

**I Suck my Tongue in Remembrance of You: A research on  
the photography's effect on memory**

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**I Suck my Tongue in Remembrance of You: A research on  
the photography's effect on memory**

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To be authentic was an important term in the working process of “I Suck my tongue in Remembrance of You”. We wanted to dig deep down in our baggage of memory and transform these memories into movements. We wanted to stay true to our movements in that process. To explore this phenomenon “to be true” I gave the exercise to find a clear memory from the past and a weak memory from the past and from that make two different movement phrases. I had assumed that the movement phrase made from the clear memory would be much clearer in the movement language than the other made from the unclear memory. But a process similar to the process of remembering from a photograph happened. We started to fill in the unclearness with abstract but clear movements so that both movement phrases became clear in the expression. I think that is a natural way of thinking as a human being. We always want to understand, and therefore if something is unclear to us we make it clear by filling in the wholes. I think our memory works like that too. If we don’t know all the details in a memory (that we impossible can) then we make them up. In that sense our memories are more or less always inauthentic.

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## **Research Questions:**

Is there something called an authentic memory, or are our memories shaped by outside coming information so as; transmitted stories and photographs?

Taking the photography as a source of assumed disturbance for our authentic memory – which affect does the photography have on our memories?

## **Introduction:**

In my performance “I Suck my Tongue in Remembrance of You” I worked with memories. The title was a lot of inspiration to me. It came from the song by Björk called “Possible Maybe”. The title is for me expressing very well the ambiguousness of what a memory is. Can you recall the memory of a lover by sucking on your own tongue and imagine a kiss? It is difficult to say. I wanted especially to explore the uncertainty around memories to find some blurry and mystical qualities. First I wanted to look into what memory is to be able to tear it apart and reconstruct it. The first chapter in this thesis is therefore a description on different theories and metaphors and an attempt to clarify where the scientists are today according to memory. Through my research I was though looking for (not avoiding) the weak sides of a memory. I was interested in a state of the memory, where what we seem to remember gets blurry and twisted.

In my research on memory I discovered the photography as an important factor of remembering. We can use a photograph as a proof that something happened and another more important factor is that the photograph is a tool for memory. We take photographs of rituals through our lives, to set small marks in our history. The photograph also helps us to remember how things were in the past; how we looked, what we did, and which people we spent our time with. Most people do not doubt the reliability of a photograph. But we don’t know the power that photography has to manipulate our memories and on the other side how we manipulate our memories through photography. In my research I met the

statement: “Scholars warn that photography interrupts authentic, natural memory and overwrites it with artificial narratives fabricated second-hand” (Espinosa, 2010: 1) I think that is a very interesting statement. By stating that it claims that we do have something called authentic memory and that photography is disturbing it.

In the second chapter “The authenticity in memory and photography” I will dig into the question: Are photography giving us an authentic inside in our memories? I will here use theories on photography to be able to comment on the existence of photography and connect it to the question of authentic memories. One theoretician and philosopher that I will use in particular is Roland Barthes from France.

In the third chapter “The photography’s effect on memory” I want to find out what effect photography have on our memories and in case that they are false what effect do false memories have on us.

Through the working process with “I Such my Tongue in Remembrance of You” I gave a few exercises according to memory and photographs. These exercises I want to discuss and compare with the theory in the two main chapters: “The authenticity in memory and photography” and “The photography’s effect on memory”

## **Memory:**

### **Introduction to the book:**

This chapter is based on my knowledge from the book ”From Conditioning to Conscious Recollection – Memory systems of the brain. Written by ” Howard Eichenbaum, and Neal J. Cohen. The book is published in 2001 as a part of the Oxford psychology series. The book gives a scientific explanation on how the memory works in the brain. It explains the newest discoveries according to brain and memory research but it also explains earlier theories and metaphors from the topic memory.

### **Intro:**

What is memory and how does it function? Where in our brain is memory stored and what does a memory look like? These questions have been asked by many writers, philosophers and scientists for hundreds of years. Especially during the last decades it

has been a huge subject and have led to an enormous amount of research and controversy. Various theories and metaphors have been developed on the subject memory. I will here try to sum up the most important theories through time.

### **Memory in form of a molecule:**

In the 1960's scientists began to research if memory was created by specific molecules. The aim was to find a specific memory molecule and then transfer the memory molecule into another brain. They made a great number of experiments on rats. And through different trainings they found a short peptide named scotophobin, which accomplished avoidance of darkness. (p. 5) The experiment never reached to any clear result and the question is still if this was the first identified memory molecule or just a hormone like substance.

