined here in several different ways. It comes as a "distracted globe," a "table of my memory," and "the book and volume of my brain." Storage memory is a notebook Hamlet keeps in his pocket. According to Hamlet's decision, functional memory contains only what is important, or rather, what is only important. On the other hand, at least until the appearance of the ghost of the father and accepting his order, storage memory gathers less significant information like book wisdom and life maxims, which Hamlet hunts and collects. However, from the perspective of memory theory, what is not model in the situation outlined by Shakespeare is a sudden reversal of proportions. Functional memory, which transforms into a command to remember, is deprived of its basic value, that is, its functionality, and perhaps the notebook contains information that could guide Hamlet's actions, if not for the fresh decision to abandon all knowledge of "baser matter." Hence, Hamlet's functional memory is non- or a-functional. It is nothing else than a paralyzing order, a commitment, or a sense of responsibility. Although Hamlet repeats "remember thee," it is not the father but the internalized duty itself that is the most important object of remembrance in this case. If functional memory is to be truly functional, it must always be capable of either differentiating between the value of different memorized

Cf. also J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*, 42: "cultural memory extends the everyday world with a further dimension of negations and potentials, and, through this, it compensates for the deficiencies of normal life."

14 It is at least intriguing that the terminological proposal by Aleida Assmann came into being after Jacques Derrida's radical criticism of Platonic logocentrism. Assmann, knowing and from time to time even quoting Derrida's works, however fails to notice that the difference between functional and storage memory can be treated as parallel to Platonic dichotomies. This is even more true of the conceptual opposition introduced by Jan Assmann. Within the framework of broadly understood collective memory, Jan Assmann distinguishes between communicative memory and cultural memory. The former is the domain of everyday life, the latter is a hallowed domain. The former is ephemeral, the latter is permanent and constitutive. The former is particular, the latter is as general as possible. See J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*, 34–50.

contents or of forgetting, relegating irrelevant information to storage memory. However, by virtue of Hamlet's own decision and his father's order, such a solution is forbidden and excluded. Hamlet already removed the unnecessary ballast of knowledge, or he naively promises to do so. His naivety would be measured by his conviction that it suffices to say "I forget" to truly forget. If he wrote his thoughts about villains in a notebook, he would prove himself incapable of forgetting.

I believe we can describe this situation in terms of an economic crisis. In oral culture, which very often forms the initial condition for memory studies, as long as a group of people is not excluded from some specific knowledge, they all share memory more or less equally, so everyone knows (and remembers) about the same amount of information. In this case, memory material differs from the usual currency in that it can be redistributed among all interested individuals without risking hyperinflation. Since minds are memory carriers, knowledge cannot be multiplied without end. It encounters a barrier that protects against the oversupply of memory money. However, this money does not end up in the free, liberal market. If this state of equilibrium is to be maintained, we need a specific commitment that binds the culture of memory understood in this way: the commitment to remember. A commitment is like market regulation. We cannot cede any part of this knowledge to external memory carriers – nor renounce it – as this would mean that we would question our affiliation with a community. Folk literature supports this thesis, and it comes from a culture closely related to orality. In folk literature, we find examples of clear ostracism that hurts those who forget.

By reducing functional memory to one specific memory order, Hamlet becomes a man of oral culture. Somehow perversely, it would be an oral culture with a notebook, the meaning of which in this scene is still unclear to the reader. But in Hamlet's case, the primary alienation does not end with redemption, a return to nature. This is due to the fact that – in oral culture – the duty to remember serves only the stability of the system that supports the cultural order. In the case of Hamlet, remembrance is entirely subordinated to the duty to remember. The duty to remember exists for its own sake. In any case, we must draw the following conclusion: to abandon the somewhat idealistic image of oral culture for the culture of writing and other external carriers of memory must lead to suspicions against the idea of mnemonic commitment. Understood as memory that goes beyond individual or group psychology, cultural memory cannot be based on any commitment.

