

THE ARTS OF ONESELF

twenty six short tales on personal memorabilia

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I

My hand is already over the waste basket when suddenly I hesitate: maybe I shouldn't? This time I keep it, many more times I throw away things, still, over the years, my house is filling up with objects and documents that have survived the ordeal of being classified as waste; things I keep on to for later... to help me remember. These are often things not purposely produced as memorabilia like souvenirs, picture post cards or photo snapshots, but objects to which I give personally an extra meaning, changing their category from daily life utensil to personal treasure. There is a story with each of such objects, in most cases the story is not visible, the object does not depict a particular event, the event needs to be told. Language to make "the invisible visible" says Krzysztof Pomian in his study on the 'Origin of the museum' and he invents a special word for such objects that have changed their status, from an object with use value to an object representing what can not be seen. The term Pomian uses is 'Semiofophors', based on the Greek words for 'sign' and 'carrier'. (Pomian/NB 82) There are others with a similar observation as Pomian using different words like the art historian Mieke Bal: "Objects are inserted into the narrative perspective when their status is turned from objective to semiotic, from thing to sign.." (Bal/NB 2) These memory objects, these personal memorabilia mostly relate to those who are or were dear to us, family, friends, lovers or those admired by us. First of all bodily things: umbilical cord, foreskin, hair of children or lovers; the first teeth in a box; nails; blood, semen and lipstick traces on love letters; garments from first baby dresses to ladies underwear; shoes and handkerchiefs; scarfs and hats; spectacles and artificial teeth. Quiet recently, while cleaning a cupboard, I discovered the blood stained chemise that marks the birth of my daughter when she was first held by her mother. I tried to compromise and make a picture of it before throwing it away, but the end of the debate that followed was that this object has been taken from my custody and thus might be saved for posterity. There are of course those things we inherit, often things that have lost their practical use and can not yet be classified as 'antique', things not kept for their price or prestige, but for emotional reasons, because they help us remember. Of course valuable objects can very well function as personal memorabilia, but their status is different, potentially they belong to the markets of gold, silver, jewels, antique, art and other things that 'have a price', they can be exchanged for money and money can be exchanged for one's wishes or needs and the needs and wishes of the day are often the strongest.

II

Objects that have purposely been made for recollection, like the souvenir, seem to be of another order. Susan Pearce, who is often quoted in recent literature on collecting, notes that in this case "the object is prized for its power to carry the past into the future" and that "the collector does not attempt to usurp its cultural and historical identity" (Pearce/NB 15) Be it mass produced trivialia from holiday resorts or the work from local artisans, the owner will still have a personal recollection when seeing or showing this object. So also here the object is a trigger for personal narrative. The souvenir belongs to the tradition of pilgrimage, bringing back home relics, prove of a long travel, often

something for which there is a claim of direct contact with a holy person or place, something with super-natural power. The ease and comfort of modern transport do not compare with the hardship of pilgrimage in former times but the souvenir is still a relict, a carrier of some of the qualities of the 'holy land'. Graceland is an example of a modern pilgrimage place. Here each year 15 to 20 thousand devotees visit the tomb of Elvis Presley. John Windsor an art journalist and specialist in transcendental meditation, researched the trade in Elvis relics, he mentions the Graceland Enterprise Inc that exploits "the ownership in perpetuity of the Elvis 'image'", a "legalized form of immortality", selling Elvis tee-shirts, badges and other memorabilia for a value of 15 million dollars a year. There is also the "undercover trade" in "Elvis necrophilia" with "toe-nail clippings, warts, even Elvis sweat preserved in glass phials", supposedly distilled from a stage floor covering on which Elvis perspired copiously. Windsor describes a greeting card that claims to carry drops of Elvis sweat with the text: "Elvis poured out his soul for you, and NOW you can let his PERSPIRATION be your INSPIRATION." Both official and unofficial Elvis markets describe their wares as souvenirs, but as Ward notes "it is the quality of devotion that turns an Elvis souvenir into an Elvis fetish." Elvis has made gospel records with Christian content and in some of his films poses as an almost Christ like figure. After his death his legend has grown to saint like proportions. Seen in the tradition of the christian saints Elvis has become a 'myroblyte,' "a saint whose relic exudes a myrrh, oil, balm or liquid" which "beneficially is used for the uplifting of spirits and the healing of bodies". Elvis has joined ranks with holy persons like Saint Nicholas and Saint Menas. The historian Charles W. Jones writes in great detail on this subject in his study 'Saint Nicholas of Myra, Bari and Manhattan, biography of a legend' (Jones...). He describes how pilgrims over many centuries visit the grave of Saint Nicholas in the Italian town of Bari, "to carry away a droplet or a phial" of the 'myrrh' from the body of Nicholas "to their faraway home". Jones observes, "Pilgrims are insatiable collectors of souvenirs, talismans, and artifacts in every age" and notes that because the body of Saint Nicholas was emanating this liquor continuously (each day a priests goes into the crypt in Bari to tap), it could be bought also by "those of meagre purse". (University of Chicago Press; 1978; p.66-67) Another parallel with modern tourism and the souvenir industry is the pillage and plunder in previous centuries of sacred objects of far away and foreign cultures, to be taken home as booty, to be sold, stored and put on show in the treasure rooms of temples and palaces, in the private Curiosity Cabinets/Wunderkammers, or the state museum, an act expressing both contempt and interest for that what is strange and foreign. Tourist industry has transposed this love-hate relationship to modern times through the mass production of representations of the authentic, adapted to what tourists are supposedly expecting. Plunder of artifacts has developed into plunder of cultural values, mimicking forms of expression and ways of life that have disappeared already or are in a high stage of disintegration. Group travel and strict time and space management by tour operators do allow for little interaction with local population to get some understanding of living style and conditions of the local population. Often such contacts are not even desired by either side. In the end, on the day of departure, there is always the airport shop which will, in exchange for the left over local currency, supply a nice choice of 'personal' memorabilia. Some object, at least, is needed for later, to help us remember. Was it not so that we were travelling because we wanted to construct a special memory, to give some more meaning to our life, or when a trip was for business reasons we still tried to acquire some material proof of our contact with an other culture?

III

There are also objects that are not typical for a certain region or country, but still emanate some kind of longing or nostalgia for far away times and places that did not even exist. Miniature rustic houses, small models of indistinct fishermen boats, glass spheres, with and without snow flakes, showing minuscule landscapes. There has always been an industry that produces what some call 'tat'. John Windsor gives a definition of what 'tat' objects represent: "not what the past was really like, but what customers like to think it was like" in other words "today's picture of yesterday". (John Windsor "Identity Parades"; p55) Bad taste, stereotype, kitsch, tat, the too well educated will force themselves not to acquire such detestable objects, though maybe inwardly, there is something left of the open mind of a child, a strong attraction to still have such taboo things. One of the explanations of the origin of the word 'kitsch' is, that it is of German origin and derived from the verb 'kitschen' (den Strassenschlamm zusammenscharren) meaning to collect rubbish from the street. It associates also with the spontaneous activity most young children show, when they start to pick up, be it in the house, street or field, anything they fancy for 'their collection', stones, sticks, feathers, leaves. Throwables from others and nature become collectibles for a kid, who will enjoy discovering similarities, comparing them, grouping them, arranging them in attractive displays, showing them to others, often with small stories and explanations.

