

# **Mnemotechnics I**

## **Provenance and Its Names**

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## I – Memory Contra Storage of Culture

Under which conditions could a *public ledger* be understood as memory and not—contrary to a commonly used term regarding information technology—as storage. After all, data is *stored*, that means accumulated over time. The collecting of data expands the content of the data medium and increases its informational load. From more data more respectively better *informative clauses* can be derived, a seemingly plausible conclusion may be. Though, why interpretability and significance of data are important beyond mere quantity will be addressed later. First, we will address a structural problem.

System states of software generally are history-less or better: genesis-independent insofar they can be called without being contingent upon definitive preceding states. Image files can be loaded and viewed and leave no permanent trace. Text files can be written, deleted and corrected without a trace—and this very editing process also is not to be traced in the final document. (At least if one disregards the analysis of metadata, such editing is rather inaccessible and also not tamper-proof.) The relation to the desired final state thus remains equipotential in regard to the preceding working states. The working states are temporal—and this is crucial for our line of argumentation—*not structure-determining*.

The present state can be altered arbitrarily into an alternative one and thereby actualize a different present. A documentation of such an altering process could be logged externally, yet is not inherent to the respective data. Such a documentation would constitute separate data. A history of data generated this way is not contained within the referred data. In this sense, present states do not pose the contingency of future ones. In contrast, blockchain fundamentally determines future system states by re-ordering the system's elements of past system states. This means, as already discussed in *Epistemic Order*, that firstly, the truth-claim of data on the blockchain is directed recursively (and not correspondence-theoretically) and beyond that, secondly, this process documents its genesis, thus incorporating the documentation of its provenance.

This fundamental property complex of consensus networks or blockchains can be summarized as a *recursive truth-claim with provenance logging*.

Often, when this matter is discussed, the relation of correspondence of the metaphorical „map and its territory“, along with their difference, is dismissed. This means, according to such understanding, a *public ledger* would be both at the same time: the „map“ and the „territory“. Data presented on it do not refer to an „external world“, as, for example,

a certificate of authenticity, a proof of origin or another (relevant in terms of bookkeeping) document does. Or as in the example: The map of Manhattan is not Manhattan. Or, following René Magritte, it would say: Ceci est un registre public! The *public ledger* is mapping itself.<sup>1</sup>

The continuous writing of the *public ledger* is therefore never disturbed by evidently contradicting events in the „real world“, because referring to it is not necessarily required. This allows for degrees of freedom with regard to the generation of its data, yet also limits it to the datasets which only can be, and must remain, prerequisites for social bindingness; and that means: they do not embody external (physical) objects, even if misleading marketing suggests otherwise. The data are not the social interactions, the juridical verdicts, the corporate-political decisions, that refer to the data as their basis. Such complexes are second-order operations, that also use the *public ledger*—I might stress—above all because of its suitability as a memory subsystem. It is thus explicitly a memory rather than merely a storage medium, since data inscribed on it are *structure-determined*. The inscription of data conditions the contingency of future data. Block 69420, in its concrete form, can only be derived as a descendant of the specifically published Block 69419 on the respective blockchain, and so on.

Now, if one attributes only a slight insightfulness to the theorem of functional differentiation, then one might assume the implementation of blockchain into (social) processes to constitute a memory function-performing technology. And this means that, even though predominantly processes of bookkeeping are published on the *public ledger*, such typically are embedded into phenomena described as „culture“ according to their readability. On the contrary, non-structure-determined datasets allow for--due to their equipotentiality--a manipulation of the past and thus the dissolving of a historical sequence. In consequence, other systems scarcely are inclined to functionally differentiate their memory in this regard, respectively set the *public ledger* into this function.

The following section concerns the conception of a design of Web3 infrastructure, which utilizes this logging of provenance, and thus externalizes its memory thereto.

This means that it is a process, an interaction, or a (digital) object configured in such a

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1 Compare with this: "It is only for this reason that they are differences that make a difference: in a sense, lasting, time-binding differences are needed for self-reference to become possible at all. The self must still be there when it refers to itself, and it must distinguish itself from itself, must step back from itself, in order to be able to do this." (Junge, Kay. „Medien als Selbstreferenzunterbrecher“ In *Kalkül der Form*. published by Dirk Baecker, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1993, p. 113, translated by the author)

way that it can both withstand the resulting intersectionality and further renders it productive. This means, such a developed infrastructure operates at the borders of systems and establishes couplings of reciprocal preference.