If we observe this condition – that the category of duty does not enter the area of cultural memory – then this memory itself begins to behave like a self-regulating market governed by the laws of liberal economics. The guiding principle of this market is the unrestricted and unregulated capital flow.

Capital consists of symbolic content that people commemorate. Flow means both the possibility of distributing memory content between members of the same community or different communities and also the possibility of transferring data content from functional memory to storage memory and vice versa. By its very nature, this market is also highly susceptible to the overproduction of mnemonic currency, which can lead to hyperinflation.

Let us refer to two examples. I think that we can read in this spirit the well-known article by Wulf Kansteiner¹⁵ and the essay by Tzvetan Todorov on uses and abuses of memory.¹⁶ Kansteiner does not really speak out against memory studies but rather tries to strengthen it methodologically by indicating its weaknesses and aporias. We may call this a contemporary variation of Kantian criticism. In Kansteiner's opinion, one of the most serious difficulties faced by scholars of cultural memory is the impossibility to clearly separate collective and individual memories. For that reason, researchers constantly use tools developed in the field of neurology or psychology. Kansteiner considers this to be "a tempting yet potentially grave methodological error."¹⁷ Later we read:

it might make sense to argue with Freud that an individual's failure to work through his or her past results in unwanted symptoms of psychological unhealth, that the self relies on a sense of continuity that makes it impossible to repress the past without having to pay a psychological price for this repression. But on a collective scale, especially on the scale of larger collectives, such assumptions are misleading. Nations can repress with psychological impunity; their collective memories can be changed without a "return of the repressed."¹⁸

As we see, Kansteiner not only opposes the application of psychoanalytical methods to the study of cultural memory but also argues against a characteristic assumption that memory studies encounters traumatized communities almost at every step. Kansteiner seems to be particularly concerned about the ease with which scholars of memory studies accept the thesis of social trauma. As we know, this applies mainly to the literature devoted to the problem of the Holocaust. Even if some communities have been traumatized, Kansteiner believes that this is not an object of cultural memory, which begins right

15 Wulf Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies," *History and Theory* 41 (2) (2002): 179–197.

16 Tzvetan Todorov, "The Abuses of Memory," trans. M. L. Chang, *Common Knowledge* 5 (1) (1996): 6–26.

17 Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory," 185.

18 *Ibid.*, 186.

where psychology ends: “though specific visions of the past might originate in traumatic experiences they do not retain that quality if they become successful collective memories.”¹⁹ These words should indicate the fact that the essence of collective memories is their detachment from primary historical and psychological motives: “memories are at their most collective when they transcend the time and space of the events’ original occurrence.”²⁰ Therefore, memories are about freeing a given event from its initial context and lead to a situation in which members of a community do not have to be personally burdened with the memory of an event, yet the event still shapes their identity or worldview. Kansteiner calls this state: “disembodied, omnipresent, low-intensity memory.”²¹ The author does not directly explain the meaning of this descriptive and challenging term, which particularly refers to the last part of the whole enumeration. The following sentence²² offers some sort of clarification: “concern with low-intensity collective memories shifts the focus from the politics of memory and its excess of scandal and intrigue to rituals and representations of the past that are produced and consumed routinely without causing much disagreement.”²³

19 Ibid., 187.

20 Ibid., 189.

21 Ibid., 189.

22 Ibid., 189–190.

23 We find a similar explanation in a book by Ana Liberato: “by ‘low intensity’ I mean that there have not been sustained and heightened confrontations by different communities of memory over competing narratives of the recent past.” Cf. Ana S. Liberato, *Joaquín Balaguer, Memory, and Diaspora: The Lasting Political Legacies of an American Protégé* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 12.

