

Flat thoughts
: The Interplay of Images, Memories, and Perceptions

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How does the interplay between mental images, photographs, and memories shape our perception of reality, and to what extent does it influence our understanding of the ever-changing world around us?

What images are created from this physical image upon seeing it? What remains in our heads and hearts visually and how this changes over time?

To write,
About an image I don't remember,
The dreams that I forgot,
The memories that got lost.

To write, about the images and memories I remember, but it changes every time I remember it; To try to understand a world I cannot fully grasp, an image I am not sure if I understood.

Images, as visuals, visible and invisible; as external and internal, as photographs and mental images; as real but not actual, ideal but not abstract; as Henri Bergson proposes that images exist in an intermediate space, neither entirely the 'thing' nor its representation.

Photographs, as external images, sometimes serve as tangible reminders of our past. They capture moments in time, preserving them on a two-dimensional surface. They allow us to look into an (un)familiar world, to revisit the past, and reconnect with moments otherwise lost to time. Like Lewis Baltz described, Photography is an instrument capable of perpetuating everything that was lost yesterday and of saving what may vanish tomorrow. It freezes moments in time, serving as bridges between past and present, connecting our memories with the visual world.

Mental images, as pictures in our minds, the fabric of thoughts and imaginations; as memories, something one remembers; as dreams, and dreams as memories; as fictions; as something real and ideal but not quite tangible.

Memories, as things we remembered, but sometimes slip through our grasp like elusive dreams; even in the act of remembering, our memories shift and evolve, sometimes overlaps with other memories or reality or dreams; Each time we revisit a memory, it is as if we are reassembling a puzzle, and the resulting image is never quite the same. We often find ourselves in a paradoxical situation, attempting to articulate the images and recollections that, at times, remain just beyond our reach.

Dreams, as part of memories and memories as part of dreams. They serve as a fascinating terrain where reality interwoven with the intangible and where memories and imaginative constructs coexist. Within dreamscapes, mental images dance with a narrative that feels both familiar and foreign, evoking a sense of recognition while unveiling entirely new narratives. Dreams, or the memories from dreams, sometimes blur the distinction between what is experienced and what is imagined; Sometimes I got mixed up with memories and dreams, thinking if I made it all up of is only dreaming.

Our external and internal images are in constant dialogue, shaping our understanding of the world. The images etched in our minds influence our perceptions, and, in turn, the external world we encounter informs our internal images. It's a continuous loop, a kaleidoscope of existence that shifts and changes with every movement.

Memories and perceptions constantly shift and intertwine, overlapping with emotions, dreams, images, and imaginations. When experiences overlap with experiences therefore a new experience comes into existence; When one image meets another, a new image begins to take form - a recreation of the original, an image of an image.

Memories can be altered each time they are recalled, According to the Memory Reconsolidation theory, when a memory is recalled, it enters a transient state where the retrieved memory becomes uncertain, allowing new information, emotions, or interpretations to be integrated. As a result, each time we revisit a memory, we might unknowingly introduce alterations, additions, or deletions to it.

Similarly, as Henri Bergson suggests in "Matter and Memory," memory is not a static repository of the past, but a dynamic, ever-changing force that interacts with our perceptions and influences our understanding of the present. Bergson's concept of duration, where the past and present intermingle. Memories are not fixed entities but living constructs that are constantly being refreshed, just as the images we perceive are subject to the fluidity of our interpretations.

Each individual has their own perceptions and interpretations of how to perceive and understand the world around us based on their personal experiences that are

different than others. In other words, we don't perceive or feel things in precisely the same manner as anyone else.

At times, I find myself pondering why my thoughts align with certain perspectives while diverging from others. I wonder why particular beliefs resonate with me while others don't quite hold the same significance.

Having spent a few years on the other side of the world, being an outsider between here and there, surrounded by people from diverse backgrounds, I realized that these divergences in perspectives arise not only from personal encounters but also from the broader cultural narratives that mold our perceptions. For instance, having grown up in an Eastern environment, I gradually realized that I was subconsciously influenced by the Eastern way of thinking.

Eastern and Western philosophies offers distinct approaches of understanding the world, such as the subject of time and its influences on life.

In Western Philosophy, time is often viewed as a linear progression from the past to the present and then to the future. This perspective emphasizes historical progress and the evolution of ideas. Understanding the past in western philosophy often involves examining historical events, movements, and ideas to comprehend how they have shaped the present.

