Memory and knowledge models

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It seems that today the art of memory, understood as the filtering and selection of our knowledge, is threatened by the presence of immense data stores organised artificially and arbitrarily in relation to our capacities. This is not the place to give answers to fears related to millenarianism, but it is nonetheless important, if not necessary, to retrieve from our vegetal memory encyclopaedic projects for the structuring of knowledge that are mnemonic systems.

By observing the masterpieces of the Young Fund in the exhibition, one can try, for example, to follow the path leading from Publicio's *Ars oratoria* (1482, Erhard Ratdolt) to Peter von Rosenheim's *Roseum memoriale* (1493): in the five years between one volume and the other, it is possible to notice a very readable transformation from books as mnemonic instruments for recording knowledge to actual repertories for interpreting the *Sacra Pagina*. And to do so not only in relation to a complex entity such as a primary written text, but also, if not above all, by connecting subliminal elements with other texts, according to an extended and widespread idea of text. A concept that encompasses not only graphic and rhetorical written references, but also visual images. The primacy of sight over the other senses, already established by the medieval tradition dating back to the circulation of Roger Bacon's *De multiplicatione specierum* (c. 1220 - 1292) and the Alhazen texts collected by Vitellione in his *Perspectiva* (13th cent., 1st printed edition, 1535), a fruitful source of inspiration for Renaissance perspectivism, strongly links the *imagines agentes* to the broad visualisation possibilities offered by the emerging printing press and favours the construction of highly complex structures. An example of this are the refined taxonomies organised in trees that, it is worth saying, proliferate out of all proportion and use Porphyry's model, clearly visible in the representation of the ability to speak properly (*appositae dicendi potestas*) in Publicio's *Ars oratoria* (1482).

However, not all knowledge models are organised as a taxonomy, which closes one space on itself but struggles to recall unexpected links between new knowledge and interpretations. Certain terms or objects can indeed be grouped in relation to different semantic references, such as the initials and incipits of von Rosenheim's *Roseum memoriale divinorum eloquiorum* (1493), or the marginalia of Carrara's *De omnibus ingeniis augendae memoriae* (1491). These are relations of semantic proximity that continue beyond the text, increase knowledge in unusual ways, and open up the possibility of being combined and recombined, according to an idea of proportionality, an allegory, a reference, an allusion: encyclopaedic mnemonics organised topically, that is, according to places that are recalled on the basis of the varying relations that connect them. Thanks to a combination of interpretations, all these places of memory aim to discover an object, hitherto unknown or seen from another point of view, or even latent. These volumes remind us of what is nowadays called intertextuality, which, to some extent, also underlies our models of communication. As stated by Umberto Eco, in a very enjoyable booklet published by the Memory Studies Centre of this University, quoting Pietro da Ravenna:

> "I usually put in certain places very shapely girls who really excite my memory. [...] and believe me: if I used beautiful girls as images, I can more easily and regularly repeat the notions I had attached to places. You now possess a secret that is very useful for artificial memory [...] may chaste and religious men forgive me: I had a duty not to remain silent."

And Echo finally says:

> "That is, one of the possible functions of Playboy".

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