## **II – Connectable Memory Differentiation: A Case of Praised Publicity**

The prior remarks indicate that—also in reference to Heidegger—through and via technics technics are and were set. Technological processes uncover inventions as something that is (partly) incorporated into them.<sup>2</sup> Just as the hydroelectric power plant is set into the Rhine, so too a friend may be set within the incentive structure of the monad machine, a cooperation partner for the purpose of directing the financial flows of his audience into the weekly sequence of product placements, and so forth. Such settings—and the incorporations into a network of purposes that typically accompany them—give rise to formations that enable interactions with them precisely by opening up an intersectional domain of something previously untouched.<sup>3</sup> At times, incentive structures grapple and connect, amplify and engulf each other. Objects which are utilized in such an environment commonly are constructed with regard to their purpose of use. Also, in the controversial case that constitutes a formation of (financial) incentive structures and therefore objectified instruments: the tax evader-CDs of the mid-2000s.

The prevalent incentive structure of tax payments is—according to a reduced philosophical-psychological critique—a double negation in the sense of avoidance of punishment. The disadvantage is supposed to be circumvented and thus the positive act of paying taxes is upheld. Now, one can list all good reasons for the financing of common good; yet, we are explicitly concerned with the mechanism and its

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2 Compare with this: "The hydroelectric plant is set into the current of the Rhine. It sets the Rhine to supplying its hydraulic pressure, which then sets the turbines turning. This turning sets those machines in motion whose thrust sets going the electric current for which the long-distance power station and its network of cables are set up to dispatch electricity. In the context of the interlocking processes pertaining to the orderly disposition of electrical energy, even the Rhine itself appears as something at our command." (Heidegger, Martin. *The Question Concerning Technology*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1977, p. 16, translated by William Lovitt)

3 Compare with this: "In this sense, the system presents itself as an avantgardistic machine which draws humanity along behind it by dehumanizing it, in order to rehumanize it at another level of normative capacity. The technocrats declare that they cannot place trust in what society designates as its needs; they 'know' that society itself cannot know these needs, since they are not variables independent of the new technologies. This is the arrogance of decision-makers and their blindness." (Lyotard, Jean-François. *Das postmoderne Wissen*. Wien: Passagen Verlag, 2025, p. 147, translated by the author)

psychological levers. Since in this way, paying taxes in accordance with the law is the expected zero point. And the tax payer can, understood this way, either nullify the debit or make himself guilty—prestige and the accompanied sense of pride (*thymós*) have barely a chance to emerge. A state of cultural appreciation the tax payer rarely, if ever, reaches within the given systems of our world, so argues Peter Sloterdijk in outline. In *Die nehmende Hand und die gebende Seite*, he writes: “People are currently talking a great deal about secret CDs containing the names of tax evaders. It would seem wiser to me if one instead compiled a cassette with the names of those who voluntarily give more.”<sup>i</sup>

Sloterdijk’s statement proves so inspiring here because it invokes an object in its concreteness. At this point there is no trace of an appeal to normativity or political education; instead, an instrument of actual practical use is being inaugurated. A demand for the formation of norms would be problematic, among other reasons, because its avoidance once again builds in asymmetrical advantages. Thus, for example, the illegal parker benefits from the perpetually free prohibited parking space, because he knows that no traffic warden will ever pass by there. Or again, that pretended behavior valued in terms of ethical conviction is rewarded in the same way as authentic behavior, thereby granting the charlatan greater opportunity to exploit his fellow human beings. The situation would remain the same: the norm refers to what ought to be done, and the dilemma of double negation is repeated in the form of the norm. In such a constellation, the horizon is always the abolition of the “ought.” Far more orienting would be the positive positing of (voluntary) action. In the context of the financing of the common good, this means: a structure in which a gift can be experienced as an actual gain for the giver. The deciding distinction.

