



CONSTITUTION OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Exemplified in Football Club Culture

por Martin Hell¹

Abstract:

Social groups are constituted on a group consciousness. The members of the group share common beliefs and attitudes - the collective memory. In interaction it becomes constituted and strengthened. The collective memory causes that the members relate every new perception to the group consciousness. By the transmission of images the constituting beliefs get propagated. These collective images become mental the images of the single group members and by that the basis their way of perceiving and interpreting the world outside. This perceptive theory works like an circle around the members of the group. It restricts new, contradictive influences and works as a kind of protectional system against reality. We don't perceive with our senses, we perceive with our thoughts. Only in the process of self reflection, in re-thinking, we can overcome the theory and new experiences are possible again.

Keywords: social groups, collective memory, collective images, perception theory, protectional system, self reflection

Abstract:

Soziale Gruppen gründen sich auf ein Gruppenbewusstsein. Die Mitglieder der Gruppe teilen gemeinsame Vorstellungen und Haltungen – das kollektive Gedächtnis. In Interaktion mit der Gruppe wird dieses konstituiert und gestärkt. Das kollektive Gedächtnis bewirkt bei den Mitgliedern, dass jede neue Wahrnehmung in Relation zum Gruppenbewusstsein gesetzt wird. Durch den Transfer von Bildern werden die konstituierenden Vorstellungen weitergegeben. Die kollektiven Bilder werden zu den mentalen Bildern der einzelnen Gruppenmitglieder und damit Grundlage für deren Art die Welt zu sehen und zu interpretieren. Diese Wahrnehmungstheorie schließt sich wie ein Kreis um die Mitglieder und verhindert, dass neue Einflüsse, die ihr widersprechen, Beachtung erhalten. Sie fungiert als Abwehrmechanismus gegen die Realität. Wir

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nehmen nicht mehr mit unseren Sinnen wahr, sondern mit unseren Gedanken. Nur in einem Prozess der Selbstreflexion, des Überdenkens, kann die Theorie durchbrochen werden und neue Erfahrung wieder beginnen.

Keywords: soziale Gruppen, kollektives Gedächtnis, kollektive Bilder, Wahrnehmungstheorie, Abwehrsystem, Selbstreflexion

1 Preface

Communities are construing their identity out of a collective memory. Occurrences of the past get connected to myths, which constitute the identity of the community. The community gets its common history.

But it would be wrong to consider this history as objective, it rather comes up to the demands of the community. The collective memory should generate a kind of unity, discrepancies get reinterpreted or erased. The process of construing a collective memory is guided by selection and (re-)interpretation depending on the demands of the community. With such a collective memory it is much easier to legitimize groups within our society. The main question in this article will be, how these collective images and beliefs become the images and beliefs of the individuals in a community. This I want to exemplify in the football club culture.

2 The Theory of Fantasy (*Die Theorie der Phantasie*)

Today there is a discrepancy in the human perception between reality and society (Kulturgesellschaft), which affects our way of acting and thinking. Mankind is withdrawing from reality and turns to a world made according to its own beliefs and interpretations. In compensation for the real world mankind is construing its own world of fantasy. Dietmar





Kamper names the becoming reality of this world of fantasy "impossible presence" (unmögliche Gegenwart) (Kamper 1995).

This process is supported by capturing the world in images. So you get a pattern what you should perceive and regard as real. In the process of perception you can't see any longer the things as they are, you see the images of them, according to the theory of fantasy. Perception gets compensated by thinking, thinking correlates to a theory - the theory of fantasy.

In this context Kamper distinguishes "das Selbst" and "das Andere". "Das Andere" means what really exists, the real world. "Das Selbst", however, is what we expect to perceive. In other words, it is our subjective theory of perception, which is on the other hand influenced by the society and related to a kind of group-pressure. "It is much easier to think "das Selbst" than to perceive "das Andere"" (Kamper 1995, S 10; transl. M.H.).