IV

The organized recycling of throwables, the jumble sales, flea markets, and bazaars attract many 'grown-ups'. Here this 'childish thing' is made somewhat acceptable, because it is packaged as trade, but aside of the impetus of making a good deal, finding something cheap, the main fascination is remembering. Such a chaotic displays of goods stimulate our abilities for recollection, they are collective memory theatres with their mish-mash of obsolete utensils, kitsch and tat, waiting to become someone's symbol for a moment of someone's life. For the last three decades I live next door's to the Amsterdam flea market, so I have had ample opportunity to study this phenomena. One aspect that seems very relevant to personal memorabilia is the daily ordering of goods on such a market, its spatial taxonomy. There are the very organized stalls with second hand shoes only, black boots, brown boots, sandals neatly lined up, but also what is called the floor displays, straight on the pavement, of things from all times and classes thrown together by the fate of the day. I associate this with an early discussion on changing the display of the art collection of the Austrian Emperor Joseph II at the end of the 18th century, when one of the early public museums in Europe was created. Though there is quiet a difference between the junk on a flea market and an imperial art collection, the discussed principle remains the same. Before the reorganisation of the gallery by Christian von Mechel, a graphic artesian and art dealer, all different periods and styles, without much order, were

associatively arranged in the different exhibition rooms. Mechel introduced a system of strict grouping of the paintings and sculptures according to different schools and a chronological time line. In a study on this debate the Dutch art historian Debora J. Meijers summarizes the debate of that time: "Mechel's opponents () did not wish () to take on such a preconceived division of the works in the gallery. Rather they preferred to rediscover such order or classification for themselves, each time they viewed the paintings." (Debora J. Meijers "Kunst als natuur de Habsburgse schilderijengallerij in Wenen omstreeks 1780; p.212) 'Rediscovery' is the word and many collections of personal memorabilia are, consciously or not, arranged in such a way. Formal chronology is mostly absent. Objects of a different order are spatially arranged, often juxtaposed to create an aesthetical effect. Of course there are people who will compulsively line up anything that comes under their hands, and the bookkeepers of the family with their strict chronological photo albums, but I dare to say that in most cases creative chaos is the preferred system for personal memorabilia. The shoe box archive with a mix of personal papers and photographs is one of the best examples of this practice. Each time a document is searched for, each time something is shown, a new disorder of the content of these boxes will be established. It is a bit different from reshuffling playing cards because there is not a complete remix, certain strata of document tend to stay together. Such messy containers are a stimulus for new associations, new comparisons, new ways of recollecting the stages of one's life, they are very much a model for the way we remember....

V

The personal snapshot, the photograph with which we try to capture the unique and spontaneous moments of our lives, is the most massive produced memory device of our time. Though the snapshot is mostly seen as a pure pictorial device, belonging to the realm of the visible, its social function is strongly narrative. When you are shown pictures by friends, even by complete strangers you happen to meet, there will be explanations and stories. As you follow with your eyes the finger of the narrator pointing at details and you listen to the stories it is striking how many references there are to what not can be seen in the picture itself. It is often boring for others to look at the pictures we took, because we see so much more in them, or better through them, we are recalling what remained outside the frame, what happened just before or after, smells, temperature, atmosphere, aura... It is evident that the photograph remains the most popular device for recollection, film, sound, and video recording have never been even near to take over its role. One reason for this is what the Hungarian collector of amateur snapshots Sándor Kardos calls the greatest power of photography: "the experience of the moment". Kardos compares the photograph with a time based registration like film: "In a film one needs a construction, not only in space but also in time. It is necessary to invent a succession of moments. There is never the spontaneous natural impulse of a still photograph." (Kardos/Horus Archives) Kardos is a man whose collection of amateur snapshots has grown to over 200.000 examples arranged in boxes using 120 different categories of his own making like 'people appearing with things they are proud of or would like to obtain', 'with weapons', 'performing indecent activities', 'in unusual dress', 'wearing masks' and

'unexpected things happening at the moment of exposure'. By collecting, selecting, classifying and arranging photographs from other people, sometimes knowing the creators, sometimes not, the function of these snapshots is changed from a personal memory utensil to a carrier of aesthetic values. Seen with other eyes, put in an other context new meaning is constructed. Pictures of moments of many different personal lives, torn from their particular time line, reassembled in series chosen by the artist archivist Kardos who says he is "making photographs by finding them". Taking away the original context, the process of collection, selection and labelling reveals something the photographs originally did not show: the recurrent themes, the archetypical element in these pictures.

VI

It's a century ago that George Eastman came up with a photographic film that was more light sensitive and produced on a roll so multiple pictures could be taken easily. "You press the button, we do the rest" was the slogan that changed the status of photography from a stiff posing, 'the head on stare' in front of a fixed camera on a tripod, to the informal amateur 'snap shot'. It meant that the professional photographer, still wearing the artist cape of the portrait painter of previous centuries, largely went out of business and had to survive by becoming a shopkeeper, selling photo equipment and supplies. On this retailers network an ever growing world wide photography business rose, and with the rising of the industry, prices of camera, film and prints were falling with the throw-away camera, for one time use, as the lowest point. Photographs have become "items of passing interest with no residual value to be consumed and throw away." (Tag/The burden of representation; p.56) This quote on the changing use of photographs has been published only ten years ago and now, with the advance of digital imagery, not only the use of photographs, but also the photograph it self will become more volatile and dematerialized. Optical film will be replaced by electronic memory card, and the visual display of television set and home computer will enable instant melting of frozen moments. Zapping through the television channels and surfing over the Internet will be followed by similar navigation strategies for our electronic family album; as long as our spinning hard disks do not crash and picture storage standards remain compatible with the ever faster changes of computer software and hardware. There will still be a need for tangible objects, the photograph as a print, especially because of its portability, but the progressing miniaturization, from desk top to palm top, will decrease the amount of enduring memory devices. "The electrification of memory provides another twist how societies do indeed remember their past in an extraordinary changing present" notes the sociologist John Urry and he quotes a colleague Huyssen who describes the influence of television with their "politics of quick oblivion" and "the dissolution of public space in ever more channels of instant entertainment". This "frenetic pace of change" leads to "the collapsing belief in possible futures" and results in "a kind of collective amnesia". Urry and Huyssen conclude that in a reaction people try "to slow down information processing" to "resist the dissolution of time.. to claim some anchoring space in a world of puzzling and often threatening heterogeneity, non-synchronicity and information overload". (John Urry/'How societies remember the past' in 'Theorizing museums'; NB 72)

VII

We seem to race forward on the tracks of time in a straight line but when we want to remember, to reflect, we have to look back, and as a train in a curve the past will show itself briefly, and further away we can dimly see the rails disappearing in the landscape. When I try to explain remembering and the passing of time, spatial metaphors, like the previous one, are the first thing that come to my mind. 'Looking back' and 'in retro-spect' are commonly used notions. In his personal memoir "Present Past - Past Present" Eugène Ionesco writes: "Up to the age of thirty-five, one could look back at the valley that one has come from. But now I am going down the other side and the only valley that awaits me is the valley of death. The mountainside separates me from myself." Such spatial metaphors for time and remembering are not completely satisfactory, there is a lot of emphasis on continuity, the flowing or passing of time, as if time is passing us, as if we are advancing through it. All euphemisms for our own vulnerability, as if time is passing out, were in fact we are passing away. Time travel would be the reversal of such flowing of time, as if each instant in time had been kept in a historical reserve and could be revisited. The French philosopher Henri Bergson is one of the critics of this conception of time: "time should not be conceived spatially and memory is to be viewed as itself temporary, as the piling up of the past on the past, no element is simple present but is changed as new elements are accumulated from the past." Bergson wrote this at the beginning of this century and his ideas had a great impact. One of the persons inspired by him was the French writer Marcel Proust, who besides being his student, was a cousin of his wife. Proust's most famous novel series 'A la recherche du temps perdu' () is constructed on the theories of Bergson, who was putting emphasis on man's creative abilities and intuition as an instrument for understanding the universe. "Yes: if, owing to the work of oblivion, the returning memory can throw no bridge, form no connecting link between itself and the present minute, if it remains in the context of its own place and date, if it keeps its distance, its isolation in the hollow of a valley or upon the highest peak of a mountain summit, for this very reason it causes us suddenly to breathe a new air, an air which is new precisely because we have breathed it in the past, that purer air which the poets have vainly tried to situate in paradise and which could induce such profound a sensation of renewal only if it had been breathed before, since the true paradises are the paradises we have lost." (Proust/In search of lost time vol. 6 p.221) In the theories of Bergson the phenomena described by Proust is called 'pure duration', "a duration in which the past is big with a present absolutely new. But then our will is strained to the utmost; we have to gather up the past which is slipping away, and thrust it whole and undivided into the present. At such moments we truly possess ourselves, but such moments are rare." (summarized by Bertrand Russell in his 'History of Western philosophy'; p.759-760) It has been said of Proust that he was a writer who put the "greatest interpretive power" in "the smallest image or detail" (NB 43) and he wrote many pages of exhaustive descriptions of memories triggered by small incidents, like the often quoted passage of a cup of tea and a special kind of cooky called 'Madeleine', the tripping on two uneven pavement stones in front of a coach house and the knocking of a spoon against a plate by a servant. Proust calls these triggers "chance happenings" and after describing the scenes they recall he summarizes the phenomena of such recollections: "...I began to divine as I