Especially since Marcel Mauss's *The Gift*, there have been numerous discussions in the history of ideas concerning a culture of giving and a desired *setting* into modern economics.<sup>4</sup> Georges Bataille, who, like Mauss, refers to the potlatch of the Kwakiutl and addresses its ecstasy.<sup>5</sup> Maurice Godelier, who works out the agonistic element within it, reading mutual outbidding as an enhancement of the value of the competitors.<sup>6</sup> Wilton S. Dillon, who analyzes modern social and state structures that are formed

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4 Compare with this Mauss, Marcel. *Die Gabe: Form und Funktion des Austauschs in archaischen Gesellschaften*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1990

5 Compare with this Bataille, Georges. *Der verfemte Teil: Versuch einer allgemeinen Ökonomie*. Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2021

6 Compare with this Godelier, Maurice. *Das Rätsel der Gabe: Geld, Geschenke, heilige Objekte*. München: C.H.Beck, 1999

through the giving of gifts. And, indeed, Peter Sloterdijk's remarks on a thymotic "economy of generosity"<sup>7</sup>, which—going beyond mere ethical attitudes—advocate for corresponding media to record and display such acts.

A hint with such an obvious meaningfulness remains without actual objectification—in the digital domain one would more aptly speak of realization, or: *virtualization and formalization*—if such a desired medium ("list of those who voluntarily give more") finds no actual embedding in (incentive) structures that then orient interactions within it toward it. A conceptual design approach that treats it as a "substitute for something already existing" seems to be misguided. Working against this, among other things, is the remaining of the remaining, Lindy effects, and so on. Without the unlocking of a domain *as* an intersectional formation *through* intersystemic processes, existing systems lack the reinforcing effects needed to amplify existing system via the differentiated utility of the newly formed domain. A modularization—for example, the (outsourcing) differentiation of a memory subsystem—becomes more probable when it contributes to the self-preservation of the system ahead of this very differentiation. The reforms toward the theoretically longed-for, more *progressive* order are doomed to fail, just like substitutes stuck competing for an already defined purpose. Better prospects of success lie in identifying functions and rendering them efficient through differentiation. Or, in systems-theoretical jargon: letting de-paradoxification occur (dispositively).<sup>8</sup> That is, in our case, creating an environment in which giving and winning harmonize.

The memory medium of the "names of those who voluntarily give more" only becomes realizable once it is set enabling connection operations within a (cybernetic) network of con- and diverging vectors. Frames such as "political convictions," "tax administration," "philanthropy," or "prestige" do not suffice on their own as motives here, because, in regard to functional connectivity, they fade as merely normative formulas. The "list" cannot be the agent of a single system. Both sides that preach conflict—the technocratic

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7 Compare with this: "The thymotic economy latently contained in Nietzsche's critique of morality stimulates an alternative money economy, in which wealth appears in connection with pride. It seeks to tear from the face of modern affluence the plaintive mask behind which is concealed the self-contempt of petty owners of large and very large fortunes – a contempt that is entirely legitimate in the sense of the Platonic doctrine of *thymós*, since the soul of the wealthy rightly attacks itself if it cannot find its way out of the circle of insatiability. The customary cultural posturing of this milieu does nothing to help here either – interest in art is, as a rule, merely the Sunday face of greed. The soul of the wealthy would find healing from self-contempt only in beautiful actions that win back the inner approval of the noble part of the soul." (Sloterdijk, Peter. *Zorn und Zeit*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2008, p. 59, translated by the author)

8 Compare with this: "The exchange on which options on the unfolding of the paradox are traded is nowadays called »culture«." " (Luhmann, Niklas. „Die Paradoxie der Form“ In *Kalkül der Form*. herausgegeben von Dirk Baecker, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1993, p. 209, translated by the author)

inhumans and the moralizing all-too-humans—can direct their complementary aversions toward a dispositive distribution, once they learn that their wishes are being fulfilled by the supposedly agonistic pole. A stance of an ethics of conviction, or even political objectives, do not suffice. The only axiom—the posing, the *enframing*—that one must accept inaugurates that the winning giving thereby achieved is worth valuing.

The idea of explicitly naming a name is ancient. "A man lives when his name is spoken,' runs an Egyptian proverb."<sup>iii</sup> (Also, beyond his lifetime.) The naming of a name is especially significant precisely because the basic tendency of name-bearers inclines toward oblivion.

- i Sloterdijk, Peter. *Die nehmende Hand und die gebende Seite*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2010, p. 152, translated by the author
- ii Assmann, Jan. *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*. München: C.H.Beck, 1992, p. 63, translated by the author