

Introduction: Technics, Memory and the Architecture of History

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Albrecht Dürer (1514). *Melancholia I* [Wikimedia Commons]

In the light of massive catastrophes – the earthquakes near Sendai and Christchurch, the tsunamis of Aceh, and Katrina’s devastation of New Orleans – the question of urban and architectural reconstruction invokes the question of remembering. What is this “past” that we remember and on which we base our future reconstructions? What *images* of the past do we call upon in our decisions to rebuild or not to build – and how do they negotiate the terrain between memory and history, and in corollary, between nature and culture, technology and sustainability, planning and responding, tradition and innovation, foundations and interstices?

To Bernard Stiegler, the image that we recall in/as history is not an “image in general” (2002: 147). The “mental image” of what has passed in/as history is inseparable from the “image-objects” associated with that history, constructed in architecture, film, photography, art or the media. Image-objects themselves therefore possess a technical history. While mental images and image-objects are phenomenologically imbricated, a temporal difference exists between the two. Mental images are fleeting and their length of retention varies depending on individual circumstance and physiological capacities, whereas image-objects persist as material abstractions indexical to the development of technological devices.

While it is difficult to fathom an image-object without a mental image, Stiegler’s more remarkable claim is that there has never been a mental image which is not, in some way, the *return* – a re-collection – of an image-object (2002: 148). We can

extrapolate to say that the image-objects of history are *given* to us: we “inherit” them, they are *imposed* on us, we make them our own in the construction of our mental images, in our practices of remembering. The images of memory possess a *technics*, and they carry with them traces of their construction, their architecture.

In Aristotle’s categorisation, humans are the only beings who possess the “noetic” soul, of a higher order from the “vegetative” and the “sensitive” souls. Noeticity, or the ability to *think*, is a specific power that leads humans to know themselves, making them the only species who can exteriorise. Thinking confers to human beings a peculiar status as an organic creature “that has no defining characteristic except for the fact that he *knows* that he is human” (Van Camp 2009: 4). As Carl Linnaeus contends, “man is the animal that must recognize itself as human to be human” (cited in Agamben 2004: 26). Through language as a means for expression, bodily gestures as a means of communication, and tool or object-making as a means of “designing” the future, the capacity of the noetic soul is inextricably linked to the “outward” transduction of internal conditions.

This process of human self-definition through exteriorisation – since its origin, or more accurately in efforts to postulate its origin, its history – has always relied upon technical prostheses, an exterior realm of tools, techniques, language, inscription and representation. It is difficult, if not impossible, to fathom the evolution of what is called – or what is sensed, or in fact what *is* - the human away from the evolution of “technics”, an exterior organised realm of technical inorganic matter, in which the internal conditions of being human is supported by technical or artificial apparatus (1998: 18). Stiegler posits that technical artefacts make possible, or in fact *are*, the retention of human experience and memory.

Arguing through a reconfiguration of Husserl’s categorisation of the three thresholds of memorisation, Stiegler considers technics as a *tertiary* level of memory retention, a retention by objects, tools and concepts exterior to the human being, that supports the retention of sense perception of temporal objects such as a melody, a written text or behavioural patterns, namely primary memory; and the conventional sense of retention of an experience or sensation which is “remembered” as the past, namely secondary memory. Primary memory is configured in a sequential temporality of present and immediate conscious perception, while secondary memory requires a selective imagination and a capacity for differentiation in which the past is recalled, modifying the experience of the temporal object currently in experience. Therefore technics as tertiary memory both makes possible and is constitutive of primary conscious perception as well as the imagination in secondary recollection. Stiegler proposes that perception is akin to cinematic “post-production”, where consciousness montages disparate elements from the senses, imagination and technologically “retained” memory (2010: 29).

Following this line of argument, the individuation of the historian would consist of the imbrication of interior psychic and exterior technical collective dimensions, which are in effect two sides of the same coin. That is, what is perceived as if from the position of an interior is an effect of exteriorisation. The past is made up of both deeply personal inheritances that arrive without being called for, with events that we did not choose to participate in; and where we find ourselves addressed by a language imposed on us. Jean Laplanche argues that the address of this “otherness” can be conceived as a demand, one whose indeterminate origin pressures – or “drives”, as he says, appropriating a Freudian concept – the workings of the unconscious (1999: 33). The alien-ness of history as an image-object arriving form

the outside is something that the internal self cannot fully assimilate because it was never fully experienced, processed or translated, but yet it drives us to think and act in relation to it.

The task of the historian becomes more complex in the light of such *mnemotechnics*. Recalling the past is an action that does not separate mental images from image-objects and their associated technics of construction and dissemination. In the extreme circumstances of catastrophe, the mutuality of image-objects and mental images is made markedly evident. The imaginary of catastrophic collapse and associated reconstruction is governed by images, narratives and myth conditioned by media and constructed by historiography. The extreme circumstances of catastrophe highlight the contribution of the tertiary machinery of externalisation on perception, which on one hand governs the way we can apprehend the unspeakability of the catastrophe, and on the other influences the ways in which we can image reconstruction, all of which make survival possible.

Tertiary memory as externalisation means the act of remembering is always situated and therefore spatially bounded. There is an architecture of historical memory that produces an *already-there* of the past that is not lived but imposed, thus rendering problematic historical accounts of civic values and democratic processes that allude to fundamental truths. This condition also challenges the status of personal testimony, witnessing and autobiography in epistemology and the politics of knowledge (Code 2006: 172).

Contributors to this volume of *Interstices* were asked to contemplate history and historiography in architecture, design and art in terms of memory and the various temporal ruptures implicate with it. It asked what alternative mechanisms of memorialising the past are imaginable: narrational, conversational, oral, gestural? Similarly, it asked what image-objects are “inherited” by the historian and what are the ontological conditions surrounding their construction and dissemination, and their effects on remembering the past?