In Eastern Philosophy such as Buddhism, the concept of time and impermanence is deeply rooted in the teachings on the Three Marks of Existence. Central to these teachings is the principle of Aniccā, which translates to impermanence. It emphasizes the transient nature of all phenomena, whether material or spiritual, tangible or intangible, thoughts, memories, emotions, perceptions, interpretations, and even the self, exist in a constant state of flux, arising and ceasing. Time is linked to this impermanence, serving as the medium through which change manifests. The past is preserved through memories, the present unfolds in fleeting moments, and the future remains uncertain or unknown.

In this dynamic world where everything is constantly changing; where times, memories, and images fluids and keep recurring; where the past and present intermingle and the threads of forgetting and remembering weave together.

Sometimes I think back to when I was a child of merely two years old or even younger, wonder how was my sensations and perceptions were like for the world around me, a time when memory had not yet woven its threads or where certain memories have long faded away. However, no matter how hard I tried or how much I wanted to remember, I am confronted with the realization that recapturing the exact emotions and perspectives remains elusive. I couldn't feel the same way as I did before, nor can I see the same things in the same way again.

The way I can sort of see what was like back when I was a child is to look at the photographs from the early days and to try to reconnect to the memory; but that is still different than if it is a perspective from me perceiving the world and my surroundings. Photographs serve as external surfaces, a blend of objectivity and subjectivity. On one hand, they render visible glimpses of life, a tangible reality for others. On the other, each captured moment carries a distinct perspective — an angle from the photographer. When viewing a photo taken by someone else, the perspective remains external, as it doesn't align with your personal viewpoint.

In revisiting the family photo albums, the forgotten memories sometimes resurfaced and be remembered unexpectedly. As Aleide Assmann writes on an article about forgetting and remembering on archives, 'What has sunk to the unsorted bottom of the forgotten in personal memory can, however, rise to the surface again under certain circumstances. What we call forgetting is usually a latent memory to which we have lost the password; when it is accidentally hit, a piece of sensually lived past returns, completely unexpectedly.'

However, there are moments of dissonance and uncertainty, where the remembered experiences do not always align with captured moments. Sometimes the images in mind do not match the photographs, or the photographs do not match the memories, not completely.

Sometimes I look back at photographs from my childhood, struggled to recognize the person I once was. There are some pictures of me from when I was a little child in my grandma's photo albums, a thick stack. Sometimes I would go through them if I was there, to see the little me, but often I was surprised the person I saw in the photos was me. There's a sense of recognition, yet disbelief - how could that child be me?

There are photos from when I was little until the age that I slowly started building up memories in my mind that I still sort of remember nowadays, sometimes. Photos from different occasions, and me surrounded by different people and family members, mostly photos of me when I was a baby, and during kindergarten, that was the times when I was with my grandma.

There is a photo I once saw in the album, I forgot what's on the photo and the details anymore, but there's a child in the picture, I thought for a while that was a cousin or a relative until one day my mom sent me that photo and said, hey look, it's you when you were a child. I was surprised that I didn't think of it, even though I thought I did think she looked a bit like me but I wasn't sure, somehow I do not remember me being like that.

The photographs documented a version of me that felt both familiar and distant. The dissonance between mental images and physical photographs, or their alignment with memories, reminds me of the subjectivity inherent in memory, sometimes leaves me questioning the certainty of my recollections; sometimes I wonder if what I remember is an accurate reflection of the reality — a recollection of the original events, a fusion with the photographs, or a unique merrgence of both visual and mental imprints.

This sense of disorientation between the images of the past and present self brings to mind Roland Barthes' sentiments in 'Camera Lucida.' Barthes struggles to recognize his mother as child when sorting through old photo albums after her passing. He described, 'According to these photographs, sometimes I recognized a region of her face, a certain relation of nose and forehead, the movement of her arms, her hands. I never recognized her except in fragments, which is to say that I missed her being, and that therefore I missed her altogether. It was not she, and yet it was no one else. I would have recognized her among thousands of other women, yet I did not 'find' her. I recognized her differentially, not essentially. [...]'

The feeling of being disconnected in recognizing the most familiar person in the photos also happens to me, sometimes when I look at my own photos, sometimes my families. Thinking about it, I might not recognize if I see my grandmother's photo when she was younger, like my age. Actually I am not sure if I had ever seen

her photo from when she was younger, or that I simply could not recognize; as I failed to imagine her life before me, as I didn't exist yet.

Besides, from looking at the photo albums, there are many things I forgot, for example, I do not remember who were the photographers, and often I also don't remember the actual events that happened and were captured in the photos. But sometimes I remember the photos; or remembering from the photographs, through them reconnect or imagine the memories.

