

MEMORY

STRUCTURE IS MEMORY

Can an entity such as a city be said to have memory? One's first reaction may be to doubt that this can be so. However if we begin to consider memory as something which is, rather than something which one has it is possible to identify characteristics which have much in common with the organisation of memory in the human structure.

1. Little survives of the earliest wooden buildings, but before the days of bricks and mortar, cities were built of the natural stone of the district. "The Granite City" - quartz, mica and felspar in certain proportions will produce a certain variety of granite. Why should this always be so? The ingredients provided by nature seem to have an in-built faculty which ensures that when they are combined in a certain way, under the same conditions, the same result will automatically follow. This surely may be called instinctive memory.

Why is a brick hard and resistant to pressure? We can't say "it consciously remembers how to be a brick", but we can say that certain ingredients, bonded together by nature, with or without the assistance of man, will resist the outside pressures of atmosphere and erosion for a limited life span.

Neither the bricks nor the granite will last for ever; man may not be able to predict their life span, and in the case of the granite it may outlast his existence on the planet. Nevertheless its ending is built into its beginning by the same instinctive memory.

2. Throughout the world, cities grow in much the same way. Man forms the stones or bricks into buildings which, if they are constructed to conform with the laws of nature, hold together and do not fall down. Roads are developed so that the buildings may fulfil their purpose by interacting with each other, and so that the city may have outside communications, and interact with other cities in the land. The inhabitants interact as families, forming communities and working relationships.
3. The city is conditioned by its geographical position and by the types of people who take up residence there. Cities by the sea build up a maritime tradition; cities by great rivers link with trade routes: cities have grown up around fortified hilltops, around religious foundations. They have adapted themselves to the physical climate and, not always willingly, to the political climate of the time.
4. Out of the foregoing a character emerges - each city will have a certain image of its own. It will discover the most economical way of transacting its business so that day-to-day life can continue for the inhabitants. This, over a period of time, creates an atmosphere, a spirit of place, which is apparent even when the city sleeps.
5. There will be those in the city who have a particular awareness of its history, traditions and character. There may be museums, local history collections, traditions, festivals and pageants re-enacting incidents from its past - all fostering awareness of the city's ethos.

6. Cities do not last for ever. They rise and fall, and their life span is not governed by the life of the stones and bricks. But once the process of building begins, interaction is inevitably set in motion and the conditions of the age determine whether or not a collection of buildings which serve a community will grow into a city. This occurs throughout the world, wherever man emerges from the hunting and nomadic state and begins to form communities - first to reap the harvest of the land or sea, and then to trade. The process proceeds inexorably, governed by a vision of a city which relates to all other cities, past present and future, and by a half formed idea of what a city should be like.
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MEMORY IS STRUCTURE

Memory exists on several levels. As in the case of the city, so it is necessary to consider human memory as something which is, rather than a faculty which is consciously controlled.

Bodily Memory

The body grows from a single cell, which divides, and thus is multiplied. Instinct impels the growth, but if there were only this instinct to grow, what would we have - a rapidly expanding pulsating mass, such as we see in horror films? For the cells to develop into a body there must be an in-built factor of limitation, also association and interaction. All living beings display the characteristics of growth/structure/interaction (ie metabolism) and control. The lack of a limiting and controlling factor is evident in cancer cells.

However, dogs, cats, cattle and indeed all living beings grow from a single cell and have the characteristics described above. So why does a single fertilised cell grow into a human being, and not into a rabbit? There is, obviously, a pre-programming which ensures that a fertilised human cell has an “urge to identity” and, barring accidents or injury to the organism, will develop into a member of one of the races of mankind which, with all their differences, can still interbreed and reproduce the species. There is a kind of “necessity” which operates - because this is, this, this and this will follow. This is bodily memory; we are not conscious of it, but it is the basis of our individuality.

Organic Memory

The cells of the human embryo not only have to divide/combine a myriad times to produce a body, they must recognise one another, like combining with like to create organs which, with the provision of food, will function to keep the body active for its allotted life span. There must be a balance between speed of growth and degree of materiality. Within the similarities of race and family, each individual body has its own structural pattern. The pre-programmed life span is not only applicable to the body as a whole but to each of its component parts. Teeth do not grow at the same rate as toe nails. When a tooth comes to the end of its life span it is possible for the body to exist without - but when the heart or liver packs up it is a different matter.