### **Memory as a warehouse:**

A known metaphor for how we see memory stored in the brain is the warehouse metaphor. That memory works like a warehouse of information. The theory claims that we have different areas in the brain where we store different kind of memories for example long-term memory and short-term memory. The memories are then stored in their particular area until they are not needed anymore.

### **Memory as a switchboard:**

Another known metaphor for memory is the switchboard notion, that memory is a set of associations between neural representations interconnected by a switchboard. (p. 6) Guided by this view the scientist Lashley (1929.1950) through experiments began to see (contrary the warehouse theory) memory as being diffusely distributed in the brain.

### **Memory as a fundamental property of the brain's information-processing activities:**

The earliest experiments show that there are no such thing as specific brain regions where memories are stored or that memory reflects switchboard like connections. Instead the newest researches suggests that memory is a fundamental property of the



brain systems and a natural outcome of the brains processing activities. (p. 11) By brain systems I mean systems that support perceptual recognition, coordination, or cognitive operations such as language and logical reasoning. (p. 11) “A memory is when experience is reflected in, and causes changes in, the operations of these systems in one manner or another”. (p.11)

What scientists have found out recently is that the Memory systems in the brain are a very complex history; “Memory is manifested in multiplied ways by multiple functionally and anatomically distinct brain systems”. (p. 11) It is as complicated as the brain is complicated and a mystery to many scientists. The new way of thinking memory rejects the earlier theories such as Warehouse theory and switchboard theory. These previous theories are though not totally wrong or useless. They have been inspiration for the research of today and according to art each metaphor can give you many ideas and for example inspire you to your working methods and structuring of a piece. In my performance I was exploring one of these theories, the switchboard theory, to create a structure and give the piece a different logic.

## **The authenticity in memory and photography**

In this chapter I will begin the research around the authenticity in both memory and photography, by discussing their relation to the objective and subjective. In my opinion the photography has developed from being understood as something objective to now, where we are looking at photography as something interpretive and by that subjective. It is thereby a question how much is left of the authenticity in the experience of a photo and hereby in our memories.

First I want to explain the term authentic and how I am using it in this context of memory. Then comes an explanation of subjectivity and at last I will explain what photographs and what memories I am talking about:

Authentic memory:

By authentic memory I mean a memory in its pure state, where no influence of for example: Photos, told stories or illusions created by the mind have influenced the memory.

Subjectivity:

To be subjective means to look at things from your own point of view. What your own point of view is, is depending on how you are raised, what information you have gained through life, etc...

Memories:

The memories I am talking about are the memories we have regarding our personal stories and experiences, memories from our childhood, memories from our past. It is memories that can be triggered by associations so as smells or sounds. These memories are connected to a special memory system called the Hippocampal Memory System. It is consisting of “our ability to recollect everyday facts and experiences.” (Eichenbaum and Cohen, 2001: 15)

Photographs:

The photographs I am talking about are personal photographs so as photos from family albums, photos showing private situations, and rituals - Photos that are used as a tool for memory.

### **The idea of photography as objective:**

In French the camera lens is called the “objectif” (Wells, 2003: 12) defining what we see as the object of vision, and the idea of objectivity. That was how they saw photography in the early days of the camera. It was a machine able to catch a true moment in history and it soon became a generally belief that the photography contra paintings was the best way of representing and document the world around us. (Wells, 2003: 12)

The photography made a huge change in the history of art where the avantgarde evolved with all its isms like cubism and surrealism and took the painting in a new direction away from realism. The photography was then left with the purpose of catching the truth.

### **The idea of photography as subjective:**

In 1980 the French philosopher Roland Barthes published his book *Camera Lucida: Reflections on photography*. Original title: *La Chambre Claire*.

The book investigates the effects of photography on the spectator, as distinct from the photographer, and also from the object photographed, which Barthes calls the "spectrum". It is a very personal book motivated by Barthes' fascination of photography, memory and death, which are the most important subjects in the book. "The book is perhaps the most influential book yet written about the photographic experience" (Batchen, 2009: 1)

In *Camera Lucida* Barthes reveals his theory; the four image-repertoires: "In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, (the mental self image) the one I want others to think I am, (the idealized self-image) the one the photographer thinks I am (the photographed self-image) and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art (the public self-image or *imago*)" (Barthes, 1980: 13)

By his theory he takes the photograph away from its previous role as an objective tool for documenting the world into the unavoidable discussion of the photograph as a subjective experience.