Remembering from a photograph, like recalling a dream, sometimes feels like a puzzle missing crucial pieces. As the fragments of memories and images, intertwine with forgetting and remembering, they shift and become a bit different every time.

Three years ago, when I left the land I grew up in and went to another side of the world, where ten thousand kilometers and 12 hours away, I still remember what my life was like when I was on the other side, the images were still vivid; I remembered the coffee place I always go to, the construction sounds, and my mom's voice from calling me from downstairs, the music that played out loud, noises from cars driving through as well as airplanes.

Three years later, as time passed and things changed, sometimes I felt like I remembered less and less of what my life was years ago from somewhere far away, or remember them differently than how I used to. It gets difficult to recall the other life when I am sort of in a completely different one. The memories I once held dear from home now seem distant, and my attempts to grasp them often feel like reaching for something just out of reach.

Sometimes I missed my life so much there on the other side, maybe so much that so I subconsciously chose to not remember a thing. Yet, not remembering lead to forgetting. Not remembering somehow becomes a habit so it becomes real.

The distance between here and there and the time and space gets bigger. Things will never happen again in the same way it was; the memories that slowly slipped through; the emotions that have changed as well as the landscapes.

I am afraid of loss, or not remembering, of the memories and the movements they creates when every time recounting and remembering them, as every remembrance seems to alter the images slightly. To preserve these fleeting moments, I try to capture them in photographs, to try to grasp the ungraspable things, and to keep the memories so I can remember them later. But sometimes I don't know if the camera helps with that or if photography makes everything worse.

We tend to remember specific details and moments captured in photographs, while forgetting others. The camera, in its attempts to freeze time, inadvertently becomes a tool for selective preservation, immortalizing specific instances while allowing the vast landscape of memory to slip through the cracks. The emotions, significance, or personal relevance shape the memories we retain, while others fade into the unknown realm of forgetfulness. The Selective memories work as a silent editor, crafting a narrative that aligns with our emotional needs and perceptions.

Similarly, nowadays in the digital era, on social media platforms, individuals often curate and share specific aspects of their lives, and present moments that align with their desired identity. People tend to share highlights or significant events, creating a narrative from their lives and experiences. This selective sharing can impact memory construction by emphasizing certain moments over others. As a result, memories might be formed based on these curated representations rather than encompassing the entirety of lived experiences.

The fluidity of memory lies in its inherent selectivity, similar to the curated nature of photography. Just as we consciously or unconsciously choose which memories to highlight, photography is also a medium of selective preservation.

However, photographs as physical objects and materials, as a negative or positive film, as a print, they fade, deteriorate and decay under the influences of time and varying conditions; and as digital images, they are subject to technological obsolescence, data loss or alteration.

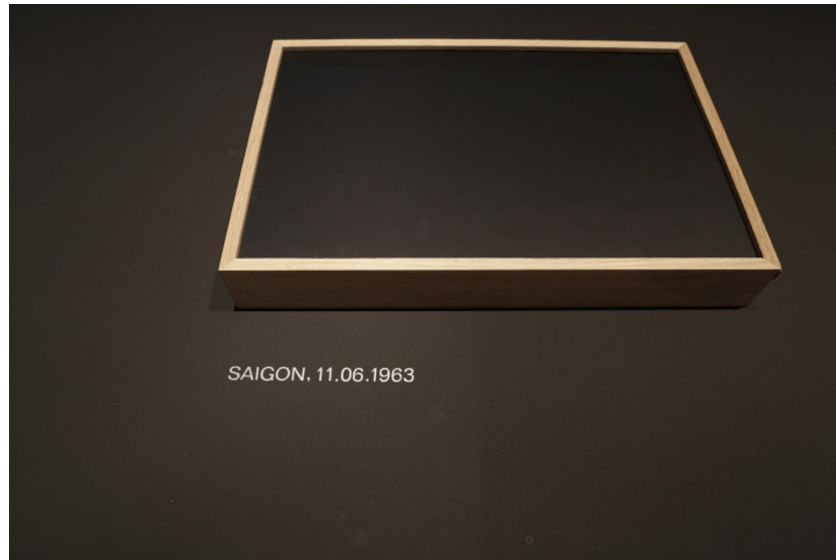
As David Campany explored the decay of photographic archives in his introduction to the book 'Cultura di Polvere', he wrote 'The promise of photography, born at the onset of a rapidly changing modern world, was immortality in the form of the frozen image that would last forever and lend itself

to the mastery of history and progress. But it was a promise that could not be kept. It is ironic that photography, a medium so often with the fixing of appearances, should turn out to be so materially susceptible, and more ironic still that this medium finds the visual effects of time - decay, deterioration, mold, entropy- to be so photogenic, should inevitably itself succumb to these effects. If photographs preserve anything, it is only for a short time, and only if they themselves are preserved.'