Mankind projects itself as "das Selbst" into the world. Every perception is still what we are prepared to perceive. The only way to get out of this vicious circle, according to Kamper, is "a process of thinking that ends by the beginning of perception" (Kamper 1995, S 14; transl. M.H.). You have to be open for new influences; only thinking inside the theory is a keeping of the still known. By categorizing our perception it becomes a part of "das Selbst", "das Andere", the contradiction to the theory, gets lost. So it would be correct to say thinking in a theory will end in a homogeneous mankind. Terms like reason or rationality are just a project we force upon the world. But world is not rational; there are also things and even people who are abnormal, which we are not prepared to perceive (as actual fact). You would have to discover and to restrict "das Selbst" in your perception (in the way of "das Andere"); you have to start and accept a process of self reflection.





Two other terms Kamper distinguishes in this context are "Sinn" and "Sinne". "Sinn" describes the reason of occurrences and processes for certain persons or groups. The system of "das Selbst" becomes the foundation and the mental horizon of experiences and actions. "Sinn" justifies our perceptions. "Sinne" means our sense-organs: eye, ear, nose, mouth and skin. With our "Sinne" we can perceive "das Andere". But "Sinn" restricts the function of our "Sinne". "Sinne" are working against "Sinn"; "Perception is a mischief-maker" (Kamper 1995, S 24; transl. M.H.) for our theory, because it is questioning it. Only the perception in the meaning of "Sinne" makes it possible for us to jump, in the end, over the wall of theory.

"The fact that "das Selbst" deals with "Sinn" and "das Andere" with "Sinne" makes it possible to draw a first conclusion. Without our body, without our sense-organs, there is no "das Andere". In an absolute unreal world just rules "das Selbe" (Kamper 1995, S 26; transl. M.H.). This influence of perception by "Sinn" Kamper describes as a protectional system (Abwehrsystem). "Nobody can recognize and even protect himself against destruction" (Georges Baitelles, quo. in Kamper 1995, S 113; transl. M.H.). Because every new influence forces you to re-think everything, new experiences destruct your former thinking within "das Selbst". "Since Freud (...) we know, that the human consciousness is a protectional system, that knows the danger from outside. It's not just a medium of recognition and open relation to the world outside, it's a complex system of protection against new influences. Its function is negation, denial and repression of recognition" (Kamper 1995, S 28f; transl. M.H.).

So the main issue is the exclusion of the theoretically impossible. Consciousness just wants to be within its own rights, it doesn't like surprises. By this erroneous belief, that everything fits the theory of "das Selbst", there are still no more open questions. We think





that we can explain everything. But it's necessary to face new experiences and even surprises, to bring the thinking within the theory to an end. That's the only way that thinking becomes an expedition again.

For a better understanding I connected the terms using in this chapter in figure 1.

3 Collective Memory

There aren't any social groups, which are not defined by collective memory. "Where it [collective memory; M.H.] is central for the identity and consciousness of a social group, we can define it as memory community (Gedächtnisgemeinschaft)" (Assmann 1992, S 30; transl. M.H.). This generates a form of exclusiveness. The members of a group share a common past, a common memory.

3.1 Constitution of Collective Memory

For the constitution of a collective memory it has to comply with two preconditions: First of all, the things which happened must have been perceived, in a second step this occurrences need to be connected with a meaning according to the social group. Memory only exists by communication and interaction within the scope of a social group. Actually the group itself defines the scope for the memory of every single member. The group is managing the process of memory and oblivion. "The individual memory of a person constitutes itself because of the participation in communicative processes" (Assmann 1992, S 36f; transl. M.H.). "(...), that way the group is constituting and stabilizing in the interaction of the single perspectives of the group-members and by relating them to their collective past. The common beliefs of the group unite their individual memories and constitute a group-memory by communication" (Schmidt 2000, S 22; transl. M.H.). Regarding to the importance of communication we can draw the conclusion that oblivion





starts when interaction stops. We can also assume that all memories are collective, individual memories are just pure perceptions without a meaning.

