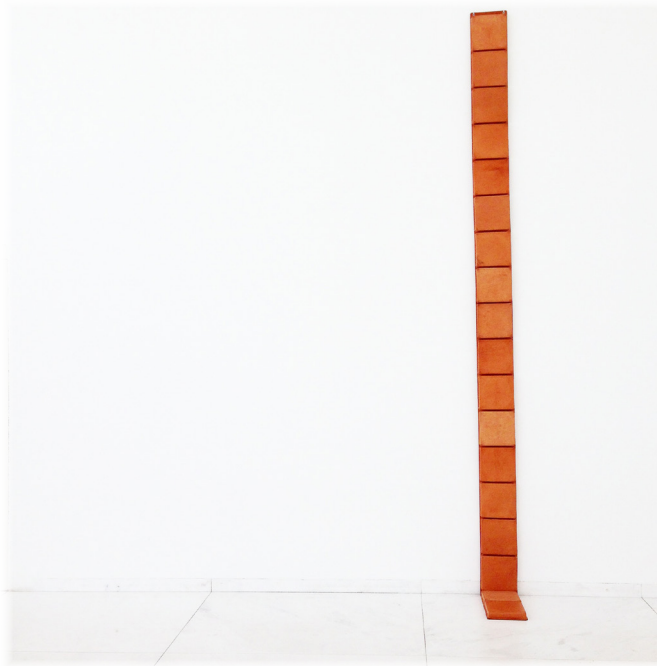


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# The Architecture of Memory. The Memory of Architecture

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## **Abstract**

*Architecture, where from, where to?*

Memory is as a *modus operandi* in establishing rapports between the material and the metaphysical, such that objects endowed with a forceful meaning permeate in the space of memory. The complex evolution of humanity takes place directly proportional to the evolution of consciousness and cognitive flow, understood not only through intellectual eyeglass, but also through identity, emotion, empathy. Considering that architecture is an “infusible fusion” of culture, art, technology, functionality, vital and spiritual support, augmenting society, we may state that consciousness, architecture and memory determine the system of our conscious existence. The temporary character of architecture represents the outgrowth of the society evolving at an accelerated pace, surpassing the individual, thus making the evolution of memory unpredictable and its life shorter. The aim of this paper is to analyse the connection between architecture and memory, starting with the known phenomenon of memorizing, continuing with the memory’s path through architecture and “the built memory” within historical or contemporary patterns of our cities and connecting it with its complexities of philosophical and metaphysical origin - the discourses of architecture – the implicit theoretical discourse, the fictional<sup>1</sup> discourse (the literary dimension of architecture) and the philosophical discourse. In order to transcend into the space of long-term memory, an object permeates through three essential perception stages: the sensorial stage (regarding sensorial memory), the semantic stage (related to short-term memory) and the emotional stage, triggering the long-term memory. Thus, in order to imprint its values to long-term memory, architecture should comply to these four conditions: synesthetic, semantic and syncretic, and emotional.

Reinterpreting architecture through the way it is being memorized and rediscovering memory as an architectural meta-language imply their reconnection with the identity and consciousness of a culture.

## **Keywords**

Memory; architecture; consciousness; identity

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1. Vais, 2008, 121

The study suggests memory as a method of understanding and perceiving architecture and landscape, beginning with the derived function of linguistic structuralism and considering memory a veritable, truly universal language and primordial matter in the creation of individual and collective identity. If space represents a materialization of society in a certain time in history, it also is a materialization of consciousness. The study upon “petrified landscapes” constitutes an important venue of investigation of human memory itself, from neuroscientific perspective. The urban dimension of space formulates a context for the incidence of consciousness instances, catalysing them through manifestation into an *illo tempore* and *illo spazio* of collective memory.

Architecture is the peremptory expression of a culture’s spirituality, *sine qua-non* metalanguage within the identification and understanding algorithm of collective memory manifestation and it constitutes the physical space of memory as long as the collective memory encodes those crucial values of spirituality that constitute collective consciousness. Memory, architecture and consciousness make up a unitary principle of cultural existence (Fig. 1).