The fragility of physical photographs, succumbing to the inevitable effects of time and decay, mirrors the natural process of forgetting or alteration of memories and the transient nature of our own existence. Just as photographs succumb to decay and alteration, so do our memories fade and transform over time.

Moreover, as an example of the artistic representation of preserving transient moments in materials, and the uncertainty surrounding photography in retaining memories, brings to mind of this work titled 'Flash Memory' made by Jan Rosseel and Gauthier Oushoorn.

Flash Memory consists of multiple lightproof oak boxes that contain iconic images of historical events. The images are rephotographed and printed in the darkroom onto photographic paper without fixing the emulsion, causing a continuous chemical process ensues upon exposure to light. Each print undergoes a unique transformation dictated by the interplay of chemicals, light, and environmental conditions, eventually turning the images into blackness. Each time the image being viewed reflects a different moment, as the image is constantly changing under the influence of varying conditions. In the end the images remained temporarily and only a certain number of people were able to see the images.



Flash Memory, Jan Rosseel and Gauthier Oushoorn, 2016/2017

The images held within our minds echo the transient nature of physical photographs. Images and memories in minds get involved and altered with each instance, while the physical photographs constantly react to reality and slowly lead to deconstruction.

Furthermore, with digital images and memories, they seem to draw a different but equally transformative patterns, shape by technological advancements, accessibilities, and the complexities of data storage and preservation.

Digital images, videos and files are stored in formats that are designed to last for a long time, yet they are also inclined to their own vulnerabilities. For instance, technology obsolescence often poses a threat as older file formats or storage devices becomes incompatible with evolving current hardware and software. This can render digital memories inaccessible, causing it to be gradually eroded or lost.

Besides, digital images can be easily altered, manipulated, or edited. The editing software and filters allow for the modification of digital images, which potentially distorting the authenticity of the original image and memory.

However, while digital memories do not decay in the traditional sense, they experience transformations marked by the vulnerability to data loss, technological obsolescence, and manipulations. Just as physical photographs degrade over time, digital images and memories face challenges that affect their stability, accessibility and authenticity over time.

These visual imprints, whether captured on film or stored digitally, they decay or altered, illustrates the transience inherent in these mediums. Images, as both preservers and distorters of memory, reflect the impermanence nature of images and memories.

Contemplating the fleeting nature of images and memories, brings back to mind the nature of life indicated by Buddhist philosophy. Buddhism recognizes the impermanence and fleeting nature of life. Like the fleeting images preserved in photographs, life itself unfolds as a continuum of fleeting moments, embodying constant change and impermanence. To photograph is not merely to immortalize a moment but to confront the impermanence of existence. The camera, in freezing moments, captures not only the visible but also the intangible essence of a fleeting instant. Each click of the camera serves as a silent acknowledgment of the impermanence, a testament to the moments that will never be replicated.

As artist Tarrah Krajnak described, ‘To photograph, is to absorb, document, index, steal. Is to archive, copy, claim, death, desire, exclude, erase, expose, frame, hold breath, mediate, record, remember, represent, recurrent, shoot, take, violate [...]’

To photograph is to remember, of the moments that might never happen and the person who might never be meeting again, is to confront the fleeting nature of existence, to hold a piece of the world that might otherwise slip through our grasp. But somehow the remembered memories in mind as well as the recorded memories and images never stay the same, they change, alter, and decay just like anything else.

The past we remember are not static but rather constantly evolving entities influenced by various internal and external factors. The photographs and mental imprints we carry influence our perceptions, while the world we encounter continually informs and reshapes these internal images. Each time we revisit a memory, it is as if we are rewriting a story, incorporating new emotions, insights, and understandings.

In this interplay between the tangible and the intangible, our understanding of reality is constantly changing. Our memories, images and perceptions are influenced by our experiences, emotions, and interpretations. Memories intertwine with present experiences, emotions, and insights, evolving into narratives that echo the essence of our current selves.

The photograph becomes a bridge between then and now, a tangible link to a reality that was there and a reminder of how our perceptions have evolved. To look into the other world, to imagine, or to remember the forgotten memories; to try to understand the image might never be understood.

It is a world that defies simple categorization, existing in the delicate balance between the known and unknown, remembering and forgetting.

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