compared these diverse happy impressions, diverse yet with this in common, that I experienced them at the present moment and at the same time in the context of a distant moment, so that the past was made to encroach on the present and I was made to doubt whether I was in the one or the other. The truth surely was that the being within me which had enjoyed these impressions had enjoyed them because they had in them something that was common to a day long past and to the present, because in some way they were extra-temporal..." (p.222-223) Being "outside time" relieves for a moment the "anxieties of death" of the central figure in the novel, who becomes "an extra-temporal being" and "therefore unalarmed by the vicissitudes of the future". (p. 223) This relieving and therapeutic function is beneficial both for the fictional figure and his creator: "...when we seek to extract from our grief the generality that lies within it, to write about it, we are perhaps to some extent consoled for yet another reason () which is that to think in terms of general truth, to write, is for the writer a wholesome and necessary function the fulfilment of which makes him happy, it does for him what is done for men of a more physical nature by exercise, perspiration, baths." (p.262) Reluctantly Proust poses himself the question whether his undertaking of writing a book about his past life is not so much for the sake of "the supreme truth of life" that resides in "art", but a method for consolation. Thinking about some of his beloved who have died he wonders "whether a work of art of which they would not be conscious could really for them, for the destiny of these poor dead creatures, be a fulfilment." (VI p.262) At an earlier stage in his novel Proust admits that other people are "merely show-cases for the very perishable collections of one's own mind." (V p.637) In the same way he observes that his thought uses the products of other writers "for its own selfish purpose", "as though they had lived a life which had profited only myself, as though they had died for me". Proust understands that in return he will be consumed by others: "Saddening too was the thought that my love, to which I had clung so tenaciously, would in my book be so detached from any individual that different readers would apply it, even in detail, to what they had felt for other women." (p.263)

VIII

Reading and rereading this passages of Proust I am thrown back to my own life and the therapeutic function of writing, my attempts to halt time, even to try to go back in time, after the unexpected and sudden death of my girlfriend, bitten in her lip by a wasp being with friends out on a roof terrace on a hot summer evening, by now eight years ago. She died almost instantly of what the doctors named an anaphylactic shock. The very night the messenger of doom had visited me I started to write: "At the cross road of night and dawn this is been written//the dead-line is alarmingly close//will your funeral appear in time?//You are not deceased, but dead//still by looking intensively in the mirror I can see your eyes in mine, talk with you..." I continued to write for several months, mostly late at night when I would feel most desperate, sitting at my computer at home both rereading and writing, also in public spaces, during train travels, in cafes in foreign countries. I would enter also the handwritten texts into the computer and during some time I would rephrase, and smooth the text, reading it half aloud to myself. After a while I would not any more change the text, I got afraid that by polishing sentences too much my feelings

would get lost in the shavings. Fixing my memories in writing was quietening me, it gave me the feeling that I had halted time, not for long but just during the process of writing and reading. It was and still is an almost complete private journal. More than a year later I printed a few copies and included them in a series of memory boxes containing scrolls of digitized pictures of memorabilia of my girl friend, photographs and a sound tape of the funeral and samples of her favourite collection of perfumed soaps. The boxes were covered with pieces of a silk banner with stripes in my girl friend's favourite colours that had been printed to show during the funeral. A few close friends did get such a big box with the message that they need not read the text now, that it was there as a testimony for later. Contemplating objects related to my beloved, arranging them in a series of picture scrolls, writing a personal journal, making a limited set of copies and distributing them, was a way of externalizing my suffering, it did not stop it but made the pain more bearable. It was a ritual of sharing grief, finding myself a model for mourning and bereavement, also keeping track of attempts to make new relations.

IX

"The normal fate of a journal is to be destroyed" notes Malik Allam in his study on "Journaux intimes, une sociologie de l'écriture personnelle/Intimate journals, a sociology of personal writing". (L'Harmattan; Paris 1996; p.7) Allam has tried to shed light on what normally remains invisible, the intimate diaries, journals of people who have no intention to publish them, who in most cases do not even show their content to members of their family or friends. It is a study about the 'diarist' who retreats to his room to have through his notebook a tête-à-tête with himself. "Il 's'isole, se ressource, reprend contact avec son moi profond. Ecrivent sa vie, il en devient l'auteur, le démiurge." (p.8) As a sociologist Allam faced a delicate problem, it is already difficult to ask someone for the existence of an intimate journal, let alone wanting to read it and then talk about it. In public collections there are very few examples of such journals of ordinary, 'non-famous' people, it is often not even a separate category for the archivist, and the interest of the Allam was not historical, but to know how such journals are functioning now a days. The solution was to "interrogate the diarists without reading their journals" (p.7) and selecting people for such interviews by advertisements, contacting amateur writers clubs and through 'hear say'. The reasons for writing and the process of writing differ. Ariane, 57 years old, married for 30 years with three children, started to write as a young girl of 16 stimulated by a catholic priest to whom she was posing questions about the meaning of life. She stopped to write at the age of 27 when she got married and started again when she became 40, in a reaction to long years of letting herself "obediently be devoured by husband, children and household tasks". Her ideal is to write every day: "Sous forme d'un flash aigu, percutant, je voudrais décrire juste l'étincelle qui a fait que cette journée est différente de celle d'hier ou de demain." She likes to reread her journals and compare her past life with the daily preoccupations of the moment. Her husband knows she is writing but respects the fact that she does not show her journal. Once she had the thought to leave her journals to her children after her death and immediately catches herself in the act of self control while writing. (p.35) Catherine, 31 years and single, has a journal because it is useful, it assist her thoughts and helps her to understand her own reactions and what is

going on in society. She uses writing as an aid to "resolve bad relations with a person." (p.49) Fanny, 43 years, two times separated and living with her two children, grew up with a lot of restrictions in an anti-clerical family: "there were things one was not supposed to say about oneself". She felt like having killed her fancies, her imagination: "that kind of things I have tried to refind by writing." At a later stage Fanny goes to a psychoanalyst for therapy but that does not work. From that moment on she starts to write again for herself: "je me disais en fait ce que je ne disais pas à l'analyste." (p....) Though in this study more women come to word than men there are examples like that of Eric, 67 years who starts only very late at the age of 57 to write his journal. After a professional life as an engineer, married with a woman who has the same occupation, both socially well integrated, his wife gets the illness of Alzheimer and he decides to care for her at home. As the illness of his wife progresses and his tasks get more heavy he feels marginalized and gets depressive. During a treatment he is suggested to start a personal journal as an anti-depressive tool. For several years he notes the events and ideas of the day. This becomes a relaxing moment for him, it makes him cope. At a later stage friends from the medical profession suggest that it would be a good idea to publish selections of his journal. Eric experiences this proposal as a sign of social acceptance of him in this marginalized role. There is also a story of a young men who starts to write a journal to overcome an unhappy love affair and one of an American student who goes to study in France, feels isolated and also has problems in a shared student apartment because of him showing his homosexuality: "I started my journal to have someone to speak to in English". (p.96) Claude, another man of 47 years, started to write at the age of 19. He says to have been influenced by reading the journals of Anne Frank and also has difficulty to fill the emptiness he feels in life. In his journal he writes about the homosexuality he keeps hidden for the world outside: "He describes himself as someone who has no love life, but a life with paper." (p.105-106)