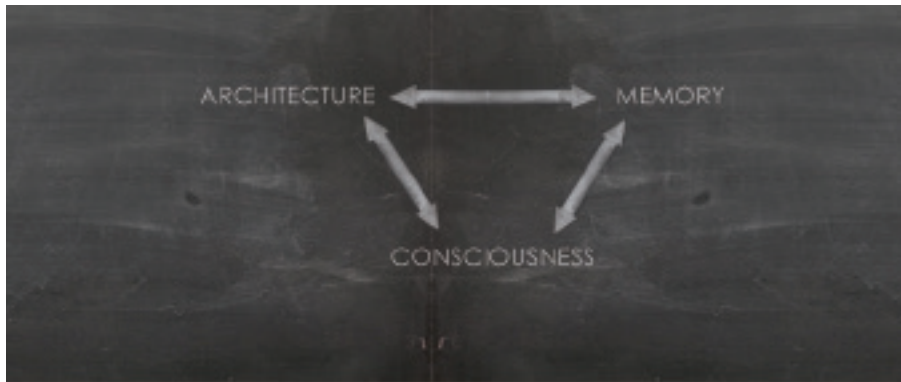


Fig. 1

The dependency between memory, architecture and consciousness  
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The bidirectional relationship between architecture and memory sets consciousness as the unifying context, where architectural memory bleeds into the space of consciousness and the consciousness of memory bleeds into architectural space. The unified principle of architecture, memory and consciousness constitutes the effervescent motor for the existence of society and for the condensation of cultural thinking. The whole landscape is, or should be, built memory, abiding by the intrinsic laws of spirituality, with sufficient actuating force to activate human existence in all its

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aspects – social, cultural, creative etc. In this context, the *landscape* is the translation of any form of scenography of the surrounding world, as it is the result of human activity and humanity's intent to mould space. Because, "in that world of memory where music and vision, adjusted by the other senses, polarize around some major themes, according to cadences that create an interior rhythm, everything is solidary, including the great mess that engulfs the rare islands that our attention, with time, is drawn to." <sup>2</sup>

When speaking of his book, *Autobiografia Científica*, Aldo Rossi concludes that "to forget architecture" becomes a pertinent title for his book because "I may talk about a school, a cemetery, a theatre, it is more correct to say that I talk about life, death, imagination." <sup>3</sup> This platonic perspective considers the physical world an exponent of transposition in the world of ideas, a dimension one would consider relevant to existence. In a heraclitian manner, truth and absolute reality are represented by the becoming, the transcendence, the flux, whereas static condition is a mere illusion and an inability of consciousness to transcend towards the space of becoming (in the world of ideas, objects *are* not but they *become*). Thus, an analysis of the possibilities to interpret the built landscape as an essential vector of transposition in the space of consciousness is warranted, along with a study of the mutation of architecture, both as a means and conclusion and as a hypothesis and moment of *becoming*.

The main argument for a study about memory has roots as far back as antiquity. The will to fortify a cultural heritage, to rule a potential space of universal cognition, has been fuelled by the constant pursuit of identity. In the vision of G.M. Cantacuzino "perception takes all its value and is amplified only within memory. The mutation of images of reality into memories is what we call sensibility, including the act of grouping and selection of perceptions. From the synthesis of these perceptions, new form and harmonies are born, meaning art. Sensibility is the actual quality of our memory. In intimate parts of memory /.../ new images and personal experiences from the field of thinking take their place, live, get amplified or remain the same /.../ but all of them are part of that unitary climate that is defined by what we call *identity*." <sup>4</sup> Ultimately, a study of memory is equivalent to a study of self. The loss of memory, be it individual or collective, is equivalent to the loss of identity, context, thus a tear in the evolution of consciousness reflected through the spectrum of its activity.

A study upon memory assumes its understanding as a process and phenomenon. Starting from the simple process of memorizing and inter-

2. Cantacuzino, 1993, 28

3. "Forgetting Architecture comes to mind as a more appropriate title for this book, since while I may talk about a school, a cemetery, a theatre, it is more correct to say that I talk about life, death, imagination." Rossi, 1998, 94

4. Cantacuzino, 1993, 32

preting its implications in the perception and memorizing of architecture, as object and sequence (urban or not), we identify the essential steps and understand the lasting character of architecture of the stages of transcendence in the space of memory. The process of individual memorization offers an essential perspective for the analysis of collective memory, of forming identity and the dynamics of consciousness.

*The first part of this analysis* follows the defining and the memorizing process, as well as its transposition in the phenomenon of “memorizing architecture”, understood as both the object and the ensemble (scenery, city, etc.). The approach focuses on the interconnections between “individual memorizing” and “collective memorizing”.