Before something becomes collective memory it must have been connected to people, places and occurrences. Precondition is a "insoluble melting of term and image" (Assmann 1992, S 38; transl. M.H.). This connection has not to be geographically or historically, but the collective memory needs a concrete reference, or else nobody knows in which context the occurrence has a meaning for the group. "Memory is fixed to the concrete, to a place, to a gesture, to an image or to an object [("Erinnerungsfiguren"); M.H.]" (Nora 1998, S 28; transl. M.H.). This collective experienced time is managed periodically to give the memory a rhythm and to make it easier to propagate the common beliefs. If it is not possible for some group members to visit this collective places (e.g. they now live in an other country), they reproduce them (e.g. churches).

Collective memory is also concrete to an identity, which means that it is fixed to an actually existing social group. Collective memory is the connection between a group and their identity - an affiliation develops. On this collective memory they constitute their consciousness. The difference in relation to other groups gets underlined, the difference between the group members gets ignored. "In addition they constitute a consciousness independent of historical changes, what leads to the situation that facts used to be selected by and focused on resemblances and continuities" (Assmann 1992, S 40; transl. M.H.).

3.2 Celebrations and Ceremonies

"Erinnerungsfiguren" are often celebrated in ceremonies; pastence becomes presence. "In calling the pastence back to mind and the becoming presence of the constituting





"Erinnerungsfiguren", the group ascertains their identity" (Assmann 1992, S 53; transl. M.H.).

Collective memory has its special bodies ("Gedächtnisträger") responsible for the observance of the common rules and the correct compliance with the regulations of the group rituals; collective memory needs a guidance. There must be a clear difference between ceremony and workaday routine, that it's absolutely clear where one ends and the other one starts. This difference causes a bi-temporaneity of life. "Collective memory is the medium of non-workaday routine" (Assmann 1992, S 58; transl. M.H.).

Ceremony contains three functions: accumulation, ritual re-production and collective participation. By meeting and personal attendance the group members take part in the collective memory. "For such meetings causes must be generated: Ceremonies. Ceremonies and rituals ensure periodically the propagation of the identity-constituting beliefs and the re-production of the collective identity" (Assmann 1992, S 57; transl. M.H.). These rituals are often fixed to a certain day in the year, even when the actual occurrence lasts longer than a day. This secures that the ceremony will be celebrated periodically and so can't become oblivion. "Recurrent in permanence >of it's own accord<, the common beliefs can be carried on persistently and still remain special, because of the annual distance" (Schmidt 2000, S 54; transl. M.H.). Repetition is a principle of collective memory, because in these ceremonies the beliefs of the group get propagated. Precondition for the constitution and effectiveness of such an annual day is a high value of identification for the group members and the possibility of reproducing the initial occurrence. "Groups and societies, who constitute annual days, give the impression of continuity and stability to there members" (Schmidt 2000, S 24f; transl. M.H.).





Members of the group (MG) get connected through a common consciousness, by mutual confirmation of their identity (by the process of communication). In figure 2 you can see the mentioned terms in relation to each other.

4 Group - Image - Body

Hans Belting (Belting 2001) has an anthropologic focus on the issue: image. This means that you can think of an image only in connection with the human body, not exclusive. "In an anthropologic focus human is not the Lord of the images, but - in absolutely difference to that- an "accumulator of images", which occupy his body: he is at the mercy of the generated images, also when he always tries to control them" (Belting 2001, S 12; transl. M.H.) In this connection Belting outlines the relation of medium, image and body (viewer). Medium is the carrier of images. "Cause an image has no body, it needs a medium to embody in" (Belting 2001, S 17; transl. M.H.). "By looking at it, the image gets exchanged between the medium and us. The medium remains where it is, while the image occupies us" (Belting 2001, S 54; transl. M.H.) and becomes a mental image and consequently a part of our consciousness. "We can regard that as an act of metamorphosis, when these seen images become minded images, which then have a new place to exist at in our individual image memory. (...) an exchange between the carrier (medium) and our body, which is actually a natural medium, takes place" (Belting 2001, S 21; transl. M.H.). You can't think mental images and images carried by media as independent.