X

For Claude there must have been an association between the hiding in the 'Achterhuis/Annexe' in Amsterdam of Anne Frank and her family for the Nazis and the hiding of his own homosexuality. He mentions Anne's journal as an example for him to follow. He has no intention to 'come out', show his journal to other people, though the fact that he participated in the research project of sociologist Allam, maybe a step in another direction. Writing her diary was a very intimate and private affair for Anne. There is an interview after the war with Miep, a woman who helped to hide the Frank family and other jewish people in the annexe in the centre of Amsterdam, that describes this: "Once [] when I went up into the Annexe and opened Anne's door, I saw her sitting at a table and writing in an account book. She was obviously startled, got up and quickly shut the book". ("The diary of Anne Frank, the critical edition prepared by the 'Netherlands State Institute for War Documentation'; David Barnouw/Gerrold van der Straan editors; Viking London; 1989; p.25). Completely different circumstances from those of Claude, incomparable in hindsight when we think about the difference in fate, but the starting point is the same: "I hope I shall be able to confide in you completely, as I have never been able to do in anyone before, and I hope that you will be a great support

and comfort to me." This is what Anne writes on the front page of her first journal on the 12th of June 1942, the moment when she starts, like Claude many years later, a 'life with paper'. As she continues to write in the almost two years that follow, the dialogues with herself are expanding to more than one Anne, like in this fragments, one of the last entries in the diary, just before the combined raid of Dutch and German Jew-hunters in August 1944 when all those in hiding are arrested: "A voice sobs within me: "There you are, that's what's become of you, you're uncharitable, you look supercilious and peevish, people you meet dislike you and all just because you won't listen to the advice given by your own better half". Oh, I would like to listen, but it doesn't work." (ibid. p.699) Right after the arrest Miep manages to pick up and hide the diary from the floor, where it has been thrown by the invaders who are searching for jewels and money. The sole survivor of the family is the father of Anne, Otto Frank. Right after the war he reads his daughter's diary in which she also mentions her idea to use her diary as a basis for writing a book after the war. He immediately starts to make a transcript and with the help of friends makes the diary into a manuscript in which a few cuts and alterations are made. After initial difficulties with almost no publisher interested in the manuscript, it gets published in 1947. Some more fragments dealing with discovery of sexuality by Anne are left out on the instigation of the publisher. After a few years the diary starts to be a world success and has been translated in 50 languages. With the spreading of this intimate account differences in reading and interpreting come to the surface. As Proust noted already readers will apply what is written to their own circumstances. In the case of the Diary of Anne Frank bitter fights have been fought, about how the published text relates to the original manuscript. There have been Swedish, French, American and German publications that claim that the diary was a hoax, all of them from ultra right wing circles. This has led to court cases because of slander and denial of the Holocaust. It even led to forensic research on the original diaries, taking samples of the glue of the bindings and handwriting identification in all detail, like a comparison of the shaping of the letter 't' as written on different dates in the diary. Other conflicts have arisen over the adaptation of the diary for film and theatre. One of the fiercest opponents in this field was not a right winger but the American author Meyer Levin, son of Jewish immigrants from Lithuania, a man who first proposed to Otto Frank to promote the book in America and also wrote a theatre adaptation, not staged because a later Hollywood style version was judged to be more suitable. In his adaptation Levin changed the emphasis from the universal lesson of tolerance and anti-discrimination as promoted by Otto Frank to one of teaching Jews how to be good Jews. In a review of a few studies dealing with this long lasting conflict for the New York Review of Books, the Dutch author Ian Buruma writes: "Since it contains so much, readers get different things from the diary, just as they would from any complex work", in the end "Everyone wants his own Anne". (NYRB...)

W.P. ... 1941

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terindes dan ook.



XI

The house I live in was also used as a hiding place for Jews during the war. It is situated on the edge of the Jewish Ghetto as it was established in 1941 in the inner city of Amsterdam. I live here for 23 years and it must have been two decades ago that while cleaning the attic that I found in a crevice between the roof panels and their supporting wall a series of dusty packages in what once might have been brown wrapping paper, containing some personal papers, an agenda, a passport, crinkled photographs, pieces of soap, a package of shaving blades, two lipsticks, a bag with tallow powder and a small box with coffee beans. All these things belonged to L.C., a Jewish man who apparently had been the owner of a music shop and also performed as a kind of clown, as could be seen on some of the photographs and which explained the make up utensils in the packages. Of course I did read and reread all the documents and the notes in the agenda, trying to make sense of it. It hardly did. Especially the notes made in the agenda (a pocket agenda of the year 1942 published by the Dutch branch of Siemens in The Hague) were difficult to understand. It is not clear whether they have any connection to the day sections in the agenda, and their content is most puzzling. There are many single sentences with almost commonplace content in an exalted style, like: "I do not maintain that I usually frequent such kind of establishments" (sunday January 4. 1942) directly followed by "Autumn hues did show themselves, fields became naked" (monday January 5. 1942). While writing this article on personal memorabilia I felt the urge to look once more at these traces of people who lived in the same house as me. Up to the attic, finding the dusty archive box that functions as a sanctuary for their souls. Again I am reading the agenda of 1942 and as I skip over sentences that seem to have no relation, now and then I find some that express, over the subsequent pages, despair, agony and fear: "That they were people who acted in horrid gravity"; and "a sinister suspicion flashed through his brain"; and "he was allowed to stay, true only conditional, but still he was allowed to stay"; and one of the last entries "Nature does not care about human crime or human suffering and that morning the sun was shouting more brilliant than ever". This last sentence is written on a page that opens with sunday the 7th of July 1942, so maybe there is a meaningful chronology after all. The rest of the agenda pages remained blank, only in the back, where there is place for addresses and notes, are some scribbles. One is a list of recipes that should be acquired, goulash, macaroni, pancakes with marmalade, ... and the very last page is a packing list. Again I shiver when I read the very small and neat handwriting with over 30 things 'not to forget'. I need not list them all: "small linen bag with darning wool, nail brush, padlock, safety pins, tooth paste, shaving cream, 2 pyjamas, 2 shirts, 2 towels, writing equipment, 5 pair of socks...." Maybe, in all, I have looked five times at these memorabilia, and each time I am so shocked. I did not dare yet to try and see if this man or any of his relatives survived the destruction machinery aimed at them. Being an archivist myself, the last thing I would do is adding these humble traces to the huge cemetery of the State War Archives or whatever institute that is professionally accumulating human misery. As long as I live in this house, these disintegrating objects and dusty papers might better remain here so I can regularly pay my respect to L.C. who is still sharing his house with me.