It is possible that Kansteiner borrowed this notion from the area of social and cultural psychology, especially represented by the theory known as “social sharing of emotions.” This term and the underlying assumptions were proposed by B. Rimé et al. “Beyond the Emotional Event.” Among other things, this theory explores how people share their emotional experiences with others. One of the indicators used to describe the research results is the level of “emotional intensity” felt by people who listen to other people’s stories. The authors distinguish between low-intensity, moderate, and high-intensity situations. However, this would be a somewhat perverse reference, because what Kansteiner would like to achieve is the independence of cultural memory studies from psychology and neurology. Cf. Bernard Rimé, Batja Mesquita, Stefano Boca and Pierre Philippot, “Beyond the Emotional Event: Six Studies on the Social Sharing of Emotion,” *Cognition and Emotion* 5 (5–6) (1991): 435–465. See also Bernard Rimé and Véronique Christophe, “How Individual Emotional Episodes Feed Collective Memory,” in *Collective Memory of Political Events: Social Psychological Perspectives*, ed. James W. Pennebaker, Dario Paez and Bernard Rimé (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997).

Consequently, such memory already traveled the path of social distillation, as a result of which it ceased to be a traumatic experience of individuals or human groups, which is equal to its “disembodiment.” It transformed into a form of socially recognized consciousness, which refers to the cultural signs of memory (“omnipresence”), and no longer includes the unwanted foam of national-ethnic and political disputes. From now on, it is only a certain “low-intensity” point of reference in the social space.²⁴ However, even a cursory overview of memory studies shows that the ideal of collective memory outlined by Kansteiner is either too ideal or too uninteresting for those who deal with collective memory. Memory studies papers very often draw our attention to divisions and points of divergence, rather than elements that unite, already with their titles, which contributes to raising the temperature of a political dispute rather than its mitigation.

Another example is Tzvetan Todorov’s treatise on memory abuse, in 2004 also published in France as a separate small book.²⁵ Todorov is certainly not part of the group of cultural memory scholars, but nothing stands in the way of seeing him in this context, especially since certain coincidences are astonishing. One of the terminological novelties proposed by Todorov is the distinction between literal memory (*mémoire littérale*) and exemplary memory (*mémoire exemplaire*). The first one covers the past experience of a particular character, therefore, of an individual or of a larger group of people. We experience the event that is the subject of literal memory for itself and treat it as exceptional and incomparable to other events. It is “an intransitive fact.”²⁶ This applies in particular to difficult or even traumatic situations, which are the main focus of Todorov’s interest. In the case of exemplary memory, we deal with an attempt to build a bridge between our own suffering and the events in which representatives of other communities suffered. The events are detached from their original psychological context and generalized in such

24 Kansteiner believes the United States of America reached such a point in terms of Holocaust remembrance.

25 Todorov presented the original version of the text in 1992, in Brussels, at a congress devoted to the history and memory of Nazi crimes. It is noteworthy because, in his speech, Todorov argues quite strongly with the popular thesis about the uniqueness of the Holocaust, or at least with its possible abuses. According to one of the main theses of the book, Jewish memory of the Holocaust takes the form of literal, closed, and intransitive memory. Todorov’s theses presented in *The Abuses of Memory* are partly a continuation of some of the themes from the 1991 book *Face à l’extrême*. Cf. Tzvetan Todorov, “The Abuses of Memory,” trans. M. L. Chang, *Common Knowledge* 5 (1): 6–26; Todorov, *Les abus de la mémoire* (Paris: Arléa, 2004).

26 Todorov, “The Abuses of Memory,” 14, cf. Todorov, *Les abus de la mémoire*, 30: *intransitif*.

a way that they can become an example and lesson, especially if an injustice occurs again. Quite contrary to what is recalled by literal memory, the events of exemplary memory “are up for evaluation with the help of universal rational criteria that sustain human dialogue, and such is not the case with literal and intransitive memories, which are incommensurable.”²⁷ A literal event subordinates the present to the past, often in an obsessive or insane manner. On the other hand, an exemplary event subordinates the past to the present. In contrast to literal memory, exemplary memory is “potentially liberating.”²⁸