*Sensory memory* – A first relation between information about self and the surrounding world enables the manifestation of sensory memory, whose “operators”, sensorial organs - hearing, sight, smell, touch, taste - transfer specific coded information towards the areas of memory that harbour the processes of consciousness. Architecture that requires the full experience of sensory, gnoseology and ontology will form stronger long-term memory.

From a critical perspective on the history and theory of architecture, this is easy to see – from antiquity, whose spaces, from housing to urban places, seem to imagine epistemological experience and metaphysical models of sacredness, by appealing to the senses, consciousness and memory, to Zumthor’s atmospheric architecture, in which, to transcend architecture to the plane of consciousness and memory, it is essential to perceive it thorough the sensorial apparatus. Within the cities of newness, of the experience of the sacred and the sensorial is an amputated dimension. In the landscape of post-industrial or forcefully reinvented cities of the last decades, many urban contexts are too incoherent to convey an architectural message, at most, paying tribute to visual aspects, in a quest to satisfy only the lower tiers of achieving and perfecting consciousness. A visually tributary architecture, as manifested in many cases in recent years, annihilates its potential of being perceived as a whole and to establish a complex relation with the human instance and its entire corolla of sensitivity.

*Short-term memory* implies the infusion of architectural concepts through *semantism*. Its implicit temporary nature attributes the metaphor of a sketchbook or draft to this type of memory, the information that will ultimately slide to the space of long-term memory, whose main trait is the availability of immediate information, acting similarly to connecting idioms and words in written text. The subtler the analogy needed to understand the information is, the more its eligibility for long-term memory storage it is.

A “landscape” (we will consider the general notion of landscape with the entire perceptive plethora implied – visual, acoustic, auditory, olfactory, tactile, spatial-temporal, etc.) ensures its place in long-term memory

space by its familiarity or its novelty, as it is juxtaposed to a meaning, an emotional connotation or any other type of relation with existing information. A landscape that is indifferent, whose nature infringes more than it intrigues perception or that requires a sum of information without rhyme or reason will have problems breaking into the realm of memory. Architecture that does not actively communicate with its users or whose message does not constitute a part of its user's reality and identity will rarely pierce the filter of memory.

*Long-term memory*, involving *syncretism and affect in architecture*, correlates the space of a multi-dimensional complex made of the previously defined levels of perception. The material support, merged with perceived space, make up a metaphor of bonding material with immaterial, defining the aesthetic category of *sublime* in architecture. The ability to communicate with architecture generates a sense of belonging, of spiritual connection with the environment and meanings – carriers of values of tradition. Syncretism in architecture refers to all the levels that make it up, physical and metaphysical, which constitute an indivisible architectural presence, and whose evocative or one of a kind force refracts into consciousness, resulting in the generation of emotion. Analog to individual consciousness, self-awareness and identity recognition involve the development of long-term memory. The same step involves acknowledgement of the subjective dimension of existence, corresponding to affect. Affect in architecture is, therefore, the humanizing of architecture.

*The second part of this analysis* refers to *memory mapping*. A relevant part in the study of memory refers to the relation between memory and space, from the perspective of time, analysing “radiographs” of “life slices” (as the naturalist exegesis names them). *Space, as a place for the memory*, has potentiated a historical will of conveying knowledge through creation, including the creation of space. The concept of place constitutes itself a space endowed with memory, an important way through which civilizations have mapped their memory. One could say that, throughout history, consciousness has mapped its memory through creation. The risk of losing or forgetting the importance of memorable places lead to the importance of understanding the theory that lies behind the creation of these places and their impact on collective memory. Mathematical and astronomical principles have been encrypted through the construction of the pyramids and other ancient representative ensembles; Cicero envisioned the concept of memory palaces; Camillo imagines memory as a theatre; Saint Augustin connects the concept of “sancta memoria” to the concept of “aedificatio”<sup>5</sup>, stating that the