XII

"In the attics of homes all over the world, in the backs of cabinets and bottom of drawers, lie testaments to the lives of many forgotten women. Scrapbooks, books constructed of the scraps of lives, () multi layered records of life experiences." These are the opening sentences of a draft text on 'scrapbooks' by Georgen Gilliam which I found on the Internet while searching for sources for the tales on personal memorabilia you are reading now. Gilliam is specially interested in personal scrapbooks by women containing ephemeral mementos of a woman's life: "letters, photographs, clippings, invitations, locks of hair, dance cards". () Often there is not much written text in such collections of documents and objects, kept together in a book as a proof of personal experiences and relationships. These scrapbooks may be occasionally shown to others but mostly in an intimate and personal atmosphere. It is during such showings that the meaning of the objects and documents will be told, though some scrapbooks might haven written captions. Georgen quotes many recent studies on the subject, often from a feminist perspective in which the exclusion of this femine form of expression from literary and historical studies and the lack of understanding of gender differences in self-representation is noted. When compared with the favourite male form of self-expression the autobiography "a lack of self-focus" can be noticed in the scrapbooks by women. "They are often a legacy for a woman's family, the creatrix in the role of the family historian." There are several references to the making of 'quilts' by women, a traditional artwork "constructed out of pieces of clothing, scraps and bits gathered from the outgrown garments of a woman's family", and the analogy with the way these scrapbooks, and women's autobiographical writings in general, are composed. The observations of Estelle Jelinek, who studied women's autobiography, on the difference between male and female auto-biography have a direct link to this: "From earliest times, these discontinuous forms have been important to women because they are analogous to the fragmented and interrupted, and formless nature of their lives." (Estelle Jellinek/Women's autobiography; p.19) Another mostly femine form of quilt like construction is the 'Poesie album', still very popular in Germany and the Netherlands were it developed in the 18th century as a companion for young girls, an album in which friends, family and acquaintances from school would write little poems, stories, wishes and wisdoms, would draw picture or donate sticker like pictures for adorning its pages. In an abundantly detailed study on the 'Poesiealbum' by Jürgen Rossin an attempt is made to rehabilitate this stereotypical text form with its subjects of worldly wisdom, virtue, friendship, religion and children's rimes. There would be entries like "Das lachen ist ein Macht, vor der die Grössten dieser Welt sich beugen müssen" or "Das ist ein Land der Lebenden und ein Land der Toten, //und die Brücke zwischen ihnen ist die Liebe//das einzige Bleibende, der einzige Sinn." (p.401) Maybe such texts might sound quiet heavy for young girls of our times, but I am sure that when one would analyze some of the texts of 'heavy metal' bands, that are extremely popular with young girls now, a similar tone can be found. The Poesie Album is a book that will be presented by its owner to others to write down new entries in them, it is meant to be read and reread to internalize its content. Rossin concludes his study with a statement in which he points to the value of these albums as a means by which human ties can be kept over time and sociability/Gemeinschaft can be documented through the use of maxims and captions. In his view these albums are more than just kitsch like, nostalgic or fashionable products, though in the end they are often lost when a girl grows older, as a 'Poesie rime' is

documenting: "Hier schreibe ich mich ins Büchlein ein, weil ich nicht will vergessen sein.//Noch lieber aber will ich im Herzen stehn,//weil Büchlein oft verlorengahn." (p.343) We can even go further back in time to find examples of similar usage of personal notebooks, like 'scrapbooks' and 'poesie albums', in the 'hupomnemata' of the Greco-Roman culture: "One wrote down quotes in them, extracts from books, examples and actions that one had witnessed or read about, reflections or reasonings that one had heard or that had come to mind. They constituted a material record of things read, heard, or thought, thus offering them up as a kind of accumulated treasure for subsequent rereading and meditation." This is part of an article by Michel Foucault, "L'écriture de soi/Self writing", in which he describes how this form of writing an reading was not so much "a narrative of oneself" but a collection of "what one has managed to hear or read" with the aim of "the shaping of the self" and he quotes Seneca on its function: "We should see to it that whatever we have absorbed should not be allowed to remain unchanged, or it will not be part of us. We must digest it; otherwise it will merely enter the memory and not the reasoning power." (p211-213) While writing this essay I am of course constantly confronted with the problem how to find a balance between neatly quoting from others, and reformulating what I have taken from others, but what in my feeling has become something from myself. Often the distinction between the two blur. You can only create yourself through the others, no divine creation out of void, it is more like an endless reconfiguration of what existed already, but there are so many elements that I myself and others might be under the impression that something unique or new has been created.

XIII

"La lutte doit continuer entre cette part de la parole qui tend passionnément à la diffusion le plus large et une parole qui au contraire veut s'enfoncer, rester dans un cercle étroit, descendre même dans l'intimité de l'individu, pour le séparer de lui-même par le moyen de ce qu'il a de plus collectif, de plus universel, de plus impersonnel, le langage." This is the concluding sentence of another study on this subject: "Les baromètres de l'âme, naissance du journal intime/Barometers of the soul, birth of the intimate journal", by Pierre Pachet. It is unescapable, once the intimate is made public it will become something of another order. Writing because of the need to tell yourself to the others, mostly unknown to you. Reading because you have a need to identify with someone else, or you just like to observe, being invisible yourself. There surely is a strong element of voyeurism and its opposite when the intimate is made public.

XIV

There are also intimate writings, pictures not consciously made public, things one

sometimes finds by chance: your heart starts to beat a bit faster, blood flushing to your face, you look and read, feel somewhat ashamed entering the private world of someone else, but still, you will read on... It must have been 1963 when during one summer I lived in a squatted house in the city of Haarlem, while attending sculpture classes at a new experimental art academy. It was an old 17th or 18th century house at the river in the centre of town and with a friend we were staying in a kind of attic, where apparently lots of other people had drifted by. Between the rubble I found a notebook with a series of letters describing an adventurous travel of a man and his girlfriend through the North of Africa. Apparently the letters in the notebook were never sent. I have forgotten the details of those letters but not the thrill it gave me to read something that was not meant for me. Seven or eight years later a similar thing happened, also related to belongings left in squatted houses. This time it was in the Nieuwmarkt neighbourhood in Amsterdam at the high time of the hippies making their pilgrimage to the 'magic city'. I still see the hoards of long haired rucksack tourists who would ask "where are the abandoned barracks", as the word had spread in the whole of Europe that there was an area in the centre of town with houses, just for free. The sounds of bongos and cheap bamboo flutes were mingling with the smell of marijuana and sometimes the siren of the fire brigade mixed in, when not well tended, fires started to devour a house because half stoned city nomads were trying to bake pancakes on an open fire in the middle of a wooden floor. Such incidents and the introduction of heroin in the area by American motorbikers in combination with some opium trade to outsiders by a few Chinese dealers, led to regular razzias in the squats by the local police in search for illegal drugs and unwanted foreigners. That is how I found a collection of letters, photographs and hallucinatory drawings left by some Italian hippies. There were some postcards meant to be sent to their families, way back in the deep south of Italy, in which they explained why they had left home and what freedom they were searching for. It must have been these incidents that have pointed me the way to another profession than that of a sculptor, that of an archivist of modern social movements, whereby my greatest interest has always been to acquire personal archives, be it during someone's lifetime or as often happens posthumously. The ceremonial in which this transfer from the private to the public is realized often has a strong schizophrenic character, on the one hand the person in question or his or her heirs are full of how important for posterity it is that everything will be made available to researchers and the public and on the other hand whole lists of restrictions are proposed to the archive institute to control the content of possible representations to be constructed from this material. There is also the silent disappearance of certain letters, photographs, books, I had noticed during a first visit in a preliminary stage of negotiations, taken away by a self-appointed censor who will give no explanation and often, as an archivist confronted with the heirs of a deceased person, one feels not in the position to ask for the reason why. I remember an extreme case of a political and literary figure who had already published some of his diaries and was handing me the original not before, right under my eyes, he tore out a few pages. Why this drama? He had told me already that he had omitted some parts, in the published journal, he found too emotional and personal. He could have easily torn out the pages before I arrived, so I would not have known. Maybe this ceremonial act was symbolic proof that any biography or other representation of a person by others can not be more than a mosaic on the basis of incomplete information, that identification and imagination of a biographer is needed to cement fragments in a portrait that seems real enough. An analysis by Nelson Goodman, though made for the visual arts, still very well applies here: "...a picture, to represent an object (O) must be a symbol for it, stand for it, refer to it; and (S) no degree of resemblance is sufficient to establish the requisite relationship of reference. Nor is