It is the instinct of these organs to function and interact to keep the body alive. They operate without our conscious control, although we can observe them, for instance, in the pulsing of the blood and the rhythm of the breath. It is possible to observe that the body has its own activity/rest rhythm at all levels. (We read, and see TV programmes about fakirs and practitioners of yoga who can suspend their breathing whilst buried, or control the flow of blood if wounded - is it possible that they are extending consciousness to the level of organic memory?). If we should doubt the existence of organic memory perhaps we should consider what happens if the heart forgets to beat.

Bodily memory and organic memory do not enter normal everyday consciousness. They arise from the pre-programming of an instinct - the instinct to grow; to interact; to respond to the conditioning of the external environment.

Ordinary Memory of the World

From the instinct and the interaction of bodily and organic memory, and from the conditioning which begins to take place as soon as the body enters the world, arises an abstraction - the individual with the instinct to develop his own identity in the world - to interact with his fellow humans (starting with his mother) and with the basic urge to survive by adapting himself and making use of the conditions which he encounters, eventually reproducing to ensure the survival of his species.

Thus, we are considering an individual with an ego and with consciousness of a memory which relates to the world in which he lives.

Food is needed for this memory, in the form of impressions, interest, feelings and actions. Impressions are built up from interaction with others, and referred back for comparison with previous impressions and reactions. These are filtered through, and related to, the bodily structure - for instance just as the body has an activity/rest rhythm of its own, we find that rhythmic chants and rhymes are easier to remember than prose. TV jingles take advantage of this. Also, just as the physical body consists of "bundles" of constituents arranged in patterns, so mental patterns are constructed. The easiest way to be sure of remembering something is to hook it on to an existing pattern - for instance if you were born on the 7th July 1950 - 7.7.50 - and your friend's telephone number is 7750, you are much more likely to remember this than four figures without any association in your mind. Similar mnemonics are used as the basis for memory training courses.

This kind of memory is deceptive because we think we are fully conscious and in control, whereas a great deal of it is automatic and an unconscious association with what has gone before, therefore the reactions are not a conscious choice but a pre-determined pattern.

Man at this level is basically concerned with the most efficient method of survival and reproduction, A change of hierarchy is possible by effort, but as it is not essential for the physical survival of the human race, the majority are only dimly aware of its existence and possibilities.

Self-Remembering

At all levels man has the urge to return to unity. The physical body inhabited by an ego maintains its life span by a balance between, on the one hand, its urge towards identity and, on the other, its already built-in pre-programmed end, when life returns to like - dust to dust, ashes to ashes - which is inevitable.

During this life span, an abstraction may develop whereby the human being glimpses a different kind of unity and is drawn towards it, realising that beyond the ego there is an essential being with the right to develop a soul.

Various teachings aim at shifting awareness to another stage in the hierarchy. These include both traditional and modern methods - a study of religion and philosophy may be related to the latest discoveries of modern science; there is meditation; movements and dances. The self becomes a watcher of its own psychological processes and eventually a conscious evaluator of impressions received, leading to considered reactions and the initiation of appropriate actions.

Archetypal Memory

When self-remembering has been experienced another memory may be glimpsed - one which goes beyond the memory of an individual into that which is common to all mankind. The urge to unity may bring about a "keying in" to this level. Sometimes it is experienced in dreams; sometimes when a symbol, a story, a ritual, means far more than can be explained by its content. We begin to ask questions such as - why do fairy stories maintain their popularity and what do they mean? Why should a child fear the dark? Why should a baby instinctively fear to fall? Why are we stirred by stories of Heroes, Knights, Quests and Hidden Treasure?

Certain archetypal characters appear often in popular stories, films and television programmes - the wise man, the powerful man, the trickster, the beautiful maiden, the mother, the old crone.

This kind of memory, although veiled from day-to-day consciousness, may bring us in full circle to the first programming of mankind - the urge to be a member of the human race, and the urge to return to Unity.

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