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The art of memory in the digital age

Esther Zarzo*

University of Alicante, Campus de Sant Vicent del Raspeig, Alicante, Ap. 99. E-03080, Spain

Abstract

Across this work we expose an innovation in educational experiences consisting of the implementation of the art of memory as a technique of metacognitive organization of knowledge within a Virtual Learning Environment. We describe a series of educational activities designed following the classical rules of mnemonic art, elaborated with *Mind-mapping* software and implemented using a *Moodle* platform. All especially adapted for senior high school students studying Philosophy.

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1. Introduction

The ongoing development of information and communication technologies raises numerous challenges to humanities (Sánchez-Mesa Martínez, 2010) and their pedagogy, among which, in our view, include those related to the saturation of information, the indiscriminate use of the image, and the acceleration of the time experience.

The use of information that comes from the Internet demands a highly complex task of selection and organization from students, in order to orient themselves on the net and build their own knowledge. However, the Internet is characterized by an information saturation that, whilst appearing to have full access to information, actually privatizes it, in the sense that proper access and comprehension is made difficult due to the lack of search criteria on the part of students and proper training in its use.

On the other hand, the image industry and virtual culture have altered both the nature and the function of images, originating new modalities for the perception, assimilation and communication of knowledge. Thus a visual culture emerges that is characterized by the tendency to transform everything into an image (Mierzoeff, 1999, 21). In this

* Corresponding author. Tel.: 96 590 9435
E-mail address: estherzarzo@gmail.com

situation, the mass media generates hyper realities that can not be integrated by the students as meaningful concepts, as the images' objective is not to educate how to form desire in a consistent way but to diversify desire, even by creating contradictory desires. External hyper realities that end by totally replacing the possible contemplative image.

Finally, the speed of which information is transmitted, because it is not balanced out with techniques for the humanistic comprehension and ordering of the content, reduce the intentional time to the point that it becomes an instantaneous presentation of the external events, thus eliminating the reflection space that is necessary to elaborate the meaning (Koselleck, 1979). As a consequence, reality becomes timeless, delocalized and dematerialized.

It is indispensable to provide students with a technique that allows them to organize knowledge in a reticular, multidisciplinary and comparative way that integrates the image in a way that is humanistically enriching. A technique that enables them not only to give meaning to their life experiences in physical and virtual environments, but to also articulate an expression of their own that is framed within a consistent image of the world.

In our view, the art of memory, the rhetoric operation focused on the design of the contemplative image, is susceptible to being implemented in strategies of metacognitive organization in a Virtual Learning Environment.

The work that follows is structured into three parts. The first, where the classical rules of the art of memory for the humanistic design of the loci and the image are briefly exposed. The second part, where we describe a series of educational activities designed with the loci-image mnemonic technique, elaborated with the Mind-mapping software and implemented in a course designed on a Moodle platform (Cole, 2008). All this is adapted for senior high school students studying Philosophy. Finally, we evaluate the virtues of this didactic methodology analyzing the reflections of students through their portfolio.

With this proposal we resume the reflection of the technique taking a similar line to Ortega y Gasset (2014), as well as the neo-humanistic ideal of Dewey's pragmatism (1966), with an "aesthetic of the media" approach to the educational issue, through which we intend to answer not only the question of what to do with technology, but also the question of how we are as technological beings (Molinuevo, 2004).

2. The art of memory

It could be said that a postromantic image of memory currently prevails, the result of two fundamental reductions being made on the classic concept (Ricoeur, 2000). The first of them, derived from the tradition of transcendental idealism, is based on the statement that memory is an individual experience, which is a fallacy in itself, because every reflection about oneself implies a reflection on their situation in the world and on the people they have relationship with. And the second is a consequence of the extrapolation of the concept of computational memory specific to the positivist paradigm, which likens the art of memory to non-reflective memory techniques, rote learning or abilities like speed reading.

However, on the classical rhetoric paradigm, framed within the historical conception of the *Magistra vitae*, memory is considered to be the faculty of intentional time, and as a consequence, as the art of the technique of reflective thought, corresponding selection and significant order of the knowledge, with the main objective of facilitating its recall in future situations and of guiding the creation of practical solutions to problems of the action.

Although classic tradition recognizes the poet Simonides of Ceos as the inventor of the art of memory, the oldest known text where the technical rules are clearly exposed is the anonymous manual *Ad Herennium* (Cicero, 1981), whose fortuitous attribution to Cicero has ensured their transmission up to now. In this manual the art of memory is defined as the technique that is used for the artificial development of the natural memory, based in three subgroups of rules: selection criteria and design of the mnemonic loci, guidelines for the creation of the memory image of the element that we wish to remember, and the parameters of the location of said image.

Under the assumption that images, as sensible elements, require a time-space location, it is postulated that an architectonical order preserves those of the images located within it. It is normatively established that the memory exercise must start with the personal construction of the mnemonic building, as one already complete would lack effectiveness for not being significantly interwoven into the disciple's imagination. This implies that the teacher doesn't transmit the mnemo-technic system objectively, but only facilitates the guidelines to configure both loci and images, and encourages the student to reflectively construct their own internal space.

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