Jeff Malpas frames the overarching theme of memory through a philosophical demonstration of how human memory is inextricably connected to places and built form beyond a purely subjectivist position or as temporal-experiential additions to them. The act of remembering is always situated and thus topological because meaning depends on those who remember objects and entities in the external world. Moreover place is itself what is orientated in and by memory. The weave of memory and of meaning is therefore accomplished in the built form of house, street, and city, rather than in the inner sanctum of the mind. That is, the question of memory becomes a question of the externalisation of the mind. Jane Madsen follows on with the recollection of un-building or collapse brought about by the earthquake disaster which turned the philosopher Kant from natural to critical philosophy; and writer-poet Heinrich von Kleist, upon reading Kant’s account of earthquakes, from empirical to critical writing. The essay demonstrates the locatedness of memory and the imagination – through the author’s personal recollection of Portland, through the medium of film – as it plays on the fibrillation between immanent spiritual and social collapse with material and actual collapse.

In the arch that remains after collapse is a building simultaneously present and absent. Michael Tawa shows that this interstice is a zone of indiscernibility that yields passage into other dimensions and worlds. Through Tarkovsky’s cinema and Lewerentz’s architecture, Tawa demonstrates how at the interstices,

architecture in encountering the uncanny and its deconstitution, reveals that the apparatus of memory resists being defined by re-presentation, and attends instead to memory as the making-place for recollection. In that space of difficulty we find barely-there images - fragile yet laborious memories. This is the space of writing for Linda Marie Walker, whose writing in this volume attends to its (and writing's) quiet potential to form and un-form, impose and puzzle, in the interstices of things and events, disaster and celebration. Writing is a technique of the self, which means that writing turns around to contemplate the self, it is a practice of turning the self in the company of materials, to condition what-it-*is*-to-know (and *be*): literally to re-collect oneself, one's self, oneself.

Continuing the resistance of architecture and the built environment to being a predeterminable stage for memory, Michael Chapman's essay describes how architecture is a found, rather than intentional, context against which creative acts and works in Surrealism and Dada are projected and reconstructed. The production of the avant-garde proceeded from the negation of architecture through both time and function, through strategies of the readymade, collage, montage, drawing and photography. Surrealism developed a radicalised architecture, and concomitantly a radicalised idea of memory that connects the visual and the lived. The result is a psychophysical understanding of place and memory, transacted by material, space, emotions, affects and bodies. Peg Rawes provides a philosophical account of such geometries through Spinoza. Spinoza's geometrical philosophy, firmly constituted in the sensory and sensible realm, provides a description of the myriad of human, living and natural subjects constructed through living ecological relations, and through these ethical relations. Spinoza's geometry is not technical in a reductive sense as is the convention in architectural form-making, but a technics of biological and material diversification, imbricated in lived habits and habitats, whether architectural, economic, social, or cultural. Memory in Spinoza's geometrical ecology is not an internal condition of the unified human, but is part of the constitution of a durational reality without recourse to an instrumental anthropological account of life.

In this issue, we invited a paper by William Taylor who provides an account of architecture as mnemotechnics through an investigation into novel appropriations of historical building forms in the face of future natural disasters or climatic variations. Architecture becomes an externalisation of the remembered past in order to predict or forestall a catastrophic future. Typologies of architectural form retain the traces of hopes, desires, affect, and attitudes to risk. Memory is therefore architectural, formed by the relations between discursive and non-discursive conditions, between interiorities of the psychic subject and externalisations of the material practice.

Hannah Lewi opens the non-peer reviewed section with "Deranging Oneself in Someone Else's House", a meditation on intimate occupations of memorialised modern houses - in this case the former home of Australian historian Manning Clark in Canberra, designed by architect Robin Boyd in 1952. In "Birth, Death and Rebirth: Reconstruction of Architecture in Ruskin's Writings", Anu Chatterjee finds in John Ruskin's critique of the restoration of historical building fabric a renovation of the "tectonic language of architecture" by a "language of tailoring and upholstering", one that paradoxically aims at a compensatory male self-engenderment. Japan-based architect and academic Tom Daniell considers responses to the March 11, 2011 earthquake and the precarious hold architecture and infrastructure ambition in the face of overwhelming natural force in "After the Aftershocks".

Andrew Barrie interviews renowned Japanese architect Taira Nishizawa during his New Zealand visit in 2012 to participate in a lecture and seminar programme. Marianne Calvelo similarly interviews acclaimed Portuguese architect Manuel Aires Mateus while he was at The University of Auckland, School of Architecture and Planning in the winter semester of 2012. Sean Pickersgill reviews *Architecture and Violence* (2012), edited by Bechir Kenzari. John Walsh similarly reviews *My Desk is My Castle* (2011) edited by Uta Brandes and Michael Erlhoff. Lastly, Tom Daniell reports on “Familial Clouds”, an installation by Simon Twose and Andrew Barrie in the *Traces of Centuries & Future Steps* exhibition held at the Palazzo Bembo in Venice, Italy as collateral event of the 13th International Architectural Exhibition, *La Biennale di Venezia*.

While these contributions speak in their own ways about the relationship between mnemotechnics and the architecture of history, all demonstrate the various modalities of the spatialisation and temporalisation of the image-object and its absorption into the spheres of production in architectural practice and theory, and the indeterminacy of images that carry the technics of inter-human relations. These essays invoke the theatre of the historian’s individuation alongside history’s *mnemotechnics* that organise the world which appear whenever memory is invoked.



Abandoned vessel near Kookynie, Western Australia (Photo: Stephen Loo)

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