Barthes claims in his four image-repertoire, that when you take a portrait, the subject on the photo turns into someone else, because she or he will always try to become someone, she wants to be or thinks she is. Barthes thinks that the subject being photographed is going through a transformation into another self because of his or her thoughts around who she is, who the photographer thinks she is and what the outcome of the photographing will be. What we see on the Photograph, in this case a portrait, is thereby never the objective true person. Barthes says that "Now, once I feel myself-observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of "posing," I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into image." (Barthes, 1980: 10) For example if the person on the portrait smiles it is a smile that is adjusted to the situation of being photographed, which is described in the 'four image-repertoires', and is never the person's authentic smile. Our tendency is even to fix our smile to our advantage. I think we all know how we like ourselves the best on photographs and someone is really good to fake an

authentic smile but others can't hide that they are trying too much to be pretty and then we get this strange distanced existence on the photograph.

About the process of being photographed Barthes further on says: "I do not stop imitating myself, and because of this, each time I am (or let myself be) photographed, I invariably suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity". (Barthes, 1980: 13)

To be authentic was an important term in the working process of "I Suck my tongue in Remembrance of You". We wanted to dig deep down in our baggage of memory and transform these memories into movements. We wanted to stay true to our movements in that process.

To explore this phenomenon "to be true" I gave the exercise to find a clear memory from the past and a weak memory from the past and from that make two different movement phrases. I had predicted that the movement phrase made from the clear memory would be much clearer in the movement language than the other made from the unclear memory. But a process similar to the process of remembering from a photograph happened. We started to fill in the unclearness with abstract but clear movements so that both movement phrases became clear in the expression. I think that is a natural way of thinking as a human being. We always want to understand, and therefore if something is unclear to us we make it clear by filling in the wholes. I think our memory works like that too. If we don't know all the details in a memory (that we impossible can) then we make them up. In that sense our memories are more or less always inauthentic. So by transforming our memories into movements we felt falseness and an inauthenticity emerging. I think that is what happens when a memory is second handed by going through a medium so as dance or photography. The false information is added and the result is a bit inaccurate.

Barthes was also struggling with this authenticity in the performance of being photographed. In *Camera Lucida* he invents the term 'the bodies degree zero'. That is the term for what we would call the authentic body, an unaffected body, body here understood as the 'being' - 'being' in front of the lens. For Barthes this bodily degree zero is not possible to achieve, as soon as you are standing in front of the camera and knowing that you will be photographed. You will unavoidable transform as earlier mentioned, through the 'four image-repertoire', into another you. Just like when we

where trying to be authentic in movement. The soon as we were standing in front of the mirror we became “dancers” and were not able to be objective to our memories.

These mentioned factors so as; the four image-repertoires, our need to add missing details, and the photograph as a second-hand source, are among a lot of other factors that takes the photography away from it’s previous function operating as a tool for reality. By claiming that the photograph is not telling us an objective truth, we are automatically also told that the memories that we have directly from photos are not completely true either. The fact is that we are living in a postmodern time where there is no ‘one big truth’. We as humans are taking a bit from here and there to create our own little truth. Barthes ends the discussion by saying; “The choice is ours, depending on our willingness to either confront photography’s “incredible reality” or politely suppress it as a mere illusion” (Barthes, 1980: 119)

## **The photography’s effect on memory**

In this chapter I want to research the effect photography have on our memories. I will begin by defining the spectator to the photograph, which is important when we speak about the photography’s effect on memories. Then I will explain where in the photograph the memory lays by using Barthes’ term the ‘*punctum*’. I will then tell about some scientific researches that have been made about false remembrance from doctored photographs. That leads me into the discussion of the photography’s effect on our identity, and how our identity is as well created from false memories. I will in between tell about my own experiences on exploring the thoughts around photography’s effect on memory and turn them into movements.

### **The spectator:**

To find the memory in the photograph it is important who is looking at the photograph - if it is one outside coming or one with a relation to the photo. If it is one with a relation to the photo as Barthes calls it “the having-been there” (Batchen, 2009: 8) then we can talk about memory and photograph in the same sentence otherwise not. The importance is who is looking at the photography and not who has taking it. The story that evolves from the photograph is depending on who is looking. That can be

compared to the famous notion by Roland Barthes; “The death of the author” which means that the reader when reading a book is just as much the author as the one who wrote the book. That is because we all read a book differently and create our own pictures in our mind. We are thereby writing the book together with the author equally and the author is no longer the authority. The same applies to photographs that we all experience differently because we are different individuals with different backgrounds. Barthes has a comment to his own notion: “The birth of the reader must be the death of the author.” (Batchen, 2009: 8) Barthes turns the notion the opposite way around and hereby stresses the importance of the reader, the subject.