According to Todorov, there are no absolute events in the sense that they could not be the subject of comparison or analogy. Todorov writes this essay long after his antistructuralist turn, but we still hear reverberations of structuralism in his text: “whoever deals in comparison deals in both resemblances and differences.”²⁹ All this in order to open to other groups the originally sterile literal memory, convinced of its uniqueness, non-recurrence, and incomparability, and to not succumb to the cult of memory for the sake of memory itself or make it sacred. Only then will we be able to connect memory with the problem of justice. Todorov emphasizes it is no coincidence that the victims or their families, however serious their pain may be, do not judge in processes that involve the culprits. What constitutes the essence of exemplary memory is its “dis-individuation,” which allows the law to appear.³⁰

Hence, what would memory economy be like in Todorov’s reasoning? Todorov himself does not put it this way, but the same mechanism governs the transition from literal to exemplary memory, as in the transition from the exchange of natural means to the exchange of money; that is, a transition to symbolic nature. Along with all the consequences resulting from this fact. Exemplary memory uses commonly recognizable and acceptable means of payment, emitted by some large memory bank. The use of these means – let us call them “memcoins” – allows us to get rid of all the troubles that the exchange provides with the use of natural means. In Todorov’s opinion, the use of natural means, that is memories with real psychological background, blocks any possibility of exchange, which ideally should be universal and rational. We would be in trouble, should one of the people involved in the transaction

27 Todorov, “The Abuses of Memory,” 14.

28 Ibid., 14, cf. Todorov, *Les abus de la mémoire*, 31: potentiellement libératrice.

29 Todorov, “The Abuses of Memory,” 16.

30 Ibid., 15, cf. Todorov, *Les abus de la mémoire*, 32: dés-individuation. Dis-individualization and deindividualization are terms used in social psychology to describe the process by which individuals abandon own personal traits in favor of group identification. Here I will use the term “dis-individuation.”

offered, for example, a wedding ring, which was the most important memento of the deceased spouse, while someone else offered a beloved pet, treated as if it was a family member. The rationality and universality of exchange – understood here as full translatability of the introduced monetary units – can appear only when we begin to refer to a system of symbolic equivalents of natural means. This means that memory studies fundamentally assumes the classic distinction between use-value and exchange-value, while imbuing the latter with significance. In such a situation, we can speak of universality, because dis-individuated *memcoins* can be used on equal rights by all participants of one or another transaction. In this case, we should understand the term “on equal rights” in a limited way, because there may be inequality resulting from different access to money; some may have more, others less. We can also discuss rationality because dis-individuated *memcoins* are no longer dependent on their initial equivalents in nature but are governed by the rational rule of the invisible hand of the market, which determines their actual value. *Memcoins* may be reverted to natural equivalents – just like Todorov’s exemplary memory allows assessing the legal effects and nature of new literal events – but this does not change anything in terms of either universality or rationality of their application.³¹

31 Kant believed that money was only partly dis-individuated. Of course, he did not use this adjective in his works. When answering the question “what is money?” (Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary J. Gregor [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 104–106), Kant explains that it would have no value if the owner and potential acquirer were unaware how much labor (Fleiss) is necessary to earn money: “it is the universal means by which men exchange their industriousness [or industry] with one another” (Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 104). We may add that Kant draws attention to the psychological side of money and believes that the direct translation of money into work – and not into a product that can be bought or sold – is a protection against excessive money supply. Without even deciding whether this interpretation is correct or not, we must admit that psychologization and individualization are not as strong in this case as in the case of the exchange of goods, especially goods of commemorative value. On the other hand, it is easy to imagine a person, let us say a pensioner, who easily multiplies original capital, earns money without much difficulty, and yet feels psychologically connected with it, while the money acquired in this way obviously does not lose its value. In such case Kant’s argument is invalid. Someone once humorously noted that it is not worth for Bill Gates to pick up a \$100 bill in the street, because he earns much more in the time he would need to pick it up. But Gates himself later admitted that he would still stop and pick up the bill. This might be compared with Simmel for whom an exchange is a means of overcoming the purely subjective value significance of an object: “the technical form of economic transactions produces a realm of values that is more or less completely detached from the subjective-personal substructure. Although the individual buys because he values and wants to consume an object, his demand is expressed effectively only by an object in exchange. Thus the subjective process, in which