resemblance necessary for reference; almost anything may stand for almost anything else. A picture that represents () an object refers to and, more particularly, denotes it. Denotation is the core of representation and is independent of resemblance." (Nelson Goodman "Languages of art, an approach to a theory of symbols", Oxford University Press; London; 1969; p.251)

XV

"I have resolved on an enterprise which has no precedent, and which, once complete, will have no imitator. My purpose is to display to my kind a portrait in every way true to nature, and the man I shall portray will be myself." These are the famous opening sentences of "The confessions" by Jean-Jacques Rousseau a text describing his own unique life from birth in 1712 to the year 1765, displaying himself "as I was", both "vile and despicable" and "good, generous and noble". Though he did read parts of this text to small audiences in 1771 it is only three years after his death in 1778 that his Confessions were published. Rousseau is seen by many as the creator of a new genre, the auto-biography, which seems nowadays such a natural form of expression, but it took several centuries of silent and slow development before the writing of intimate diaries and journals developed into this literary genre. Early examples like the 4th century "Confessions" of Saint Augustine, bishop of Hippo in Roman Africa, are different from the self-centred writings and personal display of Rousseau. Saint Augustine's confessions tell about his conversion to Christianity after a turbulent youth and the autobiographical elements in the text are mere background for his mystical experience of finding God. There have been of course many writers before Rousseau who did dutifully note the events of the day, chroniclers who registered with the pace of the calendar what they witnessed, but this differs from the writer of a personal diary who tries to capture how she or he experiences personal change. The French writer Montaigne can be seen as a forerunner of Rousseau, living two centuries earlier and developing a literary form he called 'essais', 'essais' in French: "la pensée spontanée de son auteur, mais sur sa personne même, saisie dans sa dimension la plus quotidienne, la plus privée, la moins surveillée." (NB 22) Montaigne does write about subjects like 'idleness', 'on the power of imagination', 'on friendship', 'on smells', 'on presumption', 'on repentance'. Most of the time his own person is not directly the subject of his writings, but because of this indirectness, this way of 'denotation', we have the feeling to get a better picture, with a better resemblance of the man Montaigne than the one we get from the self-centred, more realistic writings of Rousseau. "Most autobiographers are anxious to build up a personality, to present themselves as more consistent, more resolute, more far-sighted, and built on an altogether grander scale than they would have appeared to their wives or their intimates." This observation is by the English translator of the 'Essays' of Montaigne J.M. Cohen, who compares, the writings of Montaigne with those of Rousseau. He sees the Confessions of Rousseau as the classical example of a "false portraiture", with Rousseau "pretending to emotions that he never had", a man thinking that his "romantic ego was really in control of events" and in the end was not able to "explain away" incidents "in which he fell short of the ideal picture of himself". In contrast Montaigne does not have the need to explain his action "he merely notes them down". In the words of Cohen his personality is "a kind

of observer which, although incapable of controlling the complete mechanism of his life, is able to prevent its springing too many surprises on him".(p.12) The writing of essays gave Montaigne some self control, an example of which can be found in his essay "On idleness", where he describes how he tries to find rest in retirement, leaving his mind "in complete idleness to commune with itself". This does not work out as his mind starts to behave "like a runaway horse", "hundred times more active on its own behalf than it ever was for others". Montaigne gets haunted by chimeras and imaginary monsters and notes how "in order to contemplate their oddness and absurdity": "I have begun to record them in writing, hoping in time to make my mind ashamed of them". (p.28)

XVI

This theme of writing to shame one's own mind, to control oneself, is an old one, it can be found with another bishop from the same century as Saint Augustine, the bishop of Alexandria, Athanasius. Michel Foucault quotes a text of Athanasius on the indispensable elements of the ascetic life: "Let this observation be a safeguard against sinning: let us each note and write down our actions and impulses of the soul as though we were to report them to each other; and you may rest assured that from utter shame of becoming known we shall stop sinning and entertaining sinful thoughts altogether. Who, having sinned, would not choose to lie, hoping to escape detection? Just as we would not give ourselves to lust within sight of each other, so if we were to write down our thoughts as if telling them to each other, we shall so much the more guard ourselves against foul thoughts for the shame of being known." (quoted in Michel Foucault; article 'Self writing', part of a series of studies "the arts of oneself" in "Ethics/Essential works" Volume One; Allan Lane/The Penguin Press; 1997; p.207) This proposed daily writing exercise could take only place on the basis of the 'impersonal' and 'collective' device called language, it was a strict private exercise, not meant to be shown to others and still, when writing one had the feeling to be open to the gaze of others, or as Foucault formulates it: "the constraint that the presence of others exerts in the domain of conduct, writing will exert in the domain of the inner impulses of the soul." (ibid. p.208) Expressing one's thoughts in the device of 'language' implies adapting to the embedded value system of the cultural group that uses that language. One might feel free to use any language construction that comes to the mind, but in the end freely moving thoughts, not having any substance yet, need to be cast in the mould of an existing language to be fixed in writing. It is in that process that though alone, one is not really alone, while writing 'the others' are always looking over your shoulder. One wonders if the writing down of haunting images, of devilish thoughts would have an auto-cathartic effect, would function as a purgative medicine that drives out the dark forces within ourselves, a 'katharsis' effect, an act of 'self-art' where one is author, actor and audience at the same time, thus realizing the classical idea as formulated by Aristotle in his treatise on tragedy, the 'Poetics': "...through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions". (EB 13; p.14/1b) In our time we happily go around in the ghostly labyrinths of the inner souls of other writers, who apparently did not constrain themselves, be it De Sade, La Fontaine or Nietzsche, unhindered by the never ending academic debate whether this soul-hiking is just an aesthetical pleasure for the sake of art only, outside the current of ordinary human feeling, or that such darkish expositions will awaken our emotions, will learn us

something which is applicable to our own lives. (for a longer expose of this debate see EB 13; p.14-15)

XVII

The writer may show his deepest self to the reader, but apart from the professional critics, the academic discourses and fan mail the reader remains invisible for the writer. "Why can I not see the face of my reader through these seraphic pages" writes Lautréamont in his "Chants de Maldoror" and he laments the "opacity of this sheet of paper" on which he is writing being "the most formidable of obstacles". (quoted in Alex de Jonge "Nightmare culture, Lautréamont & 'Les chants de Maldoror'"; St. Martin's Press; New York; 1973; p.165) It is in personal correspondence that writing paper becomes transparent. We have an image of the other while writing, and can see ourselves when we read what we just have written. A letter thus becomes looking glass, mirror and telescope at the same time. I think that the personal letter, the correspondence between two people is one of the most constant forms of expression through history. "To write is thus to 'show oneself', to project oneself in view, to make one's own face appear in the other's presence. And by this it should be understood that the letter is both a gaze that one focuses on the addressee (through the missive he receives, he feels looked at) and a way of offering oneself to his gaze by what one tells him about oneself." This is Michel Foucault summarizing classic ideas on letter writing by Seneca and Demetrius (p.216) and it sounds like a contemporary analysis of the writing of letters twenty centuries later.