5. “A soul places far from God creates a kind of machine, that by its means [the soul] may be lifted to God.” Gregory the Great, “Expositio in canticum canticorum”, 3.14-15, quoted in Carruthers, 1998, 81

science of building thoughts is reflected through the science of building architecture; Gregory the Great, then, describes the memory as “*machina mentis*”, a device of the mind able to carry the consciousness to divinity. However, it was not until the Renaissance that architecture was considered relevant to physical conservation within cultural patrimony as a wilful act. Yet, the place, as a space for the memory, manifested itself continuously, as a way of memorising through architecture. The functioning of collective memory as a radiography of the cultural – identity matrix can be identified through its mapping (through architecture, implicitly and through arts, explicitly). The immateriality of its namespace has often lead to reducing it to the cartographic material, but one could axiomatically affirm that each consciousness represents a memory, that we are living memories of our culture (Fig. 1). The potential memories within Canaletto’s works have inspired the “Analogous City” of Aldo Rossi. 30 Years later, Christine Boyer criticises the modernist city, now displaced from the coherent discourse of the memory and history and responsible of the nihilism of the idea of an interpretative and cultural device, able to “translate memories and traditions into meaningful contemporary forms”<sup>6</sup>. Memory, thus, describes the function of a metalanguage in the study of architectural and urbanistic language. Continuing the structuralist and poststructuralist point of view, the structures of the memory, yet to be conquered from a neuroscientific point of view, could represent a new paradigm in the theorization of architecture.



Fig. 2  
Collective Consciousness  
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The place as a space for the memory also implies the reverse perspective of recovering messages and memories encrypted through the above-mentioned processes, in order to reconnect humanity with its memory, with its past, present and future, understood as a “fountain” (in the world of the unconscious, Romanian Philosopher Lucian Blaga identifies three time horizons: the “waterfall” time, related to the past, the “fountain” time, related to the future, and the “river” time, related to the present. Regarding his categorizing, memory) of tradition, spirituality, history, culture and identity of a civilization. Aggressively reacting to the abundance of

6. Boyer, 2001, 28

forms without substance, modernism alienated itself from everything that constituted history and tradition in previous times. It dislocated the individual, with its consciousness, thus emerging an undeniable syncope within collective consciousness. Also generated through a reactive phenomenon, radical historicist tendencies have altered the perceiving of memory and identity in the plenitude of their semantics.

The study upon memory combines three approaches, which, intertwined, generate a complex analysis upon the cultural memory. The first point of view is generated by the attitude of remembrance and defining the archiving, the cultural-identity, and the historical function of the memory. The second approach is related to the manifestation of the memory in the present tense and the third point of view is oriented to the potentiality of the memory and its force to discover and enrich the identity of a culture, its becoming and alternating future.

Places of remembrance range from the monument, the memorial or the museum to any other form of building a collective memory. The “built” memory represents a wilful act of collective consciousness. The gesture of edification itself bears the value of a ritual, to embody and coherently put in words flows of meanings. They empower existences that lay beyond life, death, and even memory, imprinting even on a subconscious level. Their dispersion throughout public spaces mark the historical discourse of a culture’s becoming, at least in theory.

Yet, the architecture of the memory does not rely only on its galleries and monuments. The meanings that transcend towards long-term memory are not restricted by the criteria of bearing a message. Memory itself occurs in our day-to-day life and is strongly impacted by the subjective nature of humanity in general. Our day-to-day happenings shape our memories. The city, judged by its impact on *collective memory*, emphasizes the procedural study of its evolution. Often, the contemporary city is not centred on the human dimension. It is hard to say to what extent this tope can be viewed as the most complex result of the existence of a culture and to what extent it defines the identity of its inhabitants, provides them with a sense of belonging, appropriation. Tradition, in its timelessness circumscription to the city, comes from a timeline with strong cultural substrate and presents, and manifests itself in the present foretelling scenarios of the future. The contemporary city risks the disjointing of tradition and memory from everyday modern life. Reinvented in modernism, “accelerated” and more crowded in recent times, the city has had numerous scenarios of reinventing itself. Assuming the complexity of current city requires its mental reconstruction and reinterpretation through memory. Mental maps, psycho-geography are known concepts of dealing with the hyperspace of our city.

*The sequences of nowadays* capture collective memory circumscribed to the city by defining three instances – residents, communities and non-



-residents. The city's memory is perceived through its constitutive elements – routs, fronts, urban units (districts), nodes, landmarks, and boundaries (historical stratifications, plan-metric and vertical). These constituents make up, firstly, the endogenous image (Marius-Cristian Neacsu) corresponding to inhabitant and community, and secondly, the exogenous image (Marius-Cristian Neacsu) corresponding to un-inhabitant, the perception by tourists. The instances of recollection become points of incidence between endogenous and exogenous dimensions of the city. Places marked by interventions made without consideration for the substance of spiritual and cultural substrates that memory implies are deserted places. These also constitute a point of incidence between the exogenous and endogenous memory, to a lesser extent than the first, but are fascinating through the anti-memory impact and dystopian character.