It is astonishing how in memory studies occur these continuous cash flows, from functional to storage memory, from literal to exemplary memory, from high-intensity to low-intensity memory. The spirit of a self-regulating market hovers over it, at least for the time being. In this context, it is not a coincidence that Aleida Assmann³² (2009: 47–51) introduces the concept of dialogical memory (*die dialogische Erinnerung*) contrasted with monologic national memories (*die monologische Erinnerung*), the latter being mostly described in terms of sacrifice and suffering, and as a social phenomenon concentrated on fighting external threats. According to Assmann, we should cross homogeneous memory constructions limited by national borders to reach a broader European perspective, fostered by the project of the European Union. Assmann believes that European integration cannot become any stronger as long as there are monologic constructions of memory. And now those words of warning, written long before there were any harbingers of Brexit, have proved prophetic, even though memory certainly had not been playing the key role in the process; various other aspects, for instance economics, need to be taken into account. An economic interpretation of Assmann's idea would boil down to the conviction that memory studies wishes to reduce external factors in the sphere of communication – like

differentiation and the growing tension between function and content create the object as a "value," changes to an objective, supra-personal relationship between objects. The individuals who are incited by their wants and valuations to make now this, now that exchange are conscious only of establishing value relationships, the content of which forms part of the objects. The quantity of one object corresponds in value with a given quantity of another object, and this proportion exists as something objectively appropriate and law-determined – from which it commences and in which it terminates – in just the same way as we conceive the objective values of the moral and other spheres. The phenomenon of a completely developed economy, at least, would appear in this light. Here the objects circulate according to norms and measures that are fixed at any one moment, through which they confront the individual as an objective realm. The individual may or may not participate in this realm, but if he wants to participate he can do so only as a representative or executor of these determinants which lie outside himself. The economy tends toward a stage of development—never completely unreal and never completely realized – in which the values of objects are determined by an automatic mechanism, regardless of how much subjective feeling has been incorporated as a precondition or as content in this mechanism." Cf. Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (London: Routledge, 2004), 76–77. Therefore Simmel, who owes so much to Kant, seems to give a different answer to the money question. The answer is: money separates us from the value that we subjectively give to the object.

- 32 Aleida Assmann, "Von kollektiver Gewalt zu gemeinsamer Zukunft: Vier Modelle für den Umgang mit traumatischer Vergangenheit," in *Kriegserfahrung und nationale Identität in Europa nach 1945: Erinnerung, Säuberungsprozesse und nationales Gedächtnis*, ed. Kerstin von Lingen (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2009).

politics, ideology, religion, and most of all nationalism – to a minimum. External factors in memory studies play a role analogous to government institutions that regulate the market. Political interventionism in the sphere of commemoration is as harmful as state interventionism in the field of the free market. In this sense, cultural memory can play an emancipatory role. Let us recall that Todorov views exemplary memory as “potentially liberating.” Acting outside the limitations of a political-ideological nature and outside the dimension of individual or collective harm – and the need for revenge that follows – exemplary memory can reconcile the conflicting particular memories and become a low-intensity memory as a result of this transformation. The previously confronted parties of the mnemonic dispute, now free of petty ethnic restrictions, could engage in commercial interactions and pay with a common currency: *memcoins*. If hope or even a desire for profit is what guides people, there is absolutely nothing inappropriate about it, because the exchange is rational, controlled by objective market mechanisms, and so the profit of some does not have to be associated with the harm suffered by others. If such harm happens, then this is when memory studies steps in to diagnose the causes of the illness. However, as almost directly results from Assmann’s reasoning, all parties involved in the transaction gain from the dialogic exchange of *memcoins*.