### **Where in the photograph lays the memory?**

“No object is more equated with memory than the camera image, more in particular the photograph. The camera is a technology of memory, a mechanism through which one can construct the past and situate it in the present.” (Espinosa, 2010: 1) Yet memory does not exist in a photograph. It is the one who has a relationship to the situation, who can induce the memory in to the photograph. The memory is thereby an exterior factor that is not directly visual in the photograph, but only visible for the ‘the having-been there’.

Barthes made up a term for this invisible factor where among other things also memory lays. The term is called the “*punctum*”. He describes it as an “element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierce me.” (Barthes, 1980: 26) It is the something in a photograph that hits him and makes the photograph special to him. He further says; “A photograph’s *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me is poignant to me.)” (Barthes, 1980: 27) The *punctum* is an element in a photograph that evades analysis and questions “what I can name cannot really prick me.” (Batchen, 2009: 51) For me the term *punctum* is interesting because it is a mystical factor which also memory is. I think we can apply this term *punctum* in all kinds of arts. It is the something that we cannot set words on but recalls something inside us, touches us and evokes something emotional in us. Barthes says that the *punctum* is also the fact that recalls memory or even transforms memory. Just like a memory the *punctum* is something exterior in the work that we experience individually. Barthes says; “The *punctum* is not necessarily something to be found in the photograph itself “ (Batchen, 2009: 13), but is a personal experience, a very subjective one just like the experience of memory in a photograph is.

**False memory:**

Research has proved that photographs do affect our memory (Dario, Franca and Elizabeth, 2007). We simply can have memories that we only remember because of an old private photo. That means that we can also make false memories from photographs. “The human mind actively produces visual autobiographical evidence through photographs, but also modifies it through pictures – cutting of estranged spouses or throwing away depressing images of one self when seriously overweight. (Dijck, 2008: 63 ) “ I think that not only are we manipulating our memories to the better by actively saving good memories prior to the bad ones. We also do it completely instinctively. Our memory works like that, that we are more easily to remember positive things than negative things because positive thoughts give us a bright feel and releases endorphins to our brain. For example when you break up with someone, you suddenly want him back because you only remember the good things you had together.

A Research has shown that people are also easily seduced into creating false memories of their past on the basis of unaltered and doctored pictures” (Dijck, 2008: 63) In the early 1990’s an experiment was made on a group of people. In the experiment old private photos were carefully retouched and manipulated into false scenes that had never happened. They made the persons (unknowingly involved in the experiment) grow up with the pictures. Over 50 % of the participant made false memories from the manipulated pictures. (Dijck, 2008: 64)

This is very interesting in the investigation on how photos affect our memories. In our working process we had the same discussion, which we wanted to dig into through movement. The first thing we did was to find our old private photos:

When I turned 15 my mother gave me a photo album that she had created from the very beginning of my life. Through the years I grew up I followed the process of the album growing bigger as time past and I grow older. That meant that I grow up alongside these specific photographs that my mother had chosen to be my memory collection. In the album there are photos of situations that I have always thought to remember very clear both in physical details but also emotional details so as the atmosphere and the feeling of the situation. But what if I just think I remember the situations on the photos, but actually it is my mind that creates the memory from my

remembrance of the photo? You can say that to experience a memory by looking at a photo, your memory have already been modified through one layer witch is the paper that the picture is printed on.

Another thing is that a photo is a static thing that doesn't change trough time, but I as a person grow older each day and I might see a specific photo with different eyes now than I did when I was 9 years old. Because you as a person get a lot of inputs over time that can make you see differently on your childhood memories. Time is hereby also a factor that distances you to your memory and works as a layer in between you and your memory

My theory is that for each layer you put in between you and your memory, whether it is through photography, time or as I did movements, the weaker it gets, the more false information it gets and the more false information you put on to it.

I wanted to research what happens to a memory when it goes through many layers.

A very famous example in the investigation of memory processing by the brain is the 7-year-old boy, who in 1933 fell on his bike and knocked his head. (Eichenbaum and Cohen, 2001: 137) The accident was seriously and it brought a necessary brain operation. A mix of the accident and the brain operation damaged parts of the memory systems in the brain so that the boy would mix up his memories. He would for example mix up famous personalities with the facts about them. For example that president Nixon was killed by assassination. (Eichenbaum and Cohen, 2001: 141)

The reflection on private photos as a tool for memory, the idea of layers and the example of when the memory gets a disorder, let me to the next exercise we did: We found old private photos and tried to copy the facial expression and the gestures of the persons on the photography to the most possible precision. We also recalled the feeling of the situation in the photos and tried to live it again.