Reality inside of social groups get managed by images, which constitute the group consciousness. Images are used intentionally to homogenize the individual images of the group members and to generate a difference to other groups. "An "Image" is more than the result of perception. It's the result of individual and collective symbolization" (Belting 2001, S 11; transl. M.H.), at which the individual meaning is influenced by the common





consciousness. "Our mental images aren't always individual, but even if they source a collective origin, we regard them as individual. For that reason collective images cause that perceiving the world outside, isn't just an individual process, it's also a collective one, and that affects our perception. For this function images are absolutely necessary" (Belting 2001, S 21; transl. M.H.). Perceived images have to face a mental censorship, perception is a process of construction. So every single perception relates to our theory of perception, which is influenced by the group consciousness ("das Selbst") (see Chapter 2). "A change of perception by our senses for that by our theory is a change of reality for image. Images influence every new perception, because our senses are repressed by our mental images, to which we relate these new influences, intentional or not" (Belting 2001, S 66, transl. M.H.).

Belting also discusses the term "Erinnerungsfiguren": "Places of occurrence we remember and people remembering these places are related to each other" (Belting 2001, S 68; transl. M.H.). Many of these places we know only because of pictures we have seen. You even need not been there to know its meaning. "Our memory is (...) our own neural system of fictive places of occurrence. It is construed of a plexus of places, where we look for the images, which is the data for our memory" (Belting 2001, S 66, transl. M.H.) Human is such a place of occurrence too, because he is accumulating influences during his whole life and is sharing it (transfer of images) with other people by telling stories.

An other aspect, Belting brings on is the expansion of the spatial and temporal presence of the human body by portrait and coat of arms. His example is the time of Middle Ages: "Coat of arms was expanding the presence of a Prince to places where his body itself wasn't. But by placing his coat of arms, the land and the people there had to obey his rules. Also other people were able to bear his coat of arms. This kind of vesting was





generating a legal entity by expanding the body by a second body" (Belting 2001, S 122; transl. M.H.). If we put the social group on a level with the Prince, we can draw the conclusion that the group members obtain their identity by bearing its coat of arms. Figure 3 illustrates the results of this chapter.

5 Football Culture - The Club

A Football Club represents the social bracket for the social group: 'football fans'. People, who have actually nothing really in common in their normal day lives are coming together and become brothers and sisters, cause of a shared identity. Fans are taking part in a football matches not because they want to see a good game, they want to be a part of the game (ceremony). This causes a stabilization and renewal of the common identity - a "feeling of community". "(...) its not the performance, neither the stadium or the comfort, it's an issue of tradition and history of the club, which affects the number of fans and their expectations and attitude" (Horak/Marschik 1997, S 54f; transl. M.H.).

Without a playing field there is no football game. You need a certain place to play. This can be a street, a park or a stadium. Today the stadium is the meeting point of the fans, it's where the ceremony including all its rituals happens. In periodic ceremonies the group consciousness gets reproduced and propagated to the younger fans by singing the club hymns and taking part in special choreographies. The partition of the stadium in fan sectors strengthens the collective identity and the feeling of belonging together, in difference to the other group of fans.

Names like Uridil or Sindelar (players of the Austrian National Team of World Championships 1934) are still familiar to many people in Austria. These players are representing a time when Austria was one of the worlds best teams. They are our heroes





of victorious times. Every country knows its heroes, all other players are related with: Maradona in Argentina, Pele in Brazil, Puskas in Hungary, Beckenbauer in Germany or Roger Milla in Cameroun. For Austria the all-time-ever-heroes are probably Herbert Prohaska, Hans Krankl ("the hero of Cordoba"*) and Ernst Happel, who was player of the "Wunderteam" (3rd in WC 1934) and later one of the world best coaches.

These legends of sports are so important for the social group that they also become "Erinnerungsorte". Stadiums bear their names (Hanappi-Stadium, Happel-Stadium, etc.), on different club-homepages the best players of the clubs ever are united to an all-star-team and statistics homage to the players with most goals or played games. Also foreign players are beloved the same, as long as they play for the own club, but if they "dare" to play for an other team they get hissed off and derided according to their nationality. As an example a former player of Rapid Vienna Krzysztof Ratajczyk got beaten up by frustrated Rapid fans after changing the club. This example makes obvious that inside the group homogeneity gets generated, while the difference to other groups gets underlined.