XVIII

I am a writer of letters since the time I was a boy. In the beginning I was forced to write these regular letters to my aunts, uncles and grandmother, but soon I developed a taste for it and enjoyed the exercise. I even had, as a boy, sparse correspondence with my father who I did not see for more than ten years because of a bad divorce. So in a way I learned to show myself in writing to people I knew and people I did not know. Writing letters have helped me when travelling alone and studying in other countries, to overcome feelings of loneliness and most of all to canalize the waves of emotion in relationships with women. There were travels, friends, a circle of international contacts, myself living in other countries, my girl friend finding work on an other continent, me staying behind for many months, all letter producing circumstances. I still prefer to write my personal letters by hand, the direct notation of a flow of thoughts, no backspace or delete button as on a each correction or rephrasing visible, with only the radical option of crumpling up a letter and a fresh start. Such a collection of manuscript memorabilia is only half a collection, the self, the other half stays with the addressee, and it is only through the sad circumstance of people dying that some of my own letters have come back to me. Such dramatic moments have pushed me to read some letters again. Normally all this

correspondence resides in binders, nothing but a warehouse of memories, somewhere in the attic. I rarely look at them, it is sufficient to know that they are there, traces of my life that will enable me to go back on the trail whenever I wish to do so.

XIX

Electronic mail has made correspondence more easy, one can send mail to one or more addressees in a single gesture, the speed of delivery is almost instant, the number of people one regularly contacts increases, but there are differences with the now old fashioned ways of handwritten correspondence. The final fixity of the text when one composes the initial electronic letter is still there, but when one gets a reply something changes. We often get our whole letter or parts of it back in replicated form, marked with some graphical signs, with only short answers after each particular section. Such business like efficiency can have a deadening effect on the quality of our communication, as we are missing the selective rephrasing by the other of our own observations, remarks and questions, seeing ourselves in a mirror through the answer of the other. The speed of communication makes our letters shorter, the exchange of letters more dynamic, with the system of on line 'chatting', interactive writing, as the ultimate written communication form after which we enter another realm, that of telephony. On line chatting, a dialogue over computer networks through keyboard typing, is a way of communication that normally doesn't leave traces, except when one keeps a so called 'log file' open which will capture the complete content of a chat session. That is almost on the same level as taping our telephone conversations, and telephone taping easily leads to telephone tapping. As long as we are not into black mailing or preserving our role as a president of a big firm or a country, it is something that is 'not done'. Of course we will remember our personal conversations, not as proof of law, but through the inconsistent and biased properties through which our mind wishes to remember them.

XX

Dematerialization of electronic communication diminishes the amount of traces that are left, hence the memory function such forms of communication can have. For next generation there might be less personal traces left from the end of the 20th century when the evaporating telephone, fax, email and other electronic communication systems took over, than from the three previous centuries when written and printed communication in ink on paper was more widely used. It is possible to keep 'back-up' copies of electronic documents, but their invisibility, their need of the right kind of equipment and software to make the content of a floppy, tape, CD-Rom, Zip-cartridge or whatever other form of electronic information carrier, audible or visible, the fact that the content of these back-ups can not be spatially spread out for evaluation and deselection, that the only access to

these electronic documents is through the small window of a computer screen, means that many of these indistinct back-ups of our memories will be easily lost or thrown away, because one did not realize any more what was on it. In a way we are partly moving back to ancient times when notes for daily use were written on clay and wax tablets or black boards that could be reused, as more permanent writing materials were not abundantly available. Erasing or wiping of the writing surface for reuse as in ancient times, has been superseded by the regular deletion of digital information in modern times.

XXI

Engraving and writing, have always been used in metaphors for the way we remember, how we externalise what was on our mind, how we make a prosthesis for the mind, create 'artificial memory'. It is found in our daily language: something is "engraved" or "impressed on my mind", "stamped on my memory". And with the changing over time of the technology of making notes, of depicting and recording, metaphors for remembering are keeping pace, from impressing a seal into wax, to writing with a pen on paper, painting a picture, photographing, recording with a phonograph, film, video, using a computer. The latest, multi media, computer is a device which allows us to create almost unlimited image surfaces and sound events, representing texts, sound, still or moving images, or combinations thereof. For many people there is a similarity between the working of their own mind and the coding and decoding processes that form the basis of the functioning of a computer. At the beginning of this century Sigmund Freud used in a similar way a device that was called a 'Wunderblock', a 'magic writing pad', as a metaphor. They still exist as a children's toy in a more modern form with plastic sheets and carbon paper instead of mica and wax: a small frame with a transparent top layer, an opaque middle, and a black layer below; on the spots were one writes with a stylus the layers will be pressed together and the writing becomes visible; by separating the layers again, through moving a strip between them, the text disappears from the surface, but physically the traces still exist in the lower black layer where in time they fade away because they are overwritten. In the words of Freud: "Denkt man sich, dass während eine Hand die Oberfläche des Wunderblocks beschreibt, eine andere periodisch das Deckblatt desselben von der Wachstafel abhebt, so wäre das eine Versinnlichung der Art, wie ich mir die Funktion unseres seelischen Wahrnehmungsapparats vorstellen wollte." Freud also uses another metaphor of the mind whereby he sees himself as an archaeologist who studies an imaginary Rome, the city with a long and copious past, "an entity () in which nothing that has once come into existence will have passed away and all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest one", a Rome where one could admire the Coliseum and at the same time the "vanished Golden House of Nero" that once stood at the same spot. Freud uses this unimaginable and absurd fantasy to explain the difficulty "to represent historical sequence in spatial terms", because "the same space cannot have two different contents" and he concludes: "It shows us how far we are from mastering the characteristics of mental life by representing them in pictorial terms". (p.226) It is good to point to the shortcomings of this kind of metaphors, but we can not do without such analogies, such visualisations when we want to represent the invisible workings of our own mind. Freud has had a life long obsession with archaeology and there is a strong parallel between his interest in this subject and the

development of his theories. The "clearing away, layer by layer, of the pathogenic psychical material" compares with the technique of excavating a buried city. The archaeologist uncovers objects, dates them, reassemble them and tries to place them back in their original context, in much the same way as the psychologist tries to uncover the past of his patients. () Freud was also collecting archaeological objects, his working spaces in Vienna were filled with them. He started to collect after the death of his father, in 1896 when he went through a period of self-doubt and self-analysis. These antique objects, mostly rings, scarabs and statuettes were comforting him in this period of grief and he continued the collection till his death when it had grown to over 3000 pieces. Already in 1895 Freud had analyzed why old maids keep dogs and old bachelors collect things like snuffboxes, the first as a substitute for a companion in life and the latter for his need to make a "multitude of conquests". Freud observes something that is also applicable to himself "every collector is a substitute for a Dun Juan Tenerrio", and concludes these kind of things are nothing but "erotic equivalents". () To many of us now such an analysis is too much a value judgement, there is an implicit hierarchy in it, as if there exists an accepted standard of which personal and emotional relations are good and which are bad, we might nowadays feel more comfortable with the acceptance of a wide variety of relational forms, not just between one human and other humans, but also between humans and any other object of affection they choose.