*Creative memory*, enhanced by its *oneiric and utopian character*, is a ludic or imaginative reconstruction of known realities. It polarizes around the creative act as a generator and regenerator of memory. The dream is a meta-reality in which space and the universe are deconstructed and reconstructed by non-physical laws, specific to human subjectivism. Throughout history, the manifestation of creation through oneiric leitmotif has constituted a new type of memory, usually attributed to utopian visions. The act of creation is doubled, therefore, by the act of recreation. The recreation of space in contemporary times plays a crucial role in the recovery of history, through what Romanian architect Augustin Ioan called “virtual heritage”. Thus, the act of “re-creation” manifests itself in possible ways of recovering memory through heritage.

The final part of the study suggests a method to redefine the identity of architecture through cultural memory. The memory represents a space for the recovery of the values of society: consciousness is constantly remodelled by memory and memory survives only by the will of consciousness to impose its values. To survive the time consuming and perishable destiny, consciousness maps out memory with the act of creation, be it of artistic nature or not. The metaphor of a city's “becoming” is the metaphor of consciousness's “becoming”, which centres memory as a generative spirit, “genius loci” of identity substance. The “becomings” manifest themselves as acts of creation, not limited to the boundaries of artistic vision. Architecture represents the synthesis of numerous dimensions, which we will symbolically separate into mathematical perspective and poetical perspective. The “becoming” of architecture space constitutes, generically speaking, the synthesis of the significance that it can portray, which, through a coefficient of remanence within the realm of memory, have the potential to refract through various filters of active modelling that define memory. An architectural space that has gone through the process of “becoming” implies

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the physical and metaphysical crossing, an almost ritualistic gesture in the process of interchanging memory. In the Romanian context, architecture can regain the values of cultural memory by re-establishing the dialogue with philosophy and literature, as obvious proponents for the perpetuation and individualization of cultural identity on the universal scale. The stylistic matrix defined by the philosophy of Lucian Blaga represents an important point for redefining the potential routes for local architecture.

The interpretation of architecture by using revelatory metaphors emphasizes the importance of poetic language in architecture. The “poetization of architecture”, not limited to lyrical interpretation but to a spectrum of syncretic composition, semantic and subjective, concretely formulates the principles of remanence within the bounds of collective memory. This poetization also implies considering architecture a poetic art, doubling the architectural discourse with a proustian depth every architect should have. As a man of architectural language, the architect must also be a man of letters (as Le Corbusier also stated once), capable of deciphering and encrypting metaphors. Poetic language constitutes the main avenue of understanding architecture for both its creator and its receiver, in a coagulated will of memory, culture, spirituality and identity. The poetics of architecture embody its subjective nature and its affective dimension.

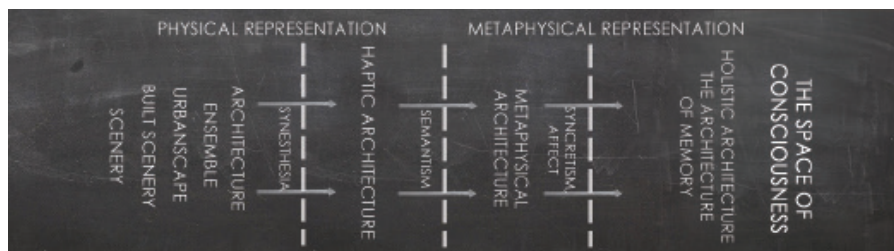


Fig. 3  
The architecture of memory  
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The reinterpretation of architecture through the way in which it is memorised and the redefining of memory as architectural meta-language require a reconnection to the identity of consciousness and culture. This study strives to analyse this potential method of reinterpretation of architecture and memory, starting with the simple act of memorization and following through to its philosophical and metaphysical complexities.

In conclusion, this gigantesque consciousness, whose rhythm and hidden geometry operates as an artful cryptographer of time embodied through architecture, must constitute an essential part of every signified, without altering the experience of the new, but empowering it and potentiating it with value, coherence and continuity.

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