"People who have actually nothing in common in normal day life meet every second week on a certain place in a stadium to speak on their club and football in general" (Plavec 2000, S 68; transl. M.H.). The term fan is decent back to "fanum", which means sanctuary. Thus a worldly value is regarded as holy (for the group).

A fan is characterized by (Herrmann 1977, S 106):

- strong affective solidarity to the reference object
- frequent attendance of meetings of this reference object
- high readiness of action in the interest of the reference object during meetings
- intensive engaging in this reference object and the entire group, also independent of the seen performance - thereby status of a sports expert





- strong identification with the reference object
- lots of own activities in sports

Many fans are coming in groups to the stadium, which also symbolizes a kind of group feeling and solidarity. That gets underlined by bearing the colours and symbols of the club (shirts, flags,..). That way the fans also become visually a part of the social group. " (...) the fan wants to represent that he even identifies with the club outside the stadium" (Schmidhofer 2000, S 8; transl. M.H.). "Cloths are becoming (...) a symbol of attitude and confession" (Becker/Pilz 1988, S 35; transl. M.H.). The colours of the club are an important part of the collective memory. They make it possible to recognize the group affiliation at first sight.

Another aspect of collective memory are the songs and chants. By singing them, the shared beliefs of the group get propagated, the own club cheered and the other one derided. There are four kind of chants (Becker/Pilz 1988, S 45):

- Ritual extermination of the enemy: e.g. "Austria Vienna - shit of Vienna"
- Deriding the other club or single players: e.g. "Otto Konrad is gay!" or at the end of the game "Go Home, Go Home!"
- Propagating the group consciousness and common beliefs: e.g. "Here rules Rapid Vienna!" or "Forever and always SC Sturm!"
- Different loud chants to be heard by the "whole world"

In addition nearly every club has its own club hymn: "You never walk alone!"

There is even a spill-over into the normal day life. Fans are reading magazines and newspapers, they are discussing as experts on their club and they are sometimes wearing





the colours and symbols. But just in the stadium they can "feel" the common identity in interaction with other group members.

6 Conclusion

In this chapter I want to relate the discussed theories (see figure 4). The social group, the club, is giving identity and "homeland" to a group of people who are characterised by the common sympathy for the club. Even if they have nothing in common in there every day routine, they periodically meet in the stadium to cheer their club team. The collective participation in the celebrity constitutes and strengthens a homogeneity (common identity) and the difference to other groups. The fans feel something special - a part of the group.

This also gets strengthened by appearing homogenous (colours and chants). Here we recognize the aspect of bearing a coat of arms, which causes the transfer of the collective group on to every member. Among the fans the rituals get acted. This happens by chants and myths; the group consciousness gets reconstituted and propagated to the new and younger members.

The group consciousness works like a circle around the members. By transferring the images every member comes into the circle. The images of common identity are reflected in the chants and myths about won games and terrific players of the past. TV-stations and newspapers are today the most important carriers of the Club-myths outside the stadium. These transmitted images are accumulated in the consciousness and affect our way of thinking. Every new perception is related to this theory which also works well as a protectional system against different opinions. So it's much easier for the fans to regard their own team playing better, fairer and more worth to get supported, while they apply





an totally different standard to the other team. That's the reason why "real" fans can't judge in an objective way.; also the referee only makes a good job when he rules in advantage for the own team.

The perception of a different opinion ("das Andere") gets ignored and regarded as impossible. The fans strictly deny that the other team may played better that time. Here it becomes obvious that the process of self reflection is nearly impossible to achieve, when you are too much influenced by "das Selbst" instead of listening, looking, feeling, tasting and smelling in the way of "das Andere". That's also the reason why Habermas' theory of the "ideal and equal discussion" keeps an utopia, because in a discussion between fans of two different clubs there can't succeed the better argument (Habermas 1984, S 116). Both regard their opinion ("das Selbst") as correct and irrefutable, while they deny the arguments of the other ("das Andere"), represented by a different opinion. This may causes just a bashing between football fans, but in the conflict between two ideologies like Capitalism and Islamism it may ends into a war.

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