XXII

Personal memorabilia can be almost anything, it need not be relics that have been part of, or were in touch with those who were close to us, spaces we lived in, places we travelled to, personal fortune and misfortune. We also can express ourselves through the collecting of objects we fancy, things we choose as personal representatives. It can be artworks, any kind of antique objects, books, gramophone records, cd's, videos, post stamps, coins, match and cigarette boxes, sugar bags, wrist watches, empty or full wine bottles, furniture, houses, cars. Depending on 'your class', the money you can spend and the amount of space you have, it can be 'real things', replicas, reproductions or small scale models, though the last type of objects do have an extra function, giving us a feeling of being in possession and control like a giant, a king of the toys, a god like master of a miniature world. Many people find comfort in collecting objects because one is able to gaze at them, without them gazing back at you. The french writer Jean Baudrillard observes this kind of relationships with another collection item, pet animals, in his article on "the system of collecting". He extends this relationship to any other collectable object and following Freud's observation in 1895 he writes in 1994: "This is why one invests in objects all that one finds impossible to invest in human relationships. This is why men so quickly seeks out the company of objects when he needs to recuperate." (Jean Baudrillard; NB p.14) Some even say that collecting is the chief mode of our culture: "not politics, not religion but collecting". (Sarat Maharaj/NB p15) It is interesting to note how the human urge to collect is represented as an elementary human faculty, in the literature on the history of the modern museum, like Reinhard Brandt did in his contribution to a recent congress on museology: "Wer nichts sammelt, kann nicht leben, sondern regrediert zur Materie und wird selbst gesammelt." A collection always needs to

be more than one thing, knowledge is based on comparing and ordering of different things: "Zur Erkenntnis bedarf es die Sammlung". (NB p51) There are others who even specify the dynamics of such creation of knowledge "the plenitude of taxonomy opens up the space for collectibles to be identified, but at the same time the plenitude of that which is to be collected hastens the need to classify." () Baudrillard puts the emphasis somewhat different, focusing on the egocentric needs of the individual who is not searching for knowledge but for himself: "The singular object never impedes the process of narcissistic projection, which ranges over an indefinite number of objects: on the contrary, it encourages such multiplication, thus associating itself with a mechanism whereby the image of the self is extended to the very limits of the collection. Here, indeed, lies the whole miracle of collecting. For it is invariably 'oneself' that one collects." (Jean Baudrillard; NB p.14)

XXIII

Of course such a collection of signs, semiophores, personal treasures, souvenirs, kitsch and tat, diaries and letters, or any other kind of collectibles that we use directly or indirectly to express ourselves, could remain exclusively intimate and private with us secretly or in seclusion perusing these memory objects and recalling inwardly their stories. More often such objects are on show in a house or displayed on special occasions to other people. Now there is a difference between objects tucked away in albums, boxes, binders, drawers, cupboards, cases, private rooms, or less frequented spaces of a house like the attic, and a more open display in the living quarters, on the wall, on the mantelpiece, the sideboard or in a glazed cabinet or showcase, or something as luxurious as a private gallery. The hidden objects need a special occasion, a ceremonial, to be displayed, their stories to be told. The impact of such infrequent showing of personal memorabilia and the accompanying story telling is more strong than with objects that are on show permanently. Their known histories are shared by the members of the household and friends and, over the years, these stories get standardized and meaning will wear away. Only new visitors to the house, who wonder about this display of objects, create a fresh opportunity for the stories to be told again. One could say that these objects on display are the attributes of a storyteller: "people who like to recount their adventures () a strange race () who feel half cheated of an experience unless it is retold". (Anne Morrow Lindbergh/NB 36)

XXIV

Remembering is not only an act of the will, often memories come and go on their own, with us being completely out of control. To constantly remember everything is an impossibility. Jorge Luis Borges, master of describing the impossible, tells the story of

'Funes, the memorious/The inexorable memory of Ireneo Funes' who is paralysed after a horse has thrown him on the ground, but also suddenly develops a faultless perceptive faculty and memory. He is confined to a darkish back room laying on a bed remembering everything: "He remembered the shapes of the clouds in the south at dawn on the 30th of April of 1882, and he could compare them in his recollection with the marbled grain in the design of a leather-bound book which he had seen only once...()... He could reconstruct all his dreams, all his fancies. Two or three times he had reconstructed an entire day. He told me: 'I have more memories in myself alone than all men have had since the world was a world'." (Jorge Luis Borges/Ficciones; p.112) The narrator, in this story by Borges, sums up many more examples of the phenomenal memory of Funes but in the end he comes to the conclusion that Funes can not think: "To think is to forget a difference, to generalize, to abstract. In the overly replete world of Funes there were nothing but details, almost contiguous details." (Jorge Luis Borges/Ficciones; p.115) The story ends with the death of this memory wonder. From one moment to the next this whole fabulous human storage medium was erased, the container of knowledge broke, its content spilled away.

XXV

Man has been a collector from his very beginnings, not so much a tool maker, a hunter with a weapon. "In collecting food man was also incited to collect information" writes Lewis Mumford in his book series on "technics and the human development" and he notes how the two pursuits went together: "Constantly picking and choosing, identifying, sampling and exploring, watching over his young and caring for his own kind -all this did more to develop human intelligence than any intermittent chipping of tools could have done." Mumford has done some counter speculation in the field of archaeology arguing that the surviving material evidence of stone flints, from which the term 'stone age' is derived, does not give enough value to the much wider use of organic resources in that period. The anthropologist Andreas Goppold uses the term 'fibre age' in his essay on the "morphology of cultural memory systems", be it materials from animals, hair, sinew, leather, or vegetable fibre.() Both Mumford and Goppold mention the copying by humans of the animal arts, nest building, weaving and spinning. Mumford places a special emphasis on the use of containers and he notes how functions of the own body were externalized: hands, mouth, stomach, womb and breasts mimicked in holes, hollow natural objects, baskets and pots, one could even extend this concept to communal containers like houses, towns, canals, ships, railways, airplanes.... Containers to sort, store and transport goods for later use. In the same line of thinking older people can be seen as repositories of the oral tradition and we often find the pot as a metaphor for their memory. It is in this process of collecting, storing and retrieving that the shift from the concrete to the symbolic took place, language developed, things could get other meanings besides their practical use as food or tool. In early times the selection, and associative grouping of things could have been a playful activity that helped to express abstract ideas by combination of concrete objects, generating what we now call 'metaphor', a carrier of meaning.

XXVI

The waste basket in the beginning of this string of tales can be used as such a metaphor, a container to store what we intend to forget before throwing it away, because to be able to know we have to throw, we must make selections, decide for ourselves what we find meaningful or not. Keeping everything is an impossibility, keeping too much makes us a slave of our own collection, keeping not a thing will make us a nobody. The worst thing is when a disaster or a violent act robs us of our material memories, because not only your past becomes less visible, also your vision on the future will be hindered. We can only look at the future by being able to look backwards by contemplating our past. So we need to be decisive, go over our past now and then and choose what is meant for the dustman, for the collective dung heap, to be burned, recycled as electricity, pester for a while our contemporaries with exhaustion fumes (for nothing is lost, everything becomes something else). When we have thus put things outside on the street, neatly packed in grey plastic bags, because even in this final stage one should try to refrain from showing oneself, there are the 'morning stars', those who roam the streets to see what is still usable, just before it is officially collected as waste; some neatly pick something out without leaving a trace, others roughly tear open and scatter the waste bags content over the pavement while looking if there is something for them in it, to be taken home, to begin a new life in a different context, or to be sold at the flea market. A wind blows through my street a little while later and playfully whirls some papers through the air, some with pictures, some covered with writing and looking from my window I see someone making a few fast steps, picking it up, looking, glancing very briefly and dropping it again, a story that failed to be written, but who knows what will happen a little further down the street, out of my sight...

Tjebbe van Tijen

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