When we mastered it we mixed up the photos. For example we took one hand gesture from one picture and combined it to another facial expression. We made the pictures absurd by having the person of one picture on top of the other person and so on. It was a game with the memories to show that we can never be sure of what is the real memory, and on top of that we played with the memory of the audience – that they would remember the real pictures and then later they would notice that something was a bit wired and mixed up. We also developed a method witch helped us to make the



movements blurry. We called this method “never arrive”. It is as the words describe, a game where you choreograph a clear movement phrase (so as the gestures from the private photos) and then you perform them one after another without arriving to each movement’s fullest. That means that you have to always be ahead and perform the next movement before you end the present movement and so on. It gives a wired quality that after a while seems blurry. Also we added different layers to the movements to play with them even more. That could be to execute them in slow-motion, fast or dropping in the joints before moving on to the next movement. It was improvised in a very strict structure, which gave it a very intense quality because it needed a lot of concentration. By Improvising we reached something more intuitive and authentic. Opposite first exercise the expression were blurrier. Blurry like a memory in its pure state where no extra imaginary information is added to complete the memory.

## **Identity**

Identity and memory are closely connected, “Our photographs tell us who we want to be and how we want to remember.” (Dijck, 2008: 71) From knowing that we have a lot of our memories from photographs, photographs also play a big role in our development of identity. Barthes says: “photographs tells us how we shall remember our selves as younger persons.” (Dijck, 2008: 63) We are thereby remodelling our self-image to fit to the picture taken at a previous moment in time. The photograph creates our memories and the memories create our identity. As previously mentioned in this chapter our tendency is to modify our memories by for example getting rid of photos of our selves that we don’t like. By that we have a huge power on manipulating our memory and by that to lead our identity into a certain direction. We have always been able to manipulate our memories in many ways but with the digitalizing of the photograph we can now take it much further. The digitalization has brought the possibility to “reconstruct and retouch one’s childhood memories.” (Dijck, 2008: 65), and with all kinds of software programs so as Photoshop we can now more directly manipulate our personal photos and thereby effect our memories which effect our identity. The interesting thing is that we can manipulate our photos so that the reality is very far and all can become a Cameron Diaz look a like. José van Dijck says in her essay about the digitalizing of the photograph that; “Memory, like photographs and bodies, can now be made picture perfect.”(Dijck, 2008: 71) It is

interesting if image doctoring become or already has become an integral element of our autobiographical memory. How does that affect us if our identity is constantly created on doctored memories adjusted to our norms and standards? “The digital age will set new standards for remembrance and recall. The terms true and doctored will no longer apply to pictures, nor will we be able to speak of ‘true’ ad ‘false’ memories.” (Dijck, 2008: 71)

## **Conclusion**

Returning to my first questions: Is there something called an authentic memory, and what effect does photography have on our memories? Through my research I found out that we are always looking at photographs with subjective eyes, so the truth for you can be another truth for me. That questions the authenticity when one situation can be remembered in many ways depending on the individual. I have found out that you can trick the brain to remember something that hasn’t happened through photographs. I also found out that we as human beings have a tendency to manipulate our memories for example by keeping our favourite photographs and throw the ones out that we don’t like. Researches have proved that we can induct false memories in people by using doctored photos. That means that photo’s do have a big influence on our memories. It can even affect our identity. The digitalizing of the photograph has made us able to create a ‘picture perfect’ memory collection, which will then affect the creation of our identity.

In my own exploration on transferring memories into movements, I found out that by setting a phrase from the remembrance of a memory we start to fill in with movements that are not true to our memory. We do it because we as humans don’t like if something is not clear to us. If there is something we don’t remember or understand we fill in the wholes with made-up information. I also found out that we as dancers have a lot of habits that are difficult to avoid. These habits are destroying the authenticity in the movements because it takes us away from the task and instead we do what we like to do and think we are good at. I found out that a better way to be true to our memories is to improvise through improvised games where you have to execute the memories in real time. That makes the movements more intuitive and thereby more true. I wanted from the beginning to find a blurry quality to explore how

a memory is in its pure state without all the extra information, which we tends to fill in to make the memory understandable for us. I found out that by adding more layers to the memory so as transforming it into movements, we can never achieve the authentic memory, but the closest we got to it was by improvising.

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