

Objects of Political Desire V: Is Memory Money? A Digression in Two Parts

Article by Rui Tavares

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We all hold a memory, more powerful than all others, for which we are grateful. It doesn't have to be an unusual or special memory. It's simply a happy memory. And when we conjure it, the important part is not to recover the sequence of events that make it, but to relive the feeling we have of the feeling we once had.

It could be the feeling, which we thought was long lost, of how our bones were light when we were little. Or of one night when we were in love and lay down on the grass looking at the stars, marveling at how immense the universe was. That's it. Everyone has that memory. That memory is us.

Now take that memory and walk into a bank.

You are asking for a loan today. You walk into the bank branch, take a ticket, sit on a chair, and wait for your account manager to call you in. You carry with you the anxiety that people experience in this kind of situation. You are about to ask for money because you need it, all the while trying to pass on the assurance that you have money and don't need it.

Exchanging pleasantries with the account manager, who happens to be a very nice lady, you realise straight away that this is going to be easier than you thought.

"How much do you need?", she asks.

You hazard a figure and immediately wonder, "Should I have asked for more? Less?" The account manager says, "Very well," and starts fumbling with papers, entering data on her computer, and asking for additional information: how long would you need to repay it, how much would each repayment be, at what interest rate. She looks calm. These are good times for borrowing money.

At one point, she asks what you can offer as collateral. "Collateral?", you ask. Yes, collateral, a house, for example. "But I don't own a house," you say. "No problem," she answers, "it doesn't have to be a house. Do you own any land?" "No land either." "In that case, it can be your car." "But I don't own a car." "I see," she says, "I'll see what I can do."

There's a silence. The account manager gets up, walks along a corridor with many doors and disappears through one of them for a few minutes. Meanwhile, you sit there, embarrassed by your condition as an individual without a house, land or car. You brace yourself for being turned down.

But then she comes back holding a few pieces of paper and wearing a smile on her face. Her proposal is that you mortgage your memory in exchange for the money. "I beg your pardon?", you ask, incredulous. She smiles and explains calmly that memories are worth money. All you need to do is pick one and sign this contract. Then you would close your eyes for thirty seconds while placing your index finger on a small electrode and think about that memory. It would then be stored on the bank's database and act as a guarantee against the loan.

While you try to recover from your incredulity, the bank manager approaches and asks if everything is ok. He repeats the same explanation, and then proposes an exercise: "Think of a memory," he says. "An

obvious, everyday, trivial memory.” “Any memory will do?” “Any at all. You’ve got one?” You nod. “Well, how much is that memory worth? How much would you like in exchange for it?” Then he turns to the account manager: “How much did our customer ask for?” She replies, “Ten thousand euros.” Then he turns to you: “How would you like twenty thousand euros for that memory?” You are unable to answer. He presses on: “How about thirty thousand?”

You are sitting there thinking about your grandmother’s hug, and how the texture of her blouse’s linen collar felt against your neck. You feel a surge of indignation: “Look, I don’t understand what’s going on. Are you proposing to take one of my memories in exchange for money, is that it? So, my memory would then belong to the bank?”

“No, not at all!” they reply with a broad smile, amused by your banking naivety. “Your memory will merely act as a banking guarantee. You would walk out of the bank today with your memory intact. It would only be transferred permanently to the bank in the event of a delay or default in the repayments.”

You remain silent. “The bank requires a guarantee, you see, but the memory still belongs to you after the loan has been granted. So, what do you say?” – the smile returns – “will thirty thousand euros be enough to cover your needs?”

After that, things precipitate very fast. You sign the contract, feeling the slightest of electric shocks as your finger touches the electrode, and walk out of the bank with a statement confirming that the money has been transferred to your account. You are troubled, but relieved.

On the journey home, all through the bus ride, the metro ride, and the twenty-minute walk, you keep conjuring up that memory to make sure that you haven’t lost it, like when reaching for your pocket just to make sure your wallet hasn’t been stolen.

The memory is, indeed, still there, intact, and even more detailed than before: the smells, the laughter, the feeling you had at that precise moment.

When you get home, the first thing you do is sit down at the table and write it all down on a piece of paper, and then store it very carefully.



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