As we see, the dream of a polyphonic memory is connected here with a certain ideal vision of a federation of nations, which, and not only because of Brexit, is still a long way off. The European Union, including the whole paradox of the situation, managed to develop a common currency but not, as far as I know, any common memory. Pierre Nora and Wulf Kansteiner share the opinion.

“Th’arithmetic of Memory”

Therefore, we should conclude that memory studies – if Hamlet’s monologue is to be a useful and representative methodological metaphor – needs this very gesture of writing down, which would perform a function analogous to the processes of dis-individuation and reduction of intensity. The reading of the monologue proposed by Aleida Assmann³³ confirms this viewpoint. Until now, I refrained from mentioning this interpretation because it required proper introduction. First, Assmann does not describe the fragment with her own categories of functional and storage memory, although, certainly, nothing stood in the way. The scholar observes Hamlet as

33 Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, 232–237.

“a passive writing surface,”³⁴ on which the father writes his order. Referring to Nietzsche’s idea of a body imprisoned by the soul, the author tries to show the psychological and traumatic dimension of the father’s order. This body, on which the father writes, must bear the spiritual burden of “the traumatic inscription,”³⁵ which Hamlet experiences and which makes him incapable of action. Like in any case, the trauma leaves a devastating mark: “whereas ancient initiation rites apply body writing to the forceful establishment of a new identity, the body writing of trauma has the opposite effect of destroying the possibility of identity-building.”³⁶ Without supporting this conviction with any evidence or even with a critical dissection, Assmann states that, at the moment of mental dissipation, Hamlet braces himself and ultimately manages to write down the last four words of his father: “adieu, adieu! Remember me.” Assmann understands it as the externalization and alienation of the most internal thoughts and beliefs. I believe she means we should understand externalization as an attempt to escape from the trauma of writing down information in the body, as a momentary relief from the memory of enormous intensity, as a change of a psychological quality to a de-psychologized and dis-individuated one. In this context, it surprises not that Assmann quotes the edition of the drama with the *[Writing.]* stage direction. However, she does not draw attention to its historical uncertainty.

After all, should we but suggest there is a problem with the possibility of inscription, Shakespeare’s “memory machine” immediately appears as a troubling anomaly. Whatever Hamlet tries to write down or even does write down in a notebook – be it a maxim about villains, a duty to remember his father, or anything else – it plays the role of an external medium, which transforms individual memory, that is, the content of the “distracted globe,” into a symbolic exchangeable currency. In this case, the memory material should be subjected to a kind of distillation, thanks to which it will be able to participate in exchange transactions with other distilled contents of memory. The trouble is that this writing down of memory in a notebook cannot succeed. It constantly confronts a command contained in the “table of memory,” with which it must have some connection. *Memcoins* can be exchanged freely, but in the end they must reveal their value in relation to natural goods. Distillation is only a technical procedure that merely postpones the question about the relation of the material recorded in the notebook and placed in the “table of memory.” Even if Hamlet is pathological and a-functional, the conviction

34 Ibid., 233.

35 Ibid., 233.

36 Ibid., 237.

of memory studies that it has a therapeutic function in relation to such individuals and communities – that memory studies can teach them how to lift themselves to a “higher generality” – is based on an unstable illusion.

It is difficult to resist the feeling that memory studies treats the moment of transition from functional to storage memory with a certain amount of reluctance. This would contradict the thesis suggested in this paper that, from the viewpoint of memory studies, inscription as a form of generalization, dis-individuation, and reduction of intensity (*scriptura non erubescit*) is a desirable phenomenon. Let us recall Ong who, unlike Plato, considered the technology of writing to be useful in all respects. Now, I may add that this statement was only a part of the problem. We may now present the second variant of functional and storage memory in Hamlet’s monologue. In this second interpretation, functional memory appears represented both by the “distracted globe” of the prince and by his notebook. To put it even more precisely, the notebook will certainly serve as a representation of functional memory in the text, while the “distracted globe” with some reservations only. Storage memory is virtually absent in this fragment. We relegate it to the background as it is of no interest to us at this juncture. What is at stake is actually the degree of functional memory’s dis-individuation, all the more so because storage memory is dis-individuated by its very definition. However, functional memory is not an individual memory but a form of collective memory. If Hamlet transfers something to his notebook, he may do so, believing that he will be able to recollect it at a given moment. As a “written memory” it achieves the value of “divisibility,” intersubjectivity, “generalization,” and “rationalization,” but as it remains within reach, it retains the form of functional memory; it is as if Assmann’s functional memory or Olick’s collected memory were going through dis-individuation. Therefore, the question mainly concerns how to talk about the low intensity and dis-individuation of functional memory, while at the same time we inevitably reach the conclusion that this memory requires someone to remember, thus performing the function of a physical and mental carrier. In other words, we ask how to move from a purely use-value to an exchange-value within the framework of functional memory.

Thanks to Shakespeare and *Hamlet*, we know that there is “th’arithmetical of memory” (5.2.114). The Prince of Denmark uses this formula to sarcastically refer to the paean sang by Osric praising the qualities of Laertes. Intriguingly, Shakespeare links arithmetic with memory in such a way that he makes arithmetic a constitutive part of memory. He does it even though most of us would immediately link arithmetic with the abilities of reasoning or the mind in a narrow sense. In other words, it would seem more natural to use words such as “mind,” “reason,” “intellect,” and perhaps “wits” rather than “memory.” Other

candidates could be some of the sixteenth-century equivalents that may have already become obsolete and would be used in the way modern English uses “mental calculation” or “mental arithmetic.”

The arithmetic of memory allows us to return to the notion of the “table(s) of memory” and the initial question. What does Hamlet actually write down, and does he actually write anything in his “tables”? The comparison of “th’arithmetic of memory” and the “table(s) of memory” reveals an inner link, an essential connection. “Table” may mean a notebook, but it may also mean a register like the one in debit and credit balance. If I commit to over interpretation, it is for a specific purpose. I know one thing: if Hamlet really wants to write a maxim about villains or a commandment to remember his father, then his arm either hangs over the tablet or simply simulates the action of writing. If Hamlet actually writes something down, then he just transfers the arithmetic of memory onto the surface, on which he places signs that result from the account of profit and loss; “debit” here and “credit” there; in the latter case, the risk of the promise made to his father, and the possible victory.

The recognition of the “table” as an accounting book is not an anachronism on my part. It is true that the annotated English editions of Hamlet usually explain the word “table” as “tablet” or “writing-tablet.” Some add the term “note-book.” All these terms refer to a notepad or writing pad. Samuel Johnson’s dictionary,³⁷ first published in 1755, translates “table” as “a tablet; a surface on which any thing is written or engraved.” This is the fifth definition of the word. Earlier definitions refer to it as “any flat or level surface” and, of course, “a horizontal surface raised above the ground, used for meals and other purposes.” The latter meaning is probably the most elementary one that we may think of today. There still are several further definitions: “a picture, or any thing that exhibits a view of any thing upon a flat surface”; “an index; a collection of heads; a catalogue; a syllabus”; “a synopsis many particulars brought into one view.” Another dictionary draws attention to the adjective “tabled,” which refers to *Cymbeline* (1.4.6) and means “noted” or “set down.”³⁸ In the abovementioned work by Peter Stallybrass and three other authors, we find a suggestion that the erasable writing tables – to which Shakespeare most probably referred in *Hamlet* and a few other places – were very popular among merchants and traders:

37 Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, vol. 2 (London: Printed for J. Johnson et al, 1799), 1.

38 Walter W. Skeat and A. L. Mayhew, *A Glossary of Tudor and Stuart Words: Especially from the Dramatists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914), 400.

Who bought these writing tables? At the end of the fourteenth century Cennino d'Andrea Cennini noted that parchment tables were used by merchants to record their calculations. And merchants seem to have been the primary market for Adams and Triplet, since the printed materials included woodcuts of coins; charts of weights, measures, and the distances of towns from London; dates of fairs; a fold-out multiplication table for calculating in roman numerals; and instructions on how to reckon a servant's wages.³⁹

Frank Adams and Robert Triplet were London booksellers and bookbinders, who in the second half of the sixteenth century flooded bookshops with their own "writing tables," which are at the same time a kind of calendars that contain various more-or-less useful information. Hence, the authors used the term "printed materials," as the "writing tables" consisted of pre-printed cards and cards intended for writing; that is, for the private use of the buyer of such a booklet. In a preserved calendar by Triplet from 1604, we find a "manual," which shows how to delete a previously noted text.⁴⁰

Finally, Shakespeare's hendiadys "the book and volume of my brain" takes us to the arithmetic of memory. Literally "one through two," a hendiadys is a rhetorical figure that renders a single concept with the use of two terms connected by "and" or its equivalent. Latin writers, among them Virgil, used this rhetorical device eagerly. Shakespeare even seems to overuse it. George T. Wright, Shakespeare's metric researcher, mostly renowned for his *Shakespeare's Metrical Art* (1988), notes that only three plays of Shakespeare do not include any hendiadys, while in *Hamlet*, there are as many as sixty-six of them. Wright indicates that in the case of the particular hendiadys above we encounter a semantic rivalry of two meanings of the word "volume"; it means either one copy of a book or the size of a book. If we look at the "book and volume" juxtaposition in this context then, "at first glance, the two words seem nearly synonymous, but the phrase also seems to mean 'within the book and largeness of my brain,' that is, 'within the spacious book of my brain.'"⁴¹ It is certainly justified to assume that the use of hendiadys entails some semantic tension, and we encounter here something more than simple rhetorical ornamentation. It certainly is of the greatest importance how large and spacious

39 Stallybrass et al., "Hamlet's Tables and the Technologies of Writing in Renaissance England," 401.

40 Roger Chartier, *Inscription and Erasure: Literature and Written Culture from the Eleventh to the Eighteenth Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 23–24.

41 Georg T. Wright, "Hendiadys and Hamlet," *PMLA* 96 (2) (1981): 186.

this book is and how much it is able to contain. This issue directly relates to the economy of memory. Contrary to Wright's interpretative suggestion, it is possible that memory is not so capacious, since Hamlet must order it and remove all trivial records. This is the moment when the Prince calculates and compares data, calculates risk, adds and multiplies, subtracts and divides. Although, whatever Hamlet really thinks about the capacity of his memory, one thing remains certain, and this is precisely the moment indicated by the hendiadys. Hamlet's fundamental dilemma is the capacity of memory, to what extent it is indeed a "vast memory," what is the absorption capacity of the book of memory. In other words, the arithmetic and economy of memory as one.

*Translated by Mikołaj Golubiewski and Jan Burzyński
(translation revised by the author)*

Abstract

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The Economy of Memory: How Memcoins Enter the Market

The main idea of the paper is that the theoretical apparatus of memory studies contains a hidden liberal economy. The article refers to the works of William Shakespeare, Aleida Assmann, Wulf Kansteiner, and Tzvetan Todorov to present how the dis-individuation of memory – understood as a resignation from the psychological side of memory and a turning to symbolic contents of low intensity – makes memory theory similar to economic rules that govern the liberal market, including its focus on the rationality of exchange and dislike of external interventionism. The invisible hand of this market witnesses the flow of mnemonic monetary units, which this article calls "memcoins."

Keywords

memory studies, economy of memory, Shakespeare, memcoins, theory of memory, New Economic Criticism